Eagle-Eye Tours

Grand Newfoundland Birdwatching Itinerary

Link: Grand Newfoundland Birdwatching

Tour Overview

Our Newfoundland birding tour offers a remarkable diversity of spectacular scenery unlike anywhere else in North America.

Nature abounds. Fabulous seabird colonies dot the Avalon Peninsula – thousands of Northern Gannets, Atlantic Puffins, Black-legged Kittiwakes and both murres, with lesser numbers of Razorbills and Black Guillemots, are nesting at this time.

Caribou and moose are often photographable along the roadsides. Landbirds include such interesting species as Gray-cheeked Thrush, Boreal Chickadee, Blackpoll Warbler, crossbills, and Rock and Willow Ptarmigan.

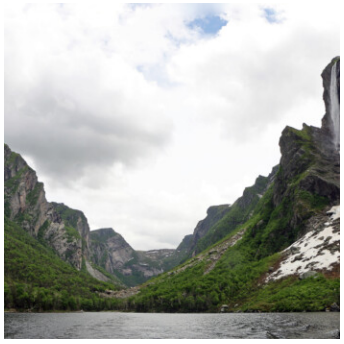
We spend three days in Gros Morne National Park, a stunningly beautiful area of mountains, fjords, sand dunes and wetlands.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival Deer Lake

Our Newfoundland birding tour commences with an evening meet & greet in Deer Lake (airport code YDF).

Days 2 - 3: Gros Morne National Park



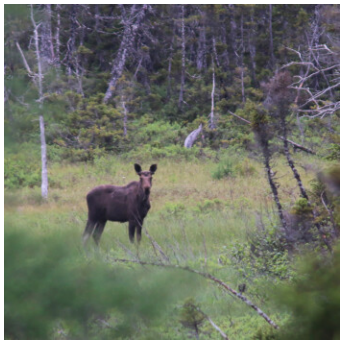
Gros Morne National Park has been named a UNESCO World Heritage Site due to its unique and globally important geological features. It also offers excellent opportunities for birding and wildlife viewing. Our meanderings through the park will include strolls along sandy beaches, rugged coastlines, rich bogs and lush forests. New birds may include vireos, Mourning Warbler, Harlequin Duck and possibly Piping Plover (an endangered species that now breeds very sporadically in the province). Weather permitting, we will take a boat tour into beautiful Western Brook Pond – one of Newfoundland's most iconic scenes. On another day we will visit the surreal Tablelands which consists of a large piece of the earth's mantle driven up from deep below the ocean floor (this can be seen at only a few places on earth). We may expect to spot Woodland Caribou, Moose and Harbour Seals during our travels, and will take time to enjoy a variety of beautiful orchids that can be found in the park. Nights: Rocky Harbour.

Day 4: Central Newfoundland



After some early morning birding in Gros Morne National Park, we begin our journey east across the island. Today's destination is Grand Falls-Windsor - located in the heart of Central Newfoundland and bordered by the mighty Exploits River. The forests here include more hardwoods and deciduous trees than we will encounter in other areas and provide some excellent birding opportunities. Time permitting, we may visit the Salmonid Interpretation Centre to see and learn more about the amazing life cycle of Atlantic Salmon and the important conservation work that is being done in the region. Overnight: Grand Falls-Windsor.

Days 5 - 6: Terra Nova National Park



Following a morning of birding in Grand Falls-Windsor, we will continue east towards Terra Nova National Park. Here we will spend our time exploring a variety of coastal and upland habitats in Terra Nova National Park which includes sheltered bays, steep cliffs and rich boreal forests. We will be looking primarily for boreal bird species including eastern Palm Warblers, Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Gray Jays and an endemic/endangered subspecies of Red Crossbill. Around the many bogs and wetlands we will search for orchids and listen for the unique songs of Rusty Blackbird and Olive-sided Flycatcher, among many other birds. Snowshoe Hare and Moose are fairly common in the park. Nights: Charlottetown

Day 7: Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve



We leave Terra Nova National Park and head towards the Avalon Peninsula, driving east across the narrow isthmus that connects it to the rest of Newfoundland. We will pass by Castle Hill National Historic Site, so named for the French and English fortifications dating back to the mid-1600s, and the top of the hill overlooks scenic Placentia Bay. We will be looking for passerines such as Pine Grosbeak and Grey-cheeked Thrush along the way. We will visit the breath-taking Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve either in the evening or the next morning depending on weather. The steep cliffs here are home to one of the largest colonies of Northern Gannet in North America and thousands of other seabirds, including the world's southernmost breeding Thick-billed Murres. The area offers spectacular scenery and very close views of the gannet colony, allowing for excellent photographic opportunities. Overnight: St. Brides.

Days 8 - 9: Southeast Avalon Peninsula



The "Irish Loop", named for the area's strong cultural roots, includes coastal headlands, seascapes and historic villages. Scenery is stark and beautiful. We will make several stops to bird the scrubby woodlands typical of the peninsula, listening for boreal songbirds such as Blackpoll Warbler, Boreal Chickadee and Fox Sparrow. The many sheltered bays and inlets dotting the coast offer chances to look for Arctic Terns and other seabirds. We will also make our first forays into some of the world's most southerly expanses of subarctic tundra in search of barrens species such as Horned Lark, American Pipit and Willow Ptarmigan. Rugged coastlines offer excellent opportunities to find seabirds, including the elusive Manx Shearwater which nests off the island's south coast. We will also keep an eye out for Short-tailed Swallowtail, a beautiful butterfly with a very restricted range outside of Newfoundland. There may be opportunities to see some of the Woodland Caribou herd that resides in this region, and we will always be on the lookout for Moose! Cultural highlights may include visits to the historic town of Ferryland (home to one of North America's oldest settlements, the storied Colony of Avalon dating back to 1621) and the stunning vista of Cape Race where the famous distress calls of the Titanic were received more than a hundred years ago. Several historic lighthouses will be seen along the way. Overnight Day 8: Trepassey. On Day 9, we will make our way to St. John's, North America's oldest city perched on the eastern edge of the continent, where we will spend the next 3 nights.

Days 10 - 11: St. John's and Witless Bay Ecological Reserve



St. John's offers a wealth of ponds, parks and ocean vistas to enjoy. Local birds include a variety of waterfowl, northern gulls & boreal songbirds, and we will keep an eye out for lingering visitors such as Tufted Duck and Black-headed Gulls. We will also visit North America's most easterly point at Cape Spear National Historic Park, which is also a great place to scan for icebergs, seabirds and migrating whales. There will be unique opportunities to experience the region's deep-rooted culture and history. One day we will take a boat tour in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve – a series of islands that is home to North America's largest Atlantic Puffin and second largest Common Murre colonies. They are joined by masses of Black-legged Kittiwakes, Razorbills, and even a few Northern Fulmars. The only thing more amazing than the sound of thousands of seabirds chattering is the incredible point-blank views as we cruise around these protected islands. Overnight in St. John's.

Day 12: Departure from St. John's (YYT)



Our Newfoundland birding tour ends today and participants can depart anytime.

What to Expect

Overview

The Grand Newfoundland Birdwatching tour is a moderately paced birding tour, with a focus on finding a diversity of birds. We will spend long days in the field, with pre-breakfast walks, as well as optional evening excursions (especially to look for moose, which are more active around dawn and dusk).

Food

Most days we return to the hotel for breakfast after some early morning birding. We often take a picnic lunch in the field, but will occasionally stop at a restaurant for lunch. Dinner is usually at the hotel or a nearby restaurant. Each evening after dinner we compile the day's checklist, review the day's activities, birds, mammals and other observations, and plan the next day's activities.

Accommodation

Generally we stay in standard hotel rooms in locations close to where we want to go birding.

Walking

The walking on this tour is rated easy to moderate. The longest walk is a 6-7 km (3.5-4.3 miles) roundtrip hike to the Western Brook Pond boat tour in Gros Morne. The trail terrain is easy (packed, groomed gravel) and mostly flat with a couple gentle hills – but the distance is significantly longer than the other walks. There is a golf cart shuttle available here for people with mobility challenges. The one other longer walk is Cape St. Mary's, a 3km (1.8 mile) roundtrip over natural terrain with occasional uneven footing. The rest of the walks are shorter in duration, between 1-2km roundtrips. We take all of our walks at a slow birding pace.

Driving

Most days have a small to moderate amount of driving; there will be two longer drives across the island, but we make several stops along the way.

Climate

Weather can be variable; warm sunny days can alternate with cool foggy days, and we will plan our daily itinerary accordingly. It is a good idea to have footwear that is waterproof. Bring mosquito repellent – mosquitoes are not usually a problem anywhere except perhaps in sheltered trails.

Boat trips

Two boat trips are planned for the tour. The first, a two hour trip into the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve, can be chilly, so we recommend wearing layered clothing to stay warm. Their new Atlantic Puffin vessel is equipped with a fully enclosed heated cabin with panoramic viewing, canteen, bar, and washrooms.

We will also take a scenic boat trip on Western Brook Pond in Gros Morne National Park. While this excursion is not focused on birding, it offers a wonderful opportunity to enjoy the spectacular scenery as we cruise through a dramatic freshwater fjord surrounded by towering cliffs and cascading waterfalls. This boat trip lasts 2 hours and is generally expected to be a calm and smooth ride. The boat has a canopied deck and on-board washrooms. The vessels, in order to operate on the pond, have a special certification required by Parks Canada and have minimal impact on the environment.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes
• All accommodation (good quality)
• All meals & soft drinks
• Boat trips to seabird colonies and on land-locked fjord
• Ground transportation
• 4 - 7 participants with one guide, 8 - 12 participants with two guides
• All park, conservation and entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include
• Flights to and from start/end location
• Travel Insurance
• Items of a personal nature
• Taxes (15% HST)
• Alcoholic beverages
