

Newfoundland Birding with Canadian Geographic Itinerary

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Tour Overview

Our Newfoundland birding tour with Canadian Geographic offers spectacular scenery and fabulous wildlife.

Seabird colonies dot the Avalon and Bonavista Peninsulas – thousands of Atlantic Puffins, Northern Gannets, Black-legged Kittiwakes and both murre, with lesser numbers of Razorbills and Black Guillemots, are nesting at this time. Landbirds include interesting species such as Gray-cheeked Thrush, Boreal Chickadee, Blackpoll Warbler, crossbills, and Willow Ptarmigan. Caribou and moose are often photographable along the roadsides.

We explore historic fishing villages and quaint, colourful outports along the way. We also visit the rugged and beautiful Mistaken Point UNESCO World Heritage Site – the unique fossils here are internationally significant and represent the oldest evidence of multicellular life on the planet.

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival - St. John's



Our Newfoundland birding tour with Canadian Geographic commences with an evening meet & greet in St. John's – North America's oldest city perched on the eastern edge of the continent. If time and weather permits, we may squeeze in a visit to historic Signal Hill for panoramic views over the city. Overnight in St. John's.

Days 2: St. John's, Cape Spear and Witless Bay Ecological Reserve



We start our morning with a visit to North America's most easterly point at Cape Spear National Historic Site, which is also a great place to scan for icebergs, seabirds and migrating whales. We stroll through a variety of songbird habitats including lush boreal forests and rich wetlands, searching out gems such as Boreal Chickadee, Swamp Sparrow, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and several species of warbler. After lunch, we will take a boat tour in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve - a series of islands that is home to more than 4 million seabirds - including North America's largest Atlantic Puffin colony, thousands of Common Murre, Black-legged Kittiwake and Razorbill. 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.

Days 3-4: Southeast Avalon Peninsula



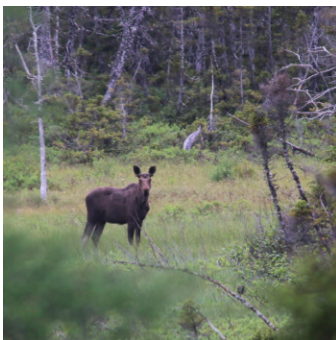
The "Irish Loop", named for the area's strong cultural roots, includes coastal headlands, seascapes and historic villages. Scenery is stark and beautiful. We will make several stops to bird the scrubby woodlands typical of the peninsula, listening for boreal songbirds such as Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Waterthrush 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. 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! On one day, we will enjoy a guided hike to the ancient fossils of Mistaken Point UNESCO World Heritage Site - the oldest evidence of multicellular life on the planet and a snapshot in time of "when life got big". Other cultural and historic highlights may include iconic lighthouses such as Cape Race which played a prominent role in the final hours of the Titanic tragedy. Overnight Trepassy (Day 3) and St. Bride's (day 4).

Day 5: Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve



During the morning we will visit breath-taking Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve. 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. The surrounding "Eastern Hyperoceanic Barrens" are a rare ecosystem that is home to Savannah Sparrows, Short-eared Owls, unique wildflowers and the range-restricted Short-tailed Swallowtail butterfly among others. We then follow the coast to Castle Hill National Historic Site, looking for passerines such as Pine Grosbeak and Grey-cheeked Thrush. Castle Hill is 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 end our day by leaving the Avalon Peninsula behind and driving west across the narrow isthmus that connects it to the rest of Newfoundland. Overnight in Charlottetown.

Day 6: Terra Nova National Park



We will spend today 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, and Canada Jay. Around the many bogs and wetlands we will search for wildflowers 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. This evening we drive to nearby Bonavista. Overnight in the Bonavista/Trinity area.

Day 7: Bonavista & Elliston



This morning we visit the colourful town of Trinity - a historic fishing village that maintained more character than most over the years. We will take a stroll through time as walk the narrow roads and laneways, visiting old churches and shops along the way. An adventurous boat tour will take us through the narrow harbour entrance and into Trinity Bay in search of seabirds, whales and maybe even icebergs along the stunning coastlines. Nearby Elliston is not only rustic and beautiful, but boasts one of the most accessible Atlantic Puffin colonies in North America. The colony is only a stone's throw from the "mainland" and puffins sometimes fly over and land near their human observers - making it a favourite haunt for nature photographers. Elliston is also known for its abundance of historic "root cellars", which can be seen throughout the town including along the trail to the puffin site. Overnight in the Bonavista/Trinity area.

Day 8: Trinity to St. John's



The Bonavista Peninsula is known not only for its natural beauty, but also its many historic settlements and the key roles it played in the island's fishing economy. We will visit the lighthouse and rugged headlands of Cape Bonavista, keeping an eye out for seabirds such as Black Guillemot along the cliff edge, whales and icebergs on the wide-open ocean and unique plants that hug the windswept coastline. "The Dungeon" is an intriguing geological formation that illustrates how the area's characteristic sea stacks are formed over thousands of years. Later this afternoon, we make our way back to St. John's with time to explore the capital city on your own this evening. Overnight in St. John's.

Day 9: Departure

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

What to Expect

Overview

The Newfoundland Birdwatching with Canadian Geographic tour is a moderately paced birding tour, with a focus on finding diversity of birds. We will spend long days in the field, with pre-breakfast morning walks, and evening excursions as optional offerings, especially to look for wildlife, 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 mostly easy, with one or two harder walks. Most of the walks are short in duration, between 1-2km roundtrips, and we always walk at a slow pace.

The hardest walk is to Mistaken Point to see the Fossils. This walk is relatively flat, but includes a couple of steeper sections with uneven footing, and is a 6km (3.8 mile) round trip. You will need to bring a spare pair of socks on this walk as you will be asked to remove your shoes before walking on the fossils. Depending on how wet or dry the fossil bed is, your socks could get wet and muddy! Anyone not wanting to do this can spend more time at the visitor centre and do some other birding nearby.

The one other longer walk is Cape St. Mary's, a 3km roundtrip over natural terrain with occasional uneven footing.

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 cloudless 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 as we may encounter them on the more 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 Transport Canada Certified and equipped with a fully enclosed heated cabin with panoramic viewing, canteen, bar, and restrooms. Non-motorized wheelchair accessibility. The captains are typically very entertaining.

The second boat tour is in Trinity Bay. You will be given a full floatation suit to wear for warmth and safety. This is a 2 hour boat trip and there are no washroom facilities onboard. It can be as cool as 3°C (37.4°F) and windy. Dressing warmly and being prepared for wind and waves will help ensure you enjoy this unique outing.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation (good quality)
- All meals & soft drinks
- Boat trips to seabird colonies and whale watching
- Mistaken Point guided fossil tour
- Ground transportation
- 5 - 7 participants with one guide and one Ambassador, 8 - 12 participants with two guides plus an Ambassador
- 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
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