



Field Guides Tour Report

Newfoundland & Nova Scotia 2015

Jun 25, 2015 to Jul 5, 2015

Chris Benesh

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



A busy scene of Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills at Gull Island (Photo by participant Doug Clarke)

The 2015 Newfoundland & Nova Scotia got off to a bit of rocky start with summer showers making us keep rain jackets and umbrellas close at hand. Yet, despite that, we had a terrific boat trip out into Witless Bay where we witnessed one of nature's greatest spectacles. Many thousands of murres, puffins, razorbills, and kittiwakes swarming around Gull Island is a sight that leaves one speechless. And it was a terrific start to our adventure.

The following day found us birding along the Irish Loop south of St. John's. A stop for drinks in Bay Bulls yielded an unexpected bonus - a flock of Red Crossbills! Not just any Red Crossbills, these were the endemic Type 8 ones! Cool! From there, we headed south to the bottom of the Avalon Peninsula. Clear conditions made the scenery breathtaking and we celebrated our luck in this normally foggy stretch. Near St. Shott's, we came across a small group of Woodland Caribou. Saint Vincent's Beach was great for Arctic Tern and several Humpback Whales. The rest of our time in Newfoundland was spent enjoying the spectacular Cape St. Mary's, summer home to thousands of Northern Gannets. The capelin hadn't really started to run in force, so whale numbers were down a bit. As a result, shearwater numbers were down somewhat from normal levels. Despite that, there was plenty to see.

The ferry was most productive in the morning, though numbers were noticeably down. Once we arrived in North Sydney, it was time to switch gears and get some land-birding under our belts. We celebrated Canada Day in Pleasant Bay with a wonderful boat trip to see... lots of Minke Whales and a couple of large Fin Whales! Plenty of Gray Seals also entertained us. Then we were off to mainland Nova Scotia.

A stop along the way produced a family of Piping Plovers. The Watnash Road north of our lodge was simply outstanding. A great variety of warblers along with other nice tidbits kept us busy. We enjoyed the hospitality of the Eshbaughs, who shared their bird feeders and showed us a wonderful garter snake. And then it was time to head to Halifax with a bit of shore-birding along the way.

A special thanks to our driver, Roy, who did a terrific job for us! And thanks to all of you for coming along. Great to meet new friends and catch up with old friends -- what a congenial group! I hope we can travel together again soon. Until then, wishing you the best in birding.

--Chris

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Surprisingly difficult to find in this part of Canada.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Five were along the Waterish Road.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – Newfoundland is one of the best places to see this species.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

NORTHERN PINTAIL (*Anas acuta*) – Twelve of these were present having nested at Forest Lake. This species is a local breeder near St. John's.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*)

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*)

COMMON EIDER (ATLANTIC) (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*)

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*) – A couple of these were at Biscay Bay in the big scoter flock.

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta fusca deglandi*)

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Two of these were on Biscay Bay, being rare at this season.

COMMON MERGANSER (*Mergus merganser*) – Two different singles seen.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) [I]

RUFFED GROUSE (*Bonasa umbellus*) – A lucky encounter with a mother and three chicks south of Placentia.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Quite a few around this year which was nice to see.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels)

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – Up to four on Gull Island in Witless Bay and quite a few more seen on the ferry. The Atlantic Fulmars are rather genetically divergent from those in the Pacific, so maybe a future split is in order.

GREAT SHEARWATER (*Puffinus gravis*) – Some twenty or so seen from the ferry.

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*) – A small number seen from the ferry.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*) – We managed to squeeze out one at Cape Spear and another on the ferry.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) – Remarkably, just a single bird was seen on the ferry.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

SOOTY SHEARWATER (*Puffinus griseus*) – A small number seen from the ferry.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*) – We managed to squeeze out one at Cape Spear and another on the ferry.

Hydrobatidae (Storm-Petrels)

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) – Remarkably, just a single bird was seen on the ferry.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets)

NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*) – Nearly a daily occurrence, the gannets are without a doubt the premier attraction of this trip. We were able to squeeze in two visits to Cape St. Mary's this year, each with different lighting. What an experience being out at the rock with all of them swarming around.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*)

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – Perhaps the worst year for this species in recent memory. Not sure exactly what was going on with them. Perhaps not finding their preferred food source locally.

Ardeidae (Heron, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*)

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A few seen including one on the Avalon Peninsula.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – A good number seen on the Irish Loop owing to a good vole year, thus lots of food around.

NORTHERN GOSHAWK (*Accipiter gentilis*) – Fortunate to see.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – Lots around including some terrorizing birds at the breeding colonies in Witless Bay.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*)

ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK (*Buteo lagopus*) – A real treat to watch the screaming bird foraging near Cape St. Mary's.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

PIPING PLOVER (*Charadrius melodus*) – Two adults and a chick were at Pomquet Beach. Nice to see that the species had better success there this year.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Four were seen on our final day.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*)

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – Just a couple of these seen this year.

WILLET (EASTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata semipalmata*) – One of the more evident species in coastal marshes where they breed.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – Perhaps as many as 30 seen at Shorebird Cove (Stinky Cove) on the final day.

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*) – A real treat seeing ten of these at Morien Bar.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – One of these was present at Shorebird Cove.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – Up to forty of these were at Shorebird Cove.

WILSON'S SNIPE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Doug spotted a couple of these for us.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins)

COMMON MURRE (*Uria aalge*) – Wow! Many thousands of these were present at the island in Witless Bay at Gull and Green Islands.

THICK-BILLED MURRE (*Uria lomvia*) – We did manage to pick out a lone Thick-billed among the Commons at Gull Island. Even more notable was seeing one at the gannet rock that Mary Lou spotted. Chris Mooney had never seen one up there in all of the years he has spent there as a naturalist.

RAZORBILL (*Alca torda*) – One of the my favorite alcids, these guys look so regal in black and white! Great looks on our boat trip around Gull Island.

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cepphus grylle*) – Common in some of the coastal coves.

ATLANTIC PUFFIN (*Fratercula arctica*) – Wow! We were fortunate to visit the largest colony of Atlantic Puffins in North America. What an impressive sight!

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Up close and personal.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*)

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*)

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – A first year bird was seen on the Pleasant Bay boat trip.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*)

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*)

ARCTIC TERN (*Sterna paradisaea*) – Nice studies of some at their small colony at Saint Vincent's Beach.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [I]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*)

Strigidae (Owls)

BARRED OWL (*Strix varia*) – A terrific encounter with one along the Waternish Road.

SHORT-EARED OWL (*Asio flammeus*) – One seen hunting over the steppe near Cape St. Mary's.

Apodidae (Swifts)

CHIMNEY SWIFT (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Two flying around the harbour at Pleasant Bay.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*)

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*)

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Along the Waternish Road.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) [*]

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*)

BLACK-BACKED WOODPECKER (*Picoides arcticus*) – Fun finding this nest while out looking for thrushes. The juvenile in the nest was begging constantly, but no sign of the parents while we were discretely observing it.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*)

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – We had one go zooming past us.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

YELLOW-BELLIED FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax flaviventris*) – Several of these colorful empids seen.

ALDER FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax alnorum*)

LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*)

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – Formerly called Solitary Vireo.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*)

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

GRAY JAY (*Perisoreus canadensis*)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*)

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*)

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*)

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*)

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*)

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Parus atricapillus*)

BOREAL CHICKADEE (*Poecile hudsonicus*) – Several seen at different sites in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. The lighting was best at Taylors Head.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*)

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis hiemalis*) **[*]**

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*)

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*)

HERMIT THRUSH (*Catharus guttatus*)

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*)

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) **[I]**

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – Some nice studies of birds breeding at Cape St. Mary's.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*)

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – Good views near our Pleasant Bay motel.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*)

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*)

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – We finally connected with this species at Taylors Head.

MOURNING WARBLER (*Geothlypis philadelphia*) – Beautiful looks at one at Great Barasway.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Funny to see them so commonly away from water.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*)

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*)

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*)

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER (*Setophaga castanea*) – One of the scarcer local breeders, we had three different birds along the Waternish Road.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*)

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pensylvanica*)

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – A couple of these were at our Great Barasway site.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Another scarce breeder on the tour route, we encountered two different birds.

PALM WARBLER (YELLOW) (*Setophaga palmarum hypochrysea*) – The birds breeding in this part of the their range are quite yellow below.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*)

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*)

CANADA WARBLER (*Cardellina canadensis*) – One of the real treats along the Waternish Road, we finally tracked down a few.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*)

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)

NELSON'S SPARROW (ATLANTIC COAST) (*Ammodramus nelsoni subvirgatus*) – Another great experience seeing as many as four at Morien Bar. Birds here are the duller (but not dull) Atlantic subspecies. Also heard at Shorebird Cove.

FOX SPARROW (RED) (*Passerella iliaca iliaca*)

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*)

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*)

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*)

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Including one really dull individual seen at Blackhead Cove.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*)

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*)

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

PINE GROSBEAK (*Pinicola enucleator*) – Best views were at Blackhead Cove on the first day of the trip.

PURPLE FINCH (*Haemorhous purpureus*)

RED CROSSBILL (*Loxia curvirostra*) – Your leader thought this very exciting as it was a banner year for this species in Newfoundland. This is the land of call type 8 which is found only in Newfoundland. We saw some twenty or so near Bay Bulls. There were other Red Crossbills in Nova Scotia flying over Liscombe Lodge.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – This species was notably scarce this year. It wasn't until the last day that we got a decent view of one.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*)

EVENING GROSBEAK (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) – A good trip for these will some wonderful viewing at the Eshbaugh house on the Waternish

Road.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [H]

MAMMALS

SNOWSHOE HARE (*Lepus americanus*) – Quite a few around this year.

PLAIN EASTERN CHIPMUNK (*Tamias striatus*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

MEADOW VOLE (*Microtus pennsylvanicus*) – This was the rodent seen well on our way to the gannets at Cape St. Mary's.

ATLANTIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) – Six or so put in a brief appearance on the ferry.

LONG-FINNED PILOT WHALE (*Globicephala melas*) – Two were briefly seen on the ferry ride. Unfortunately, they were absent from Pleasant Bay this time around.

COMMON MINKE WHALE (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) – A spectacular showing of this species out of Pleasant Bay. I estimated at least 20 animals encountered.

FIN WHALE (*Balaenoptera physalus*) – A real bonus was seeing two of these great whales in Pleasant Bay, having missed them in Newfoundland. This is the second largest whale in the world!

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – As many as five were at Saint Vincent's Beach. Another save having missed it on our Witless Bay boat trip. Yay!

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Some good looks at this species around Newfoundland.

GRAY SEAL (*Halichoerus grypus*) – Seen loafing around on rocks at Cape St. Mary's and a huge number of these bobbing in the waters of Pleasant Bay. One rather curious young animal swam right up to our boat repeatedly.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Two seen on the final day of the trip on the Watnish Road.

MOOSE (*Alces alces*) – We encountered three on the Irish Loop and another two in Nova Scotia.

CARIBOU (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) – Thanks to amazingly clear conditions, we saw six of these Woodland Caribou near St. Shotts.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Other Critters:

Maritime Garter Snake (*Thamophis sirtalis pallidulus*)

Green Frog (*Rana clamitans*)

Hudsonian Whiteface (*Leucorrhinia hudsonica*)

Short-tailed Swallowtail (*Papilio brevicauda*)

Totals for the tour: 123 bird taxa and 14 mammal taxa