

NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA

JULY 1 – 11, 2009

LEADER: KIM ECKERT

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Tour Summary

Considering that the leading highlights of this tour didn't really involve gannets, kittiwakes, murrees, or puffins, it must have been something special! Oh yes, they were all still there: the thousands of Northern Gannets at point-blank range spilling over from their original rock to the adjacent slopes at Cape St. Mary's, equally overwhelming numbers of Black-legged Kittiwakes and Common Murres crowded on nesting cliffs both at the Cape and on Witless Bay's Gull Island, and all those unique Atlantic Puffins swarming—by the thousands, of course—around our Witless Bay tour boat.

As impressive and spectacular as all that was, it's what you come to expect in Newfoundland, and, by definition, the news means something out of the ordinary. And, indeed, our four perfectly clear and fog-free days on the Avalon Peninsula of Newfoundland were something unusual, considering how often the fog can get in the way. The weather there this time was even uncharacteristically better than Nova Scotia's, where, yes, there was some fog, overcast, and occasional drizzle, but none of it really obscured our ability to see what we were looking for.

So, of course, there were some Nova Scotia news headlines, and again this year the highly sought Bicknell's Thrush provided the best news, as one repeatedly posed for photos in the Highlands of Cape Breton Island. (You know it had to be cooperative if I was even able to snap some pictures!) This bird was in exactly the same site as two years ago, as VENT's record of finding this shy bird remains perfect along one of my favorite remote roads.

Other Nova Scotia highlights included two vocal Barred Owls flying back and forth at midday along another favorite back road. This same road again produced a good selection of warblers as well, and for the second year in a row we managed 20 warbler species. All but one of these were in Nova Scotia, although I admit the Palm was mostly leader-only, and the male Bay-breasted standing in the Bicknell's Thrush's road was a brief view by only a few. But there were especially memorable views of Blackburnians, Mournings, Canadas, and others, and I was intrigued by the Northern Parula singing a near-perfect Black-throated Blue song.

Admittedly, a change in the schedule of the ferry which takes us from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland temporarily slowed our tour's momentum. Normally, this cruise in full daylight offers plenty of time to look for fulmars, shearwaters, and storm-petrels, but this year half of it was at night. So, there was time to find only a few briefly-seen storm-petrels, and the lone Northern Fulmar was a leader-only bird. However, there were excellent looks at all three of the shearwater species we saw, especially the uncommon Manx, and our fulmar-less passage was forgotten as a fulmar posed nicely a few days later on the ledges of Gull Island in Witless Bay.

Newfoundland provided two other memorable headlines. One of these was the male Willow Ptarmigan along Cape St. Mary's path to the gannet rock. This hard-to-find bird is occasionally seen along the entrance road to the Cape, but even the Cape's longtime manager had never seen one anywhere between the visitor's center and the gannets! The other special news were the two Black-headed Gulls which nicely posed for us along the waterfront in the town of Witless Bay: this highly-sought gull had only been seen once in the past six tours, in 2005.

Finally, though this tour obviously focuses primarily on birds, there were some mammals making headlines as well. On land, the moose and woodland caribou we spotted were pretty special, but they paled in comparison with the marine mammals. In Nova Scotia, the pilot whales were especially visible and closer to shore than usual (as gannets dove in their midst), while the humpback whales put on a spectacular show—repeatedly breaching, lob-tailing, and spy-hopping by our Witless Bay tour boat on our last day in Newfoundland.

Itinerary

July 1 - Arrival in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

July 2 - Morning drive from Halifax to lunch in Sheet Harbour via Dollar Lake, the Musquodoboit Valley, and the Mooseland Road; afternoon drive to Liscombe Lodge via Taylor Head Provincial Park and along Hwy. 7; pre-dinner birding option at Liscombe.

July 3 - Morning birding at Liscombe Lodge and along the St. Mary's River (including Hardy & Barb Eshbaugh's place) en route to lunch in Antigonish; afternoon drive to Cheticamp via Pomquet Beach Provincial Park, and Hwys. 104 and 19.

July 4 - All day in Cape Breton Highlands National Park & vicinity, including the Buttereau Trailhead, Pleasant Bay, the "secret" road at Cape North/Money Point, and a Bay St. Lawrence lunch.

July 5 - Cheticamp waterfront, Cheticamp Island, whale/gannet lookoff by Joe's "Scarecrows-R-Us", and the Margaree Valley/East Big Intervale Rd. (incl. lunch at the Lodge).

July 6 - Pre-breakfast option to Benjie's Lake Trail; then drive to North Sydney via Point Aconi, Louisbourg (no fort but a nice lunch), the Marconi Trail, and the Port Morien bar; evening ferry crossing from North Sydney to Argientia, Newfoundland.

July 7 - Morning continuation of ferry crossing, then afternoon at Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve.

July 8 - Pre-breakfast option to Argientia Visitors Centre woods; then drive to Trepassey via the Colinet Line and the western half of the Irish Loop, including Point La Haye, Holyrood Pond & Bay/St. Vincent's Beach, and Cape Pine & vicinity.

July 9 – Drive to St. John’s via Biscay Bay, Portugal Cove South & Chance Cove (with Dave Shepherd), Renew’s, Ferryland, the La Manche side road, and town of Witless Bay; pre-dinner scan of Quidi Vidi Lake and Pier 17.

July 10 – Drive to Bay Bulls via Quidi Vidi Lake, Pier 17, Signal Hill, woodlands en route to Cape Spear & Maddox Cove/Petty Harbour, Donovan's Rd., and successful return to Witless Bay; afternoon boat trip to Witless Bay Ecological Reserve/Gull Island with the O’Brien’s.

July 11 - Departure for home.

Bird List

Key:

- NS = seen/heard in Nova Scotia (July 2-6)
- Nfld = seen/heard in Newfoundland (July 7-10)
- **Boldfaced** species = special highlights (i.e., unexpected rarities or highly-sought specialties)
- Local Newfoundland names for some species given in *italics*

American Black Duck NS Nfld (incl. young)

Ring-necked Duck NS (incl. young)

Common Eider (*Gammy Bird*) NS (incl. sub-adult males at Pt. Aconi)

Surf Scoter NS Nfld (Cheticamp and Biscay Bay)

White-winged Scoter (*White-winged Diver*) Nfld (incl. some from the ferry)

Black Scoter (*Butter-nosed Diver*) Nfld (Biscay Bay)

Common Merganser (*Sheldrake*) NS (incl. young)

Ring-necked Pheasant NS

Willow Ptarmigan (*Brooker*) Nfld (along the path to the gannets at Cape St. Mary's!)

Common Loon (*Diver*) NS Nfld (incl. young)

Northern Fulmar (*Noddy*) Nfld (perched at Gull Island in Witless Bay; also leader-only from the ferry)

Greater Shearwater (*Hagdown; Baulk*) Nfld (many seen from the ferry; also a few at Cape Pine)

Sooty Shearwater (*Black Baulk*) Nfld (several from the ferry)

Manx Shearwater Nfld (very good looks at 3 or 4 from the ferry)

Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Careychick; Mother Carey's Chicken*) Nfld (only a few from the ferry)

Northern Gannet (*Gaunt*) NS Nfld (more than ever, incl. young, at Cape St. Mary's)

Great Cormorant NS Nfld (Taylor Head, Pt. Aconi, and Cape St. Mary's)

Double-crested Cormorant (*Shag*) NS Nfld

American Bittern Nfld (brief fly-by en route to Cape Race)

Great Blue Heron NS

Osprey (*Fish Hawk*) NS Nfld

Bald Eagle (*Grepe*) NS Nfld

Northern Harrier NS Nfld

Sharp-shinned Hawk NS

Broad-winged Hawk NS (fly-by adult at Liscombe)
Red-tailed Hawk NS
Merlin Nfld (brief fly-by at Cape Pine; also leader-only in NS)
Black-bellied Plover NS (migrant at Port Morien)
Piping Plover NS (a pair at Pomquet Beach)
Spotted Sandpiper NS Nfld
Greater Yellowlegs (*Twillick*) NS Nfld
Willet NS
Lesser Yellowlegs NS Nfld (migrants at Port Morien; small flock at sea seen from the ferry!)
Hudsonian Godwit NS (migrant still in breeding plumage at Port Morien)
Short-billed Dowitcher NS (migrant at Cheticamp Island)
Wilson's Snipe Nfld
Black-legged Kittiwake (*Tickle Lace; Stone Mason*) Nfld (1000s of pairs, many with young)
Black-headed Gull Nfld (2 at Witless Bay on our second try!)
Ring-billed Gull Nfld
Herring Gull (*Blue Gull*) NS Nfld (incl. young)
Great Black-backed Gull (*Saddleback*) NS Nfld (incl. young)
Common Tern (*Stearn*) NS Nfld (incl. young at the North Sydney ferry dock)
Arctic Tern NS Nfld (good comparison with Commons at Holyrood Pond and Renewes)
Pomarine Jaeger Nfld (fly-by adult seen from the ferry)
Common Murre (*Turr*) Nfld (the usual 1000s of nesting pairs)
Thick-billed Murre Nfld (clear, fog-free views at Cape St. Mary's)
Razorbill (*Tinker*) Nfld (close adults at Cape St. Mary's, plus others at Witless Bay)
Black Guillemot (*Sea Pigeon*) NS Nfld (lots seen – mostly just beyond camera range)
Atlantic Puffin (*Sea Parrot; Hatchet Face*) Nfld (very close views from the boat at Gull Island)
Rock Pigeon NS Nfld
Mourning Dove NS
Barred Owl NS (a vocal duo seen at midday along the East Big Intervale Rd.)
Ruby-throated Hummingbird NS
Belted Kingfisher NS Nfld
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker NS
Downy Woodpecker NS (incl. a nest with young)
Hairy Woodpecker NS
Northern Flicker NS Nfld
Eastern Wood-Pewee NS (unexpected at Dollar Lake; not seen most tours)
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher NS Nfld (it took awhile for all to see)
Alder Flycatcher NS
Least Flycatcher NS
Blue-headed Vireo NS
Red-eyed Vireo NS
Gray Jay (*Whiskeyjack*) NS Nfld
Blue Jay NS Nfld
American Crow NS Nfld
Common Raven NS Nfld
Horned Lark Nfld (Cape St. Mary's and Cape Pine)

Tree Swallow NS Nfld
Bank Swallow NS
Barn Swallow NS
Black-capped Chickadee NS Nfld
Boreal Chickadee NS Nfld
Red-breasted Nuthatch NS Nfld
Winter Wren NS (heard-only at Taylor Head)
Golden-crowned Kinglet NS Nfld (some showing their crown patch)
Ruby-crowned Kinglet NS (ditto)
Veery NS (unexpected at Pomquet Beach; not seen most tours)
Bicknell's Thrush NS (our record with this elusive thrush remains perfect!)
Swainson's Thrush NS
Hermit Thrush NS Nfld
American Robin NS Nfld
Gray Catbird NS (Pomquet Beach)
European Starling NS Nfld
American Pipit Nfld (Cape Pine and Cape Race)
Cedar Waxwing NS Nfld
Tennessee Warbler NS
Nashville Warbler NS
Northern Parula NS (incl. one singing like a Black-throated Blue)
Yellow Warbler NS Nfld
Chestnut-sided Warbler NS (unexpected at Pomquet Beach)
Magnolia Warbler NS
Yellow-rumped Warbler NS Nfld
Black-throated Green Warbler NS Nfld
Blackburnian Warbler NS
(Palm Warbler NS / leader-only at Liscombe)
Bay-breasted Warbler NS (brief view near the Bicknell's spot)
Blackpoll Warbler NS Nfld
Black-and-white Warbler NS
American Redstart NS
Ovenbird NS
Northern Waterthrush NS Nfld
Mourning Warbler NS
Common Yellowthroat NS
Wilson's Warbler Nfld (our 20th warbler species)
Canada Warbler NS
Chipping Sparrow NS
Savannah Sparrow NS Nfld
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow NS (close view again at Cheticamp Island)
Fox Sparrow NS Nfld
Song Sparrow NS Nfld
Lincoln's Sparrow NS
Swamp Sparrow NS Nfld
White-throated Sparrow NS

Dark-eyed Junco NS Nfld
Bobolink NS (Musquodoboit Valley pairs)
Red-winged Blackbird NS
Common Grackle NS
Pine Grosbeak (*Mope*) Nfld (Argentia Visitors Centre)
Purple Finch NS Nfld
White-winged Crossbill Nfld (unexpected but briefly viewed flock)
Pine Siskin NS
American Goldfinch NS Nfld
Evening Grosbeak NS (again at Hardy Eshbaugh's feeders)
House Sparrow NS Nfld

[Not seen: *Fool Hen, Rocker, Sea Hen, Gale Bird, Bullbird*]

Also seen:

Humpback Whale (a spectacular show at Witless Bay)
Pilot Whale (better views than normal, especially south of Cheticamp)
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin
Harbour Seal
Moose (Cape Breton Highlands and Cape Pine)
Woodland Caribou (10 or so near Cape Pine)
Red Fox (blocking traffic at Cape Breton Highlands)
Beaver
Woodchuck (at Liscombe's feeders)
Snowshoe Hare
Red Squirrel
Eastern Chipmunk
Masked Shrew