

AUTUMN GRAND MANAN

August 29–September 4, 2011

**LEADER:
BARRY ZIMMER**

COMPILED BY: BARRY ZIMMER

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003
AUSTIN, TX 78746
WWW.VENTBIRD.COM**

TOUR REPORT
AUTUMN GRAND MANAN
August 29–September 4, 2011

By Barry Zimmer

Once again, our boat trip on the Autumn Grand Manan tour was absolutely amazing. I don't think any one-day pelagic trip in North America can top the combination of variety, sheer numbers of birds, close-viewing, specialty birds, and marine mammals that the Bay of Fundy has to offer.

On near glass-like seas, we ventured out from Seal Cove on a nine-hour day-trip to such areas as Gannet Rock, Bulkhead Rip, Old Proprietor's Shoal, and The Basin. Activity throughout the day was almost constant. Black Guillemots dotted the water's surface as we journeyed through nearshore waters, and the occasional Northern Gannet flew overhead. As soon as we hit deeper water, we were immediately accompanied by Great Shearwaters—at first just a few, and some distance out. Then, with the help of some chum, we had dozens of them right next to the boat. For the day we would tally an estimated 1,800 Great Shearwaters (at times hundreds were in view at once), many of which were literally within a few feet. Joining them were smaller numbers of Sooty Shearwaters. Wilson's Storm-Petrels began appearing, dancing about on the water like frenetic ballerinas. A slick of fish oil brought them in closer, and eventually some Leach's Storm-Petrels joined in. An astounding final day count of 8,000+ storm-petrels was estimated.

Flock after flock of phalaropes came and went, both Red and Red-necked, offering great comparisons. Atlantic Puffins buzzed by with regularity, and on occasion we would get one close on the water. Pomarine Jaegers, both light and dark morph birds, joined the mix, as did a couple of Lesser Black-backed Gulls (among the abundant Great Black-backed Gulls). Then a super rarity, a South Polar Skua, landed right next to the boat! We enjoyed superb, close studies of the skua on the water and flying around overhead for about five minutes. There are only a handful of documented provincial records for this species. We had a nice group of white-sided dolphins at one point, and a short while later, a great study of a bizarre ocean sunfish, or mola mola.

The Bay of Fundy is the place to see northern right whale, the rarest whale in the world, and this trip did not disappoint. We followed two for about 30 minutes as they performed on the surface. We also had finback and humpback whale for the day. While watching the right whales, the mate spotted a Manx Shearwater on the water just ahead of the boat. This highly sought species is always uncommon and in low numbers here, but we had great views. On the way back in, a swing by a rocky outcrop yielded wonderful studies of Great Cormorants, another northeastern specialty. The only bird we had missed for the day was Razorbill, and the captain said they had been unusually scarce the past few weeks. It was hard to be disappointed with the incredible day we had, but Razorbill was a bird we did not want to miss. However, late in the afternoon and less than 15 minutes from Seal Cove, a lone Razorbill was spotted on the water. Although he was a little skittish, everyone obtained good views. A true last minute find!

Of course, Grand Manan is about so much more than just pelagic birding and marine mammals. This trip is timed to coincide with landbird and shorebird migration as well. The day after our boat trip, there was a fantastic fallout of migrants as favorable conditions for moving existed. Scouring the spruce forests, we checked flock after flock of migrants. In all we had 18 species of warblers including such gems as Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, and Canada. Our most common warbler for the trip was Black-throated Green with an impressive 75 individuals seen. Northern Parula was second with 36. Other nice finds included Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Philadelphia and Blue-headed vireos, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher (rare here), Mourning Warbler, Lark Sparrow (very rare), and Orchard Oriole (also very rare here). A Boreal Chickadee gave great views near Dark Harbor, as did two Nelson's Sparrows in Castalia Marsh.

Shorebirds were not to be outdone. A rare Baird's Sandpiper allowed us to study it from 20 feet away. After some searching, we finally got White-rumped as well. In one spot, we had 143 Black-bellied Plovers in view at once, and with some searching found a few Red Knots mixed in. In all we tallied 16 species of shorebirds.

Other highlights included large creches of Common Eiders, a close pair of Red-necked Grebes, good studies of Merlin and Broad-winged Hawk, and a wonderful pair of Pileated Woodpeckers. Oh, and I failed to mention the fantastic lobster and blueberries that were near daily offerings in one form or the other, the perfect weather, and the scenic beauty and ambiance of coastal Maine and New Brunswick. I can't think of a better way to spend a week in early September!

Itinerary:

August 29 - arrival in Bangor

August 30 - Orono Bog Boardwalk, drive to Grand Manan via Hwy 9 and Hwy 1 with ferry ride from Black's Harbor to Grand Manan (50 species)

August 31 - grounds of Marathon Hotel, Castalia Marsh, all day boat trip off Grand Manan (Gannet Rock, Old Proprietor's Shoal, Bulkhead Rip, The Prong, The Basin) (48 species; 70 total)

September 1 - grounds of Marathon Hotel, The Whistle, Castalia Marsh, The Anchorage, Dark Harbor Road (66 species; 101 total)

September 2 - Castalia Marsh, Dock Road, Dark Harbor Road, Thoroughfare Road, Castalia Marsh, Southwest Head, Ducks Unlimited Ponds (70 species; 119 total)

September 3 - Whale Cove, Hole-in-the-Wall Park, The Whistle, ferry ride to Black's Harbor, Ossie's, Moosehorn NWR, Orono Bog Boardwalk (58 species; 128 total)

September 4 - departures for home (128 total species)

Key:

M = all areas in Maine

G = all areas on Grand Manan including boat trip, plus other parts of New Brunswick

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species that occur regularly but in such low numbers as to be easily missed

Birds:

Canada Goose G

Wood Duck M---spotted by Judy

American Wigeon G

American Black Duck G,M

Mallard M

Green-winged Teal G

Ring-necked Duck G

Common Eider G---mostly females & young (a few males in decent plumage); four very close birds near Southwest Head and a few large creches at sea

Surf Scoter G---just arriving

Red-breasted Merganser G---nice views of mother with three young

Ring-necked Pheasant G

Common Loon G

Red-necked Grebe G---good views at Castalia

Northern Fulmar G---normally not seen on this tour, but we had over 120 including one dark morph; rare this early

Greater Shearwater G---an estimated 1800 on our boat trip, some within six feet of us!!!; voted the favorite bird of the tour in a runaway

Sooty Shearwater G---about 48 total

Manx Shearwater G---one seen well from the boat; always uncommon

Wilson's Storm-Petrel G---about 5000 on our boat trip; great views; voted the third favorite bird of the tour

Leach's Storm-Petrel G---great luck with this often difficult to find species; we had 25 total including a few that came very close to the boat; often missed entirely

Northern Gannet G---a total of 86 seen of varying ages and plumages; a good year for this species

Double-crested Cormorant G

Great Cormorant G---about 30 on one rock from the boat trip; exceptional views

Great Blue Heron G

Turkey Vulture M,G

Bald Eagle G

Northern Harrier M---one male at Moosehorn

Broad-winged Hawk G,M---great views of perched birds on the Dark Harbor Road and near Calais

Red-tailed Hawk M---one in Bangor was our last new bird; very uncommon here
 Merlin G
 Black-bellied Plover G---a total of 143 birds, some still in breeding plumage
 Semipalmated Plover G---60 in one day
 Spotted Sandpiper G---not seen by all
 Greater Yellowlegs G
 Lesser Yellowlegs G
 Ruddy Turnstone G---five total
Red Knot G---three at Thoroughfare Road; uncommon
 Sanderling G
 Semipalmated Sandpiper G---the most numerous peep with 200+ in one day; mostly juveniles
 Least Sandpiper G---nice views of fresh juveniles
White-rumped Sandpiper G---only one in Castalia Marsh; scope views
Baird's Sandpiper G---one fresh juvenile in Castalia; rare here
Dunlin G---one on Thoroughfare Road; uncommon
 Short-billed Dowitcher G
 Red-necked Phalarope G---about 70 total
 Red Phalarope G---an estimated 500 on our boat trip!
 Black-legged Kittiwake G---oddly, only one bird was seen
 Bonaparte's Gull G---one immature bird from the boat
Laughing Gull G---one distantly from the ferry; very uncommon this far north
 Ring-billed Gull M,G
 Herring Gull M,G
Lesser Black-backed Gull G---two seen our boat trip; increasing here but still considered rare to very uncommon here
 Great Black-backed Gull M,G---by the hundreds
 Common Tern G---only one this year
South Polar Skua G---incredible study of one on the water right next to our boat; only a handful of documented provincial records; voted second favorite bird of the tour!
 Pomarine Jaeger G---four total with both light and dark morphs seen
Common Murre G---one distantly from the ferry; uncommon
 Razorbill G---only one on our boat trip, found at the very last minute; two more on our second ferry crossing seen briefly; a down year for this species
 Black Guillemot G
 Atlantic Puffin G---83 total with many nice views of birds on the water
 Rock Pigeon M,G
 Mourning Dove M,G
Common Nighthawk G---small migrant group of three after our boat trip near Seal Cove; late for this species
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird G---about six seen
 Belted Kingfisher G---distantly at Whale Cove
Pileated Woodpecker M---pair south of Calais along Hwy 9 our last afternoon; very uncommon & not expected on this tour
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker M---nice study
 Downy Woodpecker M,G

Hairy Woodpecker G
 Northern Flicker M,G---yellow-shafted variety
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher M,G---one in each location; uncommon
 Alder Flycatcher G---one south of Seal Cove
 Least Flycatcher G---a high count of nine total
 Eastern Phoebe M---one at Orono the first morning
 Eastern Kingbird G---five in one group near Seal Cove
 Blue-headed Vireo M,G---eight total, a good count for this trip
Philadelphia Vireo G---three total; nice views
 Red-eyed Vireo G---common with **45** seen
 Blue Jay M,G
 American Crow M,G
 Common Raven M,G
Tree Swallow G---a few late birds over Castalia Marsh
 Barn Swallow G---one in with Trees at Castalia
 Black-capped Chickadee M,G---our most common landbird with an estimated 159 seen
Boreal Chickadee G---nice views near Dark Harbor; only the second time in the last seven years!
 Red-breasted Nuthatch M,G---40 seen!
 Brown Creeper M---heard only at Orono
Winter Wren G---heard by all and seen briefly by a few; uncommon
 Golden-crowned Kinglet G---nice views
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet G
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher G---our last morning at Hole-in-the-Wall; rare here
 Eastern Bluebird G---two family groups on the island; uncommon
 American Robin M,G
 Gray Catbird G---six total
Northern Mockingbird M---in Bangor; uncommon this far north
 European Starling M,G
 Cedar Waxwing M,G---common
 Tennessee Warbler G---four seen
 Nashville Warbler G--- three total
 Northern Parula M,G---total of 36 for the trip (our second most common warbler); a high count for this tour
 Yellow Warbler G--- twelve total
 Chestnut-sided Warbler G---seven total
 Magnolia Warbler M,G---18 total
Cape May Warbler G---one along the Whistle; uncommon at this time
 Yellow-rumped Warbler G---Myrtle; 16 seen
 Black-throated Green Warbler M,G--- the most common warbler this year with an estimated total of **75**; many almost at arm's length
Blackburnian Warbler G---one along the Dark Harbor Road and one at Ossie's
Bay-breasted Warbler G---one along Dark Harbor Road (seen within ten feet) and one at Ossie's; very uncommon at this time
 Blackpoll Warbler G---seven total
 Black-and-white Warbler M,G--- 17 total

American Redstart M,G---14 for the trip including about five males
Mourning Warbler G---good views of one at the old dump; hard to find this late
 Common Yellowthroat M,G---our third most common warbler with 34 seen
 Wilson's Warbler G---eight total
Canada Warbler G---two; our first spotted by Tara; great study of second bird
 Chipping Sparrow G
Lark Sparrow G---one along Thoroughfare Road; very rare this far east
 Savannah Sparrow G
 Nelson's Sparrow G--- superb views; the duller race *subvirgatus*
 Song Sparrow M,G
 Swamp Sparrow G
 White-throated Sparrow G
 Brown-headed Cowbird M---uncommon; only one immature bird spotted by Tara
Orchard Oriole G---rare this far north; spotted by Tara; a tour first
 Baltimore Oriole G
 Purple Finch G---only one
White-winged Crossbill G---bad views of three flying overhead along the Dark Harbor
 Road; a down year for this nomadic species; seen on about a third of the trips here
 American Goldfinch M,G---scarcer than usual
 House Sparrow M---always tough on this trip, but some were spotted in Bangor at a Burger
 King our last afternoon by tara!

total species - **128** (our third highest total ever)

Leader only birds:

Lincoln's Sparrow
 Common Grackle

Mammals:

Harbor Seal
 Gray Seal
 Harbor Porpoise---very common
White-sided Dolphin---very uncommon in this region; good views
Northern Right Whale---great views of two for about twenty minutes (the rarest whale in the
 world!)
 Finback Whale---from the ferry & from our boat trip
 Humpback Whale---one distantly on our boat trip
 whale species (probably a Minke but possibly a Sei)---seen briefly from our boat trip
 Red Squirrel
 Eastern Gray Squirrel---leader only
 Eastern Chipmunk---heard only
 White-tailed Deer

total species - 12

Butterflies:

Cabbage White (plus other unidentified whites)
Orange Sulphur
Mourning Cloak
Common Ringlet
Monarch
Viceroy---thanks to Tara
American Copper
Common Wood-Nymph

total species - 8

Significant others:

Mola mola (Ocean Sunfish)---up close and personal
Basking Shark---30 or more feet long!
lobster in various forms
blueberries in various forms
miniature golf at Durlan's---(Durlan = 48, Barry = 53, Sandy = 55, Wayne = 55, Tara = 64 ,
Judy = 68, Pat = 69); Barry versus group's best ball---group wins 44 to 53; Barry & Durlan
best ball versus group best ball---Barry & Durlan win 42 to 44
adventures of Mr. Camera
spooky girl (boy?) at the Marathon
dulse tasting---yuk!
Stephen King's house
pitcher plants
Hurricane Irene---disrupted arrival times slightly but nothing else