

NOVA SCOTIA & NEWFOUNDLAND

JULY 6 - 16, 2005

**LEADERS:
KIM ECKERT**

COMPILED BY: KIM ECKERT

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

Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.

Nova Scotia - Newfoundland Tour

July 6 - 16, 2005

Leader: Kim Eckert

Tour Summary:

The success of a spring tour to a place like High Island or Point Pelee, where finding migrants is the whole point of the trip, certainly depends on the weather: you have to count on the right conditions to bring in or put down the birds. But during the breeding season, a day's weather forecast matters a whole lot less. Sure, there are unpleasant days, but the birds are still there, and there's always tomorrow to find them. However, there's one summer tour I do each year when one single meteorological consideration has much to say about our success. Nova Scotia and Newfoundland are wonderful places to go birding, but they would be even better if there weren't all that fog to worry about.

Just getting there in the first place can be a challenge. None of us had any difficulties landing in Halifax, but for a couple days after our arrival date most flights were being canceled due to fog. The rest of our birding time in Nova Scotia was mostly fog-free, but after that it was on to the ferry dock for our passage to Newfoundland. This crossing holds the potential for some of the best pelagic birding anywhere – and with virtually no need to worry about seasickness aboard this large and stable car ferry.

A few Wilson's and lots of Leach's storm-petrels are there every summer, Greater Shearwaters are common, along with lesser numbers of Sooty and Manx shearwaters, and several Northern Fulmars are to be expected. Jaegers, usually Pomarines, are seen on most crossings, even a skua (usually, alas, unidentified) crosses the bow on perhaps a third of them, and a few Red Phalaropes are starting to migrate in July. Very nice additions to any tour's bird list, as long as – you guessed it – the fog doesn't get in the way. But this year it did much of the time, like it does on at least half these trips, and there was rain as well. Still, both storm-petrels, all three shearwaters, and the fulmar were seen when the visibility improved, although there was only one unsatisfactory Manx sighting, and a fly-by phalarope was leader-only.

But there is little time to complain about fog (or to savor a fog-free crossing) when the next day is our visit to Cape St. Mary's Seabird Sanctuary. The view here is terrific, with Humpback Whales and distant shearwaters cruising the ocean for food, and the cliffs lined with literally tens of thousands of gannets, kittiwakes, and murre. Naturally, this is a place shrouded in fog most of the time: indeed, in July 2004 the Cape recorded no fewer than 28 fog-filled days! So it was little wonder this year when we pulled in the parking lot with the visitors center nowhere in sight, even though it was only some 50 yards away. This time, for a change, luck was with us, and it cleared up nicely as we

stood by the gannet rock, enough so that we were able to see the Thick-billed Murres among the Commons – something we are unable to do some years.

Meteorological luck failed us, though, the next time we needed it a couple days later. During our day-long drive to view seabirds, ptarmigan, whales, caribou, and scenery at the headlands south of St. John's, it was mostly either raining or foggy. A flat tire even added injury to insult. But we still saw our first Humpbacks, Caribou were standing by the road, hundreds of shearwaters and scoters rafted close to shore, and the diving gannets were spectacular. Naturally, there was some fog the following day on our boat trip to Witless Bay Seabird Sanctuary, but there wasn't enough to spoil our very close views of puffins (standing less than 10 yards from the boat!), Razorbills, a family of Humpbacks, and Green Island's wall-to-wall population of 100,000 murres.

Not all of this tour's highlights, of course, were fog-related. We saw Spruce Grouse twice: a dust-bathing and “anting” female, plus a family of young attended by both parents. Common Eiders chased off a Great Blue Heron that had landed too close to their ducklings. A Winter Wren sang from the top of a 50-foot spruce: such a seemingly odd perch is actually appropriate for this species (and other low-to-the-ground skulkers, like Ovenbird and Mourning Warbler) when singing on territory. One of the prettiest overlooks in all of Cape Breton Highlands hosted the highly sought and secretive Bicknell's Thrush; it was hard to know whether to look at the bird or the view. Less scenic but just as interesting was a rooftop in St. John's, Newfoundland, where a surprising adult Iceland Gull and Lesser Black-backed Gulls chose to summer far from their normal breeding grounds.

A family of Ruffed Grouse, Great Cormorants atop a sea stack, Black-headed Gulls patrolling tidal mudflats, Arctic Terns nesting next to Commons, no fewer than 19 warbler species (including Black-throated Blue, which we hadn't seen in years). . . . The highlights go on and on: even the thickest fog banks cannot obscure our memory of them.

Itinerary:

July 6 - arrival in Halifax.

July 7 - Airport Hotel side road before breakfast; drive to Liscombe Lodge via Hwys. 212 & 224, Taylor Head Provincial Park, and Hwy. 7.

July 8 - pre- and post-breakfast birding at Liscombe; morning drive to Antigonish along the St. Mary's River; afternoon drive to Cheticamp via Antigonish Landing W.M.A. and Hwys. 4 & 19.

July 9 - all day in Cape Breton Highlands National Park & vicinity, including the Bicknell's road at Cape North/Money Point, Dingwall, and White Point.

July 10 - drive to North Sydney via the Trous de Saumon Trail, Cheticamp Back Road,

Joe's Scarecrows-R-Us, East Big Intervale Road & Resort in the Margaree Valley, Baddeck Inlet, and Port Morien.

July 11 - ferry crossing from North Sydney to Argentia (mostly in the fog – alas!).

July 12 - much of the day at Cape St. Mary's (with heavy fog lifting as we birded!), plus a brief visit to Pt. Verde.

July 13 - pre-breakfast birding in Dunville & vicinity; drive to St. John's via The Cataracts and Salmonier Nature Park; brief visits to Quidi Vidi Lake (and a nearby roof top), Signal Hill, and the sewage outlet en route to dinner.

July 14 - all day on the Trepassey/Irish Loop (mostly in the fog & rain – alas!), including Renew's, Portugal Cove/Cape Race (including a flat tire), Holyrood Bay & Pond, and Point La Haye.

July 15 - morning at Quidi Vidi Lake, Signal Hill, and wooded roads en route to Cape Spear; afternoon boat trip with the O'Brien's to Witless Bay Seabird Sanctuary.

July 16 - departure for home [or, in my case, departure for the ferry dock & all day on the ferry (another crossing plagued by fog & rain), 550-mile drive on July 17 to Bangor, and flight home July 18].

Bird List:

Key

NS = seen/heard in Nova Scotia (July 7-10)

F = seen from the North Sydney-Argentia ferry (July 11)

Nfld = seen/heard in Newfoundland (July 12-15)

Birds not annotated NS or Nfld were found in both provinces

Local Newfoundland names for some species given in parentheses

Canada Goose NS (incl. young)

Wood Duck NS (incl. young)

American Black Duck (incl. young)

[Mallard Nfld (non-wild hybrids?)]

Green-winged Teal NS

Ring-necked Duck NS (incl. young)

Common Eider (Gammy Bird) NS (incl. young at Taylor Head defended from a Great Blue Heron by their mothers)

Surf Scoter NS (summering non-breeders at White Point)

White-winged Scoter (White-winged Diver) (also summering at White Point, plus 100s at Holyrood Bay)

Black Scoter (Butter-nosed Diver) Nfld (unexpected female at Holyrood Bay)

Common Merganser (Sheldrake) NS

[Ring-necked Pheasant NS (game farm escape?)]
Ruffed Grouse NS (incl. young escorted across the road by an adult)
Spruce Grouse (Fool Hen) NS (incl. 3 young with both parents on the Fish Ladder Rd., plus a lone female dust-bathing & "anting" at Taylor Head)
Common Loon (Diver) (incl. birds calling flight)
Northern Fulmar (Noddy) F only (a few close views before the fog rolled in)
Greater Shearwater (Hagdown; Baulk) F, Nfld (first one from the ferry was only 30 min. out of N. Sydney; also 100s along Cape Race Rd.)
Sooty Shearwater (Black Baulk) F, Nfld (a few good looks from the ferry and en route to Cape Race)
Manx Shearwater F (only one pre-fog sighting) [plus leader-only in Nfld]
Wilson's Storm-Petrel F only (3 or 4 seen, the first ones less than an hour from N. Sydney)
Leach's Storm-Petrel (Careychick; Mother Carey's Chicken) F only (lots before the fog)
Northern Gannet (Gaunt) NS, F, Nfld (incl. young at Cape St. Mary's, plus lots of adults diving in Holyrood Bay)
Great Cormorant (Taylor Head and post-fog at Cape St. Mary's)
Double-crested Cormorant (Shag)
American Bittern NS (fly-over along Hwy. 224)
Great Blue Heron NS (incl. one with a taste for baby eiders at Taylor Head)
Osprey (Fish Hawk) (incl. a pair on the nest in NS)
Bald Eagle (Grepe)
Northern Harrier NS
Northern Goshawk NS (going-away look at an imm. on Big Intervale Rd.)
Red-tailed Hawk NS
Merlin NS (only at the Airport Hotel)
Greater Yellowlegs (Twillick)
Lesser Yellowlegs ("fall" migrants)
Willet NS
Spotted Sandpiper (incl. young already wagging their tails)
Short-billed Dowitcher NS (migrants at Port Morien)
Wilson's Snipe Nfld
[Red Phalarope (Gale Bird) / leader-only on F]
[Parasitic Jaeger / leader-only in Nfld]
Black-headed Gull NS (nice views of this rare species at Port Morien)
Bonaparte's Gull NS
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull (Blue Gull) NS, F, Nfld (incl. young)
Iceland Gull Nfld (unexpected summering adult sleeping on a roof top by Quidi Vidi L.)
Lesser Black-backed Gull Nfld (also unexpected on the same roof top)
[Glaucous Gull / leader-only in Nfld]
Great Black-backed Gull (Saddleback) (incl. young)
Black-legged Kittiwake (Tickle Ace; Stone Mason) Nfld (incl. young at nests at Cape St. Mary's & Witless Bay)
Common Tern (Stearn) NS, F, Nfld

Arctic Tern Nfld (good comparisons with Commons at Renew's & Holyrood Pond)
Common Murre (Turre) Nfld (incl. young at nests at Cape St. Mary's & Witless Bay)
Thick-billed Murre Nfld (after the fog lifted at Cape St. Mary's!)
Razorbill (Tinker) Nfld (best views at Witless Bay, plus a lone adult at Cape St. Mary's)
Black Guillemot (Sea Pigeon) NS, F, Nfld
Atlantic Puffin (Sea Parrot; Hatchet Face) F, Nfld (the closest I've ever seen them from the boat!)
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove NS
Ruby-throated Hummingbird NS
Belted Kingfisher
Downy Woodpecker NS
Hairy Woodpecker NS
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker NS (Big Intervale Rd. fly-over)
Olive-sided Flycatcher NS (Big Intervale Rd.; not seen every year)
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher NS (close & cooperative along Cheticamp Back Rd.)
Least Flycatcher NS (briefly along the St. Mary's R. road)
Blue-headed Vireo NS
Red-eyed Vireo NS
Gray Jay (Whiskeyjack) (incl. young)
Blue Jay (incl. young)
American Crow
Common Raven
Horned Lark Nfld (incl. one singing & skylarking at Cape St. Mary's)
Tree Swallow
Bank Swallow NS
Barn Swallow NS
Black-capped Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee (incl. some too close to focus on)
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Winter Wren NS (excellent view of a singing male atop a 50-foot spruce!)
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Bicknell's Thrush NS (again this year from the scenic overlook on the road to Money Pt.)
Swainson's Thrush
Hermit Thrush NS
American Robin
Gray Catbird NS (Cheticamp Back Rd.)
European Starling
American Pipit Nfld
Cedar Waxwing NS
Nashville Warbler NS
Northern Parula NS

Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler NS (only at the "usual spot" at Antigonish W.M.A.)
Magnolia Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler NS (singing male for the first time in years along the St. Mary's R. road)
Yellow-rumped Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler NS
Blackburnian Warbler NS
Palm Warbler NS (only along the Airport Hotel side road)
Blackpoll Warbler
Black-and-white Warbler
American Redstart NS
Ovenbird NS
Northern Waterthrush
Mourning Warbler NS (incl. two at the Bicknell's overlook)
Common Yellowthroat NS
Wilson's Warbler Nfld
Canada Warbler NS (= 19 warbler species)
Chipping Sparrow NS
Savannah Sparrow
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow NS (as usual at Antigonish W.M.A. and for the first time at Port Morien!)
Fox Sparrow
Song Sparrow NS
Lincoln's Sparrow NS
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco (incl. young)
Bobolink NS
[Red-winged Blackbird / leader-only in NS]
Common Grackle NS (but were the fly-bys at Renew's grackles or Rusty Blackbirds?)
Pine Grosbeak (Mope) Nfld
Purple Finch
Red Crossbill Nfld (distant female perched near Dunville)
Pine Siskin Nfld
American Goldfinch
Evening Grosbeak NS (pair at a feeder near Cheticamp) [plus leader-only in Nfld]
House Sparrow

[Not seen: Brooker, Rocker, Sea Hen, Bullbird]

Also seen:

Pilot Whale
Minke Whale
Humpback Whale (close views of a female & young at Witless Bay; also seen from Cape

Race Rd.)

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

Gray Seal

Caribou (two seen farther east than expected – before the fog)

Moose (briefly at Cape Breton Highlands)

White-tailed Deer

Snowshoe Hare

Woodchuck

Red Squirrel

Eastern Chipmunk

Wood Turtle

Green Frog (heard-only)