

# **NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA**

**JULY 5-15, 2006**

**LEADERS: KIM ECKERT AND BRENNAN MULROONEY**

**COMPILED BY: KIM ECKERT**

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## **Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.**

### **Nova Scotia - Newfoundland Tour**

**July 5 - 15, 2006**

**Leaders: Kim Eckert & Brennan Mulrooney**

#### **Tour Summary:**

With so many memorable highlights on this year's tour, it's genuinely hard to know where to begin! One could make a case for headlining this summary with weather news, which resulted in something happening on this tour for the first time ever. Or perhaps the lead story should be our being able to observe a bird which had only occurred twice ever before in North America! Then there were all those nesting and pelagic seabirds, which are what this tour is really all about in the first place. On the other hand, back in the woods, there were some unprecedented views of two elusive thrushes, plus one of our longest lists of warbler species ever.

Well, I suppose you have to give the edge to that third North American record of a Western Reef-Heron, which had been present at Glace Bay in Nova Scotia for a few weeks. Luckily, this site was only a half hour from our hotel in North Sydney and easy enough to include in our itinerary. Fortunately, as well, the heron was waiting for us as we arrived; several previous observers had reported having to wait several hours or even a few days before it would appear.

As far as other water birds go, the pelagic ferry crossing between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland typically provides some of our best birding—given decent weather, of course. And this year the weather and the birds certainly did not disappoint. There was not a hint of a fog bank or rain the whole way, and we were handsomely rewarded with some significant birds. A skua flew low enough over our heads to provide us the opportunity to confidently identify it as a South Polar. Manx Shearwaters probably appeared in numbers higher than I had ever witnessed on this crossing, as did several groups of Red Phalaropes, along with what I think were the first Red-necked Phalaropes ever noted on this tour.

But, alas, the weather did not always cooperate. The chronic fog at Cape St. Mary's presented its usual visibility problems, but it lifted just enough to provide the more patient birders with decent views of Thick-billed Murres on the cliffs below. Our first attempt to visit Cape Pine featured not just fog but also wind-driven rains. Fortunately, conditions were favorable the next morning when we returned to see Atlantic Puffins, Razorbills, Black Guillemots, and Great Cormorants posing on ledges below the lighthouse. We even saw a pair of moose and a few caribou en route and some whales in the waters beyond the headlands.

It was especially lucky, indeed, that we had such nice looks at puffins at Cape Pine, since the weather the next day deteriorated to the point of being impossible. For the first time since my first tour here in 1985, the boat tour to see thousands of Atlantic Puffins close at hand (not to mention equal numbers of murrelets and kittiwakes) had to be canceled due to high winds and even higher seas. (Some of the waves that day reportedly crested at 20 feet!)

But despite this tour's emphasis on some amazing quantities of many quality seabirds, I have to think I may have been more impressed by our list of woods birds. Consider, for example, our tally of 20 warbler species, a total seldom reached on this tour. Especially satisfying was being able to turn up Tennessee, Chestnut-sided, Palm, Bay-breasted, and Canada—all species we have failed to see on some past trips.

Equally impressive—if not more so—were the fine looks we had of both Bicknell's and Gray-cheeked thrushes, two highly elusive birds. The Bicknell's we found on Cape Breton provided the best and most prolonged views we've ever had, as it repeatedly posed in plain sight and even sang a few times. (This is still a species we've never missed seeing on this tour!) More elusive in recent years, for reasons unknown, has been the Gray-cheeked Thrush on the Newfoundland side, but this year there were two or three singing males which eventually emerged for all to see.

And what about that male Black-backed Woodpecker at Liscombe, the four Ruffed Grouse sightings (including three with chicks), Parasitic Jaegers and Arctic Terns chasing each other in and out of the fog at Holyrood Pond, and those whales and other marine mammals seen from the headlands and ferry? Just honorable mention, I guess. Nothing more than page 2 material in this year's edition of *The Nova Scotia & Newfoundland News*.

### **Itinerary:**

July 5 - Arrival in Halifax.

July 6 - Airport Hotel side road; drive to Liscombe Lodge via Hwys. 212 & 224, the Moose River & Mooseland road, Taylor Head Provincial Park, and Hwy. 7; early evening option at Liscombe (with a woodpecker in the grouse area).

July 7 – Morning birding in Liscombe Lodge area and along the St. Mary's River; afternoon drive to Cheticamp via Hwys. 7, 104, and 19, with a stop at Margaree Harbour (for baby seagulls).

July 8 - All day in Cape Breton Highlands National Park & vicinity, including the Buttrereau Trail/Pillar Rock area, the Bicknell's road at Cape North/Money Point (!), Cabot's Landing Prov. Park, and the Bog Trail.

July 9 - Drive to North Sydney via the Cheticamp Back Road, Cheticamp Island, Joe's Scarecrows-R-Us (!), and the Margaree Valley; late afternoon option to Glace Bay (for a reef-heron!) and Port Morien.

July 10 – All-day ferry crossing from North Sydney to Argentia (with clear sailing all the way!).

July 11 - Most of the day at Cape St. Mary's (mostly in the fog), with brief stops on the way back at Great Barasway and Point Verde.

July 12 – Drive to Trepassey via the Argentia visitors centre (for another thrush), the Colinet Line, Point La Haye, Holyrood Pond & Bay, and Cape Pine (in the fog, wind, and rain).

July 13 – Morning return to Cape Pine (in clear weather); drive to St. John's via the Trepassey Harbour, Biscay Bay, Portugal Cove South/Cape Race (with Dave Sheppard), and Renews.

July 14 – A day of cold, light rain, and high winds (which aborted the Witless Bay boat trip); tried to bird Quidi Vidi Lake, Pier 17's sewage outlet, Signal Hill, Cape Spear, and Bay Bulls; afternoon visits to The Rooms (natural history museum) and the Geo Centre (geological and Titanic museum).

July 15 - Departure for home.

### **Bird List:**

#### Key

NS = seen/heard in Nova Scotia (July 6-9)

F = seen from the North Sydney-Argentia ferry (July 10)

Nfld = seen/heard in Newfoundland (July 11-14)

Birds not annotated NS or Nfld were found in both provinces

Local Newfoundland names for some species given in *italics*

Canada Goose NS

American Black Duck

Northern Pintail NS

Greater Scaup NS (unexpected at Cheticamp Island)

Common Eider (*Gammy Bird*) NS (Taylor Head; incl. sub-adult males)

White-winged Scoter (*White-winged Diver*) Nfld (various places along the Irish Loop)

Common Merganser (*Sheldrake*) NS

**Ruffed Grouse** (seen no fewer than 4 times; chicks seen on 3 of these)

Common Loon (*Diver*)

Northern Fulmar (*Noddy*) F only

Greater Shearwater (*Hagdown; Baulk*) F only

Sooty Shearwater (*Black Baulk*) F only

Manx Shearwater F only (several good looks; more than usual)

Wilson's Storm-Petrel F only (only one seen by part of the group)

Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Careychick; Mother Carey's Chicken*) F only

Northern Gannet (*Gaunt*) NS, F, Nfld (incl. ugly – for a change – babies at Cape St. Mary's)  
Great Cormorant (Taylor Head, Pillar Rock, and Cape Pine)  
Double-crested Cormorant (*Shag*) NS, F, Nfld  
Great Blue Heron NS  
**Western Reef-Heron** NS (no waiting at Glace Bay!)  
Osprey (*Fish Hawk*)  
Bald Eagle (*Grepe*) NS, F (best view at the Argentinia ferry dock)  
Northern Harrier  
Sharp-shinned Hawk NS  
Broad-winged Hawk NS (Canso Causeway)  
Red-tailed Hawk NS  
(American Kestrel / leader-only)  
Merlin  
Greater Yellowlegs (*Twillick*)  
Lesser Yellowlegs NS  
Willet NS  
Spotted Sandpiper  
Whimbrel (best view at Cape Race)  
Hudsonian Godwit NS (3 at Port Morien)  
(Least Sandpiper / leader-only)  
Short-billed Dowitcher NS  
Red-necked Phalarope F only (first ever on this tour?)  
**Red Phalarope** (*Gale Bird*) F only (several good looks, probably the most ever)  
**South Polar Skua** (*Sea Hen; Bonxie*) F only (nice spotting, Lilah!)  
**Parasitic Jaeger** Nfld (5+ chasing terns in the fog at Holyrood Pond)  
**Laughing Gull** Nfld (3 unexpectedly at Holyrood Pond)  
Bonaparte's Gull NS  
Ring-billed Gull  
Herring Gull (*Blue Gull*)  
**Lesser Black-backed Gull** Nfld (also unexpected at Holyrood)  
Great Black-backed Gull (*Saddleback*) NS, F, Nfld  
Black-legged Kittiwake (*Tickle Lace; Stone Mason*) F, Nfld (many chicks at Cape St. Mary's)  
Caspian Tern NS  
Common Tern (*Stearn*) NS, F, Nfld  
Arctic Tern (good comparisons with Commons at Holyrood Pond and Renew's)  
Common Murre (*Turre*) F, Nfld  
Thick-billed Murre Nfld (seen well if you waited for the fog to lift)  
Razorbill (*Tinker*) F, Nfld (tied for second as most favorite bird of the tour)  
Black Guillemot (*Sea Pigeon*) (red mouths and feet visible at Cape Pine)  
Atlantic Puffin (*Sea Parrot; Hatchet Face*) F, Nfld (despite no boat trip, voted #1 favorite bird)  
Rock Pigeon  
Mourning Dove NS  
Chimney Swift NS (Margaree Valley)  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird NS  
Belted Kingfisher NS

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker NS  
Downy Woodpecker NS  
Hairy Woodpecker NS  
**Black-backed Woodpecker** NS (a male rewarded those who did the evening Liscombe option)  
Northern Flicker  
(Pileated Woodpecker / leader-only)  
Eastern Wood-Pewee NS  
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (best views at Liscombe)  
Alder Flycatcher NS (best view on Cheticamp Back Road)  
Least Flycatcher NS  
Blue-headed Vireo NS  
Red-eyed Vireo NS  
Gray Jay (*Whiskeyjack*)  
Blue Jay NS  
American Crow  
Common Raven  
Horned Lark Nfld (incl. young at Cape Pine)  
Tree Swallow  
Bank Swallow NS  
Barn Swallow NS  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Boreal Chickadee NS (why so few?)  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
Winter Wren NS (a nice consolation at the woodpecker site)  
Golden-crowned Kinglet  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet NS (males of both kinglets showed their crowns)  
**Gray-cheeked Thrush** Nfld (a nice surprise at the Argentia visitors centre)  
**Bicknell's Thrush** NS (tied for second as most favorite bird; certainly our best looks ever!)  
Swainson's Thrush NS  
Hermit Thrush NS  
American Robin  
European Starling  
American Pipit Nfld (Cape Pine)  
Cedar Waxwing  
Tennessee Warbler NS (several singing along the Bicknell's road)  
Nashville Warbler NS  
Northern Parula NS  
Yellow Warbler  
Chestnut-sided Warbler NS (unexpected surprise on the Cheticamp Back Road)  
Magnolia Warbler NS  
Yellow-rumped Warbler NS  
Black-throated Green Warbler NS  
Blackburnian Warbler NS (best views along the St. Mary's River)  
Palm Warbler NS (unexpectedly with young at Liscombe)  
Bay-breasted Warbler NS (another surprise along the Moose River-Moosehead road!)  
Blackpoll Warbler

Black-and-white Warbler  
American Redstart NS  
Ovenbird NS  
Northern Waterthrush  
Mourning Warbler NS (best along the Bicknell's road)  
Common Yellowthroat NS  
Wilson's Warbler Nfld (the 20<sup>th</sup> warbler species of the tour)  
Canada Warbler NS (the first warbler of the tour)  
Savannah Sparrow  
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow NS (most cooperative and responsive at Cheticamp Island)  
Fox Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Lincoln's Sparrow NS  
Swamp Sparrow  
White-throated Sparrow  
Dark-eyed Junco  
Bobolink NS  
Red-winged Blackbird NS  
Common Grackle NS  
Pine Grosbeak (*Mope*) Nfld (best views at the Argentia visitors centre)  
Purple Finch  
Red Crossbill NS (fly-bys briefly landed at Taylor Head)  
Pine Siskin NS  
American Goldfinch  
Evening Grosbeak NS (best at Liscombe and Hardy Eshbaugh's feeders)  
House Sparrow

[Not seen: *Butter-nosed Diver, Fool Hen, Brooker, Rocker, Bullbird*]

**Also seen:**

Pilot Whale  
Minke Whale  
Humpback Whale  
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin  
White-beaked Dolphin  
Risso's Dolphin  
Harbor Porpoise  
Gray Seal  
Harbor Seal

Caribou (large herd behind Gannet's Nest Restaurant; also a few near jct. of St. Shotts road)  
Moose (2 en route to Cape Pine visit #2)  
White-tailed Deer

Coyote (Cape Breton Highlands)  
Snowshoe Hare  
Red Squirrel  
vole, sp.

Wood Turtle (St. Mary's River)  
Green Frog (heard-only)  
Bluefin Tuna