

# **NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA**

**JULY 3 – 14, 2007**

**LEADERS: KIM ECKERT & BRENNAN MULROONEY**

**COMPILED BY: KIM ECKERT**

**VICTOR EMANUEL NATURE TOURS, INC.  
2525 WALLINGWOOD DRIVE, SUITE 1003  
AUSTIN, TX 78746  
[WWW.VENTBIRD.COM](http://WWW.VENTBIRD.COM)**

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**Leaders: Kim Eckert & Brennan Mulrooney**

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**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.**

### **Tour Summary:**

This is not supposed to be a tour characterized by identification challenges! Of course, you do need a good look during our ferry crossing between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to pick out a Wilson's Storm-Petrel from among all the Leach's, and a decent view is helpful to tell the Arctic and Common terns apart, but once given favorable circumstances these IDs are pretty straightforward. And, while I'd never pretend to be able to separate a silent Bicknell's Thrush from a Gray-cheeked in migration, during this trip it's safe enough to call it a Bicknell's in Nova Scotia (our record with finding this elusive and highly sought bird is still perfect!) and to assume it's a Gray-cheeked in Newfoundland.

Nor is this tour one which typically has any unexpected rarities to highlight—after all, it is July during the breeding season with nothing but a few shorebirds migrating through. We're more than content to enjoy and remember all the expected resident woods birds we find, mostly in Nova Scotia, and this year—in addition to the Bicknell's—that Red Crossbill at Liscombe Lodge's feeders (crossbills don't normally go to feeders!), the unexpected family group of Rusty Blackbirds in the Margaree Valley, and no fewer than 20 species of warbler were especially memorable.

The all-day ferry crossing to Newfoundland usually makes the news highlight reel as well, since this may be the most comfortable and productive pelagic birding experience anywhere, with our annual sightings of the two aforementioned storm-petrels, Northern Fulmars (this year the numbers were far higher than anything previously!), and three shearwaters (Greater, Sooty, and especially Manx). We see them annually, that is, given fog-free conditions, and this year the weather and visibility were close to ideal.

In addition, this summary always has something to say about our days in Newfoundland, especially at Cape St. Mary's, where the fog can be bad just as often as on the ferry. This year, though, the weather wasn't merely close to ideal, it was *perfect*, with unlimited visibility, light winds, and moderate temperatures, and the sights and sounds (and smells) of all those cliff-nesting Northern Gannets, both Thick-billed and Common murre, Black-legged Kittiwakes, plus a few close-at-hand Razorbills were indeed nothing short of spectacular.

But, alas, the weather did close in at times during the tour's last few days (similarly, our birding during all four of our days in Nova Scotia had been hampered much of the time by rain). Fog

eventually obscured our seabird and whale-watching opportunities at Holyrood Bay, Cape Pine, and Cape Spear, and it threatened to do the same during our boat trip to Witless Bay. But it did lift just in time for us to see all the Atlantic Puffins and the rest on Gull Island, which seemed almost close enough to touch from the boat.

The humpback whales also put on a show as they lunge-fed on capelin in the shallows right next to the boat as we returned to dock. These were certainly the most impressive mammals we saw, although the close-to-shore fin whales at Cape Race were a close second (we also saw minke and pilot whales), while on land we spotted four caribou (one of these strolling down the middle of the highway) and five moose (one in full gallop and four others standing like statues in a residential front yard).

So much for the highlights? Well, not quite! It seems I have yet to mention that apparently first Newfoundland record of a **Pacific Golden-Plover** and the second provincial record of a **Fea's Petrel!** The plover, sporting its handsome breeding plumage as it fed on earthworms on its favorite lawn in Trepassey, was first found in mid-June (when initially it was mistakenly assumed to be the very similar American Golden-Plover), but it then disappeared for a couple of weeks before conveniently reappearing just a couple of days before our arrival in Trepassey.

And that Fea's Petrel, a rare vagrant detected on a few favored pelagic trips much farther south along the Atlantic coast, was identified from the ferry by Brennan, who had done his pelagic birds homework and was struck by its distinctively whitish tail before noting other field marks. (I may have spotted it first, but I was unsure of its identity, initially thinking it to be a shearwater.) There is, though, a remote possibility this could have been something called a Zino's Petrel, a much rarer species which no one is sure how to distinguish in the field from the Fea's.

These were hardly our only birds involving identification challenges, however. First, there was this distant loon in Nova Scotia which looked pale and on the small side, but we're still not sure if it might have been a Red-throated or even a Pacific instead of a Common Loon. From the ferry the next day we watched an equally distant unidentified jaeger which appeared to have white limited to only its outer two primaries—a feature suggestive of Long-tailed Jaeger.

Upon reaching Newfoundland, our ID problems continued with yet another jaeger: everything about its bulky profile, broad-based wings, and superior size compared to the kittiwakes it lumbered after suggested Pomarine—but through the scopes we could see short but clearly pointed central tail feathers indicating Parasitic Jaeger. And then there was that immature white-winged gull we saw in Trepassey just minutes after enjoying the Pacific Golden-Plover: it was about the same size in all respects as the Herring Gulls around it—probably a large Iceland Gull, but at this time I can't entirely rule out small Glaucous Gull as a possibility.

### **Itinerary:**

July 3 - Arrival in Bangor, Maine.

July 4 – Drive to Truro, Nova Scotia from Bangor via Maine Hwy. 9 to Canadian Customs in St. Stephen, New Brunswick; then along Hwy. 1 and the Trans Canada Highway to the Nova Scotia

Visitors Centre near Amherst; brief wetlands/marsh birding near Amherst, before completion of 370-mile drive.

July 5 - Drive from Truro to Liscombe Lodge via mixed habitats along Hwys. 289 and 224, Sheet Harbour, Taylor Head Provincial Park (our main birding stop), and Hwy. 7; early evening option along Liscombe's fish ladder road (partly in the rain).

July 6 - Morning birding (mostly in the rain) along the St. Mary's River, after being rained-out of birding Liscombe Lodge area; afternoon drive to Cheticamp via Antigonish, Pomquet Beach (for Piping Plovers!), Hwys. 104 and 19, including a whale-watching stop in Inverness.

July 7 - All day in Cape Breton Highlands National Park & vicinity (partly in the fog and/or rain), including the Buttereau Trail/Pillar Rock area, French Mountain, MacIntosh Brook, the Bicknell's road at Cape North/Money Point (!), and North Mountain.

July 8 - Drive to North Sydney (again, partly in the rain) via the Cheticamp Back Road, Cheticamp Island, Joe's Scarecrows-R-U's (!), and the Margaree Valley woodlands; late afternoon option to tidal marshes/mudflats at Port Morien (with still some rain).

July 9 - All-day ferry crossing from North Sydney to Argentia, Newfoundland (with clear and fog-free sailing all the way!) and night in Placentia.

July 10 - Much of the day at Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve (in ideal weather: fog free, light winds, and moderate temperatures!), with a stop on the way back to Placentia at Point Verde.

July 11 - Drive to Trepassey via the Argentia visitors centre woodlands, the Colinet Line, and the western half of the Irish Loop, including Point La Haye, Holyrood Pond & Bay (foggy), and Cape Pine (in the fog); after-dinner option for our first look at the Pacific Golden-Plover on Ryan's Lane in Trepassey!

July 12 – Optional pre-breakfast return to Cape Pine (but still fogged in); drive to St. John's via another look at THE plover, the Trepassey Harbour (for an "Iceland" Gull), Portugal Cove South/Cape Race (with Dave Shepherd), Chance Cove, Renew's, and the La Manche road.

July 13 – Kent's and Long ponds woodlands, brief check of Quidi Vidi Lake and Pier 17's sewage outlet, Signal Hill (mostly shopping), woodlands en route to Cape Spear (mostly fogged-in), and partly fogged-in Witless Bay Ecological Reserve boat trip via the O'Brien's boat out of Bay Bulls.

July 14 - Departure for home.

### **Bird List:**

Key M = seen/heard in Maine (morning of July 4 only)  
NB = seen/heard in New Brunswick (July 4 – mostly at 110 kph)  
NS = seen/heard in Nova Scotia (July 4-8)

F = seen from the North Sydney-Argentia ferry (July 9)

Nfld = seen/heard in Newfoundland (July 10-13)

• y = young seen (aw!)

• **Boldfaced** species indicate special highlights of tour – i.e., either unexpected rarities or highly-sought specialties

• Local Newfoundland names for some species given in *italics*

Canada Goose M,NB,NS (y)

Wood Duck NS (y)

Gadwall NS

American Wigeon NS

American Black Duck NS,F,Nfld (y)

Mallard NB,NS (y)

Blue-winged Teal NS

Northern Shoveler NS

Northern Pintail Nfld

Green-winged Teal NS

Ring-necked Duck NS

Common Eider (*Gammy Bird*) NS (y, plus an adult male with females at Taylor Head)

Harlequin Duck Nfld (an unexpected female at Pt. La Haye with the scoter flock)

Surf Scoter Nfld (also unexpected with the scoters)

White-winged Scoter (*White-winged Diver*) Nfld (the usual large flock at Pt. La Haye)

Long-tailed Duck Nfld (yet another unexpected bird at Pt. La Haye)

Common Goldeneye NS

Common Merganser (*Sheldrake*) NS (y)

Ring-necked Pheasant NS

(Willow Ptarmigan / leader-only, heard-only in Nfld at Cape Pine)

Common Loon (*Diver*) NS,Nfld (plus a possible Red-throated south of Cheticamp?)

Pied-billed Grebe NS

**Fea's Petrel** F (or could it have been a Zino's Petrel?!)

**Northern Fulmar** (*Noddy*) F,Nfld (unprecedented high numbers on the ferry crossing, plus another "buzzing" the boat at Witless Bay)

Greater Shearwater (*Hagdown; Baulk*) F,Nfld (low numbers from the ferry until we encountered rafts of them in Placentia Bay)

Sooty Shearwater (*Black Baulk*) F,Nfld (normal numbers from the ferry: i.e., a few dozen)

Manx Shearwater F (also normal numbers, with about 10 seen from the ferry)

Wilson's Storm-Petrel F (especially good looks this year!)

Leach's Storm-Petrel (*Careychick; Mother Carey's Chicken*) F (plus another found dead by the Cape Race lighthouse keeper)

Northern Gannet (*Gaunt*) NS,F,Nfld (y: ugly ones – for a change! – at Cape St. Mary's)

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

Double-crested Cormorant (*Shag*) M,NS,F,Nfld

Great Blue Heron M,NB,NS

Turkey Vulture M

Osprey (*Fish Hawk*) M,NB,NS,Nfld

Bald Eagle (*Grepe*) NS,Nfld (including one snatching a baby gull or tern along the Irish Loop!)

Northern Harrier NS,Nfld  
 Sharp-shinned Hawk NS  
 Red-tailed Hawk NS  
 American Kestrel M,NS  
 Merlin NS,Nfld  
**Pacific Golden-Plover** Nfld (breeding-plumaged adult in Trepassey initially identified in June as American Golden-Plover)  
**Piping Plover** NS (y: 2 of them with an adult at Pomquet Beach)  
 Greater Yellowlegs (*Twillick*) NS,Nfld  
 Lesser Yellowlegs NS  
 Willet NS (y: playing in the road at Taylor Head, to the distress of its parents)  
 Spotted Sandpiper NS,Nfld  
 Whimbrel NS,Nfld (best looks at Port Morien; another fly-by at Cape Race)  
 Hudsonian Godwit NS (seen again at Port Morien: 3 in breeding plumage)  
 Red Knot NS (unexpected at Port Morien, but only a distant view)  
 Semipalmated Sandpiper Nfld  
 Short-billed Dowitcher NS  
 Wilson's Snipe Nfld (doing a display flight at the caribou crossroads!)  
 Parasitic Jaeger Nfld (or was it a Pomarine along the Cape Race road. . . and was there a Long-tailed seen from the ferry?!)  
**Laughing Gull** NS (an unexpected rarity at Port Morien)  
 Bonaparte's Gull NS  
 Ring-billed Gull M,NB,NS,Nfld (y: nesting at the expense of terns along the Irish Loop)  
 Herring Gull (*Blue Gull*) NB,NS,F,Nfld (y)  
**Iceland Gull** Nfld (or was it a Glaucous we saw at Trepassey Harbour?)  
 Great Black-backed Gull (*Saddleback*) NB,NS,F,Nfld  
 Black-legged Kittiwake (*Tickle Lace; Stone Mason*) F,Nfld (y: unlike the baby gannets, the chicks at Cape St. Mary's were cute!)  
 Common Tern (*Stearn*) NS,F,Nfld (y: especially at the North Sydney ferry dock!)  
 Arctic Tern NS,F,Nfld (y at Renew's; good comparisons with Commons at Holyrood Pond and Renew's)  
 Black Tern NS (at the marshes near Amherst)  
 Common Murre (*Turr*) F,Nfld (the usual 1000s at Cape St. Mary's and Witless Bay)  
 Thick-billed Murre Nfld (great views on the fog-free cliffs at Cape St. Mary's, plus another from the boat at Witless Bay)  
 Razorbill (*Tinker*) Nfld (3 close adults at Cape St. Mary's, plus others at Witless Bay)  
 Black Guillemot (*Sea Pigeon*) NS,F,Nfld (best views at Cape Breton Highlands)  
 Atlantic Puffin (*Sea Parrot; Hatchet Face*) F,Nfld (almost close enough to touch from the boat at Witless Bay!)  
 Rock Pigeon M,NB,NS,Nfld  
 Mourning Dove NS  
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird NS  
 Belted Kingfisher NS,Nfld  
 Downy Woodpecker NS  
 Hairy Woodpecker NS (y: in a telephone pole nest hole at Liscombe Lodge – but, alas, no Black-backed)

Northern Flicker NB,NS,Nfld  
(Pileated Woodpecker / leader-only, heard-only in NS at Pomquet Beach)  
Olive-sided Flycatcher NS (distant views along the St. Mary's River)  
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher Nfld (best views at the Argentic visitors centre)  
Alder Flycatcher NS  
Least Flycatcher NS  
Eastern Phoebe M  
Blue-headed Vireo NS  
Red-eyed Vireo NS  
Gray Jay (*Whiskeyjack*) Nfld (only seen by a few at Chance Cove)  
Blue Jay NS  
American Crow M,NB,NS,Nfld (y)  
Common Raven M,NB,NS,Nfld  
Horned Lark Nfld  
Tree Swallow NS,Nfld  
Northern Rough-winged Swallow NS (unexpected at the Amherst marshes)  
Bank Swallow NB  
Barn Swallow M,NS  
Black-capped Chickadee NS,Nfld  
Boreal Chickadee NS,Nfld (best view of one posing in the scope at Long Pond in St. John's)  
Red-breasted Nuthatch NS  
(Winter Wren / leader-only, heard-only in NS along the St. Mary's River)  
Golden-crowned Kinglet NS  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet NS,Nfld (males of both kinglets showed their crown colors)  
Gray-cheeked Thrush Nfld (close views along the La Manche and Cape Spear roads!)  
**Bicknell's Thrush** NS (very close views again along our "secret" road to Money Point)  
Swainson's Thrush NS  
Hermit Thrush NS,Nfld (best views at Chance Cove)  
American Robin M,NB,NS,Nfld  
Northern Mockingbird M (unexpectedly at the Bangor Hampton Inn)  
European Starling M,NB,NS,Nfld  
American Pipit Nfld (why so few?)  
Cedar Waxwing M,NS  
Tennessee Warbler NS (only at Taylor Head)  
Nashville Warbler NS (along the St. Mary's River)  
Northern Parula NS  
Yellow Warbler M,NS,Nfld  
Chestnut-sided Warbler NS (unexpectedly easy along Hwy. 289 southeast of Truro)  
Magnolia Warbler NS,Nfld  
Yellow-rumped Warbler NS,Nfld  
Black-throated Green Warbler NS  
Blackburnian Warbler NS (everyone's favorite was in good numbers this year)  
Palm Warbler NS (a bit of a surprise en route to Sheet Harbour)  
Bay-breasted Warbler NS (singing at the Bicknell's spot – and more elusive than the thrush!)  
Blackpoll Warbler Nfld  
Black-and-white Warbler NS,Nfld

American Redstart NS  
 Ovenbird NS (most cooperative in the Margaree Valley)  
 Northern Waterthrush NS,Nfld (ditto)  
 Mourning Warbler NS (uncharacteristically easy to observe at North Mt.!)  
 Common Yellowthroat M,NS  
 Wilson's Warbler Nfld (our 20<sup>th</sup> warbler species of the tour at the Argentinia visitors centre)  
 Canada Warbler NS (2 singing males along the St. Mary's River)  
 Savannah Sparrow NS,Nfld (y: still in the eggs in a Cape St. Mary's nest)  
 Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow NS (in the scopes at Cheticamp Island)  
 Fox Sparrow NS,Nfld  
 Song Sparrow M,NS  
 Lincoln's Sparrow NS  
 Swamp Sparrow NS,Nfld  
 White-throated Sparrow NS,Nfld  
 Dark-eyed Junco NS,Nfld  
 Bobolink NS (nice spotting, Don, at the Amherst visitors centre)  
 Red-winged Blackbird M,NB,NS  
**Rusty Blackbird** NS (quite unexpected family group in the Margaree Valley)  
 Common Grackle M,NB,NS,Nfld  
 Pine Grosbeak (*Mope*) Nfld (best views of a male in Trepassey)  
 Purple Finch NS,Nfld  
**Red Crossbill** NS,Nfld (uncharacteristically coming to the feeders at Liscombe Lodge)  
 Pine Siskin NS,Nfld (more than usual, but – alas –no redpolls again this year)  
 American Goldfinch M,NB,NS,Nfld  
 Evening Grosbeak NS (finally at Hardy Eshbaugh's feeders!)  
 House Sparrow NS,Nfld

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

**Also seen:**

Pilot Whale  
 Minke Whale  
 Humpback Whale (close at Bay Bulls!)  
 Fin Whale (close at Cape Race!)  
 Atlantic White-sided Dolphin  
 White-beaked Dolphin  
 Harbor Seal  
 (Gray Seal / seen only by Andie during her boat tour)  
 Caribou (4 near jct. of the St. Shotts road, one of these walking up the highway)  
 Moose (at full gallop at Cape Pine, and 4 posing as statues in a Trepassey yard!)  
 Snowshoe Hare  
 Woodchuck  
 Racoon  
 Beaver

Short-tailed Weasel

Red Squirrel

Eastern Chipmunk

Meadow Vole

Green Frog (heard-only)