

# **NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA**

**JULY 2 – 12, 2008**

**LEADER: KIM ECKERT**

**COMPILED BY: KIM ECKERT**

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**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc.**

### **Tour Summary**

You might think that this tour's weather was ideal, considering almost every day's highs reached the 20s (Celsius, that is—remember, this is Canada), and the only rain the entire time was a brief, light shower on the last day. The problem this year, though, was the fog, that unpredictable meteorological variable that can threaten to dampen our birding success here every year.

Unless our passage by ferry from Nova Scotia to Newfoundland is fog-free, views of fulmars, shearwaters, and storm-petrels become problematic. Dense fog at Cape St. Mary's the next day will obscure our view of the Thick-billed Murre ledges. And fog-bound headlands and bays along the Irish Loop the two following days can limit our chances to see ptarmigan, seabirds, caribou, and whales. This year's score on these four days: Fog 4, Visibility 0.

Well, that's perhaps too harsh an assessment. After all, even though we were entirely fogged-in from noon on during the ferry crossing, we still managed two clear morning hours with visible pelagic birds, and we still saw all six of the expected pelagic species! The next day at foggy Cape St. Mary's, we at least dimly had one Thick-billed Murre, plus our closest look at Razorbills, along with the usual spectacle of gannets, murres, and kittiwakes. The fog then continued to obscure parts of the next two days at places like Pt. La Haye, St. Vincent's, Cape Pine, and Cape Race, but at least there were lots of scoters, a pair of ptarmigan crossing the road (!), and a caribou standing in the highway.

But Newfoundland wasn't all about the fog. For one thing, after too many heard-only, fly-by White-winged Crossbills in Nova Scotia, some crossbills finally posed for all to see in the conifers along the Colinet Line. And for another, our last day's tour with the O'Brien's at Witless Bay featured two humpback whales swimming within 10 metres (this is still Canada!) alongside our boat, lots of Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills at point-blank range at Gull Island, and the always amazing sight of Green Island's slopes salt-and-peppered with literally tens of thousands of Common Murres.

And let's not forget about the first half of the tour in Nova Scotia! The always-difficult Black-backed Woodpecker drummed away from a snag along one of Liscombe Lodge's hiking trails. A lone Piping Plover ran into view at its nesting site at Pomquet Beach. A totally unexpected Sandhill Crane flew by at our first stop in Cape Breton Highlands National Park, which apparently was a first park record for this casual Nova Scotia species. Later that morning, three Bicknell's Thrushes finally (!) emerged into full view, maintaining this tour's perfect record with this highly sought specialty. Earlier on this same road, a family of Ruffed Grouse nervously

wandered into view, and on this same day in the park we had two moose standing in the highway and a black bear along a different section of this same road.

Another measure of this tour's success was certainly our list of 20 warbler species. Such a total is not achieved most years, and it took a bit of luck in Nova Scotia, where 18 of the species were seen, to make this possible. A singing male Black-throated Blue at Dollar Lake on our very first morning was a complete surprise, as was a pair of Bay-breasted Warblers carrying food in the Margaree Valley. A Chestnut-sided and a Canada, both highly local, cooperatively reappeared where we had them last year. And an always highly sought Mourning Warbler actually made us turn our backs on those Bicknell's Thrushes at Cape North.

## **Itinerary**

July 2 - Arrival in Halifax, Nova Scotia.

July 3 - Morning drive from Halifax to lunch in Sheet Harbour via the Musquodoboit Valley and the Mooseland Road, with main birding stops at Dollar Lake and Taylor Head Provincial Park; afternoon drive to Liscombe Lodge along Hwy. 7 with an eider stop at Harrigan Cove.

July 4 - Morning birding at Liscombe Lodge and along the St. Mary's River en route to lunch in Antigonish; afternoon drive to Cheticamp via Pomquet Beach (for Piping Plover), and Hwys. 104 and 19.

July 5 - All day in Cape Breton Highlands National Park & vicinity, including the Buttereau Trailhead, the Bicknell's Thrush road at Cape North/Money Point (!), and The Bog Trail.

July 6 - Drive to North Sydney via the Cheticamp Back Road, Cheticamp Island, Joe's "Scarecrows-R-Us" wayside, the Margaree Valley, and a lobster lunch at St. Ann's Bay; late afternoon option to tidal marshes/mudflats at Port Morien and Glace Bay.

July 7 - All-day ferry crossing from North Sydney to Argentia, Newfoundland (morning clear and warm; afternoon and evening fogged in) and late night (1:30 am) arrival in Placentia.

July 8 - Morning woods birding near the Argentia visitors centre and along the Colinet line; afternoon at mostly fogged-in Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve, with a stop on the way back to Placentia at fog-free Point Verde.

July 9 - Drive to Trepassey via the Colinet Line and the western half of the Irish Loop, including Point La Haye/Gaskiers (partly foggy), Holyrood Pond & Bay (mostly foggy), and Cape Pine (still mostly foggy).

July 10 – Drive to St. John's via the Trepassey Harbour (fogged-in), Portugal Cove South visitors centre (Chance Cove road fogged-in and under construction), Bear Cove (finally fog-free!), Renew's, Bear Cove Head, Ferryland, the La Manche road, and Bay Bulls.

July 11 – Morning at Quidi Vidi Lake, Pier 17's sewage outlet, Signal Hill, woodlands en route to Cape Spear, and afternoon boat trip to Witless Bay Ecological Reserve with the O'Brien's out of Bay Bulls.

July 12 - Departure for home.

## Bird List

### Key:

- NS = seen/heard in Nova Scotia (July 3-6)
- F = seen from the North Sydney-Argentia ferry (July 7)
- Nfld = seen/heard in Newfoundland (July 8-11)
- **Boldfaced** species = special highlights (i.e., unexpected rarities or highly-sought specialties)
- Local Newfoundland names for some species given in *italics*

Canada Goose NS

(American Wigeon / leader-only in NS)

American Black Duck NS Nfld

Ring-necked Duck Nfld

Common Eider (*Gammy Bird*) NS F (incl. an adult male at Harrigan Cove)

(Surf Scoter / leader-only in Nfld)

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

Black Scoter Nfld (a few mixed in with the White-wingeds)

Common Merganser (*Sheldrake*) NS

Ring-necked Pheasant NS

**Ruffed Grouse** NS Nfld (incl. a family group crossing the Bicknell's road)

**Willow Ptarmigan** Nfld (a pair in the road at Cape Pine)

Common Loon (*Diver*) NS Nfld

Pied-billed Grebe NS

Northern Fulmar (*Noddy*) F (a couple close views before the fog)

Greater Shearwater (*Hagdown; Baulk*) F Nfld

Sooty Shearwater (*Black Baulk*) F

Manx Shearwater F (seen just before the fog arrived)

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

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

Northern Gannet (*Gaunt*) NS F Nfld (still special despite the fog at Cape St. Mary's)

Great Cormorant NS (best view at the Buttereau trailhead)

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

Great Blue Heron NS

Osprey (*Fish Hawk*) NS

Bald Eagle (*Grepe*) NS Nfld

Northern Harrier NS Nfld

Sharp-shinned Hawk NS

Broad-winged Hawk NS  
Red-tailed Hawk NS  
American Kestrel NS  
Merlin NS Nfld  
**Sandhill Crane** NS (apparently only casual in Nova Scotia; perhaps the first record for Cape Breton Highlands?)  
**Piping Plover** NS (again at Pomquet Beach)  
Greater Yellowlegs (*Twillick*) Nfld  
Lesser Yellowlegs NS (migrants at Glace Bay)  
Willet NS  
Spotted Sandpiper NS Nfld  
Least Sandpiper Nfld (a fledged chick on the highway near Trepassey)  
Wilson's Snipe NS  
**Laughing Gull** NS (quite unexpected at Glace Bay)  
Ring-billed Gull NS Nfld  
Herring Gull (*Blue Gull*) NS F Nfld  
Great Black-backed Gull (*Saddleback*) NS F Nfld  
Black-legged Kittiwake (*Tickle Lace; Stone Mason*) F Nfld (with their cute babies)  
Caspian Tern NS  
Common Tern (*Stearn*) NS F Nfld (especially at the North Sydney ferry dock)  
Arctic Tern NS F Nfld (good comparisons with Commons at Port Morien, Holyrood Pond, and Renewes)  
jaeger, sp. Nfld (two at Pt. Verde: probably Parasitics)  
Common Murre (*Turr*) F Nfld (especially impressive at Green Island at Witless Bay!)  
Thick-billed Murre Nfld (barely visible 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 F Nfld (best views at Buttereau trailhead)  
Atlantic Puffin (*Sea Parrot; Hatchet Face*) F Nfld (very close from the boat at Gull Island)  
Rock Pigeon NS Nfld  
Mourning Dove NS  
Chimney Swift NS (unexpected over the Mabou gas station)  
Ruby-throated Hummingbird NS  
Belted Kingfisher Nfld  
(Downy Woodpecker / leader-only in NS)  
Hairy Woodpecker NS  
**Black-backed Woodpecker** NS (drumming female at Liscombe Lodge)  
Northern Flicker NS Nfld  
Pileated Woodpecker NS  
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher NS Nfld (best at Liscombe Lodge)  
Alder Flycatcher NS (Cheticamp Back Road)  
Least Flycatcher NS  
Blue-headed Vireo NS  
Red-eyed Vireo NS  
Gray Jay (*Whiskeyjack*) Nfld (more than usual)  
Blue Jay NS Nfld  
American Crow NS Nfld

Common Raven NS Nfld  
Horned Lark Nfld (Cape Pine)  
Tree Swallow NS Nfld  
Bank Swallow NS  
Barn Swallow NS  
Black-capped Chickadee NS Nfld  
Boreal Chickadee NS Nfld (why so few in Nfld?)  
Red-breasted Nuthatch Nfld (only one)  
Winter Wren NS (heard-only)  
Golden-crowned Kinglet NS Nfld  
Ruby-crowned Kinglet NS Nfld (one showing its ruby crown)  
**Bicknell's Thrush** NS (finally, nice views again along our "secret" road at Cape North)  
Swainson's Thrush NS  
Hermit Thrush NS Nfld  
American Robin NS Nfld  
European Starling NS Nfld  
American Pipit Nfld (only seen by Bob)  
Cedar Waxwing NS  
Tennessee Warbler NS  
Nashville Warbler NS  
Northern Parula NS  
Yellow Warbler NS Nfld  
Chestnut-sided Warbler NS (again along the Cheticamp Back Road)  
Magnolia Warbler NS  
Black-throated Blue Warbler NS (unexpected surprise at Dollar Lake!)  
Yellow-rumped Warbler NS Nfld  
Black-throated Green Warbler NS Nfld  
Blackburnian Warbler NS  
Bay-breasted Warbler NS (another surprise, this time in the Margaree Valley!)  
Blackpoll Warbler NS Nfld  
Black-and-white Warbler NS Nfld  
American Redstart NS Nfld  
Ovenbird NS (most cooperative at Dollar Lake)  
Northern Waterthrush Nfld  
Mourning Warbler NS (again in the Bicknell's area)  
Common Yellowthroat NS  
Wilson's Warbler Nfld (our 20th warbler species)  
Canada Warbler NS (at the "usual spot" along the St. Mary's River)  
Chipping Sparrow NS  
Savannah Sparrow NS Nfld  
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow NS (close views again at Cheticamp Island)  
Fox Sparrow NS Nfld  
Song Sparrow NS Nfld  
Lincoln's Sparrow NS  
Swamp Sparrow NS Nfld  
White-throated Sparrow NS Nfld

Dark-eyed Junco NS Nfld  
Bobolink NS (Musquodoboit Valley)  
Red-winged Blackbird NS  
Rusty Blackbird NS (a pair again at the Margaree Valley swamp)  
Common Grackle NS Nfld  
Pine Grosbeak (*Mope*) NS Nfld (best look in the Margaree Valley)  
Purple Finch NS Nfld  
(Red Crossbill / leader-only in Nfld)  
**White-winged Crossbill** NS Nfld (finally on the Colinet Line after too many fly-bys)  
Pine Siskin NS Nfld  
American Goldfinch NS Nfld  
Evening Grosbeak NS (again at Hardy Eshbaugh's feeders)  
House Sparrow NS Nfld

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

Also seen:

Minke Whale  
Humpback Whale  
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin  
Harbor Porpoise  
Harbor Seal  
Black Bear  
Caribou  
Moose  
White-tailed Deer  
Snowshoe Hare  
Woodchuck  
Red Squirrel  
Green Frog