

USA – MAINE BIRDING TOUR: SET DEPARTURE TRIP REPORT

05-13 JULY 2021

By Jacob Roalef



Always a fan favorite, Atlantic Puffins are a top highlight of this trip.



Overview

This nine-day set departure tour of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont commenced in Portland, Maine on the 5th of July 2021 and concluded back there on the 13th of July 2021. The tour visited many amazing birding locations including <u>Scarborough Marsh</u>, <u>Kennebunk Plains</u>, <u>Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge</u>, <u>Vinalhaven Island</u>, <u>Acadia National Park</u>, <u>Messalonskee Lake</u>, Moose Bog, and Mount Washington Auto Road.

The tour connected with many of our target birds giving us a great list for our nine days in the region. Avian highlights included a long list of breeding species such as Upland Sandpiper, Vesper, Saltmarsh, Nelson's and Field Sparrows, Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Great Cormorant, Wilson's Storm Petrel, Roseate, Least, Black and Arctic Terns, Sandhill Crane, Purple Martin, Olive-sided, Yellow-bellied, and Alder Flycatchers, Canada Jay, Ruffed Grouse, Common Eider, Piping Plover, Bicknell's Thrush, Winter Wren, Broad-winged Hawk, Hooded Merganser, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, Brown Creeper, Magnolia, Nashville, Pine, Blackpoll, and Blackburnian Warblers, Ovenbird, and a code 3 ABA rarity in Red-billed Tropicbird.

A total of 148 bird species were seen (plus three species heard only), along with a few other amazing animals, including **Moose**, **Stoat** (Ermine/Short-tailed Weasel), and **Harbor Porpoise**. Species lists can be found at the end of the report.

Detailed Report

Day 1, 05th July 2021. Arrival in Portland and birding Crescent Beach

After gathering everyone from the airport and meeting at the hotel, we decided to venture out for a quick session of birding before dinner. We headed over to Crescent Beach State Park for a lovely stroll along the sandy beach. Our hour or so of birding yielded some great species including Common Tern, Common Eider, Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown Thrasher, and Piping Plover, with a pair of adorable fluffball chicks. From here we headed off to dinner to discuss our upcoming trip in further detail.

Day 2, 06th July 2021. Kennebunk Plains, Scarborough Marsh and Gilsland Audubon

The morning started off with a bit of birding in the hotel parking lot which netted us a stunning **Pine Warbler**, before we headed off towards the grasslands of Kennebunk Plains. This unique habitat was full of awesome birding and the weather held off nicely for us. We were treated to loads of sparrow species such as **Eastern Towhee**, **Vesper**, **Grasshopper**, and **Field Sparrows**, however the real highlight had to be a pair of **Upland Sandpipers** circling overheadand landing at the top of a pine tree! We crossed the road into another section of the plains in search of **Claycolored Sparrow** and while we heard one singing, alas it did not want to make an appearance for us. That's the way birding goes sometimes though. We headed off for more coffee and a bit of brunch.



Our next birding stop was the expansive saltwater marsh habitat of Scarborough Marsh. This area contains a nice (and extremely popular) dike trail, cutting right through the middle of the marsh. We had a great time birding here and the sun even poked out halfway through. Bird species here included Glossy Ibis, Snowy and Great Egrets, Song Sparrow, Tree and Barn Swallows, Sand Martin (Bank Swallow), Least Tern, and we were successful with the top targets for this location, Saltmarsh and Nelson's Sparrows. We continued south to the mouth of the Nonesuch River where we set up shop to watch the tide recede and enjoy the various water birds coming in to feed. Here we managed to follow a pair of Roseate Terns way out over the water, really studying the plumage and identification characteristics, versus the more numerous Common Terns nearby. In addition to the terns, we spotted Great Black-backed and Bonaparte's Gulls, Bald Eagle, and Common Eider. Our last stop of the day took us to Gilsland Farm. This lovely nature center offers a few feeder areas and some prairie areas where we noted White-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, House Finch, and a family of Wild Turkeys, including ten chicks! This certainly capped off a great day of birding and from here we headed off to dinner.



This Wilson's Storm Petrel was part of a large feeding group.

Day 3, 07th July 2021. Vinalhaven and Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge

Today had us all excited as we were to catch a ferry over to Vinalhaven Island where we would meet up with the amazing Captain John Drury for an afternoon boat trip out to Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge. Before catching the 10:30 ferry out of Rockland, we made a quick stop at Wharton Point where we noted **Bobolink**, **Eastern Kingbird**, **American Goldfinch** and some beautiful scenery. From here it was off on our adventure to Vinalhaven! The ferry ride over offered us our first chance at some seabird species, so of course we were kept busy scanning. We



saw several nice birds such as **Laughing Gull**, **Black Guillemot**, **Common Loon** and **Wilson's Storm Petrel**, however most of these views were a bit distant, and so we hoped to improve upon them later.

We made it onto Vinalhaven and after a bit of lunch, we headed off towards the docks to meet up with Captain John Drury and board the *Skua*, his 36-foot vessel. On our way out, we really enjoyed chatting with John as his knowledge and personality are unmatched and he was a true highlight of the trip. We spotted several **Northern Gannets**, a few **Harbor Porpoises** and eventually became surrounded by a feeding group of **Wilson's Storm Petrels** which was an awesome experience. Eventually we arrived at Seal Island and immediately were greeted by **Atlantic Puffins**, **Razorbills**, **Common** and **Arctic Terns**, and **Great Cormorants**. We did a full loop around the island taking in the scenery and birds before we anchored the boat and waited for the star to hopefully arrive. As time was passing, John did a bit of fishing, again adding to the fun and experience and then all of the sudden, boom, Troppy had arrived! This **Red-billed Tropicbird** is quite a marvel as it has returned to this area for 17 years now and we watched as it chased terns and was chased a bit in return. What an incredible bird and an unforgettable experience. With that, we started our way back to Vinalhaven where we didn't see any new species but did enjoy the scenic route and setting sun over the amazing islands in the Gulf of Maine.



"Troppy" the famous, **Red-billed Tropicbird** of Seal Island.

Day 4, 08th July 2021. Back to the mainland and Mount Desert Island

We enjoyed a nice breakfast spread at the Tidewater, our local accommodation on Vinalhaven, before heading back to the mainland of Maine via a ferry ride. Similar to our ride the previous day, the ferry netted us **Black Guillemot**, **Common Eider** and the usual gull suspects like



American Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. We eventually made it back to Rockland and started our journey towards Ellsworth and Mount Desert Island. After enjoying a flyby Bald Eagle at lunch, we spent the afternoon on the west side of the island exploring Seal Cove and Seal Cove Road. These areas produced our first mixed flock of the trip with species such as Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Creeper, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, and Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warblers, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat, and Red-breasted Nuthatch. A bit further along the road we encountered a pesky Blue-headed Vireo calling but only giving brief views as well as a small group of Black-throated Green Warblers. It was a very pleasant afternoon of birding on Mount Desert Island. In the early evening we headed up to the top of Cadilac Mountain to enjoy some great views out over the water, including Acadia, and Bar Harbor down below. We also managed to spot a few Dark-eyed Juncos but the wind was really strong and kept a lot of birds down, so we headed back for dinner.



This **Winter Wren** showed nicely for us after so many of them being heard through the woods.

Day 5, 09th July 2021. Acadia National Park and Hurricane Elsa

We started off early in the hopes of getting some birding in before Hurricane Elsa made her way to Maine, as forecasts were indicating. We headed straight to Sieur de Monts Springs in Acadia National Park, one of the best birding locations in the park. As we arrived in the parking lot, I received the call that our second boat trip was indeed cancelled, an expected call and really it would have been hard to top our boat trip with John. So we were off on the trails, with no rain yet, exploring the mixed forest and picking up some lovely birds such as **Barred Owl**, **Winter Wren**, **Wood Thrush**, **Ovenbird** and **Red-eyed Vireo**. Towards the end of the trail, we were treated to a lovely sighting of a **Stoat** (Ermine/Short-tailed Weasel) as it bounced around from tree to tree. As soon as we loaded back into the van, the rain started, so we headed off to a



delicious brunch full of blueberry pancakes and waffles. From here we continued and drove the park loop of Acadia hoping for a break in the weather, but the rain was strong, and the fog was thick. We eventually decided to take the afternoon to do some laundry and relax a little as a nice halfway point in the tour and knowing we couldn't beat the rain and storm.

Day 6, 10th July 2021. Messalonskee Lake and Boy Scout Road

Today we said our goodbyes to the coast and headed inland towards the mountains and boreal forest of interior Maine. To break up our drive, we stopped at Messalonskee Lake, a unique location with several key target species that strangely aren't easily found elsewhere in the state. Here we encountered many great species including **Sandhill Crane**, **Black Tern**, **Warbling Vireo**, **Least Flycatcher**, and **Purple Martin**. After lunch we headed to Boy Scout Road for a fun afternoon of birding. This location is in the middle of nowhere and includes some nice bogs and forests, with minimal human traffic through it. We scored more great species such as **Nashville Warbler**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Alder Flycatcher**, **Downy Woodpecker** and **Northern** (Common) **Raven**. On our way back to town, we cruised down highway 16, also known as Moose Alley to locals, so of course we had our eyes peeled. About halfway down the road we spotted a beautiful female (cow) **Moose**!! These giant animals are always a huge highlight and command distance and respect. What a perfect ending to a day of birding and nature exploring.



This gorgeous *Moose* felt comfortable with us around and allowed some amazing views.



Day 7, 11th July 2021. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont birding

There are not very many locations in the US where you can bird three different locations and be in three different states, but today we did just that. Our first stop was a quick one back at Boy Scout Road in Maine to check if the birding was any different in the morning. Along the way we spotted another **Moose** on highway 16 but this time it disappeared quickly into the woods. Boy Scout Road produced much of the same from the previous evening with a picturesque **Great Blue Heron** and a **Northern Waterthrush** as new highlights. From here we ventured across the state line and into New Hampshire to bird along East Inlet Road. This area is very far north and approaches the Canadian border. Birding started off rather slowly with **Swainson's Thrush** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers** singing in the dense woods. It wasn't until our way back out that things started to heat up. It started with a **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher** and soon after a small group of quizzical **Canada Jays**, coming in to inspect us. Finally, right at the end of the road, an incredibly accommodating **Ruffed Grouse** posed beautifully for us allowing prolonged looks before scurrying away into the brush.

Our last stop of the day was just barely into Vermont at Moose Bog. This amazing and unique habitat is always a joy to wander through and bird. Down on the boardwalk through the bog, things were particularly birdy, and we had several great species including **Olive-sided Flycatcher**, **Eastern Kingbird**, **American Bittern**, **Hooded Merganser**, and a pair of **American Beavers** swimming in the water. Someone had sprinkled some seeds out along the railing and a cute, **Red-breasted Nuthatch** came down for a visit as well as a terribly angry **Red-winged Blackbird** wanting some free food. On our way back out of the bog we spotted a large **Hairy Woodpecker** and a **Winter Wren** singing his heart out like they so often do. This completed our three-state birding day and we headed to our hotel and dinner for the evening.



This Ruffed Grouse was a lifer for everyone on the trip!



Day 8, 12th July 2021. Mount Washington and back to Portland

Today was spent climbing to the top of Mount Washington, the tallest summit in northeastern USA. We worked our way up to about 4,000 feet (1,220 meters) to the preferred habitat of our top target for the day. Unfortunately, it didn't show at our first stop and besides a White-throated Sparrow, all we encountered were a face full of gnats! We carried onwards to the next pull off location and here the birding picked up immensely. It wasn't long before the target Bicknell's Thrush was spotted off in the distance, but it did take some time before we all enjoyed closer looks. In addition to the thrush, we scored goodies such as Blackpoll Warbler, Dark-eyed Junco, and Purple Finch. The real highlight however might have a been a hilarious Pine Siskin constantly flying in and checking us out, only to swirl in a circle again back overhead. We all enjoyed a good laugh at this funny behavior and watched a group of four siskins forage in the stunted growth trees. We eventually made our way up to the summit and the Alpine zone where we found a nice (American) Buff-bellied Pipit. Once back down from the mountain we headed back towards the coast of Maine.

Our final birding stop of the trip was at Wells Preserve. This lovely park has a nice trail showcasing different habitats from woodlands to a saltmarsh and eventually down to the ocean. On our way to the beach, we encountered several interesting species including Cedar Waxwing, Snowy Egret, Least Tern, American Black Duck, and Brown Thrasher. We did a bit of scanning on the ocean and bagged all three US scoter species, Black, White-winged and Surf Scoters, all new for the trip! On the way back we spotted a Chestnut-sided Warbler, always a welcome sight. It was now time for our final dinner together as a group and a recap of the trip and our favorite birds and moments.



This brilliant **Canada Jay** was a favorite of the trip.



Day 9, 13th July 2021. Departure day

After a bit of breakfast, it was time to say our goodbyes after an incredible trip full of many birds, mammals, scenery, and memories. The favorite species for the group were Atlantic Puffin, Ruffed Grouse, Canada Jay, Winter Wren, and Razorbill.

Bird List - Following IOC (11.1)

Birds 'heard only' are marked with (H) after the common name, all other species were seen.

The following notation after species names is used to show conservation status following BirdLife International: CE = Critically Endangered, EN = Endangered, VU = Vulnerable, NT = Near Threatened.

Common Name	Scientific Name	
Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies (Phasianidae)		
Wild Turkey	Meleagris gallopavo	
Ruffed Grouse	Bonasa umbellus	
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)		
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	
Wood Duck	Aix sponsa	
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	
American Black Duck	Anas rubripes	
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima	
Surf Scoter	Melanittaperspicillata	
White-winged Scoter	Melanittadeglandi	
Black Scoter	Melanitta americana	
Hooded Merganser	Lophodytescucullatus	
Swifts (Apodidae)		
Chimney Swift - VU	Chaetura pelagica	
Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)		
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Archilochus colubris	
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)		
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	Columba livia	



Common Name	Scientific Name
Mourning Dove	Zenaida macroura
Cranes (Gruidae)	
Sandhill Crane	Antigone canadensis
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Pied-billed Grebe	Podilymbuspodiceps
Plovers (Charadriidae)	
Killdeer	Charadrius vociferus
Piping Plover	Charadrius melodus
Sandpipers, Snipes (Scolopac	
Upland Sandpiper	Bartramialongicauda
Least Sandpiper	Calidris minutilla
Short-billed Dowitcher	Limnodromus griseus
Spotted Sandpiper	Actitismacularius
Willet	Tringasemipalmata
Gulls, Terns, Skimmers (Lar	
Bonaparte's Gull	Chroicocephalusphiladelphia
Laughing Gull	Leucophaeusatricilla
Ring-billed Gull	Larus delawarensis
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus
American Herring Gull	Larus smithsonianus
Least Tern	Sternulaantillarum
Roseate Tern	Sterna dougallii
Common Tern	Sterna hirundo
Arctic Tern	Sterna paradisaea
Black Tern	Chlidoniasniger
Auks (Alcidae)	1
Common Murre	Uria aalge
Razorbill	Alca torda
Black Guillemot	Cepphusgrylle



Common Name	Scientific Name	
Atlantic Puffin - VU	Fraterculaarctica	
Tropicbirds (Phaethontidae)		
Red-billed Tropicbird (Rarity)	Phaethon aethereus	
Loons (Gaviidae)		
Common Loon	Gaviaimmer	
Austral Storm Petrels (Oceanitie		
Wilson's Storm Petrel	Oceanites oceanicus	
Gannets, Boobies (Sulidae)	1	
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	
Commonanta Chaga (Dhalasser	racidae)	
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacroco Double-crested Cormorant		
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax auritus Phalacrocorax carbo	
Great Cormorant	1 natacrocorax carbo	
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornitl	Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiornithidae)	
Glossy Ibis	Plegadisfalcinellus	
Herons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)		
American Bittern	Botaurus lentiginosus	
Great Blue Heron	Ardeaherodias	
Great Egret	Ardea alba	
Snowy Egret	Egrettathula	
New World Vultures (Cathartid		
Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura	
Osnrovs (Pandianidas)		
Ospreys (Pandionidae) Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	
Western Osprey	r anaion natiaetus	
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitric	lae)	
Cooper's Hawk	Accipiter cooperii	









Common Name	Scientific Name
Dark-eyed Junco	Junco hyemalis
Savannah Sparrow	Passerculussandwichensis
Nelson's Sparrow	Ammodramusnelsoni
Saltmarsh Sparrow - EN	Ammodramuscaudacutus
Grasshopper Sparrow	Ammodramus savannarum
Chipping Sparrow	Spizella passerina
Clay-colored Sparrow (H)	Spizella pallida
Field Sparrow	Spizella pusilla
Vesper Sparrow	Pooecetesgramineus
Eastern Towhee	Pipilo erythrophthalmus
Oropendolas, Orioles, Blackbirds (Icteridae)	
Bobolink	Dolichonyxoryzivorus
Eastern Meadowlark	Sturnella magna
Baltimore Oriole	Icterus galbula
Red-winged Blackbird	Agelaius phoeniceus
Brown-headed Cowbird	Molothrusater
Common Grackle	Quiscalusquiscula
New World Warblers (Parulida	
Ovenbird	Seiurusaurocapilla
Northern Waterthrush	Parkesianoveboracensis
Black-and-white Warbler	Mniotilta varia
Nashville Warbler	Leiothlypisruficapilla
Common Yellowthroat	Geothlypistrichas
American Redstart	Setophaga ruticilla
Northern Parula	Setophaga americana
Magnolia Warbler	Setophaga magnolia
Blackburnian Warbler	Setophaga fusca
American Yellow Warbler	Setophaga aestiva
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Setophaga pensylvanica
Blackpoll Warbler	Setophaga striata
Black-throated Blue Warbler	Setophaga caerulescens
Pine Warbler	Setophaga pinus
Palm Warbler (H)	Setophaga palmarum



Common Name	Scientific Name
Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler	Setophaga coronata
Prairie Warbler	Setophaga discolor
Black-throated Green Warbler	Setophaga virens
Cardinals & Allies (Cardinalidae)	
Northern Cardinal	Cardinalis cardinalis
Indigo Bunting	Passerinacyanea

Total seen	148
Total heard only	3
Total recorded	151

Mammal List

Common Name	Scientific Name	
Squirrels and Relatives (Sciuridae)		
Woodchuck	Marmota monax	
Eastern Gray Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis	
Eastern Chipmunk	Tamias striatus	
Red Squirrel	Tamiasciurushudsonicus	
Beavers (Castoridae)		
American Beaver	Castor canadensis	
Rodents (Cricetidae)		
Muskrat	Ondatra zibethicus	
Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae)		
Snowshoe Hare	Lepus americanus	
New England Cottontail	Sylvilagus transitionalis	
Earless Selas (Phocidae)		
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus	
Harbor Seal	Phocavitulina	



Common Name	Scientific Name	
Mustelids (Mustelidae)		
Stoat (Ermine/Short-tailed Weasel)	Mustela erminea	
Deer, Elk, Mooses (Cervidae)		
Moose	Alces alces	
White-tailed Deer	Odocoileus virginianus	
Porpoises (Phocoenidae)		
Harbor Porpoise	Phocoenaphocoena	
Total Seen	14	

