

FORILLON NATIONAL PARK

QUEBEC, CANADA

AUGUST 10-16, 2018



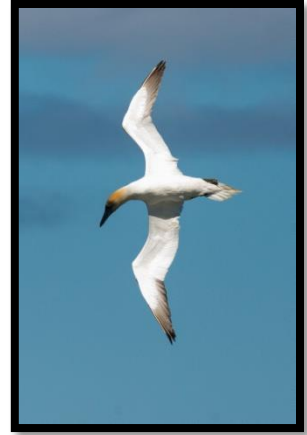
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Trip list for Park and immediate vicinity:

1. **North American Porcupine:** Numerous sightings, numerous individuals, excellent photo opportunities
2. **North American Beaver:** Single family, excellent photo opportunities
3. **Woodchuck:** Single individual in Cap-aux-Os outside of park, good photo opportunities
4. **Red Squirrel:** Numerous sightings, numerous individuals, excellent photo opportunities
5. **Eastern Chipmunk:** Numerous sightings, numerous individuals, excellent photo opportunities
6. **Rock Vole (presumed):** Single individual on Mont Saint Alban Trail, no photo opportunity
7. **Meadow Vole (presumed):** Single individual on Las Graves Trail, no photo opportunity
8. **Pygmy Shrew (presumed):** Single individual on Les Lacs Trail, no photo opportunity

9. **Snowshoe Hare:** Single individual on Les Lacs Trail, excellent photo opportunity
10. **Short-tailed Weasel:** Single individual at Le Castor, no photo opportunity
11. **Gray Seal:** Numerous sightings, numerous individuals, acceptable photo opportunities
12. **Harbor Seal:** Numerous sightings, numerous individuals, acceptable photo opportunities
13. **Humpback Whale:** single individual during whale watch, acceptable photo opportunity
14. **Fin Whale:** multiple individuals during whale watch and from shore, acceptable photo opportunities
15. **Atlantic White-sided Dolphin:** Numerous sightings during whale watch, acceptable photo opportunities
16. **Harbor Porpoise:** Numerous sightings during whale watch, poor photo opportunities
17. **White-tailed Deer:** Single individual in Cap-aux-Os outside of park, good photo opportunities



Other species detected:

Black Bear: Scat, bite and claw marks

Moose: Tracks, scat, rubs, browse

Shrew sp: found dead. Masked or Pygmy?

Striped Skunk: Tracks and scat

Red Fox: Scat and tracks

10 August: Arrived at park in mid-afternoon. Park is about 840 miles from home, so we split the drive over two days. Had a nice opportunity to photograph Northern Gannets plunge fishing before reaching the park. **Harbor Seals** easy to spot on the rocks along the coast. Once we reached the park, our first of many **North American Porcupines** was on the shoulder of the road attempting to cross.

We had reserved our campsites online weeks ahead of time and the “Campground FULL” sign never left the window of the entrance booth during our visit. Our first four nights were at Petit Gaspe Campground and once we were set up, we took our first hike on the Les Graves Trail to the lighthouse at “Land’s End”. Beautiful scenery and lots of people at this time of day. Saw a vole dart across the grassy path that



I thought was **Meadow Vole**. At the end of the trail is a scenic view and a large white and red lighthouse on a grassy lawn. And on that lawn were 5 porcupines! This was the largest assemblage of porcupines I had ever seen and the first time I have seen porcupines grazing. If you look carefully, you can see the lighthouse reflected in the eyes of the porcupine close-up photo included here. We ended up seeing 14 different porcupines on the trip, but these were by far the best.



11 August: **Red Squirrels** served as an effective alarm clock throughout the trip. All of the Province of Quebec is in the Eastern Time Zone, so the sun rose very early here at the easternmost tip. Early starts proved to be a great advantage on the trails as we often had them to ourselves for at least the first few hours. On this day, we had reservations for a morning snorkeling trip with Harbor Seals. The trip was fun. It gave us an opportunity to get close to the seals (still editing the Go

Pro footage) both in the water and on shore. My wife and I are both SCUBA certified so the little bit of chop was not an issue. Would I recommend this for others? Perhaps. Some of the people in our group never saw seals in the water but I suspect that was due more to their lack of experience in the water than a lack of seals.

**Gray Seals** were easy to see from shore as well as from the small boat, but we did not snorkel with them. We made lunches and then hung out until our late afternoon whale watch. Both of these concessions (as well as the kayak rental) begin at Grande-Grave Harbor. At this time, there are no official bilingual whale watch tours on the weekends but the first and last trips of the day during the week are bilingual. With that said, the guide on the boat went out of her way to communicate the sightings to us in English despite this being a “French only” tour. Both species of seals were seen and our first cetacean was **Atlantic White-sided Dolphin**, seen numerous times. It was pretty slow whale-wise with only a single **Fin Whale** and **Humpback Whale** sighting. I tried to ask if this was typical but received the classic “animals are wild and unpredictable” speech. So I cannot tell you much except that they also tout Minke, Blue and, after mid-August, North Atlantic Right Whales as possibilities. After dark, we drove to a grassy area to watch the Perseid meteor shower and shared the space with two very loud porcupines (chewing and vocalizing at each other).



12 August: Another early start, this time to Penouille where there is a trail along a salt marsh. What a beautiful spot! Saw our only **White-tailed Deer** on the way to this corner of the Park. Birds dominated the hike including some amazing Bald Eagle fly-overs and Great Blue Herons roosting in spruce trees. We found fresh **Red Fox** scat on

the boardwalk and after careful examination, its delicate sand-transfer tracks as well. Although we didn't see much mammal-wise, this sure looked like a promising location.

In the afternoon, we hiked the first few miles of Les Lacs Trail. Starting at the south trailhead, we immediately found a dead shrew. I took no measurements nor did I examine the teeth but it seemed to be either Pygmy or Masked. I will include a photo here and welcome any and all comments. In four hours, we encountered only one other hiker plus Boreal Chickadees, Ruffed Grouse, **Snowshoe Hare**, and lots of Moose tracks and browse. The highlight for me was at least a full minute view of a shrew in the trail ahead of us. This was the type of trail where a pair of hikers can walk next to each other (I have always heard them called "two tracks") and the shrew first darted across one of the bare paths, then the other. Laura didn't manage to catch it either time, but with some patience, we saw vegetation move next to the trail and the shrew made its way into view again. Despite watching it for an extended time, making an identification to species is difficult (for me anyway). As much as I tried to turn it into a Gaspé Shrew, the tail was just way too short. So short in fact that I convinced myself I was looking at a **Pygmy Shrew**. Again, any comments are appreciated. Ironic that this was also the trail we found the dead shrew miles earlier.



We stopped at a convenience store on the drive back to the campground and then again along the road to make a phone call. This proved to be our only **Woodchuck** sighting of the trip.

13 August: Woke at dawn and hiked to Land's End again. This time, we took the wooden stairs down to a platform where we scanned the water for a few hours and enjoyed the bird life. We saw both species of

seal as well as Fin Whales. But the stars of the show were Peregrine Falcons swooping both above and below us. We left when the next people arrived, about 2.5 hours later. Heard seals vocalizing a deep eerie sound. Mammal-wise, the only other thing to report for the day was our second whale-watch trip. We told the guide our only wish was to see Harbor Porpoise. She laughed and said they are small, fast and hard to see. We smiled. She said "So we don't usually stop for them." We smiled. She said "We will see...". It turned out that was the only cetacean we saw on the whole trip! They were everywhere. We had been out 48 hours earlier and saw none. Today, there were **Harbor Porpoises** everywhere, including one that breached. No whales and no dolphins. Weird. I told Laura that this was probably the first time they only saw porpoises and two of the passengers were happy! They really were fast, so no photos.

14 August: Took the loop trail early to the lookout tower. Spectacular scenery. A small rodent seen briefly but completely in the boreal forest seemed to me to be a **Rock Vole**, a new species for us. Then it was back to the campground to pack the tent. We ate lunch on the La Chute Trail among the **Eastern Chipmunks** and waterfalls. Our last stop before heading to the new campground was the Le Castor parking area. Now, I had found a trip report on Mammal Watching from Ben Balmford and printed out



the careful directions on how to see beavers from this spot. Turns out, that information is no longer valid as the road has been re-routed. Here is what we found: Park at Le Castor and proceed to the far end of the parking area where the old road can be seen. Walk about 250 yards to the T and turn left. We found the fresh beaver sign (but no beavers) about 100 yards away, on both sides of the abandoned road. We were told the road was rerouted because of the beaver activity. We also

explored the abandoned road system a bit and it felt a bit like a scene from *The Walking Dead* with no zombies, with the roads growing weeds, but looked promising for all kinds of critters including Moose. The old parking area is still there and only a few yards past the current beaver spot. We visited this location later that evening and saw at least three **North American Beaver** and were able to approach and observe very closely. Kits were vocalizing in the lodge. Just before reaching the beavers, a **Short-tailed Weasel** darted into the road practically at our feet, saw us, and darted back into the woods as quickly as he emerged.

15 August: Our first morning at Cap Bon Ami Campground. Another early start, this time to La Vallee loop trail. We only saw one other person, a jogger who was excited at the sight of two hikers with binoculars. We chatted for a while with this resident birder. She asked if we were afraid of bears and we assured her we were not. I couldn't read her expression and she said nothing to betray her thoughts on the subject. We saw no new mammals but did find our best black bear scat along with striped skunk diggings, scat and perfect tracks in the mud. Best bird species was a flock of Evening Grosbeaks. That

afternoon brought a violent cloudburst that uprooted several tents in the campground and caught a scout group unprepared. They spent the night crowded into the cooking shelter. It also made our second visit to the beavers a wet and dark affair, so new no photos.

16 August: Early wake-up and we were off! One long day of driving later and we were home.

Missing: We really thought we would see Black Bear and Moose. Neither are really easy in the Park we were told. I also knocked on a bunch of hollow trees hoping for Northern Flying Squirrel, but no go. We also listened for them at night. A Blue Whale would have been nice. 😊

