

## Quebec road trip – 5<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> July 2016

Having just finished my undergraduate degree, and with my girlfriend completing her year abroad in France, we decided to go on our first road trip together: a tour of southern Quebec. We were to head up north from Quebec City, before heading east, crossing the St Lawrence, continuing east, and finally heading back down to the Quebec City area.

### Itinerary:

5 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>	Parc national de la Mauricie
7 <sup>th</sup> -8 <sup>th</sup>	Lac Saint-Jean
8 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup>	Saguenay Fjord/Les Escoumins area
10 <sup>th</sup> -11 <sup>th</sup>	Matane
11 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup>	Parc national de la Gaspesie
14 <sup>th</sup> -17 <sup>th</sup>	Parc National de la Forillon
17 <sup>th</sup> -18 <sup>th</sup>	Campbellton
18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup>	Saint-Jean Port-Joli
19 <sup>th</sup> -21 <sup>st</sup>	Sherbrooke

### The trip:

We set off from Quebec City (where **Eastern grey squirrels** were common) around midday and arrived in **Parc National de la Mauricie** in the early afternoon. With no tent, we were unable to stay within the national park but there were plenty of good B&Bs just outside in Saint-Jean-des-Piles. We spent the day of the 6<sup>th</sup> in the park itself, and walked the **Mekinac Trail** in the morning – I had seen on another trip report that **Star-nosed mole** could be seen from the first bridge on that trail. We heard some suspicious plops and saw lots of air bubble trails but no mole – the signs could well have been fish anyway. I later discovered that this is also mentioned as a good site for the species in the “**Peterson Field Guide to Finding Mammals in North America**”, also written by Vladimir Dinnetts, the author of the trip report. Had I known that at the time I would probably have invested much more time on the bridge! A guide we met later in the day said she had seen one three weeks earlier from another bridge – stupidly I didn’t ask which one. (I also didn’t appreciate how rare a good naturalist was – we’d only meet two more! Moreover, I don’t think this is a language problem as Jessy is fluent in French so could translate for us, though we would often speak in English anyway.)

We continued pottering around the park, with **Eastern chipmunk** and **Red squirrel** easily seen.

We also saw a **Black bear** with two young cubs cross the road and then stay feeding in the verge for over half an hour. Another couple at our B&B

had seen a different individual that day and the guides were clear that bear were really fairly common. **Lac Saint-Jean** had pretty scenery and a few good birding spots, but nothing of note on the mammal front. The next morning we headed east along the north shore of the **Fjord du Saguenay** and stopped off at the lookout onto the marine protected area there (it’s clearly sign posted from the main road, about 40km west of Tadoussac). The **Belugas** were not there – apparently they show one in two days (probably not worth a stop in hindsight) – but we did see our first **Woodchuck**, as



well as more **Eastern red squirrels**. We carried on until we hit the St Lawrence, and then headed northeast. Just past **Les Bergeronnes**, and ~1km before the turn off to **Cap Bon Desir**, there is a picnic spot on the right hand side of the road, with camping below, from where we could see at least 15 **Beluga**.

We spent the next two night in **Les Escoumins**, a really nice little village on the coast. Up to 20 **Beluga** were easily visible from the lookout in **Essipit** (an Innu Indian reserve; situated within Les Escoumins) being particularly visible around 6pm. We also saw **Grey seals**, **Harbour porpoise** and **Minke whale** from there, the latter being very close to shore (maybe 40m from the rocks). We then continued north to **Forestville** to catch the ferry across the St Lawrence to **Matane** – we only saw **Harbour porpoise** on the trip across. We stayed in a nearby motel, and, as we had arrived quite late, got no mammal-searching in before heading off to **Parc national de la Gaspesie**.

We spent three nights in the **Tentnik** tent-cum-cabin self-catered units near the park centre at the base of **Mont Albert**. Our first piece of luck was finding a naturalist who could answer some questions (of several rangers we spoke to there, only one knew anything about mammals).

Around 3pm just driving the main road back to camp from a picnic spot a **Long-tailed weasel** crossed the road (interestingly, it is shown as being too far north to be in range in the mammal book, but the guide was clear that is what it would be, which fitted with the fact that the tail was >50% of the body length). That evening we drove to **Petit lac cascapedia** which the guide said was the best place to look for **Beaver**.



Though there were no **Beaver**, this was more than made up for by a **Woodland jumping mouse** hopping across the road, and even more excitingly a **Porcupine** in the verge – trying to see **Porcupine** was one of my main motives for the trip!

The next morning we tried to go early to **Le mont Ernest-Laforce** but we realised about 3km before parking up that we were running out of fuel rather quickly and so instead had to abandon an early morning walk and fill up with fuel first. On the way back, still on the dirt section of the road, we saw a **Fisher** about 150m ahead scuttle off into the vegetation at about 7.15am (the knowledgeable ranger said they were pretty common in the park). Re-fuelled we managed to start the walk just after 9am, but apart from a few birds and the ever present **Eastern chipmunk** we saw little of note. We spent the afternoon swimming in **Lac cascapedia** – it's much nicer if you head through the camp ground to a little trail at the northern end of the lake rather than going to the canoeing spot which is ~500m further south. Along with a couple of leeches (which happily seemed uninterested in us) we were lucky enough to see a **Beaver** pass from the main lake into the flooded aspen woodland behind. The pools in the woodland are easily visible from the trail, so it may be worth a shot in the evening to stake out the **Beaver**.



The next day we decided to try and climb **Mont Albert** in search of **Caribou**. Though the guide recommended **Mont Jacques-Cartier**, we had seen that the other trip reports suggest this may actually be a decoy, and moreover you have to catch a shuttle bus to the start of that path which costs nearly \$20 a person, so we decided on **Mont Albert** instead. The walk was ok, though steep in places and relatively gruelling as you do climb over 800m to the 1088m summit. About 2h30mins into the climb (so ~10am) we saw a large male **Caribou**. It was by the toilets which are ~1km from the summit, and as such it was clearly used to people, and we were able to sit with it for 15 minutes. The following morning we went back to **Le mont Ernest-Laforce** path, first seeing a **Snowshoe hare** in the campsite, before setting off from the car park around 7.30am. We saw two female **Moose** relatively easily, and then carried on east towards **Forillon**.

En route we stopped in a small layby overlooking the St Lawrence and **Meadow vole** were very obvious in the grassy area around the picnic benches. In **Forillon**, we stayed in the hostel in **Cap-aux-os** which was rather lucky as the owner, **Giles**, was the best naturalist we met on our trip. We arrived late afternoon, and quickly set up the scope. **Grey** and **Harbour seals** were common, as were **Harbour porpoise** and **Humpback whale**. **Fin whales** would also occasionally surface. The first morning we were there we took the boat trip out of **Grandes-Grave** (<http://www.baleines-forillon.com/>) we had good views of all five marine mammals listed above, and the company were really pretty good; they include a sightings by month page on their website too. We also saw **Humpback** breaching from the lighthouse path on our last morning.

In the park, and **Woodchuck** were common, as were **Porcupine** from dusk onwards and before 9am. We also saw a single **Black bear**. **Beaver** were easily visible from **Le Castor**, though the place to look is less obvious: park in the car park, and then cross the main road. There should be a path in front of you which will cross a small stream before heading left (parallel to the main road) when it enters the woodland. Follow this for ~750m. You'll pass a relatively old looking beaver lodge on the right, continue a little further and there is another lodge much closer to the bank. It is this one that they use, and the animals are not afraid of people.



The next two days were spent driving back towards Quebec City to drop the car off. **Harbour porpoise** were visible around **Perce**, and I saw a **Rock vole** in the grassy area near the marina in **Saint-Jean Port-Joli**. Having dropped off the car, we took a ride to **Sherbrooke** to go and visit family friends for two nights. Both are fantastic naturalists so we spent our time in the field. **White-tailed deer** are common almost everywhere in the area. We saw a few **Muskrat** at dusk in **Ile du Marais**, and in an afternoon there we saw **Painted turtle** as well as a **North American river otter** (though our hosts pointed out this is the first ones they had seen there).

We were equally lucky at **Mont Orford** where we saw **White-tailed deer**, **Beaver** and **Moose** (a young male) from the lookout overlooking **L'étang Fer-de-Lance**. We also saw **Raccoon** and **Striped skunk** on our way out (at ~10.30pm – though I suspect these would have been visible earlier if it were not for the full moon). A few days later and we were back in the area and saw a **Red fox** at the side of the road.

1. Snowshoe hare
2. Porcupine
3. Muskrat
4. Beaver
5. Woodchuck
6. Eastern grey squirrel
7. Red squirrel
8. Eastern chipmunk
9. Woodland jumping mouse
10. Meadow vole
11. Rock vole
12. Red fox
13. Black bear
14. Raccoon
15. North American river otter
16. Fisher
17. Long-tailed weasel
18. Striped skunk
19. Harbour seal
20. Grey seal
21. Caribou
22. Moose
23. White-tailed deer
24. Humpback whale
25. Fin whale
26. Minke whale
27. Beluga
28. Harbour porpoise