

Eastern Canada 2025

On August 16th I drove to parc national de la Gaspésie from Ottawa, this was mostly a driving day – after passing Rimouski the highway is largely next to the Gulf of the St Lawrence. Highlights were two **Harbour Seals** hauled out on rocks and many flocks of Common Eider. This was a long drive (normally about 9-10h) made even longer by Montreal traffic.



Common Eider

My target species in Gaspé was Woodland Caribou, which can be observed on the alpine tundra of the park's mountains. They're most frequently seen on Mont Jaques Cartier and Mont Albert. There are more observations from Jaques Cartier (I'd imagine this is due to more visitation), but this hike can only be accessed via shuttle, so I went with Mont Albert which seemed to have more suitable habitat, and where I could get an earlier start. Unfortunately I saw no caribou (the weather was quite terrible so I'd imagine they were hunkered down below treeline, and even if they weren't I probably wouldn't have been able to see them due to the fog), but the landscape was incredible, and Mont Albert is both botanically and geologically fascinating. Definitely a place I'd like to visit again in better weather.



Mont Albert habitat

On August 18th I drove from the Gaspé peninsula to Grand Manan, New Brunswick. Grand Manan is accessed by a roughly 1.5 hour ferry out of Blacks Harbour, New Brunswick. The ferry had many **Harbour Porpoise**, a large distant rorqual (probably **Fin Whale**) as well as a really interesting whale that gave a single breach near the ferry – I couldn't be certain of species but my initial impression was of a small blunt headed whale, perhaps North Atlantic Right Whale, but views were fleeting and I felt better to leave it as a sp.



Ferry to Grand Manan

Apparently (this was unknown to me prior to visiting the area) Right Whales are no longer reliable in the Bay of Fundy, with more animals now wintering in the Gulf of St Lawrence. I gather this is due to warming waters in the bay of Fundy. However, they are still seen in the area occasionally – one had become trapped in a fishing weir a week or so before my visit.

Bird highlights include Great Shearwater, Common Murre, Razorbill, Atlantic Puffin, and good numbers of Red-necked Phalarope.

On August 19th I joined an offshore pelagic out of Seal Cove, Grand Manan, we were on the water for around 9 hours and travelled around 130km. The pelagic was organized by Alain Clavette (He advertises his trips on Eventbrite – I'd highly recommend them) and largely catered to birders (the reason I was there) but did stop to look at marine mammals. Grand Manan also has at least one whale watching operator but I did not go out with them while I was there.

Mammal highlights were many dozens of **Atlantic White-sided Dolphin** (shutting the engines down 30km offshore while surrounded by a large pod of these dolphins is an experience I'll never forget, absolutely transcendent), excellent looks at **Grey Seal**, as well as a single **Harbour Seal**, and at least two **Humpback Whales** that gave decent looks.



South Polar Skua



Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

Bird highlights include South Polar Skua, excellent views of Lesser Black-backed Gull, Wilson's and Leach's Storm Petrel, Atlantic Puffin, Sooty Shearwater, Great Shearwater, Great Cormorant, Red Phalarope, and Pomarine Jaeger.



Harbour Seal



I spent the 20th and 21st birding around Grand Manan – I really enjoyed the area, the scenery is lovely, people are nice, and it is not very busy as tourists go.

Bird highlights for Grand Manan itself include Nelson's Sparrow (Castalia Marsh), Whimbrel, Red Knot, Red-throated Loon, Surf Scoter, Common Eider, Black Guillemot, Red Crossbill. Grand Manan is very well birded (I focused mainly on marine species and shorebirds), and information abounds on birding locations throughout the archipelago.



Nelson's Sparrow



Whimbrel

I didn't see many mammals on the island, with the only notable species being feral **European Rabbits**, a roadkill **Muskrat**, and a good number of **Grey Seals** from land.



Gray Seal

On August 22nd I took the ferry back to the mainland, and drove to St John, New Brunswick, where I caught yet another Ferry to Nova Scotia. The afternoon ferry ride across the Bay of Fundy was exceptionally quiet, with no birds away from land save for a single Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The only mammals were few Harbour Porpoises just off Digby. A shark (probably a Blue Shark or Porbeagle, but only quick looks), and a few Lion's Mane Jellies made the trip. A possible Mola Mola skeddaddled before I could get a good look at it.



My main reason for visiting Nova Scotia was to try and see the Thread-leaved Sundew (*Drosera filiformis*), a species found only in Nova Scotia within Canada (it has a slightly more broad but still disjunct distribution from NJ to FL within the United States) – this was made tricky by restrictions on woodland travel placed due to extremely high wildfire risk at the time, but I was able to check out a few plants from a roadside in Southern Nova Scotia (a completely reasonable 980km detour to look at a plant). I stayed at Thomas Radall PP, a nice little provincial park, with decent shorebirding (but nothing unexpected) a very vocal group of **Grey Seals**, and **Black Bear** prints all over a beautiful natural beach (but no bear sighting proper, unfortunately). After checking things out the morning of the 23rd, I drove across Nova Scotia to Blomidon Provincial Park.



Grey Seals welcoming the morning



Black Bear print

On August 24th I drove from Blomidon Provincial Park to the parc national du Lac-Témiscouata. This was mostly a driving day with a longer stop at Johnson's Mills Shorebird Center to see the tail end of staging Semipalmated Sandpipers in the Northern Bay of Fundy as they head south for the winter. Roughly 50,000 birds (a low count compared to peak season!) put on an incredible show before high tide and put the cap on a lovely trip. Definitely a sight worth seeing if one is in the area during migration season. Other birds included Peregrine Falcon, Merlin, Black Duck, Black Scoter, and two possible Boreal Chickadee, as well as Semipalmated Plovers and the only White-rumped Sandpiper of the trip.



More like manypalmated sandpipers haha

Links and Notes:

Ebird trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/433174>

Flickr album: <https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjCs7PU>

Happily, I got most of the species I was expecting to see on this trip, I'd like to go back to Gaspé to try for Caribou again and spend a bit more time in the area (it was quite beautiful). If I was back in the area I'd be keen to try and see Gaspé Shrew (and same with Maritime Shrew in NB and NS – targeting more small mammals is definitely on my list for future trip planning) as well as Bicknell's Thrush as they are supposed to breed in the park. Given the shifts in the wintering grounds of NA Right Whale, I'd think the tip of the Gaspé peninsula may be a decent location to try and see them, but I haven't investigated this further.

In terms notable misses, I was surprised to make the entire trip without seeing a Moose.

Mammal List:

Harbour Seal

Pine Squirrel

Harbour Porpoise

Fin Whale

European Rabbit

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin

Grey Seal

Humpback Whale