

Eastern North America, Summer 2025

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Introduction

This report is a collection of trips that I took in the summer of 2025 based out of my home in Philadelphia, PA. Each trip is listed under the state (or province) where it was, rather than strictly in chronological order. These are trips from June through August, and it should be obvious as to where and when I was for each one. Feel free to use individual reports as their own, or read through the whole collection for fun - there's lots of great reports and some good pictures along the way too!

New Jersey

Cape May



Tamanend's Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops erebennus*); Cape May

The first trip out of Pennsylvania was a weekend trip down to Cape May, New Jersey. I had been invited by a friend of a friend to hang out and assist with a research project studying sharks from off the beach here (which ended up being its own long and exciting story), and decided to stay longer to do some mammalwatching. My main target out of Cape May was to look for **Tamanend's Bottlenose Dolphins**, which are common off the shore here. I went out on a boat with Cape May Whale Watcher, which runs many boats a day out of the harbor with lots of people on board. Sure enough, just about as soon as we cleared the main harbor walls there were dolphins swimming right along the shore. We watched them for a while, with a new small pod coming in as soon as the old one went out, and then went off into deeper water. The captain was hoping to track down some **Humpback Whales**, which are occasionally around offshore here, but we didn't see any. We did find some more dolphins in much larger pods further offshore, which I believe were **Common Bottlenose Dolphins**. Back on shore in town there were **Eastern Cottontails** at dusk along the beachfront trail.



Common Bottlenose Dolphins (*Tursiops truncatus*); Atlantic Ocean off Cape May

The next morning I went to walk the boardwalk by Coral Beach in Cape May Point to look for **Gray Seals** and any roosting bats, but nothing showed up. I did see some more **Tamanend's Bottlenose Dolphins** from shore here, and **Eastern Cottontails**. I also saw a **Groundhog** on the highway along my drive back to Philly, but nothing else on the trip.

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge



Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*); Great Swamp NWR

In late July I stopped at this wildlife refuge on the way back to Philly from NYC to try my luck for **Woodland Voles**. In the mid-afternoon I walked the White Oak trail across the road from the visitor's

center (which is mostly boardwalk), and the very short Nature Detective Trail just past the picnic area. Along the White Oak trail I saw **Eastern Gray Squirrels** and a pair of **White-tailed Deer**. There were also **Eastern Cottontails** along the main road. The Nature Discovery trail had more squirrels along it, but nothing else new. I think the voles may be easier to find in winter as the brush is clearer, and when the snow might make movement a little more obvious.



Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*); Great Swamp NWR

West Virginia

Spruce Knob



Appalachian Cottontail (*Sylvilagus obscurus*); Spruce Knob Peak

In mid-July I took a road trip with a friend of mine from our homes in Philly down to Atlanta where he was moving to start medical school at Emory. I tagged along for company on his drive, and convinced him to make a couple of mammalwatching stops along the way. Our first was in West Virginia, where we camped near the highest point in the state, Spruce Knob. We arrived in the mid-afternoon and set up our camp, and then headed up to the top of the mountain to walk the trails into dusk. Our target here were **Appalachian Cottontails**, which are pretty common at this elevation and should be the only rabbits that high up locally. We started along the Spruce Knob trailhead, but five minutes in we realized we forgot to lock the car so turned back - only to be turned face to face with an **Appalachian Cottontail** off the trail. We were pretty happy to see this guy so quickly, but still decided to keep walking around at least through the sunset. We found two more rabbits along the trails this way, as well as a couple of **American Red Squirrels** up in the trees. As darkness set there were a few bats flying around too, but they weren't identifiable. The next morning we left from Spruce Knob Lake Campground, and saw an **Eastern Chipmunk** run across the road on our way down to the highway.



American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*); Spruce Knob Peak

North Carolina

Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge

Next up we went down to Alligator River NWR in North Carolina for a night. I had been here in January of 2024 before, where I was successful in seeing a pair of **Red Wolves** which are the biggest draw here, and so didn't have the pressure of trying to spot them this time around. I was curious what else we might be able to find, and wanted to see what the park looked like in summer, and so decided we would go back. Immediately after we drove in in the late afternoon we started seeing **Black Bears**, which were all over. In a few hours of driving around on the main roads of the park we saw around 15 bears. They were out in the field, walking across Milltail Rd, and there were more (fittingly) on Bear Rd. We had great views of many individuals including a mother with three cubs, and some inquisitive youngsters walking between the cars parked on the side of the road. At one point while we were sitting and watching

some bears out in a field off of Milltail Rd we also heard howling that sounded fairly close by, but as much as we were searching we couldn't find the **Red Wolves** that it must have come from. I did see a **River Otter** run across the road quickly from one of the canals into the woods, which was also very marshy at this time of year. Wanting to have a bit of time outside of the car we decided to hike along Sandy Ridge Trail, which is a boardwalk that runs through the swamp. We saw a couple of **Eastern Gray Squirrels** here, as well as an American Alligator. On the way back out there was a **Northern Raccoon** out and about on Sawyer Lake Rd, as well as what looked like an introduced **Coypu** in the canal along the side of the road.



Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*); Alligator River NWR

We camped that night out on the Outer Banks, at Oregon Inlet Campground. It was a little full of mosquitos this time of year, and crowded with RVs, but otherwise not so bad inside the tent. We woke up early the next morning to look through the NWR again, and saw about eight more **Black Bears** including the same mother with three cubs, this time up high in a tree. There wasn't much else out this morning though, so we started on our ride down to Myrtle Beach to see my friend's sister. There were a lot of Box Turtles out on the roads on the first part of this drive, some of which we narrowly missed, so be sure to be conscious as you're headed down that route.



American Black Bears (*Ursus americanus*); Alligator River NWR

South Carolina

Huntington Beach State Park



American Mink (*Neogale vision*); Huntington Beach SP

Our night in South Carolina was primarily spent with my friend's sister and his nieces, but I did get to sneak in a small bit of mammalwatching. This came in the form of visiting Huntington Beach State Park, which has been reported previously on this site as an excellent place to see **American Mink**. After visiting myself very early in the morning, I can confirm that this is absolutely true - we saw around four mink in under half an hour of walking along the jetty after arriving around 6:30am. They were common running up and down all along the rocky jetty, which is the farthest north point along the beach (and probably a 20+ minute walk up the sandy beach from the parking lot). There were several fishermen already out, and they seemed very used to having the Mink all around. They posed very well for pictures, and were so cool to see out in the open all over. There were also a few **Eastern Gray Squirrels** along the roads in the park, and I kept my eyes open for **Marsh Rabbits** but didn't see any.



American Mink (*Neogale vision*); Huntington Beach SP

Rhode Island

Trustom Pond National Wildlife Refuge



White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*); Trustom Pond NWR

In early August I stopped for a night in this area of Rhode Island while driving from Philly to visit family in New Hampshire. The NWR is a great place to look for a number of rodent species, and I found many of them easy to see while I wandered. I started walking through the park after arriving in the mid-afternoon, and immediately saw a number of **Eastern Cottontails** all around. Some have reported **New England Cottontails** as an option here, but the current opinion is that this species is actually not found in this area. I did see a number of **White-tailed Deer** here too, both while walking along the trails and on the roads near the park entrance. About halfway along Osprey Point Trail before the junction, I started hearing rustling off to the West side of the trail. I waited for a bit to see what was making the noises and for them to become visible, and eventually saw a few **Southern Red-backed Voles** along the trail. I got a few diagnostic images of them and then kept going, where a little farther along the trail (probably three quarters of the way to the junction) I saw a small shrew running through some of the underbrush. I could see it very well running between the plants and other brush, but couldn't get any pictures as it kept disappearing. Based on the very small size and dark coat that I saw, I believe that this was a **Smoky Shrew**, which seems to have been otherwise recorded in the area as well. I continued along trying to find a **Southern Bog Lemming**, which has been common here in previous years, but seemed to be much less common this year. I did see a small animal that looked to be the right dimensions for one run across Osprey Point Trail just after the Red Maple Swamp Trail junction, but didn't get a good enough look to confirm. There were other rodents running around on Red Maple Swamp Trail, but nothing I could ID, and a few also unidentifiable bats flying over the clearing at Otter Point Trail.



Southern Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*); Trustom Pond NWR

After it turned to dark and I left the reserve (which officially closes at sunset, but I wasn't kicked out and never saw the gate locked) I drove out towards Moonstone Beach Rd to spotlight, but didn't see anything new along that drive. I stayed the night out by Point Judith Lighthouse, which has a nice lot that doesn't mind you staying there, and was back in the wildlife refuge the next morning. I went first towards Otter Point this time, seeing more **Eastern Cottontails** and **White-tailed Deer** along the way. I also found an **Eastern Gray Squirrel** on the Otter Point Trail, and many **Eastern Chipmunks** along Red Maple Swamp Trail. As I headed back to the parking area via Osprey Point Trail I found a few more **Southern Red-backed Voles** too, which seemed not hard to find along this route.



Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*); Trustom Pond NWR

Maine

Portland



Lighthouse on the Coast of Maine

While staying with family in central New Hampshire, I made a quick day trip to the coast of Maine to look for a couple of interesting species. My first stop was a whale watch out of Portland, just to see what might show up. We found a spot on whichever boat was open and fit best with our arrival time as we drove down, as there are plenty of options leaving out of the harbors here. We traveled South along the coast, hearing about the history of some of the forts and lighthouses on shore along the way, and waited until we got out to deeper water where the whales might appear. We saw a few quick glimpses of **Harbor Porpoises** along the way, but only very briefly. Once we arrived at the typical whale spot we found that there wasn't much activity out that day, and so we went around for a bit without seeing much. Eventually we had a quick view of a **Minke Whale** swimming past the boat, but it didn't seem to be interested in coming up again, and so we headed back without any satisfactory views. Back in the harbor I briefly spotted a distant **Harbor Seal** as we were pulling in.

Wells Reserve at Laudholm



White-footed Mouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*); Wells Reserve

After our whale watch we headed South from Portland to the town of Wells, where there are a few interesting reserves. I went to the Wells Reserve at Laudholm, which directly borders Rachel Carson National Wildlife Refuge. Together, these two natural areas run out to the coast, and form a good sized grouping of habitat. Rachel Carson NWR will be most interesting to mammalwatchers because it is the site of an ongoing reintroduction program for **New England Cottontails**, which have a healthy population in the area. Helpfully, a big part of why they are introduced there is because there is not an existing population of **Eastern Cottontails**, meaning that all rabbits in the area should represent the former species (and be readily identifiable). I was drawn here for this exact reason, and arrived at the parking area of the reserve around dusk. In a rocky area just next to the parking lot I saw a mouse-sized rodent running in and out of a pipe, which looked like it was likely a *Peromyscus* mouse. Before I could get a confident ID on it, however, a ranger for the reserve came by and let us know that they were closing, and we had to leave so that she could lock the gate behind us. Bummer. I did ask about the rabbits, though, and she said that they were commonly seen by people walking along the Beach Barrier Trail that runs from the visitor's center to the shore.

Having been kicked out of the visitor's center, and with it now becoming dark, I decided the only sensible course of action was to drive to the other end of the trail, near the shore, and hike from there. So, that's exactly what we did. The trail pops out on the shore at the North end of the community of Drake's Island. I was able to park some ways up the road, and it was a pretty short walk from there to be able to head back into the reserve. I regretted coming so late, as I believed the dusk/dark would help my search, but it sounds as though spotting the rabbits during daytime may actually be easier in the end. As I started my walk up the trail I was keeping my eyes peeled for any animals that may show up, and after passing to the far side of the pond I got eyes on what looked to be a **White-footed Mouse** in some of the brush. This can be a tricky ID to separate from **Eastern Deer Mouse** in the area, but I believe the former species should be more likely and it appeared to give off some of these diagnostics from the view that I got. I continued on a little farther towards the center, and as I neared the visitor's center past the junction with the other trails I finally got good eyes on a **New England Cottontail** off in some of the scrub to the side of the trail. It was pretty deep into the bushes, but stayed very still allowing me to get quality pictures and

good views of the animal. Pretty happy with this we decided to head back to New Hampshire, where we saw some unidentified rodents and a **Red Fox** run across the road en route.



New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*); Wells Reserve

Quebec

Tadoussac



Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*); St. Lawrence Seaway near Tadoussac

My last East coast stop this summer was to drive up to Canada, where I heard there was some great potential for marine mammals along the St. Lawrence Seaway out of the town of Tadoussac. I arrived here in mid-August and camped for two nights at Camping Tadoussac, which was nice if a little crowded. Be aware that the primary language here is French, and many people speak only French and no English at all. Typically tourist-focused locations will have at least one bilingual employee on staff at all times, but you may need to ask or wait to get someone to talk to. During my time I did three whale watches with three different companies (of the many that operate whale watches in the area) to try them each out. The first tour I did was with Du Fleuve, leaving out of Les Escoumins near the Marine Discovery Center up the coast.



Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*); St. Lawrence Seaway near Tadoussac

This ended up being my favourite outing of the three, as they take you out in open-air zodiacs of under 20 people with a captain/guide in charge. They provide thick jackets and waterproof pants in case of the spray, and offer what feels like a very authentic and connected experience compared to some of the other companies. As we pulled out of the boat dock we first came across a **Harbor Seal** on the rocks immediately across from us. From there, we went along the shore to the West and began our search for whales. The water gets incredibly deep incredibly fast in this area, and allows for whales to be seen often right along the shore. This was exactly our experience, as after not too long of searching we found a **Minke Whale** swimming right along shore. We saw several individuals as we traveled up and down the coast, likely in the neighborhood of 7-8 different whales. All of them were within a stone's throw of the coast, often with other people watching them from shore that we could see as well. As we were out South of Les Escoumins, we started to get eyes on a few **Grey Seals** out in the water as well. All those that I saw were typically further out in deep water (although we did see a couple closer in), and at some point we decided that we had seen enough to keep going past them. This was especially true as we headed out towards deep water in the center of the river, away from the coast, to look for **Belugas**. It wasn't long

after we arrived out here that we first got eyes on a pod of them, which are incredibly obvious thanks to their bright white coloration. We had great views of a pod, including a few individuals that swam up and right under our boat! We watched them as long as we could before they had moved on, and then headed back towards the coast. There was another **Harbor Seal** on some rocks, and then we had a few more **Minke Whales** and some **Harbor Porpoise** a little ways East of Les Escoumins. We headed back after this very successful outing, and I was more than happy.



Beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*); St. Lawrence Seaway near Tadoussac

I killed time the rest of the day by visiting some touristy lighthouses and other locations (where I saw a couple more **Harbor Seals** from shore, but no whales) until I had my next outing. By the evening it had started pouring rain, but that didn't stop the next company, Croisieres AML, from running their boat. I had signed up with them for a sunset fjord cruise, which runs out of Tadoussac harbor up the fjord towards Saguenay. This boat is a much larger operation, which had close to around 100 customers on board and a full set up to run dinner service on some of their cruises. They spent a little while looking for wildlife at the river's mouth near Tadoussac, but this only turned up a couple of **Gray Seals**. As we headed up the river I had a brief look at a **Beluga**, but it only surfaced once or twice before disappearing. We also stopped in a small harbor that was supposed to be a good place for **Harbor Seals**, but didn't see any there. The main point of this outing seemed to be for scenery anyway, but with the gray conditions the entire outing ended up just a bit iffy.



Gray Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*); St. Lawrence Seaway near Tadoussac

The next morning was my last whale watch in the area, this time with Tadoussac Autrement. Their boats are a little more mid-sized, with 30 or 40 passengers per vessel. They are also running zodiac-type boats, but with a closed-air cabin of windows to block wind and allow for faster travel. We traveled East along the coast from Tadoussac, where we saw a few far-off **Belugas**. This looked like a smaller group than the day before, and was a little harder to get good looks at, but still very cool to see. On our way to them we saw a **Minke Whale** along the coast that we spent a good amount of time with, and another **Gray Seal** off in the distance. I had mainly gone out with this company because they had recorded a **Northern Bottlenose Whale** in the area the week before I was visiting, and I had hopes they might be able to find it again. No luck though unfortunately, as the crew told me they hadn't seen the animal since and didn't think it was still in the area. After the tour I spent some time driving around town, and briefly saw an **American Red Squirrel** run across the road headed toward the dunes Northeast of town.



Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*) being watched from land and sea

Conclusion

I drove from Tadoussac all the way back to Colorado Springs where I live most of the year, not stopping for much along the way (although I did see some **White-tailed Deer** on the side of the highway near Montreal). Altogether I was able to create a pretty solid list off of a few combined weekend or longer trips, and felt very good with the species I saw. There were a few misses along the way, including potential for **Southern Bog Lemming** in Rhode Island or **Woodland Vole** in New Jersey, but for the most part I had a pretty high success rate on the majority of my targets. A lot of this was because I found reliable and consistent locations for as many species as possible, therefore maximizing the ability to find them without too much effort. This was thanks in large part to some reports already up on mammalwatching, which gave me lots of great information, as well as some iNaturalist records that pointed me to some really reliable spots. If anyone has questions about any of my locations or species, do let me know.

Species List

** = Introduced species (not included on life list)

24 species, 8 lifers in bold

1. Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)
2. **Appalachian Cottontail (*Sylvilagus obscurus*)**
3. **New England Cottontail (*Sylvilagus transitionalis*)**
4. **Coypu (*Myocastor coypus*)
5. Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)
6. North American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
7. Groundhog/Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*)
8. Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)
9. **Southern Red-backed Vole (*Clethrionomys gapperi*)**
10. White-footed Deermouse (*Peromyscus leucopus*)
11. **Smoky Shrew (*Sorex fumeus*)**
12. North American River Otter (*Lontra canadensis*)
13. American Mink (*Neogale vison*)
14. Northern Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)
15. **Gray Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)**
16. Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)
17. American Black Bear (*Ursus americanus*)
18. Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)
19. **Common Minke Whale (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*)**
20. **Tamanend's Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops erebennus*)**
21. Common Bottlenose Dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*)
22. **Beluga (*Delphinapterus leucas*)**
23. Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)
24. White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)