

# USA – MAINE BIRDING TOUR: SET DEPARTURE TRIP REPORT

24 JUNE - 02 JULY 2021

By Jacob Roalef



This incredibly rare Little Egret was certainly a top highlight of the trip.



#### Overview

This nine-day set departure birding tour of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont commenced in Portland, Maine on the 24<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 and concluded back there on the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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>Acadia National Park</u>, <u>Messalonskee Lake</u>, <u>Moose Bog</u>, and <u>Mount Washington Auto Road</u>.

The tour connected with many amazing bird species, giving us a great list for our nine days in the northeastern USA. Avian highlights included a long list of breeders in a wide variety of habitats including Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Arctic, Roseate, Least and Common Terns, Common Loon, Great Cormorant, Broad-winged Hawk, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, Boreal Chickadee, Bicknell's Thrush, Lincoln's, Nelson's, Saltmarsh, Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows, Ovenbird, Blackburnian, Palm, Blackpoll, Prairie, and Black-throated Green Warblers, and a Code-4 ABA rarity in Little Egret.

A total of 138 bird species were seen (plus four species heard only), along with a few amazing mammals, including **Moose**, **North American Porcupine**, **American Beaver** and **Harbor Seal**. Species lists are at the end of this report.

#### **Detailed Report**

## Day 1, 24th June 2021. Arrival in Portland with some evening birding

After gathering up everyone from the airport and checking into the hotel, we decided to venture out for some first-day birding. We headed off to Crescent Beach State Park for a nice evening walk along the beach where we enjoyed several nice species including Common Eider, Laughing Gull, Common Tern, Great Black-backed Gull and Double-crested Cormorant. While these were all great, the real highlight came in the form of nesting Piping Plovers, with recently hatched chicks running around like cotton balls with legs! We enjoyed these adorable birds for a while before heading to dinner and discussing our upcoming trip. What a great way to begin!

### Day 2, 25th June 2021. Kennebunk Plains, Scarborough Marsh, Gilsland Farm

The morning started off with a quick stop for coffee before heading out to Kennebunk Plains for a nice morning session of birding. Today was dubbed "sparrow day" with loads of sparrow species as targets throughout the day, and the plains got us off to a fantastic start with **Eastern Towhee**, **Vesper**, **Chipping**, **Field**, and **Grasshopper Sparrows**. As we walked around the loop, we enjoyed the constant song and presence of **Prairie Warblers**, here on the northern edge of their breeding range. From here we enjoyed a nice brunch before heading out to Scarborough Marsh, one of Maine's premier birding destinations. This massive marsh hosts loads of flats for waders and shorebirds where we enjoyed seeing **Glossy Ibis**, **Snowy** and **Great Egrets**, a rare **Tricolored Heron** and the eastern subspecies of **Willet**, a possible future split. Of course, don't forget about the two amazing sparrow species which breed in these marshes. We had great views of both



**Saltmarsh** and **Nelson's Sparrows** (Atlantic subspecies) as well as a few birds which seemed to show characteristics of both—potential hybrids.



This adorable **Piping Plover** and a couple of cute fluff-ball chicks were a real treat.

From the marsh we headed a little further south to Pine Point Beach. During our walk along the beach to the river mouth, we saw a few more **Piping Plovers** with chicks, who could get tired of them? We then spotted a decent-sized feeding flock out over the water where we were able to spend some time studying the differences between **Roseate** and **Common Terns**. From here we headed north to Gilsland Farm Audubon Center where we enjoyed several new species for the trip including **Tufted Titmouse**, **Red-bellied Woodpecker**, **Great Blue Heron**, and **House Wren**. From here we were off to dinner after a great first day of birding, satisfied with our "sparrow day", that yielded ten different species of sparrows!

# Day 3, 26th June 2021. Wharton Point and Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge

Today was full of excitement as we had our first scheduled boat trip! But first, we had to cover a decent drive to reach the docks in Stonington. We made a quick stop along the way at Wharton Point, a lovely grassland right on the edge of the water. Here we had several **Bobolinks** and a pair of **Bald Eagles** circling together and they even locked talons for a brief moment! Next it was off to the docks and our exciting visit to Seal Island National Wildlife Refuge.

Weather is always a big issue when dealing with the <u>Gulf of Maine</u> and today was no exception. Luckily, the waters had settled down slightly by the afternoon and our captain managed to get us out on the water, although conditions were extremely foggy. That didn't stop us from enjoying our time. On our way out to the island, we managed to spot a **Wilson's Storm Petrel** and a **Northern** 



Gannet flying near the boat before quickly disappearing into the misty abyss. We finally arrived at Seal Island and were treated to some close views of the many amazing birds that nest here including Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill, Black Guillemot, Artic Tern and Great Cormorant. In addition to the birds, we saw Grey and Harbor Seals plus a few of us spotted a Harbor Porpoise. We made it back to the mainland and over to our hotel and had dinner for the evening, all of us still basking in the enjoyment of the day's many exciting seabirds.



Atlantic Puffin was a favorite bird for the trip and a lifer for all.

## Day 4, 27th June 2021. Acadia National Park and Cadillac Mountain

This morning we started off with some great breakfast in Bar Harbor and a hopeful spirit about our second boat trip, this time out to Petit Manan Island. Unfortunately, midway through breakfast I got the dreaded phone call to say that the winds were just far too high this morning and the trip was cancelled. We wouldn't let that stop us from enjoying a nice day of birding though, so we quickly regrouped and headed out to Sieur de Monts Spring in Acadia National Park. Here we enjoyed several good species including **Pileated Woodpecker**, **Brown Creeper**, and **American Redstart** before Carly made an incredible find of a **Barred Owl** tucked deep in the canopy. We continued our exploration of the park stopping at the Precipice Trail where we scanned the cliffs and bagged a pair of **Peregrine Falcons**. We eventually made our way up to the top of <u>Cadillac Mountain</u>, enjoying the amazing views along the way. The summit was insanely windy with gusts easily approaching 50-60 mph, however we still managed to see a few species such as **Hairy Woodpecker** and a **Myrtle** (Yellow-rumped) **Warbler** feeding young. What started as an unfortunate cancellation turned into a great day birding Mount Desert Island and taking in all the many scenic viewpoints on offer here.





The views atop Cadillac Mountain were stunning.

#### Day 5, 28th June 2021. Mount Desert Island and transfer to Machias

Today we started off back at Sieur de Monts Springs as this destination offers some of the best birding opportunities in Acadia National Park. The morning's birding netted us several species that we had missed the day before including **Ovenbird**, **Wood Thrush**, and **Northern Parula**. The top highlight was probably a **Red-eyed Vireo** nest with at least four chicks being fed by mom. From here we headed around the scenic island and ventured over to the eastern side at Seal Cove. A short walk along the edge of the water produced **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, **Western Osprey**, and **Common Yellowthroat**. We then cruised along Seal Cove Road which produced a couple of magnificent species such as **Blue-headed Vireo** and **Blackburnian Warbler**. After this we started our drive to Machias where we would be spending the evening.

#### Day 6, 29th June 2021. Boot Head Preserve and Messalonskee Lake

This morning we headed off for some exploration of Boot Head Preserve which features some incredible, mossy-covered bog habitat. Along the way we encountered a few species including **American Black Duck** and **Broad-winged Hawk**. Once we arrived, we enjoyed a pleasant walk through the eerie, misty bog encountering such species as **Golden-crowned Kinglet**, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, **Hermit Thrush**, **Lincoln's Sparrow** and **Palm Warbler**. In addition to the birds, the local flora here really stood out as unique with the flowering **Purple Pitcher Plants** a real highlight. From here, we were off to some breakfast before starting our long journey across the state towards the northwestern portion of Maine.

To break up the drive a bit, we had a planned stop at Messalonskee Lake, an interesting freshwater habitat which hosts several species difficult to find elsewhere in the state. We enjoyed some stellar views of breeding-plumaged **Black Tern** as well as other species including **American Yellow** 



Warbler, Warbling Vireo, Purple Martin, and a Common Loon with a chick following close behind. Eventually we ended up at our hotel and enjoyed a nice dinner. After dinner, we decided to check out a nearby area in hopes of a Moose sighting around dusk and while we had no luck with the giant mammal, we did enjoy some hearty laughs while out looking and great fun was had by all.

# Day 7, 30th June 2021. Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont birding

Today we had a very full schedule of birding planned across three different states. We started off the morning by heading towards the Boy Scouts Road. Along the way, we had our eyes peeled for our large mammal target. While slowing down in an attempt to get nice looks at a **Northern** (Common) **Raven** along the roadside, Devon spotted an amazing young bull **Moose** back along the brush line! What a serendipitous stop. This amazing animal paused and looked at us for a few moments before retreating back into the bushes and out of sight. An amazing start to the day but our roadside vigilance wasn't over quite yet. As we continued up the road a few miles further, there was a bird-shaped blob on the side of the road which turned out to be a **Ruffed Grouse!** We quickly and safely got out and were able to track it as it wandered to the edge of the forest. Eventually we made it to the Boy Scouts Road where our morning hike yielded several nice birds such as **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** and **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. We decided to carry on and leave Maine behind us as we ventured into neighboring New Hampshire.



This **Moose** was sighted along the side of the road (photo Carly Boyd-Dovideo).



Our first planned visit in this new state was East Inlet Road, a 12-mile-long stretch ending incredibly close to the Canadian border. Our first stop along the road was at a small lake hosting a pair of **Common Loons**. We made several further stops along this stretch, letting our eyes and ears guide us, which helped us locate several fantastic species including **Yellow-bellied Flycatcher**, **Swainson's Thrush** and **Boreal Chickadee**! It was soon time to move on to Vermont and our final birding destination for the day, Moose Bog.

Again, we enjoyed another quiet bog, although noticeably different from the one at Boot Head. Pretty early on, Carly managed to spot a female **Spruce Grouse** deep in the dense woods but unfortunately it disappeared before anyone else managed a look, which is the name of the game in the birding world sometimes. We continued on searching for more grouse but overall, the bog was rather quiet. We did manage some lovely sightings however including a female **Hooded Merganser** with several chicks, a pair of **Black-throated Blue Warblers**, a **Cape May Warbler** and two **American Beavers** swimming out in the bog. Much to our chagrin, the grouse never made another appearance for us. We wrapped up and headed back to New Hampshire where we would spend the evening.



Our group enjoyed amazing looks at this **Bicknell's Thrush** (photo Devon Bradley).

### Day 8, 01st July 2021. Mount Washington and Wells Preserve

This morning we began our adventure up Mount Washington, the tallest peak in the northeastern US at 1,916m (6,288 feet). Down at the base of the mountain, there is a more open grassland-type area with a small body of water and some flowers where we spotted species such as **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**, **Belted Kingfisher**, and **Eastern Bluebird**. From here we slowly began our journey up the mountain, taking note of the four distinct habitat types as we climbed in elevation. We wanted to quickly reach the third zone, consisting of stunted-growth trees, to



maximize our time searching for the top target bird. It was a very windy morning with some fog/clouds creeping onto the mountain but luckily it didn't take long to find an accommodating **Bicknell's Thrush** at approximately 1,250m (4,100 feet) in elevation. We continued on towards the top but quickly realized the fog was going to make any views futile, so we made a stop just before the view was inhibited where we enjoyed another Bicknell's Thrush as well as a Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler and Dark-eyed Junco. As we birded slightly lower, it appeared the wind was calming down and the fog and clouds had lifted from the summit, so we climbed the rest of the way to the alpine zone at the top. Here we enjoyed the scenic views and managed to find a beautiful (American) **Buff-bellied Pipit** which called this rocky alpine area home. We slowly began our descent of the mountain, stopping about halfway down for lunch and some birding where we finally scored views of a Blackpoll Warbler. From here it was back to the Portland area for a final afternoon of birding.

We arrived at Wells Preserve at Laudholm Farm in the afternoon and found it to be quite birdy with Brown Thrasher, Brown-headed Cowbird, Veery, Northern Flicker, and House Finch, all showing for us. Eventually we made it to the saltmarsh here and had several Snowy and Great Egrets foraging in the shallow waters with more dropping in every so often. We decided to stay here a while in the hopes of a true rarity popping in, that had been seen in the area recently. Everything felt right and things seemed almost too perfect as more and more egrets were piling in until all of a sudden, we spotted a mid-sized egret with two very noticeable, long head plumes in flight... Little Egret! A true rarity for North America, we enjoyed watching this bird fish for quite a while and had absolutely stellar comparison views with nearby **Snowy** and **Great Egrets**, noting the size differences, grey lores and two head plumes. What an incredible sighting enjoyed by all. On our way out, we spotted a young North American Porcupine along one of the trails, an extremely exciting mammal encounter. This was the perfect finish to our final full day of birding in the northeastern US.



This cute North American Porcupine was a fantastic sighting (photo Tracy Marr).



# Day 9, 02<sup>nd</sup> July 2021. Departure day

On our final day, Marjorie and I went out for a final walk at Capisic Pond Park where we enjoyed several species including **American Redstart** and most importantly, we kept Marjorie's <u>eBird</u> checklist streak alive! After this, our group (minus Carly) enjoyed one final breakfast together where we discussed all the fun moments of the trip. The favorites on this trip consisted of **Atlantic Puffin, Little Egret, Bicknell's Thrush, Barred Owl**, and **Saltmarsh Sparrow**. We all said our goodbyes and wrapped up a great trip to the Northeastern United States.



Saltmarsh Sparrow was deemed one of the favorite species of the trip.



### **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 (Pha	sianidae)
Wild Turkey	Meleagris gallopavo
Ruffed Grouse	Bonasa umbellus
Spruce Grouse	Falcipennis canadensis
Ducks, Geese, Swans (Anatidae)	
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis
Wood Duck	Aix sponsa
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos
American Black Duck	Anas rubripes
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima
Hooded Merganser	Lophodytes cucullatus
Nightjars (Caprimulgidae)	
Common Nighthawk	Chordeiles minor
Swifts (Apodidae)	
Chimney Swift - VU	Chaetura pelagica
Hummingbirds (Trochilidae)	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Archilochus colubris
Pigeons, Doves (Columbidae)	
Rock Dove (Pigeon)	Columba livia
Mourning Dove	Zenaida macroura
Grebes (Podicipedidae)	
Pied-billed Grebe	Podilymbus podiceps





Common Name	Scientific Name	
Cormorants, Shags (Phalacrocoracidae)		
Double-crested Cormorant	Phalacrocorax auritus	
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	
Ibises, Spoonbills (Threskiorni	ithidae)	
Glossy Ibis	Plegadis falcinellus	
Herons, Bitterns (Ardeidae)		
American Bittern	Botaurus lentiginosus	
Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias	
Great Egret	Ardea alba	
Tricolored Heron	Egretta tricolor	
Snowy Egret	Egretta thula	
Little Egret (Rarity)	Egretta garzetta	
New World Vultures (Catharti	idae)	
Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura	
Ospreys (Pandionidae)		
Western Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	
Kites, Hawks, Eagles (Accipitr		
Cooper's Hawk	Accipiter cooperii	
Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus	
Broad-winged Hawk	Buteo platypterus	
Red-tailed Hawk	Buteo jamaicensis	
Owls (Strigidae)		
Barred Owl	Strix varia	
Kingfishers (Alcedinidae)		
Belted Kingfisher	Megaceryle alcyon	



Scientific Name
Melanerpes carolinus
Sphyrapicus varius
Dryobates pubescens
Leuconotopicus villosus
Colaptes auratus
Dryocopus pileatus
Falco sparverius
Falco columbarius
Falco peregrinus
yrannidae)
Sayornis phoebe
Contopus virens
Empidonax flaviventris
Empidonax minimus
Tyrannus tyrannus
Myiarchus crinitus
s (Vireonidae)
Vireo solitarius
Vireo gilvus
Vireo olivaceus
Cyanocitta cristata
Corvus brachyrhynchos
Corvus corax
Bombycilla cedrorum



Common Name	Scientific Name
Tits, Chickadees (Paridae)	
Tufted Titmouse	Baeolophus bicolor
Black-capped Chickadee	Poecile atricapillus
Boreal Chickadee	Poecile hudsonicus
Swallows, Martins (Hirundinidae)	)
Tree Swallow	Tachycineta bicolor
Purple Martin	Progne subis
Northern Rough-winged Swallow	Stelgidopteryx serripennis
Barn Swallow	Hirundo rustica
Goldcrests, Kinglets (Regulidae)	
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Regulus satrapa
Wrens (Troglodytidae)	T
Winter Wren (H)	Troglodytes hiemalis
House Wren	Troglodytes aedon
Nuthatches (Sittidae)	
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Sitta canadensis
White-breasted Nuthatch	Sitta carolinensis
Treecreepers (Certhiidae)	
Brown Creeper	Certhia americana
Mockingbirds, Thrashers (Mimid	ae)
Grey Catbird	Dumetella carolinensis
Northern Mockingbird	Mimus polyglottos
Brown Thrasher	Toxostoma rufum
Starlings, Rhabdornis (Sturnidae)	
Common (European) Starling	Sturnus vulgaris
Common (European) Starting	Siaitus vaigatis
Thrushes (Turdidae)	
Eastern Bluebird	Sialia sialis



Common Name	Scientific Name
Veery (H)	Catharus fuscescens
Bicknell's Thrush - VU	Catharus bicknelli
Swainson's Thrush	Catharus ustulatus
Hermit Thrush	Catharus guttatus
Wood Thrush	Hylocichla mustelina
American Robin	Turdus migratorius
Old World Sparrows, Snowfinch	es (Passeridae)
House Sparrow	Passer domesticus
Wagtails, Pipits (Motacillidae)	
(American) Buff-bellied Pipit	Anthus rubescens
Finches, Euphonias (Fringillidae	)
Purple Finch	Haemorhous purpureus
House Finch	Haemorhous mexicanus
American Goldfinch	Spinus tristis
New World Sparrows (Passerelli	dae)
Song Sparrow	Melospiza melodia
Lincoln's Sparrow	Melospiza lincolnii
Swamp Sparrow	Melospiza georgiana
White-throated Sparrow	Zonotrichia albicollis
Dark-eyed Junco	Junco hyemalis
Savannah Sparrow	Passerculus sandwichensis
Nelson's Sparrow	Ammodramus nelsoni
Saltmarsh Sparrow - EN	Ammodramus caudacutus
Grasshopper Sparrow	Ammodramus savannarum
Chipping Sparrow	Spizella passerina
Field Sparrow	Spizella pusilla
Vesper Sparrow	Pooecetes gramineus
Eastern Towhee	Pipilo erythrophthalmus
Oropendolas, Orioles, Blackbirds (Icteridae)	
Bobolink	Dolichonyx oryzivorus



Common Name	Scientific Name
Eastern Meadowlark	Sturnella magna
Baltimore Oriole	Icterus galbula
Red-winged Blackbird	Agelaius phoeniceus
Brown-headed Cowbird	Molothrus ater
Common Grackle	Quiscalus quiscula
New World Warblers (Parulidae)	
Ovenbird	Seiurus aurocapilla
Black-and-white Warbler	Mniotilta varia
Nashville Warbler (H)	Leiothlypis ruficapilla
Common Yellowthroat	Geothlypis trichas
American Redstart	Setophaga ruticilla
Cape May Warbler	Setophaga tigrina
Northern Parula	Setophaga americana
Blackburnian Warbler	Setophaga fusca
American Yellow Warbler	Setophaga aestiva
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Setophaga pensylvanica
Blackpoll Warbler	Setophaga striata
Black-throated Blue Warbler	Setophaga caerulescens
Palm Warbler	Setophaga palmarum
Myrtle (Yellow-rumped) Warbler	Setophaga coronata
Prairie Warbler	Setophaga discolor
Black-throated Green Warbler	Setophaga virens
Cardinals & Allies (Cardinalidae)	
Scarlet Tanager	Piranga olivacea
Northern Cardinal	Cardinalis cardinalis

Total seen	138
Total heard only	4
Total recorded	142



# **Mammal List**

Common Name	Scientific Name
Squirrels and Relatives (Sciur	idae)
Woodchuck	Marmota monax
Eastern Gray Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis
Eastern Chipmunk	Tamias striatus
Red Squirrel	Tamiasciurus hudsonicus
Beavers (Castoridae)	
American Beaver	Castor canadensis
Rodents (Cricetidae)	
Muskrat	Ondatra zibethicus
Rabbits and Hares (Leporidae	<u> </u>
New England Cottontail	Sylvilagus transitionalis
Canids (Canidae)	
Red Fox	Vulpes vulpes
Earless Selas (Phocidae)	
Grey Seal	Halichoerus grypus
Harbor Seal	Phoca vitulina
Deer, Elk, Mooses (Cervidae)	
Moose	Alces alces
White-tailed Deer	Odocoileus virginianus
Porpoises (Phocoenidae)	
Harbor Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena
Erethizontidae (New World P	orcupines)
North American Porcupine	Erethizon dorsatum

Total Seen	14
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