

FIELD REPORT

AUTUMN GRAND MANAN

SEPTEMBER 4–10, 2023



South Polar Skua, off Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Dina Perry

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Autumn Grand Manan September 4–10, 2023

By Barry Zimmer

“Skua!” This is the one word you are always hoping to hear on a pelagic trip in the Bay of Fundy, and on this day, it was coming from Durlan (local birding expert) in the front of the boat. “Coming around the port side.” I looked left and quickly saw the hulking brown bird with large white wing patches sailing past us towards the wake. Usually, when we do get a skua, it makes one quick pass by the boat and then heads on its way. This time, however, the bird headed right into the mix of gulls and a couple of shearwaters behind our boat and started wreaking havoc. After dive-bombing a couple of birds, it circled the boat again. We were frantically chumming, hoping to keep its attention, and miraculously, the skua landed in the wake no more than fifteen feet away! The smooth body coloration, lack of rufous tones, and dark underwing revealed the bird to be a South Polar Skua (the more expected of the two species, but still rare). In all, it spent about five minutes very close to the boat before it departed. A most memorable moment to be sure!

Of course, this was but one of many excellent sightings on our all-day boat trip out of Seal Cove on Grand Manan Island. We started the morning with superb studies of about 25 Great Cormorants at Black Rocks, along with many Gray Seals. Shearwaters were way down in numbers from a typical year, but we still enjoyed very close studies of several Great Shearwaters attending our chum. Northern Gannets (of every age and plumage) were numerous, as were dapper Black-legged Kittiwakes. A couple of adult Pomarine Jaegers allowed nice views, and several flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes dotted the ocean surface. Eventually, we began to see Atlantic Puffins—distant fly-bys at first, followed by close studies on the water. We would tally about 50 for the day. Wilson’s Storm-Petrels flitted about the water like swallows and were constant companions for several hours. We had a total of ten Lesser Black-backed Gulls (a tour record) among the abundant Great Black-backed and Herring gulls. It took until early afternoon, but our marine mammal luck rivaled that of the birds. First came a pod of at least 30 Atlantic White-sided Dolphins that continuously circled our boat for about fifteen minutes at close range. Then we had a wonderful Humpback Whale show, as at least four individuals gave repeated superb views, at times no more than forty feet from the boat. We also enjoyed a few non-seabird surprises with Merlin, Northern Flicker, Cedar Waxwings, and Wilson’s Warbler all being seen well out to sea. Simply put, it was a marvelous day!

Our tour began with a travel day from Bangor. After successfully navigating the border crossing into Canada, we did some birding near the town of Bethel. A stunning, not to mention rare, male Black-throated Blue Warbler was the highlight, but we also enjoyed a Broad-winged Hawk circling overhead, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Black-and-white Warbler among others. A tiny and elegant Ringneck Snake next to our vans may have stolen the show. As we waited for our ferry to Grand Manan, we

birded around Blacks Harbour. We had very nice scope views of Black Guillemot there, as well as a small raptor flight that included American Kestrel, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and several Northern Harriers. The ferry ride itself yielded our first Great Shearwaters, two Pomarine Jaegers, an impressive 20 Common Murres, and a close Humpback Whale.



Black-throated Blue Warbler, Bethel, New Brunswick, September 5, 2023, ©Dina Perry

The remaining two and a half days of our tour (following the aforementioned boat trip) were largely spent scouring the island looking for passerine migrants. We encountered some nice flocks, usually led by chickadees, and each with a different composition. In all, we tallied sixteen species of warblers with 89 individuals. Our most common species were Black-throated Green (22), Common Yellowthroat (15), Bay-breasted (10), and Black-and-white (9). We also had a couple of the later arriving species like Blackpoll and Cape May. An especially cooperative Ovenbird along the Dark Harbour Road was so memorable as to be voted the favorite bird of the tour! Other notable passerine finds included Blue-headed, Philadelphia (great views of four), and Red-eyed (25 individuals) vireos, a rare pair of Carolina Wrens at the Marathon, numerous Gray Catbirds, Hermit Thrush, Baltimore Oriole, and Lincoln's Sparrow.



Ovenbird, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 8, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

A special effort at Castalia Marsh yielded nice scope views of Nelson's Sparrows right out in the open one evening. Shorebirds deserve special mention, as we tallied fifteen species. White-rumped Sandpiper, Whimbrel, and Dunlin were among the more noteworthy, while Semipalmated Plover was among the most common with nearly 400 seen! Other goodies seen on the island included Surf and White-winged scoters, Red-necked Grebe, Common Nighthawk, American Pipit, and a male Merlin catching dragonflies!

It was, simply put, a wonderful tour. A superb boat trip combined with nice passerine migration, good shorebird variety, and all under generally good (albeit foggy at times) weather conditions. Did I mention the blueberry pie and lobster? Also, how can I forget the 8th Annual VENT Fall Classic (mini-golf)? I can't wait to return next year!

ITINERARY

September 4 - arrival in Bangor

September 5 –drive from Bangor to Grand Manan via Hwy 9 and Canada Hwy 1 with stops at Saint George Marsh, near the Subway and in Blacks Harbour, ferry ride from Blacks Harbour to Grand Manan (59 species)

September 6 – Ballfield Beach, Castalia Marsh, Thoroughfare Road, 8-hour boat trip out of Seal Cove, Grand Manan (including Black Rocks, Clark Ground, Old Proprietor's Shoal, Bulkhead Rip, The Prong, Murre Ledges and Gannet Rock). (55 species; 84 total)

September 7 – pre-breakfast walk around the Marathon Inn; The Whistle Road all morning; Castalia Marsh, Miller Pond Road, The Anchorage (76 species; 113 total)

September 8 – Marathon Inn, Dock Road & Dark Harbour Road in the morning; Ballfield Beach, Castalia Marsh, Southwest Head in the afternoon (59 species; 115 total)

September 9 – pre-breakfast walk at Marathon Inn; two hours on The Whistle Road, ferry ride from Grand Manan to Blacks Harbour, drive to Bangor along Canada Highway 1 and Highway 9 in Maine (64 species; 122 total)

September 10 - departures for home (122 total species)

KEY

M = all areas in Maine

G = all areas on Grand Manan including boat trip, plus other parts of New Brunswick

bold-faced species indicate birds of rare, casual, or accidental occurrence

underlined species indicate birds of very uncommon occurrence or species that occur regularly but in such low numbers as to be easily missed

BIRDS

Waterfowl:

Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*) G,M---daily

Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) G,M---two at the hidden pond at Anchorage Park, four at Saint George Marsh and two at Moosehorn NWR

Blue-winged Teal (*Spatula discors*) G---flock of ten at Seal Cove

American Wigeon (*Mareca americana*) G---six at Long Pond

Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) G,M

American Black Duck (*Anas rubripes*) G,M---Castalia Marsh & Moosehorn NWR

Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) G---one female on hidden pond at Anchorage Park

Green-winged Teal (*Anas crecca*) G---Anchorage Park

Ring-necked Duck (*Aythya collaris*) G---six on Long Pond and an impressive **133** at Mooshehorn NWR

Common Eider (*Somateria mollissima*) G---mostly females & young, but several eclipse males as well; daily with a high count of 70 one day

Surf Scoter (*Melanitta perspicillata*) G---two males from the boat trip and another five near the southern end of the island; uncommon this early

White-winged Scoter (*Melanitta deglandi*) G---nine distantly off The Anchorage, plus one more at the south end of the island; uncommon

Pheasants, Grouse & Allies:

Ring-necked Pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*) G---three total; all males; great views

Grebes:

Pied-billed Grebe (*Podilymbus podiceps*) G---four at Saint George Marsh

Red-necked Grebe (*Podiceps grisegena*) G---two off The Anchorage; distant, but actually pretty good views eventually; very uncommon

Pigeons & Doves:

Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) M,G

Mourning Dove (*Zenaida macroura*) M,G

Nightjars:

Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*) G---one distantly from the Marathon Inn deck at dusk

Hummingbirds:

Ruby-throated Hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) G---one on Oven Head Road and another from the ferry landing

Plovers:

Black-bellied Plover (*Pluvialis squatarola*) G---three adults (mostly in breeding plumage still), plus one juvenile at the US border crossing

Semipalmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) G---103 counted together at Ballfield Beach one day, over 250 on the beach at The Anchorage one afternoon, plus a few others; 375 total counted

Sandpipers & Allies:

Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) G---flock of four flying by from the boat; uncommon

Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*) G---two on Black Rocks during the boat trip; uncommon

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*) G---a very impressive 120+ (mostly juveniles) on the beach at The Anchorage

Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) G---one adult transitioning to winter plumage at The Anchorage

Least Sandpiper (*Calidris minutilla*) G---6 total

White-rumped Sandpiper (*Calidris fuscicollis*) G----one bird on the beach at The Anchorage that was maddeningly difficult to get everyone on at first as it was among about 400 total shorebirds; eventually it sat in one spot for scope views; uncommon

Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*) G---one for some on the late evening Nelson's Sparrow search at Castalia Marsh; uncommon

Semipalmated Sandpiper (*Calidris pusilla*) G---about 320 total

Short-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus griseus*) G---two juveniles

Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) G---50 (fewer than normal) estimated on boat trip

Spotted Sandpiper (*Actitis macularius*) G---Blacks Harbour ferry landing

Greater Yellowlegs (*Tringa melanoleuca*) G---Castalia Marsh; seven total

Lesser Yellowlegs (*Tringa flavipes*) G---Castalia Marsh; five total

Skuas & Jaegers:

South Polar Skua (*Stercorarius maccormicki*) G---incredible display of a bird attacking gulls behind our boat for about five minutes, at times as close as fifteen feet

away; by far the best views ever of this rare species for this tour; voted the second favorite bird of the trip!

Pomarine Jaeger (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) G---two on the first ferry crossing, two from our boat trip, and another on the ferry ride the last day



Pomarine Jaeger, off Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Dina Perry

Alcids:

Common Murre (*Uria aalge*) G---twenty birds (a good count) seen on the ferry ride from Blacks Harbour to Grand Manan and one on our boat trip; generally uncommon & localized

Razorbill (*Alca torda*) G---two seen late in the day on our boat trip; can be tough on this tour

Black Guillemot (*Cephus grylle*) G---41 total; many good views, including scope studies from shore in Blacks Harbour

Atlantic Puffin (*Fratercula arctica*) G---about 50 total from our boat trip, with some close views of birds on the water; voted the fourth favorite bird of the tour!



Atlantic Puffin, off Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Dina Perry

Gulls and Terns:

Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*) G---about 40 total with many good views of both adults & immatures; tied for third favorite bird of the tour!

Bonaparte's Gull (*Chroiocephalus philadelphia*) G---fairly widespread this year with about 35 total

Laughing Gull (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) G---one juvenile spotted by Erik at The Anchorage; very uncommon to rare this far north

Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*) M,G

Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*) G---an unprecedented ten seen on our boat trip; very uncommon, but increasing here

Great Black-backed Gull (*Larus marinus*) G---several hundred total

Loons:

Common Loon (*Gavia immer*) G---five total

Tubenoses:

Wilson's Storm-Petrel (*Oceanites oceanicus*) G---about a 250 on our boat trip

Great Shearwater (*Ardenna gravis*) G---a down year for shearwaters; only 16 total birds seen, but we had repeated, fantastic views from less than twenty feet away; tied for fifth favorite bird of the tour!



Great Shearwater, off Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Dina Perry

Boobies & Gannets:

Northern Gannet (*Morus bassanus*) G---a total of 45 seen of varying ages and plumages; generally a good year for this species; repeated, excellent studies

Cormorants:

Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) G---excellent views of 25 on our boat trip (most at Black Rocks), plus a few others elsewhere; this species can be tough on this tour



Great Cormorant, Black Rocks, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

Double-crested Cormorant (*Nannopterum auritum*) M,G---seen daily

Herons & Egrets:

Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*) G---four total

New World Vultures:

Turkey Vulture (*Cathartes aura*) M,G---21 total

Osprey:

Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) M,G---six total, including two being chased by Bald Eagles

Hawks, Eagles & Kites:

Northern Harrier (*Circus hudsonius*) G---seven total, including one male at Castalia

Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*) G---five total

Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) M,G---twelve total

Broad-winged Hawk (*Buteo platypterus*) M,G---our first bird of the tour (close to our Bangor hotel on our way to dinner); nine total

Kingfishers:

Belted Kingfisher (*Megaceryle alcyon*) G---one distantly at Castalia Marsh

Woodpeckers:

Downy Woodpecker (*Dryobates pubescens*) G---four total

Hairy Woodpecker (*Dryobates villosus*) G---two total

Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*) G---yellow-shafted variety; nine total, including one on our boat trip!

Falcons:

American Kestrel (*Falco sparverius*) G---one at Blacks Harbour

Merlin (*Falco columbarius*) G---a male hawking dragonflies at Long Pond was quite memorable; two total

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) G---one high overhead at Castalia for a few folks

Tyrant Flycatchers:

Alder Flycatcher (*Empidonax alnorum*) G---one bird at Dark Harbour; getting late for this species

Least Flycatcher (*Empidonax minimus*) G---two total

Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) G---one at Whale Cove

Vireos:

Blue-headed Vireo (*Vireo solitarius*) G---one along Whistle Road thanks to Barry L.

Philadelphia Vireo (*Vireo philadelphicus*) G---four total with exceptional views; generally uncommon



Philadelphia Vireo, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 7, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) G---an impressive 25 seen

Corvids:

Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*) M,G---seen daily with best studies the final morning

American Crow (*Corvus brachyrhynchus*) M,G

Common Raven (*Corus corax*) M,G

Tits, Chickadees & Titmice:

Black-capped Chickadee (*Poecile atricapillus*) G---far less numerous than usual, but still about 60 seen; the flock leaders

Swallows:

Tree Swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*) G---three total (two on our boat trip)

Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) G---four total

Kinglets:

Golden-crowned Kinglet (*Regulus satrapa*) G---three total

Waxwings:

Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) G---seen daily (including a few on our boat trip well offshore), but was less numerous than usual

Nuthatches:

Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*) G---very scarce this year with only seven seen; very good views

Wrens:

House Wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) G---one at the Marathon; uncommon

Winter Wren (*Troglodytes hiemalis*) G---heard only along the Dark Harbour Road

Carolina Wren (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) G---a pair at the Marathon for the second straight year; quite rare this far north; superb views

Mockingbirds & Thrashers:

Gray Catbird (*Dumatella carolinensis*) G---scope views; six total

Starlings:

European Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) M,G

Thrushes:

Hermit Thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) G---one along Oven Head Road

American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) M,G

Old World Sparrows:

House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) M---a few by Diane the first morning at our Bangor hotel, and then a small flock near the Paul Bunyan statue the final evening

Pipits:

American Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) G---not normally seen on this tour, but we had a total of 14 birds

Finches:

American Goldfinch (*Spinus tristis*) G

New World Sparrows:

Dark-eyed Junco (*Junco hyemalis*) G---Miller Pond Road; two total; Slate-colored variety

White-throated Sparrow (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) G---six total

Nelson's Sparrow (*Ammospiza nelsoni*) G---nice scope views post-dinner at Castalia Marsh at high tide; tied for the fifth favorite bird of the tour!

Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) G

Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*) G

Lincoln's Sparrow (*Melospiza lincolni*) G---one along Dock Road

Icterids:

Baltimore Oriole (*Icterus galbula*) G---one along Whistle Road; uncommon

Common Grackle (*Quiscalus quiscula*) G,M----201 total; often missed entirely

New World Warblers:

Ovenbird (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) G---superb views of one along the Dark Harbour Road; voted the favorite bird of the tour!

Black-and-white Warbler (*Mniotilta varia*) M,G---9 total; several excellent studies



Black-and-white Warbler, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 7, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

Tennessee Warbler (*Leiothlypis peregrina*) G---only one seen this year

Common Yellowthroat (*Geothlypis trichas*) G---our second most common warbler with 15 seen

American Redstart (*Setophaga ruticilla*) G---five for the trip

Cape May Warbler (*Setophaga tigrina*) G---two total; often missed this early

Northern Parula (*Setophaga americana*) G---total of eight for the trip

Magnolia Warbler (*Setophaga magnolia*) G---four total

Bay-breasted Warbler (*Setophaga castanea*) G---ten total with superb studies; generally uncommon this early; tied for fifth favorite bird of the tour!



Bay-breasted Warbler, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 7, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

Yellow Warbler (*Setophaga petechia*) G---two total

Blackpoll Warbler (*Setophaga striata*) G---six total; often uncommon this early

Black-throated Blue Warbler (*Setophaga caerulescens*) G---thanks to Barry L. we had eye level views of a male from about fifteen feet away along Oven Head Road; rare on this tour

Palm Warbler (*Setophaga palmarum*) G---seen by a couple of folks at the Marathon

Yellow-rumped Warbler (*Setophaga coronata*) G---two seen; Myrtle types

Black-throated Green Warbler (*Setophaga virens*) M,G---the most common warbler this year with a total of 22 birds seen

Wilson's Warbler (*Cardellina pusilla*) G---one trying to land on our boat well out to sea

Cardinals & Allies:

Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) G---nice views of a family group at the Marathon Inn

total species – **116**

FIVE FAVORITE BIRDS OF THE TOUR

1. Ovenbird (ten votes)
2. South Polar Skua (nine votes)
3. Black-legged Kittiwake & Black-throated Blue Warbler tied (six votes each)
4. Atlantic Puffin (four votes)
5. Great Shearwater, Nelson's Sparrow & Bay-breasted Warbler tied (three votes each)



Nelson's Sparrow, Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 8, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

MAMMALS

Eastern Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)---in Setphen King's yard!
Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)
Gray Seal (*Halichoerus grypus*)---15 or more on boat trip; good views
Harbor Seal (*Phoca vitulina*)

White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

Humpback Whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*)---a couple seen well from the ferry and then an excellent show of four or more on our boat trip



Humpback Whale, off Grand Manan, New Brunswick, September 6, 2023, ©Dina Perry

Atlantic White-sided Dolphin (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*)---large pod of 30 or more right next to our boat for some time; uncommon

Harbor Porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*)---very common on the initial ferry crossing

total species - 8

BUTTERFLIES

Cabbage White

Clouded Sulphur

Monarch

Red Admiral

Painted Lady

Mourning Cloak

Common Ringlet

Fritillary species

Common Wood-Nymph

Common Branded Skipper---leader only

total species – 10

REPTILES

Ringneck Snake (*Diadophis punctatus*)



Ringneck Snake, Bethel, New Brunswick, September 5, 2023, ©Barry Zimmer

Smooth Green Snake (*Opheodrys vernalis*)

SIGNIFICANT OTHERS

Leopard Slug----several at Brookside Mini-Golf; a favorite for many

Tuna---seen breaching from the ferry

lobster in various forms

blueberry pie

dulse tasting---yuk!

Stephen King's house

The Paul Bunyan statue

miniature golf at Durlan's Brookside Mini-Golf---Eighth Annual VENT Fall Classic----
Barry Z = 46, Durlan = 53, Erik = 54, Ken = 59, Barry L = 63, Diane = 71, Brooke = 75;
Barry Z is crowned the champion of 2023!



Golfing group, Seal Cove, New Brunswick, September 7, 2023, ©Durlan Ingersoll