



Field Guides Tour Report

Maine in Fall: Seabirds & Coastal Migrants 2019

Sep 9, 2019 to Sep 18, 2019

Eric Hynes

For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, [please VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE.](#)



A breaching Humpback Whale has to be one of the most dramatic wildlife sightings one could ever hope to see while at sea and we experienced it not once but a half dozen times! Photo by guide Eric Hynes.

Thank you all so much for choosing Field Guides for your fall migration adventure along the Maine coast. I truly enjoyed birding with each one of you and have nothing but fond memories from our experience together. We were fortunate to enjoy nearly ideal weather conditions, lots of interesting birds, delicious food, beautiful scenery and a memorable boat trip.

We began our adventure with an afternoon introduction at the hotel and brief evening out. Several flocks of Wild Turkeys and a Great Blue Heron teed up high atop a towering white pine were noteworthy en route to dinner on the coast. Lobster rolls and more were enjoyed at Dyer Point in Cape Elizabeth while we watched Black Guillemots, Common Eiders and Common Loons.

Our first full day together was spent searching for shorebirds along the coast. Our itinerary that day started at Goose Rocks Beach, then over to Timber Point where we had excellent views of White-rumped Sandpipers and a Baird's Sandpiper among the more numerous Semipalmated Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Semipalmated Plovers. Fortunes Rocks Beach was pretty quiet but Biddeford Pool Beach hosted an impressive concentration of Sanderlings and a Merlin made a strafing flight along the dunes. The afternoon was spent in the Scarborough Marsh area where we added two hunting Peregrine Falcons and a number of wading birds and shorebirds.

Wednesday morning we returned to Scarborough Marsh and picked up a late Purple Martin, an excellent comparison of Lesser versus Greater yellowlegs and some beautiful juvenile Short-billed Dowitchers. After checking out of the hotel, we worked our way up to Port Clyde and caught the ferry over to Monhegan Island. Quite a few Northern Gannets were seen in passage.

Thursday was our full day on Monhegan Island and the charming hotspot did not disappoint. We spotted a juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, lots of Merlins, flocks of Cedar Waxwings, a White-eyed Vireo, a Lark Sparrow and plenty of warblers and vireos. Most of our birding was around the village but we managed to get to Lobster Cove, the ice pond and across the island to White Head in the afternoon.

The legendary migration fallouts that birders dream of on Monhegan Island are entirely dependent on the weather. Lucky for us, there were offshore winds all night so dawn on Friday produced one of those magical mornings. A Common Nighthawk was practically the first bird we saw that morning but the wave of warblers passing over and all around us stole the show. We made our way up to the lighthouse and simply marveled at the phenomenon. For about the first hour after sunrise, hundreds, likely thousands, of warblers were working their way back to the mainland or settling in on Monhegan to forage and rest. It made for a spectacular morning and an ambivalent departure but the midday ferry had to take us away. The afternoon was spent driving up Route 1 to get to Bar Harbor.

Saturday we joined many others birders from Maine and "away" on Maine Audubon's annual pelagic out into the Gulf of Maine. Planning a pelagic is a bit like playing the lottery -- you hope for a winner but you never know what you are going to get. Mother Nature made for a pretty challenging day but we added Leach's Storm-Petrel, Northern Fulmar, Atlantic Puffin, Great Shearwater, Atlantic White-sided Dolphin, Pomarine Jaeger and Great Skua (barely) to our list. You might forget all of those sightings but I bet you will never forget "Victim" and "Churn" -- the Humpback Whales that did all those spectacular breaches.

Sunday was spent exploring Mount Desert Island and Acadia National Park. The scenery was stunning but there were some good birds to be had along the way as well. The handsome Wood Ducks, close scope views of Red-necked Grebes and those marvelous flycatching Red-breasted Nuthatches were a few of the noteworthy moments. Sites visited were Sieur de Monts Spring, MDI High School ponds, Seawall, Bass Harbor Head and Valley Cove.

Day eight of the tour we worked our way up the coast all the way to the US - Canada border at Lubec. Off West Quoddy Head we spotted Harbor Porpoise, Great Cormorant and Black-legged Kittiwake. Bald Eagles seemed to be around every turn and playing "Where's Waldo" at the jetty produced two Lesser Black-backed Gulls. After lunch we explored the enchanting boreal forest at Boot Head Preserve and lucked into a handsome Spruce Grouse to punctuate the outing.

Our last full day together was primarily a travel day but got some fun birding in as well. More boreal birding was needed so we headed out into the working forest on Stud Mill Road, which is northwest of Bangor and managed to add another half dozen species to our list.

For those who had time before their flights, we headed back to Scarborough Marsh on the tenth morning and were rewarded with additions of Pectoral Sandpiper, American Oystercatcher and improved looks at Whimbrel.

Thanks again for choosing Field Guides for your Maine birding adventure. I hope our birding paths cross again sometime soon. Until then, take care and good birding.

--Eric

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl).

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Fall migrants were just starting to arrive.

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – Excellent looks on the ponds behind the Mount Desert Island High School.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Plenty here and there.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – A regional specialty seen well.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Seen on several days.

COMMON EIDER (DRESSER'S) (*Somateria mollissima dresseri*) – The default duck on the coast of Maine.

SURF SCOTER (*Melanitta perspicillata*)

WHITE-WINGED SCOTER (NORTH AMERICAN) (*Melanitta deglandi deglandi*)

HOODED MERGANSER (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – It was fun to see one sharing a rock with a Painted Turtle.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies).

RING-NECKED PHEASANT (*Phasianus colchicus*) – A small colony of introduced birds persists on Monhegan Island. [I]

SPRUCE GROUSE (*Falcipennis canadensis*) – A tour highlight to be sure! It was thrilling to spot a male up in a tree but it got even better when he dropped to the ground.

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – We observed several small flocks our first evening in Cape Elizabeth.

Podicipedidae (Grebes).

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A juvenile was still sporting its boldly patterned head at Dunstan Landing.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – Good scope views off Seawall on MDI.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [II]

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaidura macroura*) – Here and there.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos).

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) – This uncommon bird in Maine narrowly escaped becoming a meal of a Cooper's Hawk on Monhegan Island. After dodging the hungry predator, the cuckoo hid in a small clump of spruce completely out of view.

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies).

COMMON NIGHTHAWK (*Chordeiles minor*) – Those awake for the early walk our second morning on Monhegan got to watch a silhouette bouncing around the sky behind the hotel.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds).

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – A fair number on Monhegan Island, mostly sipping nectar from the patches of spotted jewelweed.

Haematopodidae (Oystercatchers).

AMERICAN OYSTERCATCHER (*Haematopus palliatus*) – Picking up a pair on the mudflats at Pine Point our last morning was a pleasing addition to our list at the end of the tour.

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Our best looks were at Pine Point.

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – Dozens were seen in Biddeford.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

WHIMBREL (*Numenius phaeopus*) – It was thrilling to hear a "Seven Whistler" calling overhead, then seen while we were making our way out to Lobster Cove on Monhegan Island. The scope view at Pine Point our last morning was a better look thanks to the scope but less exciting.

SANDERLING (*Calidris alba*) – Watching these wave chasers is always entertaining.

BAIRD'S SANDPIPER (*Calidris bairdii*) – One individual allowed for an excellent study in comparison to White-rumped Sandpipers at Timber Point Beach.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Those bright, rufous juveniles were particularly handsome.

WHITE-RUMPED SANDPIPER (*Calidris fuscicollis*) – We observed several closer and at length at Timber Point Beach. When a Baird's Sandpiper came into view, we enjoyed an excellent comparison study.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – Our only encounter was a bird(s?) in flight overhead, calling, as we walked out Eastern Trail in Scarborough Marsh.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Hundreds.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – We enjoyed outstanding looks at juvenile birds at Dunstan Landing in Scarborough Marsh.

WILSON'S SNIBE (*Gallinago delicata*) – Some of us enjoyed good views of a bird in flight circling over town in beautiful early morning light on Monhegan Island.

RED-NECKED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus lobatus*) – Scattered individuals and small flocks during the pelagic; the sea conditions made scrutinizing field marks challenging.

RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) – Scattered individuals and small flocks during the pelagic; the sea conditions made scrutinizing field marks challenging.

SOLITARY SANDPIPER (*Tringa solitaria*) – Our only sighting was appropriately a lone bird at the edge of a salt marsh pan in Lubec.

GREATER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa melanoleuca*) – "Everything about a Greater is greater".

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – The direct comparison at point blank range of this species with the previous species at Dunstan Landing was a wonderful shorebird ID refresher.

Stercorariidae (Skuas and Jaegers).

GREAT SKUA (*Stercorarius skua*) – Only one individual on the pelagic and unfortunately it flew directly away from the boat.

POMARINE JAEGER (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) – A fair number were seen during the pelagic but one bird trailing in the wake was particularly memorable.

Alcidae (Auks, Murres, and Puffins).

BLACK GUILLEMOT (*Cephus grylle*) – Great looks on multiple days; perhaps our best looks were from Lobster Cove on Monhegan.

ATLANTIC PUFFIN (*Fratercula arctica*) – Just a few birds already in nonbreeding condition during the pelagic.

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers).

BLACK-LEGGED KITTIWAKE (*Rissa tridactyla*) – Some people spotted one on the pelagic but our scope views from West Quoddy Head were superior.

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – The pitter-patter of their webbed feet in the shallows was entertaining.

LAUGHING GULL (*Leucophaeus atricilla*) – About an every other day bird; many of the breeders had already migrated away.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – Plenty.

HERRING GULL (AMERICAN) (*Larus argentatus smithsonianus*) – Numerous.

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus fuscus*) – We teased out an adult and an immature on the jetty in Lubec.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – Numerous.

Gaviidae (Loons).

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Good scope views on multiple days.

Oceanitidae (Southern Storm-Petrels).

WILSON'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanites oceanicus*) – It took awhile on the pelagic but once we got into them, they were fairly common.

Hydrobatidae (Northern Storm-Petrels).

LEACH'S STORM-PETREL (*Oceanodroma leucorhoa*) – This species, that breeds on the islands in the Gulf of Maine, was separated from the previous species by its more buoyant/erratic flight.

Procellariidae (Shearwaters and Petrels).

NORTHERN FULMAR (*Fulmarus glacialis*) – A few good looks on the pelagic.

GREAT SHEARWATER (*Ardenna gravis*) – On some trips this species can be numerous but we just spotted a scattering of individuals.

MANX SHEARWATER (*Puffinus puffinus*) – Just one bird made a quick pass by the boat on the starboard side and I am not sure how many of you got on it.

Sulidae (Boobies and Gannets).

NORTHERN GANNET (*Morus bassanus*) – One of the highlights of the tour; we saw quite a few gannets on multiple days of the tour and that one dramatic plunge just as we were entering the harbor at Monhegan Island on the port side of the ferry will not soon be forgotten.

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

GREAT CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) – What an excellent comparison to a Double-crested Cormorant on the rocks at West Quoddy Head.

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Many.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns).

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – More days than not; the immature bird soaking up the first rays of sun on our last morning stands out in my memory.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – We witnessed some impressive aggregations in Scarborough Marsh.

SNOWY EGRET (*Egretta thula*) – Outnumbered by the previous species.

LITTLE BLUE HERON (*Egretta caerulea*) – Just one juvenile bird off Eastern Trail in Scarborough Marsh.

BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) – We got an up close view of an immature bird behind the Pelreco building in Scarborough.

YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – This species is a rarity in Maine, which is at the north end of its range but seems like more years than not, a juvenile or two finds their way up to Monhegan Island during post-breeding dispersal.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Masters of soaring.

Pandionidae (Osprey).

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – Many of the breeders in Maine had already headed south but we had plenty of good looks.

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus hudsonius*) – Scarborough Marsh was the site for most of our encounters with this graceful raptor.

SHARP-SHINNED HAWK (*Accipiter striatus*) – Good looks on Monhegan Island.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Our only sighting of the tour was very exciting -- that immature bird crashed into the spruce tree at Lobster Cove on Monhegan and narrowly missed making a meal out of a Black-billed Cuckoo.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – It seemed like the farther Downeast we got, the more common this beast got. One young bird put up thousands of large gulls in Lubec.

BROAD-WINGED HAWK (*Buteo platypterus*) – Good scope views of an adult on a wire en route to Bar Harbor.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – Surprisingly few and far between.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers).

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – We had great luck with this species during our tour, with many sightings.

Picidae (Woodpeckers).

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates pubescens*) – Here and there.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Dryobates villosus*) – Just a few.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – Its maniacal call rang across the valley in Acadia National Park.

NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED) (*Colaptes auratus luteus*) – At one point on Monhegan, we watched a steady flow of birds passing overhead.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras).

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – A few on Monhegan.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – THE aerial predator on Monhegan -- we had many excellent views.

PEREGRINE FALCON (*Falco peregrinus*) – We got lucky with several hunting at Scarborough Marsh; one bird dropped into an incredible stoop after an unseen target in a channel.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers).

LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*) – A fair number sought respite on Monhegan.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – The tail swinger.

EASTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Three in one treetop on Monhegan.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis).

WHITE-EYED VIREO (*Vireo griseus*) – Expect the unexpected when birding on Monhegan Island (although this species is an annual vagrant at that site in fall migration). Steve Spunk found it for us.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – A handsome bird on Stud Mill Road remains memorable.

PHILADELPHIA VIREO (*Vireo philadelphicus*) – Good looks on Monhegan.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – We had a fun study of this species with the previous vireo in the same apple tree on Monhegan.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Plenty of good looks.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies).

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – A handsome and charismatic corvid.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Common.

COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*) – More conspicuous later in the tour.

Hirundinidae (Swallows).

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*) – This was a bit of a shocker, given the late date; the severe weather prior to our tour may have kept or pushed this bird back north.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice).

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – The state bird.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – In southern Maine.

Sittidae (Nuthatches).

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – What a treat it was to watch the pair flycatching from open perches in a spruce at the end of the Valley Cove trail.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (EASTERN) (*Sitta carolinensis carolinensis*) – Who knows if this subspecies will be split out or not but the vocalization is noticeably different.

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Only on Monhegan Island.

WINTER WREN (*Troglodytes hiemalis hiemalis*) – Another bird we only had on Monhegan and this one was even less confiding, unfortunately.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus satrapa*) – Daily during the second half of the tour.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – Only our first evening out.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Surprisingly, this common species was few and far between.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers).

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Most days the first half of the tour.

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Just on the southern coast.

Sturnidae (Starlings).

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) [I]

Bombycillidae (Waxwings).

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Good-sized flocks swirling all over Monhegan.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies).

HOUSE FINCH (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Only in southern Maine.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Nearly an every day bird.

Passerellidae (New World Sparrows).

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – A couple of times early in the tour.

LARK SPARROW (*Chondestes grammacus*) – Good looks down by the ice pond on Monhegan.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED) (*Junco hyemalis hyemalis*) – A few on MDI.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – Our best look was the last morning along the Eastern Trail.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – Nearly an every day bird.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – Not until we got into the boreal forest above Bangor.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies).

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – Easily heard overhead but hard to get a look at on Monhegan.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Many had already departed Maine.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – We kept running into a flock on Monhegan.

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – A calling bird stayed out of view on Monhegan. [*]

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Wonderful looks at this little zebra.

TENNESSEE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) – We spotted one in an apple tree outside the hotel while we enjoyed a marvelous breakfast.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Sounds like striking a match.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – A lot of immature birds.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – This uncommon warbler was not so uncommon on Monhegan Island. We had beautiful looks at a number of birds and saw a variety of plumage patterns.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – Less numerous than the previous species but not hard to come by on Monhegan.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – I think my favorite look was a bird on Stud Mill Road.

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER (*Setophaga castanea*) – We had illuminating studies of this "confusing fall warbler".

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER (*Setophaga fusca*) – Just a few.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – It was getting late for this early migrant; many had already departed for their wintering grounds.

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – One of the warblers that looks dramatically different in the fall but in some ways, the yellowish-green plumage we got to enjoy is almost more beautiful than in the breeding plumage.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – We were fortunate to have close proximity comparisons with the similar Bay-breasted Warbler while we were out on Monhegan Island.

PALM WARBLER (YELLOW) (*Setophaga palmarum hypochrysea*) – We didn't catch up to this tail-pumping warbler until we got into the boreal forest above Bangor.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (MYRTLE) (*Setophaga coronata coronata*) – They were certainly around but their numbers were just starting to build.

PRAIRIE WARBLER (*Setophaga discolor*) – Several good looks on Monhegan.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – Many of the big warbler flight the second morning on Monhegan were this species.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Several good looks.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies).

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Mostly in southern Maine.

DICKCISSEL (*Spiza americana*) – Their call note is memorable; the one we heard down by the ice pond on Monhegan never showed itself. [*]

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows).

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) [I]

MAMMALS

PLAIN EASTERN CHIPMUNK (*Tamias striatus*)

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*)

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)

ATLANTIC WHITE-SIDED DOLPHIN (*Lagenorhynchus acutus*) – A pod of these gorgeous cetaceans zipped by the boat on the return trip during our pelagic.

HARBOR PORPOISE (*Phocoena phocoena*) – This tiny cetacean was pointed out several times but I think our best view was off Bass Harbor Head on MDI.

HUMPBACK WHALE (*Megaptera novaeangliae*) – Wow. Just wow. Victim and Churn put on one heck of a show. All that breaching was unforgettable.

HARBOR SEAL (*Phoca vitulina*) – Point blank views in Lubec.

GRAY SEAL (*Halichoerus grypus*) – The larger of the two pinnipeds we saw; also referred to as "Horse head." Their populations in New England have recovered significantly in the last decade or two and with their increased numbers have come their primary predator: Great White Sharks.

WHITE-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus virginianus*)

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 135 bird taxa and 9 mammal taxa