Trip Report — Newfoundland & Nova Scotia 2025

June 29-July 9, 2025 with Jay VanderGaast & Alex Sundvall

The incredible scene that surrounded us on our journey through Witless Bay approaching Gull Island. This colony has hundreds of thousands of Atlantic Puffins and Common Murres. Photo by Richard Kaskan.

The coastlines and forests of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia have long been famed for their stunning beauty. Coastal fjords meet rocky outcrops with tundra and boreal bogs. This tour sees just a slice of what makes the Canadian maritimes famous. In our brief ~week-long tour we explored the Avalon peninsula of Newfoundland and then took the ferry across to Cape Breton where we explored the highlands before ending the tour on the southeastern coast of Nova Scotia. I typically describe northern tours as a

quality over quantity tour, where the species list isn't terribly high but the birds you do see are absolutely remarkable. And this was definitely the case with our tour! While we only saw just over 120 species, each one of them was amazing. The highlight of course being the now long staying world-famous Steller's Sea-Eagle, which just happened to be hanging out not too far from our first hotel! This tour is also great for seabirds, visiting a few different nesting colonies. Witless Bay is home to the largest Atlantic Puffin colony in North America, with nearly 350,000 individuals! It's also home to nearly a million Common Murres and a smattering of Thick-billed Murres and Razorbills. Seeing this swirling mass of birds erupting from the cliffs out into the sea to feed is something we'll all remember for a long time. It wasn't just a great tour for birds either, the mammals were also very impressive with a number of fabulous encounters with Humpback Whales over the course of the tour.

From Jay and I and everyone here at Field Guides, we'd like to thank you for taking your journey through the Canadian Maritimes with us. This was a lovely group that was unbothered by the challenges of the coastal fog and the wide temperature swings. We hope to see you sometime again soon somewhere down the birding trail! Here is a day to day account of what we did and where we went on this tour of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Quite possibly the most famous bird in the country, and maybe the world! This Steller's Sea-Eagle has dazzled birders for years now as it's flown across the Atlantic states. We were so lucky to be able to cross paths with it during our time here! Photo by guide Jay VanderGaast.

Day 1: we hit the ground running today with our first stop at the incredibly scenic and historic Signal Hill, overlooking the harbor and out into the ocean. There was nothing too crazy here in terms of species, but it was nice to watch a Bald Eagle and Great Black-backed Gull in the scope. Next, we headed to Burton's Pond where the local celebrity Pink-footed Goose has hung around for the past 5 years. It has grown quite accustomed to people and we could nearly walk right up to it. Certainly some of the best looks you'll ever get at the species. Sharing that same pond was a small flock of American Wigeons with a single drake Eurasian Wigeon mixed in with them! From there we headed towards Mundy Pond where a Tufted Duck had been hanging out. Unfortunately for us it seemed to have hunkered down in the reeds and was completely out of sight for us. We had a bit more luck with targets at Bidgood Pond where in just a short while we had Blackpoll and Black-and-white Warblers, Cedar Waxwings, and nice looks at a singing

male Purple Finch! After lunch we enjoyed an incredible boat ride out to Gull Island where we saw tens of not hundreds of thousands of Atlantic Puffins and Common Murres. Interspersed amongst those were our remaining Alcids: Razorbills, Thick-billed Murres, and Black Guillemots. It wasn't just an incredible bird show, but the mammals also were quite the sight! At one point we had half a dozen Humpback Whales feeding around us and coming right under the boat. Truly a magical experience. On our way back to St. John's we made a quick stop to Cape Spear, the easternmost part of Canada. We didn't see too many birds with the wind and impending rain, but we did see yet another rail.

Day 2: We started off the morning with yet another attempt at finding the Tufted Duck at Mundy Pond before we left St. John's. While he wasn't at Mundy, mercifully he had merely relocated to the nearby Kent's pond and we ended up with great looks at his tuft flopping around while he preened. From here, we moved on to the real main course of the morning, an hour long drive to see the most famous bird in North America! For the past 4 years there has been a Steller's Sea-Eagle moving about the northeastern US and the Canadian maritimes dazzling birders along the way. And thanks to some sharp spotting by Sue, we were able to join those hundreds of birders from over the years and see the bird they've affectionately named Stella. She was perched high up on the hillside, but through a scope you could see every detail, including that massive bill! Then we headed to lunch, and the rest of the day was mainly devoted to getting down to Trepassey for the evening. We stopped in Renews-Cappahayden at some feeders where we had great views of the endemic Newfoundland Type 8 Red Crossbill. While scoping a nearby river mouth we had excellent views of perched Arctic and Common Terns to really be able to compare the two, along with a random Eastern Willet that had dropped in. Once we arrived in Trepassey, we took a quick jaunt down towards Cape Race Point, and while we didn't see much for birds it did give us a teaser about where we'd be going in the morning.

Some hopeful birders scanning the flocks of shearwaters through the fog at Race Point. Photo by Sue Boettger.

Day 3: today we unfortunately awoke to the famous Cape Race fog. Cape Race is one of the foggiest places on earth with 158 average days of fog a year. And that fog stuck with us essentially the whole day! We did the best we could though, and headed out towards the lighthouse hoping for anything in the fog. We lucked out to an amazing encounter with a Short-eared Owl and our first looks at Fox Sparrows. Once we made it to the lighthouse proper, a pair of American Pipits were actively carrying food to a nearby nest, and a score of Black Guillemots loafed on the water. Far offshore at the fog edge there were hundreds of Shearwaters sitting in the water, but it was really tough to pick anything out! Thankfully the fog lifted and we were able to pick out a few Great Shearwaters amongst the hordes of Sooty Shearwaters. After our lunch stop in St. Schotts, we headed to St. Vincent where an incredible whale spectacle awaited us. The beach there

has a sheer drop-off into the ocean so the Capelin get incredibly close to shore. This is a favorite food for Humpback whales, and there were at least 3 of them feeding mere feet from the beach edge putting on an unforgettable show! We finished our birding for the day on our drive to Placentia along Route 91 near the cataract provincial park, where we had Fox Sparrows, Golden-crowned Kinglets, both chickadees, and a firecracker of a Magnolia Warbler right on the side of the road!

Day 4: we unfortunately awoke to another day of fog. We optimistically went down to Cape St. Mary's Ecological Reserve with the hope that the fog might be clear enough to see a part of their famously huge Northern Gannet colony. When we pulled into the parking lot, the fog was so thick we couldn't even see the visitors center. As we walked the trail out to the seabird cliffs, it truly felt like the trail to nowhere. You could see the trail in front of you and behind you, with tundra surrounding us, but no details on the horizon. The only real sensations were the sounds and smells of a large seabird colony. As we neared the end of the trail, the fog lifted slightly and when we got to the colony we could see thousands of birds nesting on the rocky cliff faces. After a magical showing, we walked the mile long foggy trail back to the bus and headed back up towards Argentia to catch the ferry to Nova Scotia. We still had a little bit of time before we needed to get to the terminal, so we made a quick stop in to Castle Hill National Historic Site with great success! We never made it out of the parking lot as we quickly had an Olive-sided Flycatcher, an incredibly cooperative Fox Sparrow, a lovely pair of female Pine Grosbeaks, and an active Blackpoll Warbler nest out in the open at eye level! What a wonderful way to close out the birding day. Once we boarded the ferry, the fog and rain rolled in and despite a valiant effort, there was no real birding to be done the rest of the day.

One of thousands of Northern Gannets we saw at Cape St. Mary's, one of their largest breeding colonies in North America. Photo by Charlie Baisden.

Day 5: We fell asleep to fog and woke up to fog! Unfortunately no birds were seen on the ferry crossing. Once we landed in Nova Scotia, we drove up to a nearby beach with the hopes of seeing Piping Plovers. While we didn't, we did have some incredible looks at Atlantic Nelson's Sparrow and some better looks at Eastern Willet. After lunch, we went to Point Aconi where there was a family of Common Eiders in the surf, and picked out a handful of Great Cormorants mixed in with the Double-crested. From there we headed toward Cheticamp and our hotel with a brief but lucrative stop at the Doyle's Bridge Park Reserve, where we had wonderful looks at Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Mourning Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Northern Parula.

Day 6: Instead of fog this morning, we woke up to thunderstorms bearing down on us from a distance. Thunder echoed and lightning flashed as we ate our breakfasts. Our first birding stop of the morning was to the French Lake

Overlook, where it hadn't started raining yet. The birds were largely uncooperative here, but we did have both Blue-headed Vireo and our first Bay-breasted Warbler. Unfortunately soon after we got back on the bus the rain settled in and we decided to wait it out in the parking lot of the Bog Trail before going out and hiking it. This was a fantastic strategy as the bird activity picked up greatly after the brief rain! Right in the parking lot were Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers, and the highlight of the day for many was the group of Evening Grosbeaks coming for grit right on the side of the parking lot. These three species are indicators of Spruce Budworm outbreaks, and as we drove around the highlands we could see hundreds if not thousands of trees that had the telltale signs of Spruce Budworms. After lunch we took a short boat trip out on Pleasant Bay with the holes of seeing Pilot Whales. Unfortunately, no Pilot Whales had been seen this year yet, but we did have a few Minke Whales playing around the boat. After the boat, we took a long and scenic walk out to Benjie's Lake where the highlight was a few adult Eastern Newts!

Day 7: Today was mostly a repositioning day with lots of time in the van. On our way down to the southern coast, we stopped again at Doyle's Bridge Park Reserve where we got better views of Alder Flycatcher and picked up a somewhat cooperative Veery. Our next stop was Whycocomagh Provincial Park, which despite being midmorning had very little in the way of birdsong. We did manage to pick up a distant male Pileated Woodpecker at the top of a drumming tree. After lunch we made a brief stop at Pomquet Beach where we hoped for Piping Plover again. Alas, it wasn't meant to be as there wasn't even a roped off section of beach to indicate there were any plovers this year at all. We ended the day watching the feeders at dinner from the Liscombe Lodge, which had Red Crossbills and Purple Finches visiting.

The group all staring at a stunning Blackburnian Warbler with the gorgeous Cape Breton Highlands in the background. Photo by guide Alex Sundvall.

Day 8: We started the morning with a short walk around the Lodge grounds where we eventually tracked down one of the singing Winter Wrens for views. It is remarkable how loudly they sing for how small they are! We had 9 different species of warblers as well; with Northern Parulas, Magnolia Warblers, and Black-and-white Warblers showing nicely. We also heard our first Black-throated Green Warblers, and there were still some more Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers around from the budworm outbreaks. Just up the road from the hotel, we found a pair of Canada Jays and an Osprey on its nest. The main birding for the day was along the Waternish Road which cut through some nice old growth forests along the St. Mary's River. Our first stop had a couple of really nice looks at Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, and we finally got a look at a Hermit Thrush. A little farther up the road Cindy caught a glimpse of something interesting

looking in the ditch, and when we got out some folks were just able to see an American Woodcock as it flew across the road and back into the marshy creekside. After lunch, we briefly went down the Waternish Rd again hoping for Canada Warbler, but unfortunately they just weren't around. At this point it was getting pretty hot and even quieter than before, so we tried birding portions of the Indian River Rd and the Sinclair Lake Rd, but all we could muster up that was new were looks at a Black-throated Green Warbler.

Day 9: Our final birding day, with a lot of potential on the horizon! We retraced our steps from yesterday in the morning, as the first rule of Boreal Birding is that repetition is key! If you don't see something one day, try again the next day and see if you get luckier. We did just that as we started out on the Sinclair Lake Rd again, but this time we found the Yellow Palm Warblers we had been looking for! Back along the Waternish Rd we managed to track down a female Ruffed Grouse with her chick running around in the woods. While the chick was pretty skulky, the adult was very vocal trying to distract us and gave pretty good views! Then over on the Indian River Road we had an absolutely magical encounter with a female Spruce Grouse and her two chicks! They were much more accommodating than the Ruffed were, with both the adult and the chick perching for quite a while letting everyone get great scope views of each. From here, we started making the long drive down towards Halifax. After lunch we made a quick stop at Caribou and Munroe's Island Provincial Park where we finally saw a Piping Plover, and this one was on a nest! A wonderful way to end the day, and a fantastic closing bird of the trip.

You can see my complete trip report on eBird at this link: **https://ebird.org/tripreport/425579**

You can see my iNaturalist report of non-avian taxa at this link: **https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/field-guides-newfoundland-nova-scotia-2025**

Jay and Alex

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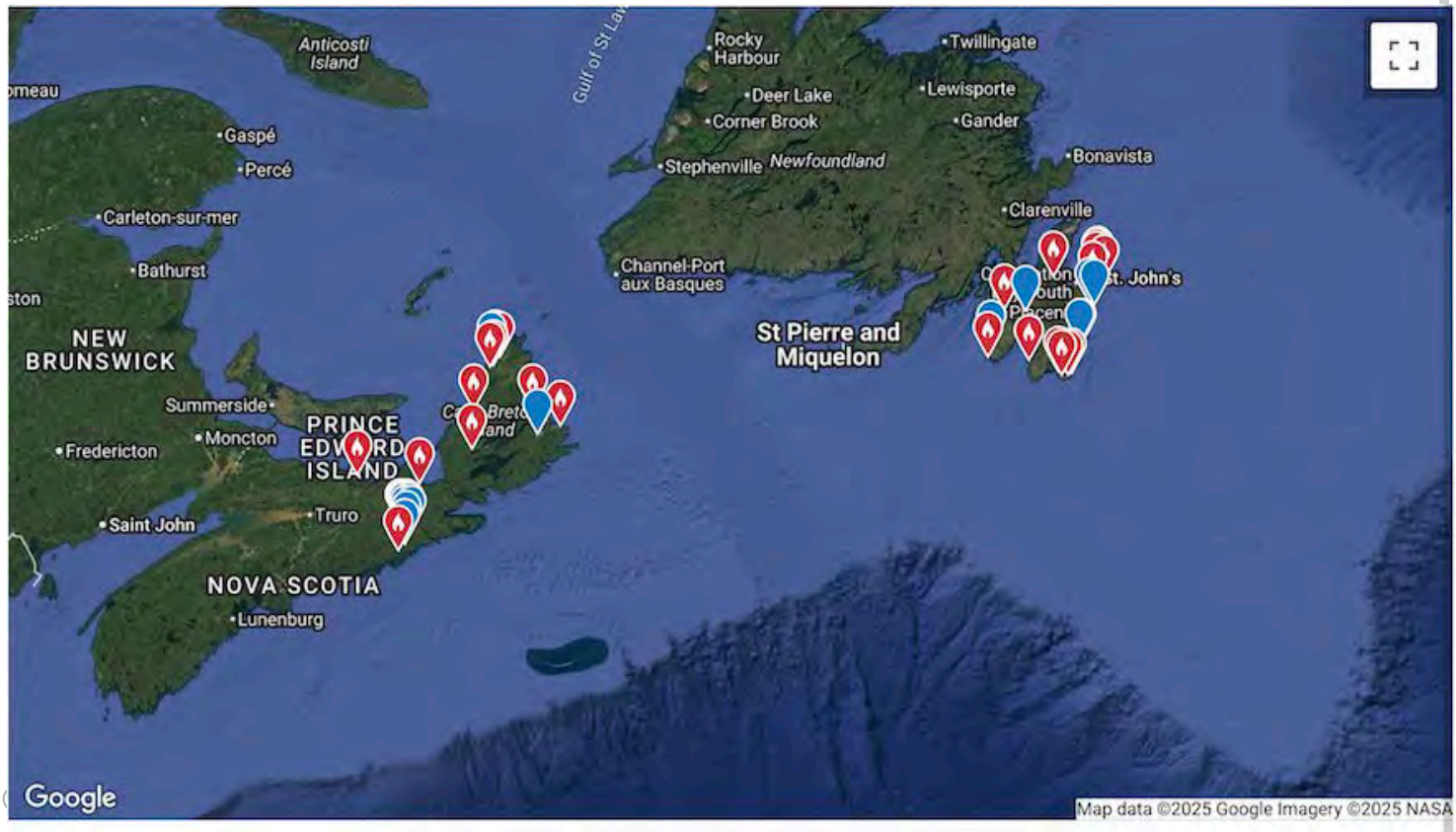
Field Guides Birding Tours - NEWFOUNDLAND & NOVA SCOTIA, 2025 (with guides Jay VanderGaast and Alex Sundvall

30 Jun – 9 Jul 2025 (10 days) Public



Canada

Newfoundland and Labrador | Nova Scotia Subregions

Alex Sundvall

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For a narrative summary of this tour, including a Field Guides photo gallery and additional media for this trip…

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Species Observed

Show all details

1	Pink-footed Goose	*Anser brachyrhynchus*	1
55	Canada Goose	*Branta canadensis*	2
1	Wood Duck	*Aix sponsa*	1
1	Eurasian Wigeon	*Mareca penelope*	1
15	American Wigeon	*Mareca americana*	2
78	Mallard	*Anas platyrhynchos*	9
193	American Black Duck	*Anas rubripes*	9
5	Northern Pintail	*Anas acuta*	2
6	Ring-necked Duck	*Aythya collaris*	2
1	Tufted Duck	*Aythya fuligula*	1
6	Greater Scaup	*Aythya marila*	2
12	Common Eider	*Somateria mollissima*	1
3	Surf Scoter	*Melanitta perspicillata*	1
3	White-winged Scoter	*Melanitta deglandi*	1
4	Hooded Merganser	*Lophodytes cucullatus*	1
9	Common Merganser	*Mergus merganser*	3
1	Red-breasted Merganser	*Mergus serrator*	1
4	Ruffed Grouse	*Bonasa umbellus*	2
3	Spruce Grouse	*Canachites canadensis*	1
60	Rock Pigeon	*Columba livia* *	9
9	Mourning Dove	*Zenaida macroura*	5

5	Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*	5
1	Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus*	1
1	American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*	1
10	Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularius*	7
7	Willet *Tringa semipalmata*	2
3	Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*	2
1	South Polar Skua *Stercorarius maccormicki*	1
102,637	Atlantic Puffin *Fratercula arctica*	6
49	Black Guillemot *Cepphus grylle*	5
115	Razorbill *Alca torda*	4
20	Thick-billed Murre *Uria lomvia*	1
100,851	Common Murre *Uria aalge*	6
2730	Black-legged Kittiwake *Rissa tridactyla*	8
2	Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*	2
231	Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*	6
979	American Herring Gull *Larus smithsonianus*	16
43	Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*	6
1	Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea*	1
24	Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*	7
3	Common Loon *Gavia immer*	3
20	Great Shearwater *Ardenna gravis*	1
281	Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea*	3
2	Manx Shearwater *Puffinus puffinus*	1
1090	Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus*	6

6	Great Cormorant	*Phalacrocorax carbo*	1
68	Double-crested Cormorant	*Nannopterum auritum*	8
7	Great Blue Heron	*Ardea herodias*	4
1	Turkey Vulture	*Cathartes aura*	1
5	Osprey	*Pandion haliaetus*	5
3	Northern Harrier	*Circus hudsonius*	3
12	Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	8
1	Steller's Sea-Eagle	*Haliaeetus pelagicus*	1
1	Red-tailed Hawk	*Buteo jamaicensis*	1
1	Short-eared Owl	*Asio flammeus*	1
5	Belted Kingfisher	*Megaceryle alcyon*	5
5	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	*Sphyrapicus varius*	3
5	Downy Woodpecker	*Dryobates pubescens*	2
3	Pileated Woodpecker	*Dryocopus pileatus*	3
11	Northern Flicker	*Colaptes auratus*	9
4	Merlin	*Falco columbarius*	3
1	Olive-sided Flycatcher	*Contopus cooperi*	1
2	Eastern Wood-Pewee	*Contopus virens*	2
6	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	*Empidonax flaviventris*	5
9	Alder Flycatcher	*Empidonax alnorum*	5
16	Least Flycatcher	*Empidonax minimus*	7
19	Blue-headed Vireo	*Vireo solitarius*	14
56	Red-eyed Vireo	*Vireo olivaceus*	13

2	Canada Jay	*Perisoreus canadensis*	1
21	Blue Jay	*Cyanocitta cristata*	8
26	American Crow	*Corvus brachyrhynchos*	12
11	Common Raven	*Corvus corax*	9
25	Black-capped Chickadee	*Poecile atricapillus*	12
5	Boreal Chickadee	*Poecile hudsonicus*	2
6	Bank Swallow	*Riparia riparia*	2
59	Tree Swallow	*Tachycineta bicolor*	14
13	Barn Swallow	*Hirundo rustica*	2
3	Cliff Swallow	*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*	1
11	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	*Corthylio calendula*	5
25	Golden-crowned Kinglet	*Regulus satrapa*	9
3	Red-breasted Nuthatch	*Sitta canadensis*	2
2	Brown Creeper	*Certhia americana*	2
10	Winter Wren	*Troglodytes hiemalis*	5
30	European Starling	*Sturnus vulgaris* *	7
2	Gray Catbird	*Dumetella carolinensis*	2
3	Veery	*Catharus fuscescens*	1
9	Swainson's Thrush	*Catharus ustulatus*	7
28	Hermit Thrush	*Catharus guttatus*	12
53	American Robin	*Turdus migratorius*	24
71	Cedar Waxwing	*Bombycilla cedrorum*	21
3	House Sparrow	*Passer domesticus* *	1

3	American Pipit	*Anthus rubescens*	2
8	Evening Grosbeak	*Hesperiphona vespertina*	1
2	Pine Grosbeak	*Pinicola enucleator*	1
24	Purple Finch	*Haemorhous purpureus*	13
11	Red Crossbill	*Loxia curvirostra*	1 3
2	White-winged Crossbill	*Loxia leucoptera*	1
14	Pine Siskin	*Spinus pinus*	5
36	American Goldfinch	*Spinus tristis*	16
8	Fox Sparrow	*Passerella iliaca*	4
43	Dark-eyed Junco	*Junco hyemalis*	17
33	White-throated Sparrow	*Zonotrichia albicollis*	15
8	Nelson's Sparrow	*Ammospiza nelsoni*	1
25	Savannah Sparrow	*Passerculus sandwichensis*	10
44	Song Sparrow	*Melospiza melodia*	19
5	Lincoln's Sparrow	*Melospiza lincolnii*	2
14	Swamp Sparrow	*Melospiza georgiana*	7
2	Red-winged Blackbird	*Agelaius phoeniceus*	1
31	Common Grackle	*Quiscalus quiscula*	12
16	Ovenbird	*Seiurus aurocapilla*	10
10	Northern Waterthrush	*Parkesia noveboracensis*	7
23	Black-and-white Warbler	*Mniotilta varia*	15
1	Mourning Warbler	*Geothlypis philadelphia*	1
18	Common Yellowthroat	*Geothlypis trichas*	14

19	American Redstart	*Setophaga ruticilla*	11
5	Cape May Warbler	*Setophaga tigrina*	4
30	Northern Parula	*Setophaga americana*	11
29	Magnolia Warbler	*Setophaga magnolia*	12
11	Bay-breasted Warbler	*Setophaga castanea*	4
6	Blackburnian Warbler	*Setophaga fusca*	4
28	Northern Yellow Warbler	*Setophaga aestiva*	17
11	Chestnut-sided Warbler	*Setophaga pensylvanica*	8
9	Blackpoll Warbler	*Setophaga striata*	4
2	Palm Warbler	*Setophaga palmarum*	1
21	Yellow-rumped Warbler	*Setophaga coronata*	12
12	Black-throated Green Warbler	*Setophaga virens*	5
1	Wilson's Warbler	*Cardellina pusilla*	1
5	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	*Pheucticus ludovicianus*	2

EXOTIC: ESCAPEE

2	Mute Swan	*Cygnus olor*	2

HYBRIDS

20	Mallard x American Black Duck (hybrid)	*Anas platyrhynchos x rubripes*	3

ADDITIONAL TAXA

2	Common/Arctic Tern	*Sterna hirundo/paradisaea*	1