

Northern New England Birding June 15-23, 2013

Leaders: Brian Rapoza and Robin Diaz

Participants: Joe and Helen Barros, Ted and Barbara Center, Nancy Freedman, Bob and Alice Pace, Maria Rodriguez, David Schaffter, Lorena Siquiera

Saturday, June 15

We were scheduled to leave Miami on a 7:00am flight, but due to a flight crew delay, we didn't depart until about 9:30am. As a result, we didn't arrive in Portland, Maine until almost 3:00pm, two hours later than originally scheduled. Co-leader Robin Diaz was waiting for us at the Portland airport. After loading our two rented minivans, we headed to our first birding destination, Brownfield Bog Wildlife Management Area, in the foothills of the White Mountains near the Maine/New Hampshire border. This stop provided an opportunity to see a few "southern" species at the northern edge of their breeding range. Though we had less time to explore this area than originally planned, we still managed to find a nice selection of birds, including Mallard, Ruffed Grouse (flushed from the side of the road), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling and Red-eyed Vireo, Black-capped Chickadee, Veery, Yellow, Chestnut-sided and Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Scarlet Tanager, Baltimore Oriole and Purple Finch. Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Ovenbird were heard-only. We then crossed into New Hampshire and drove north to Gorham, a quaint little town in the heart of the White Mountains. Our base for the next two nights was the Town and Country Motor Inn, east of town. We had a late dinner at the restaurant right at the hotel.

Sunday, June 16

Today's destination was mighty Mt. Washington, at 6,288 feet, the tallest peak in the northeast. After breakfast at the hotel, we headed south to the Mt. Washington Auto Road, a privately owned toll road providing access all the way to the summit. Our main target bird here was Bicknell's Thrush, which nests between 3,000 feet and tree line in the mountains of the northeast. Mt. Washington is one of the few locations where one can reach their breeding territory without a lengthy and strenuous hike. We immediately drove up to a pull-off just below the 4,000-foot marker where Robin and I found a singing Bicknell's on a previous trip. It took some time, but eventually a Bicknell's came close enough to hear and give a fleeting, rather unsatisfying view. Unfortunately, that would be our only encounter of the day. As consolation while exploring this area, we had two Northern Goshawk flyovers plus satisfying looks at Boreal Chickadee, Blue-headed Vireo, Myrtle and Blackpoll Warbler, White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco. We also heard our first Winter Wren, but as is typical for this skulking species, it remained hidden from view. While driving to another pull-off, Robin heard a Mourning Warbler, but it too remained out of sight.



Figure 1. Brian and Joe atop Mt. Washington

As lunchtime approached, we headed for the summit, stopping briefly at a pull-off above tree line to search for breeding American Pipit. No pipits were found, but during our descent after lunch, two Common Raven were in this area. Mt. Washington is well known for its brutal weather around the summit, but for our visit, conditions were no worse than pleasantly cool and breezy. After lunch and exploration of the summit gift shops and interpretive displays, we headed back down the auto road, pausing at a pull-off a short distance from the entrance.



Figure 2. Common raven, Mt. Washington

A local guide stopped to let us know that a bear was in the area; seconds later, a momma bear and her three cubs were spotted rambling through the woods down slope from our position. After the bears moved on, we drove down to Pinkham Notch and the trailhead for the Tuckerman Ravine Trail. This popular but challengingly steep trail winds its way to Mt. Washington's summit; we only had time to explore the first, relatively flat . mile of the trail. Golden-crowned Kinglet and Swainson's Thrush were among the birds encountered here and along a short trail we explored across the road. Unfortunately, it began to rain heavily, forcing us back to the vans and then back to the hotel. After a short rest, we had dinner at a pizza joint in town before retiring for the night.

Monday, June 17 We headed back to Maine this morning, stopping for breakfast first at a McDonald's in Gorham. Cedar Waxwings were found nest-building in a small tree in the parking lot. Our first stop after entering Maine was Grafton Notch State Park, north of Bethel. Robin's van flushed a Ruffed Grouse along the road to the park. In boreal habitat at the Spruce Meadow picnic area, we found Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Swainson's Thrush, Blackburnian Warbler and Pine Siskin. Wet roadside meadows north of the park added Alder and Great Crested Flycatcher, Brown Creeper, Northern Parula and Swamp Sparrow. Philadelphia Vireos were conspicuous at the Baldpate/Old Speck trailhead as well as at Screw Auger and Mother Walker Falls.



Figure 3. Philadelphia vireo

Other species seen during these short stops included Least Flycatcher, Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, and Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warbler. South of the park, we stopped in areas of open fields, where we spotted Wild Turkey, Northern Flicker,

Chimney Swift, Tree and Bank Swallow, House Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Savannah Sparrow and Bobolink.



Figure 4. Orono Bog



Figure 5. Pink lady's slipper (*Cypripedium acaule*)

After lunch at the Route 2 Diner in Rumford, we headed east to Bangor, where we made a late afternoon stop at Orono Bog Walk in Bangor State Forest. Birds encountered along the boardwalk through extensive peat bog habitat included Common Raven, Hermit Thrush, Magnolia, Canada and Palm Warbler and White-throated Sparrow.



Figure 6. Northern pitcher plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*)



Figure 7. White-throated sparrow

We then drove north to Millinocket, and Ruthie's Hotel Terrace, our home for the next two nights. During our stay, Ruthie Leet, the irrepensible owner of this adorable 10-room hotel and restaurant, made us all feel like members of her extended family. She was especially helpful to

Joe and Helen Barros, who, upon learning of the passing of a dear friend, needed to cut short their participation in the trip and return to Florida.

Tuesday, June 18

Millinocket is the gateway to Baxter State Park, home to 5,271-foot Mt. Katahdin, Maine's highest peak. At over 200,000 acres, Baxter is the state's largest park and one of its most spectacular wilderness areas. We spent the entire day exploring the park and surrounding areas. Our first stop was at Roaring Brook, eight miles north of the main park road and one of the main access points for climbing Katahdin. Philadelphia Vireos and Least Flycatchers were easy to find in and around the parking area. Around Sandy Stream Pond, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Northern Waterthrush were heard but not seen. A flock of Common Goldeneye was on the pond; we also spotted a couple of white-tailed deer along the shore, but a hoped-for moose sighting would have to wait until later in the day. At various ponds and wetland areas along the main park road, we found Ring-necked Duck, Common and Hooded Merganser, Common Loon, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Barn Swallow and Pine and Nashville Warbler, as well as a number of species seen previously.



Figure 8. Common loon

In Abol Pond, we spotted an enormous snapping turtle basking in the sun. In an area of boreal forest along the road, Robin heard a Bay-breasted Warbler singing; we eventually located this stunning bird and enjoyed extended looks. By late afternoon, we left the park to explore an area

just outside the entrance where moose are regularly reported.



Figure 9. Bull moose near Baxter State Park

Once we found the location, we easily found the moose, three in all, including a bull with a full rack. Also seen in this area were Canada Goose, Wild Turkey, American Bittern, Red-shouldered Hawk and Alder Flycatcher. After dinner at Ruthie's, we bade farewell to Joe and Helen, who had completed arrangements to fly back to Miami the next morning.

Wednesday, June 19

Today started with a long drive to the down-east coast of Maine. By mid-morning, we arrived at Moosehorn National Wildlife Refuge, near the border with New Brunswick, Canada. On a nest platform near the refuge entrance, a Bald Eagle was seen feeding its young, while Canada Geese

were spotted in surrounding impoundments.



Figure 10. Bald eagle feeding nestlings

During a productive stop at an observation deck, we found a singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak and a nesting Eastern Kingbird, plus Downy Woodpecker, Eastern Phoebe, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Parula, Yellow Warbler, Song and Swamp Sparrow, Purple Finch and American Goldfinch. The trip's only Ruby-throated Hummingbird was coming to a feeder at the refuge visitor center; birds seen on nearby interpretive trails included Black-capped Chickadee, Veery, and Nashville and Black-throated Blue Warbler. After lunch in Lubec, we headed to Quoddy Head State Park for some coastal birding. Located on a peninsula jutting into the Bay of Fundy, with an iconic lighthouse at its tip, the park is the easternmost point in the United States. Upon entering the park, we were surprised to find a female Ruffed Grouse dust-bathing in the

parking lot!



Figure 11. Ruffed grouse

Once the grouse concluded its dust-bath and slowly strutted into the surrounding woods, we parked and made our way to spots where we could scope the bay. New birds came quickly: Common Eider, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Herring and Great Black-backed Gull, Black Guillemot and Razorbill. A late Red-throated Loon was an unexpected bonus. We then visited boreal forest habitat at nearby Boot Head Preserve. A one-mile trail led through the forest to a pebble beach; more guillemots were offshore and a few warblers, including Blackpoll, Nashville and Black-throated Green, were found along the trail. A Northern Harrier was spotted near Cutler, our next day's starting point for our boat trip to Machias Seal Island. Our day ended in Machias, where we'll stay just for one night. We had dinner at a restaurant adjacent to our hotel, the Machias Motor Inn.

Thursday, June 20

We didn't need to be in Cutler until 8:45am this morning, allowing participants to sleep in a bit and have a slightly later than usual breakfast. The drive to Cutler took only 20 minutes. After figuring out where to park the vans and getting checked in, we were shuttled to the tour boat, the

Barbara Frost, by its delightful captain, Andrew Patterson. The tide was high as we departed shortly after 9:00am; within the hour, Machias Seal Island, located about 10 miles offshore, was in sight. The island has an interesting history in that both the U.S. and Canada claim sovereignty; the dispute has never been settled. The island's lighthouse is operated and maintained by keepers assigned by the Canadian Coast Guard.



Figure 12. Cap'n Andy

As we approached the island, hundreds of Razorbills and Atlantic Puffins and smaller numbers of Common Murres were swarming everywhere around the boat. Flocks of Common Eider were roosting on the rocks or swimming close to shore. Though skies were clear and seas were calm, an initial attempt to shuttle participants onto the island had to be aborted due to heavy swells washing over the landing ramp. Confident that the swells would dissipate shortly, Capt. Andy stalled for time by taking us on a quick tour around the island. A second attempt upon our return to the landing ramp was successful and soon all of us were shuttled to the island safely. We were met at the landing ramp by Ralph Eldridge, the current lighthouse keeper, who then led us to “the patio,” a staging area in the center of the island for a quick briefing. I was disappointed to learn that the island's Arctic Tern colony, which once dominated the island's interior, had failed in recent years, for still unknown reasons. We saw only a couple of Arctic Tern circling overhead during our visit. The only birds seen in the grassy interior were Savannah Sparrows and a lone Gray Catbird.



Figure 13. Treacherous landing

Participants were divided into groups of four and assigned to blinds overlooking the periphery of the island. Alcids scattered upon our approach but once we were inside the blind, the birds quickly settled down. Birds were soon everywhere around the blinds, including, as the pitter-patter of little feet suggested, directly on top! The Puffins and Razorbills were most brazen, often approaching within arms distance and providing unbelievable photo opportunities.





Figure 14. Atlantic puffin (top left), Razorbill (top right), and Common murre (bottom, with a puffin).

The Common Murres seemed more wary and were somewhat difficult to photograph. We were given up to an hour in the blind and the time passed quickly as we became lost in the world of these comical and enchanting seabirds. Soon it was time to leave and we were all shuttled back to the Barbara Frost. In less than an hour, we were back in Cutler; it was now low tide, providing an opportunity to witness firsthand the dramatic tidal fluctuations along the Bay of Fundy coast. All that was left for us to do was make the long but scenic drive down the coast to Acadia National Park on Mt. Desert Island. Our lodging for the next two nights was the High Seas Motel, on the outskirts of Bar Harbor. Dinner was at a very nice seafood restaurant at Hull's Cove, not far from the motel.

Friday, June 21

After breakfast at Jordan's, a Bar Harbor restaurant famous for their blueberry pancakes, we headed for the western side of Mt. Desert Island. Our first stop was Indian Point Blagden Preserve, a Nature Conservancy property that preserves an area of mostly mature boreal forest that escaped the Mt. Desert Island fire of 1947. An old oak tree near the entrance was planted on

the day Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. Six species of woodpeckers breed on the property, including Black-backed Woodpecker, one of the few trip targets still not seen. We came close, hearing a Black-backed twice, but it never came into view. Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers were heard and seen during our walk. Also seen were American Black Duck, Common Loon, Redbreasted Nuthatch, Winter Wren (finally!), Golden-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Blackburnian Warbler and Dark-eyed Junco. After a quick stop at Acadia National Park's Pretty Marsh Picnic Area, we headed south to Bass Harbor for lunch at a harborside seafood restaurant. From there we entered Acadia's Seawall area, stopping to hike both the Ship Harbor and Wonderland nature trails. Both trails end at rocky shore habitat, with Ship Harbor passing through a mixture of deciduous and boreal woodland and Wonderland mostly boreal forest. Both trails were popular with visitors this warm and sunny afternoon, so bird activity was low. Birds seen along the coast included Common Eider, Great Black-backed Gull and Black Guillemot, while Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Black-throated Green Warbler and Purple Finch were among the forest birds encountered during our hikes. For a change of pace, we had dinner tonight at a BBQ restaurant right next to our motel.

Saturday, June 22

We went back to Jordan's in Bar Harbor for breakfast this morning, then drove south into Acadia National Park via the Sieur de Monts entrance. Along a boardwalk and trail that begins at the Wild Gardens of Acadia, we found our only owl of the trip, a Barred Owl.



Figure 15. Barred owl

Other birds found in this beautiful deciduous forest included Downy Woodpecker, Alder and Great Crested Flycatcher, Redeyed Vireo, Hermit Thrush, Ovenbird, Northern Parula, American Redstart, Black-and-white, Yellow and Yellow-rumped Warbler, Swamp Sparrow and Baltimore Oriole. A few White-tailed Deer were also spotted along the trail.



Figure 16. White-tailed deer

We then entered the park loop road that circumnavigates the eastern side of Mt. Desert Island. Our first stop was the Precipice trailhead, which provides access to the summit of Champlain Mountain. For the last two decades, Peregrine Falcons have nested on the sheer cliffs here. Though the trail is closed during the nesting season, we didn't need to walk any farther than the parking area to see a Peregrine soaring overhead. The location of its nest was revealed when it landed; using a scope, we were able to spot two Peregrine chicks! A Chestnut-sided Warbler was seen and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak was heard across the road from the parking area.



Figure 17. Common eiders (males)

Continuing south along the park loop road provided numerous opportunities to view the park's dramatic coastline. We stopped briefly at Otter Point, observing Common Eider, Common loon, Great Black-backed Gull and Black Guillemot offshore.



Figure 18. Black guillemot

We then looped back north to Cadillac Mountain, at 1,530 feet the tallest of Mt. Desert Island's seventeen peaks and the only one accessible by road. The view from the top was spectacular, with visibility for miles in every direction. Black-capped Chickadee, White-throated Sparrow and Dark-eyed Junco were the only birds seen at the top. Robin thought she heard an Eastern Towhee but the bird never came into view. Cadillac Mountain is one of few nesting locations in the state for this species outside of southern Maine. With lunchtime approaching, we headed out of the park, stopping at a couple of lobster pounds along the way. Participants were hoping for a more varied menu selection than what the lobster pounds had to offer, so we moved on and eventually found an acceptable venue in Ellsworth. Since no trip to Maine is complete without a trip to L.L. Bean, we made a quick stop at the outdoor gear store's small outlet in Ellsworth. Disappointed with the selection, we headed south to Freeport, home to L.L. Bean's flagship store. The Freeport complex is impressive, covering several city blocks. We gave participants about an hour to shop, then continued south to Portland and our hotel just south of the airport. For our last dinner in Maine, we ate at Chili's, right next door to the hotel.

Sunday, June 23

Our run of good weather ended during our last day in Maine, as we had to deal with intermittent rain, sometimes heavy, for much of the morning. After a continental breakfast at the hotel, we headed to Scarborough Marsh, just south of Portland. Willet, our first shorebird of the trip and the only shorebird that breeds there, were spotted as we drove by a section of the marsh. The marsh was also the trip's most productive location for wading birds, with Great Blue and Little Blue Heron, Great and Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron and Glossy Ibis present. A Black-necked Stilt, a rare bird anywhere in the northeastern states, was also present. A local

birder pointed out the stilt's location for us and we had distant scope views of the bird. Those in the group who were not in that much of a hurry to see the stilt were rewarded when they came upon a Black-billed Cuckoo, the only one seen the entire trip. The rain made birding difficult, but we still managed to see a few Nelson's Sparrows, another breeder in the marsh. Other birds found during our walk along the road that bisects the marsh included Hairy Woodpecker, Tree Swallow, Yellow Warbler and the ubiquitous Song Sparrow.



Figure 19. Song sparrow

For our final stop of the trip, we drove out to Pine Point, an inlet that connects the marsh to the Atlantic. American Oystercatcher, Laughing Gull and Least and Common Tern, along with Common Eider, Common Loon and other gulls were present in and around the inlet. A beach access parking area allowed us to check for birds in the Atlantic. A large flock of Common Tern was swirling offshore. Small flock of distant ducks was scoped, adding White-winged and Surf Scoter and an out-of-place Ruddy Duck to our trip list. On our final pass by the marsh before returning to the airport, we pulled over to view a family of American Black Ducks swimming alongside the road. At the airport, we returned our rental vans, said goodbye to Robin (who wasn't flying out until the next day) and checked in for our return flight to Miami. A total of 139 birds were tallied during tour; a list follows. In addition to the bears, moose, seals and snapping turtle, we also crossed paths with many other mammals, reptiles, amphibians, fish, butterflies, moths (including the spectacular luna moth) and other critters.



Figure 20. Luna moth

The black flies, mosquitoes and ticks were annoying, but we survived them all. The group was outstanding; thanks to all for making this trip such a fantastic experience for all. Special thanks to my co-leader, Robin, whose incredible birding skills, as always, ensured a successful tour.

Bird list:

Canada Goose
American Black Duck
Mallard
Ring-necked Duck
Common Eider
Surf Scoter
White-winged Scoter
Black Scoter
Long-tailed Duck
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser
Common Merganser
Ruffed Grouse
Wild Turkey
Red-throated Loon
Common Loon
Double-crested Cormorant
American Bittern
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Snowy Egret
Little Blue Heron
Black-crowned Night-Heron
Glossy Ibis

Turkey Vulture
Osprey
Bald Eagle
Northern Harrier
Northern Goshawk
Red-shouldered Hawk
Broad-winged Hawk
Peregrine Falcon
Killdeer
American Oystercatcher
Black-necked Stilt
Willet
Laughing Gull
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Great Black-backed Gull
Common Tern
Arctic Tern
Least Tern
Common Murre
Razorbill
Black Guillemot
Atlantic Puffin
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Black-billed Cuckoo
Barred Owl
Common Nighthawk
Chimney Swift
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Belted Kingfisher
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Black-backed Woodpecker
Northern Flicker (Yellow Shafted)
Pileated Woodpecker
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
Alder Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe
Great Crested Flycatcher
Eastern Kingbird
Yellow-throated Vireo
Blue-headed Vireo
Warbling Vireo

Philadelphia Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay
American Crow
Common Raven
Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
House Wren
Winter Wren
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
Eastern Bluebird
Veery
Bicknell's Thrush
Swainson's Thrush
Hermit Thrush
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Northern Mockingbird
Brown Thrasher
European Starling
Cedar Waxwing
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush
Black-and-white Warbler
Nashville Warbler
Mourning Warbler
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Northern Parula
Magnolia Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler
Blackburnian Warbler
Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler
Blackpoll Warbler
Black-throated Blue Warbler
Palm Warbler
Pine Warbler

Yellow-rumped "Myrtle" Warbler
Black-throated Green Warbler
Canada Warbler
Chipping Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Nelson's Sparrow
Song Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco
Scarlet Tanager
Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Indigo Bunting
Bobolink
Red-winged Blackbird
Common Grackle
Baltimore Oriole
Purple Finch
House Finch
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow

Mammal List:

Black Bear
Harbor Seal
Gray Seal
Woodchuck
Eastern Chipmunk
Eastern Gray Squirrel
Red Squirrel
White-tailed Deer
Moose