

# Summer in Maine: From Acadia to the North Woods | Trip Report | May 21 – 28, 2025

by James Petersen

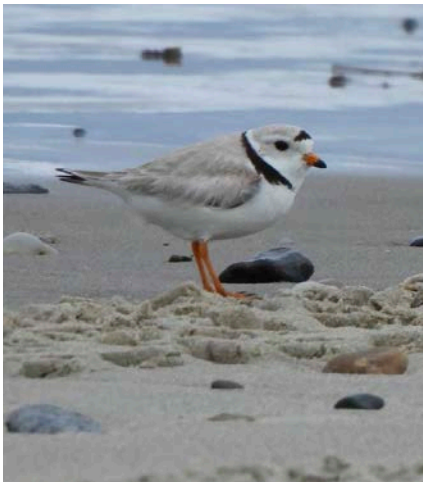


**Compiled by guide James Petersen. Our clients included Chuck, Barbara, Nancy and Robert.**



## **Wednesday May 21: Scarborough Marsh-Scarborough Beach State Park- Portland Head Lighthouse**

After everyone met at the airport, and having luggage dropped off at the hotel, we drove down to start the tour off by birding Scarborough Marsh. This is a large, tidal, saltwater marsh in southern Maine, which is the start of the Eastern Trail. We started out by spotting several Great Egrets feeding on the incoming tide, their dark legs and bright yellow bills telling them apart from the similar Snowy Egrets. A few minutes later, we had a smaller,



slender Snowy Egret fly in; the dark bill, golden slippers and size easily telling the bird apart from the nearby Great Egrets. As we slowly continued down the trail, we scanned the exposed mudflats. This paid off by spotting four black-bellied Plovers; a few of them close to breeding plumage. While watching the plovers, an “Eastern” Willet started calling, its loud “pill-will-willet” call announcing its presence to every Willet nearby. As we continued down the trail, we slowly spotted more shorebirds on the exposed mudflats—a decent sized flock of Least Sandpipers buzzed by. They spent the rest of the day flying over us, switching between both sides of the trail. Further along the trail, multiple American Herring Gulls both flew by and were observed roosting in the marsh. Meanwhile, two Common Terns flew further out in the marsh, plunging for fish. As we got closer to the edge of the woods, we started finding more of the “woodland birds” with both a Common Yellowthroat and a Yellow Warbler foraging on the sides of the trail. Overhead, several swifts and swallows acrobatically cut through the air, a mix of Tree, Barn and the “cigar with wings” Chimney Swifts.

The forest we were heading into was composed of Northern Red Oak, Eastern White Pine and Northern Red Maple with an understory that consisted of shrubs and 3 species of ferns: Bracken, Interrupting and Cinnamon Ferns. Mixed throughout the ferns were patches of Skunk Cabbage as well. As we worked our way deeper into the forest, we were greeted with a small migrating flock of birds that consisted of 5 species of warblers! The dominant species in the flock were American Redstarts, which seemed to be everywhere we looked. There were smaller numbers of both Magnolia and Black-and-white Warblers as well. The highlight of the flock, a Blackpoll Warbler was also observed. Usually, the Blackpolls reside way up in the canopy of the forests, most of the time causing warbler neck just to catch a glimpse of one. Not only was this warbler singing away, but it was halfway down in the canopy—giving fantastic views of this black capped warbler with pink colored legs. In addition to all the warblers, we also had both Tufted Titmouse, Black-capped Chickadee and a distant calling Great-crested Flycatcher. After working the warbler flock, we turned around and slowly made our way back to the car to head to the next spot. On our way back, the tide had continued to come in and we saw many of the same birds we had on our walk out.

Our last stop for the day was Scarborough Beach State Park. Due to the weather, we were the only ones on the beach and hence were able to have point blank views of two Piping Plovers. They were so close, it was almost too close to put the scope on these gray-backed, orange beaked plovers. In addition to the plovers, we had a Common Eider hanging out in the nearby surf, while 3 Great Black backed Gulls flew by. With a little time





remaining before the park closed, we worked our way back along the edge of a marsh. The large marsh held several Red-winged Blackbirds, while a Muskrat was spotted swimming towards us near the shoreline. As we continued past the marsh, we heard the characteristic rattle of a Marsh Wren, calling from somewhere in the thick reeds. By the park entrance, we had several warblers, including a few Yellow-rumped Warblers and one of the few Wilson's Warbler of the trip. By this time, the park was close to closing for the day, so we headed out, making one last stop at the Portland Head Lighthouse. This lighthouse has been in several movies and is considered by some to be the most photographed lighthouse in the United States. After a quick stop to admire the lighthouse, we continued onwards to have a delicious dinner at Demillo's, a restaurant located on a ship on the Casco Bay.

## **May 22: Kennebunk Plains Preserve- Wells National Estuarine Research Reserve- Crescent Beach State Park**

We started the day heading towards the Kennebunk Plains Preserve. This grassland was formed by the melting of the glaciers around 14,000 years ago. The outwash of glacial water helped form an area of gravel and sand, that doesn't absorb rain well, which has allowed this grassland to develop. This has allowed some uncommon and endangered species to breed in this area of Maine, often, these species reach the northern edge of their ranges here.

As we started walking the trail, we observed several American Goldfinches as they flew over, while the high-pitched call of a Grasshopper Sparrow was heard. These sparrows reach the northern edge of their range here, and we heard several of them calling from the ground, concealed by the grasses. We continued further down the trail, a medium-sized brownish bird flushed, heading low into a nearby bush, a Brown Thrasher. Everyone got looks at the thrasher before it quickly before it flew off. As we slowly continued further down the trail, we came across a few small orange sparrows, Field Sparrows along with several rufous-capped Chipping Sparrows. By this point, we reached the edge of the forest where we heard a ringing song sounding like someone playing a chromatic scale upwards—a Prairie Warbler. With some work, we had fantastic views of this yellow breasted warbler with black breast streaks. By this time, we had gone the furthest we would go and turned to head back to the van. As we did so, we came across a few washed-out sparrows with white eye rings—Vesper Sparrows.



Most of these birds would only be found here at the preserve on this trip.

From here, we continued to the Wells Harbor-marshes and beaches where we braved the cold wind to see a bunch of Common Eiders floating in the harbor and sitting on the rocks. With some more scanning, we had 2 Common Loons, one near the shoreline and one in the water, while an Osprey screamed at a Great Black Backed Gull that got too close to it. By now, it was approaching noon, so we headed out to our lunch spot.

After a delicious lunch, we headed to our last stop of the day, Crescent Beach State Park. Here, we got good views of the ocean as we walked the trail near the shoreline. With some scanning of the ocean, we were able to pick up a large flock of Black Scoters. As we were looking at the Black Scoters, we had 2 black headed Laughing Gulls whizz by us in the brisk wind. As the wind was picking up, we decided that it was getting late in the day and time to go back to the hotel after a fantastic day of birding.

## **May 23: Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens- Weskeag Marsh- Down East Lobster Bake**

After a delicious breakfast, we headed north for the day. Our first stop was the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens. The birding started as soon as we entered the gardens, with a Black-throated Green Warbler and some Red-winged Blackbirds hanging out by a small body of water that was full of cattails. Continuing on, we slowly worked our way through the gardens, noticing plenty of both native and non-native plants—some being cultivars of native plants. The gardens themselves were surrounded by enormous Eastern White Pines. Inside the gardens, a sculptor had hidden 4 large wooden trolls—we found the first one in the front gardens. A large wooden troll, standing on short legs, clutching two nearby white pines for balance. We slowly worked our way through the pond gardens that held an Eastern Phoebe and close looks at a Chipping Sparrow. After taking in Roskva the troll, we slowly made our way past the Slater Forest Pond and through the Reiser Woodland Garden. We continued onwards, slowly birding the Haney Hillside Garden, where we had some more Black-throated Green Warblers, while the loud “teacher-teacher-teacher” calls of an Ovenbird sounded far off. From here, we continued along the shore trail that paralleled the Black River, picking up some Herring Gulls and watching a





Common Loon before heading back up the Maine Woods Trail and back via the Birch Allee trail. The Birch Allee was a mix of Eastern White Pine, Eastern Hemlock and Paper Birch. Here we had a small group of warblers which included good looks at a Magnolia Warbler, while both Bay-breasted and Blackburnian Warblers called from the canopy. By now, we headed back to the van, and to Rockland for lunch.

After a fantastic lunch, we walked down to the Project Puffin Museum, which explained the history of Project Puffin. One of the first projects to both transplant baby puffins from New Foundland to put them in man-made burrows on Machias Seal Island. They also put out puffin decoys to attract birds to make it look like an active island. This ended up working after a couple of years and has led to decoys being used worldwide to help endangered species increase their populations.

After the museum, our last stop of the day was Wesaque Marsh. Here, we parked and scanned the expansive marsh for any ducks, shorebirds or gulls that would be out. A surprise bird here was an adult Bobolink. We watched as this blonde headed blackbird sang his complex R2D2 like call, before disappearing in the tall grasses. After scanning the marsh, we found 2 adult Blue-winged Teals, their white faces obvious among the Mallards surrounding them. In the way back of the marsh held several American Black Ducks, like Mallards, only darker with brighter bills.

By now, it was time to head to Mount Desert Island for two days exploring Acadia National Park after a fantastic day of birding.

## **May 24<sup>th</sup> : Pretty Marsh Picnic Area- Bass Harbor Light House- Seawall Picnic Area- Cadillac Mountain- Thunder Hole**

Today was our day to explore Acadia National Park. After breakfast, we started by heading towards the quite “western” side of the park with our first stop being the Pretty Marsh Picnic area. Upon getting out of the car, we heard the high pitched “tse-tse-tse” of a Bay-breasted Warbler. This habitat was more what we would be seeing in northern Maine; a spruce-fir forest with sporadic Eastern Hemlock trees. As we slowly worked our way down the trail, we had a small flock of Golden-crowned Kinglets working the canopy of the trees. Mixed in was a “Myrtle” Yellow-rumped Warbler and a few Black-throated Green Warblers. While this was happening, a Swainson’s thrush was heard in the distance, its downward rolling song echoing through the forest. The trail



slowly wound through the spruce-fir forest and down to the water's edge. While scanning the shoreline, we had several Common Terns foraging for food, while a Double-crested Cormorant flew by. We then worked our way back to our next stop, the Bass Harbor Lighthouse. At the lighthouse, we followed the trail down to the shoreline where we had fantastic views of a Black Guillemot. We watched as the alcid dove, working its way towards us, eventually coming right in front of us. On our way back up the trail, we had good looks at both a Northern Parula and a bright Black-throated Green Warbler foraging in a nearby Alder trees. Our last stop before lunch was at the Acadia Seawall. Here, we scanned the ocean, finding a group of Red-breasted Mergansers. As we continued to scan, a large group of 30 plus Black Scoters, all black sea ducks with bright orange bills were seen. With some more scanning several Common Eiders and a few Common Loons were observed. Closer in, we had a smaller loon with a gray head and up turned bill, a late staying Red-throated Loon. Everyone got on this loon as it dove for food, not staying above the water for long. By this time, it was time to head to lunch.

After a fantastic lunch, we continued towards the eastern side of Acadia National Park. After driving through the park, we stopped for a short hike at Bubble Pond. Here we had a fantastic hike through the woods of the park. We got to see how the sun and weather affects which trees grow on which side of the mountains—with the side that got more sun having a higher coverage of deciduous trees such as Northern Red Oak and Red Maple, while the side that receives less sunlight, was coniferous trees such as Hemlock, Eastern White Pine, and Northern White Cedar. At the end of the hike, it was time to head up Cadillac Mountain.

This mountain is the tallest one on Acadia National Park and in the right season, is the one that gets the first rays of sunlight at sunrise. As we drove up, the views became fantastic, before we entered a swirling mass of low fog. This added to the views as we had areas of fantastic views that were quickly obscured by the fast-moving fog. Only for the view to clear again ½ mile later. The two stops were much the same. Half the mountain was shadowed in fog, while the other half you could see for miles, giving a good contrast in depth. The birding up here was good; we heard the “drink” call of an Eastern Towhee and later saw a female foraging near the road. We also had our first looks of the trip at a few “Slate-colored” Juncos as well as a few Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian and Blackpoll warblers. After watching the clouds swirl and give us fantastic views of Mount Desert Island, we worked our way down the mountain. After the mountain, we continued in the park to visit “Thunder Hole”. This feature got its name from movement of the tides; making a thundering sound with each wave that





came in. Thunder Hole did not disappoint, with the thunder like noise being heard by all. After a fantastic dinner, we headed to bed after a fantastic day.

## **May 25: Early morning bird walk at hotel- Whale Watch- Acadia Botanical Gardens**

After breakfast, we left to head into Bar Harbor for our whale/pelagic birding trip. Our boat was the Friendship v, a large boat to get out into the Gulf of Maine. The ride out was slow, but it didn't take long for some pelagic birds to start appearing, with the first being a few large winged Northern Gannets, while soon after, a Great Cormorant flew past the boat. Once the boat driver slowed down, we were able to spot a few more species, which included a Black and White Warbler that circled the boat, while a Gray Catbird landed in front of the captain's windshield; exhausted migrants catching a rest before continuing further north. A little further out, a few of our clients saw a fly by Leach's Storm Petrel, the only one of the trip. It was at this time, the captain spotted some whale spouts, and we were treated to 45 minutes of watching 2 Fin Whales surface, and dive around the boat. During this time, a lone black and white seabird with heavy black bill flew across the bow of the ship—a Razorbill. Meanwhile, we were treated to small flocks of Red-necked Phalaropes, heading north on their spring migration. After spending a while watching the whales, it was time to turn back to Bar Harbor. On our way back, we were treated to a small group of both Atlantic Puffins and a group of dolphins, jumping out of the water. Their white sides identifying them as Atlantic White-sided Dolphins!

After getting back from the whale watch and shedding some layers. A few clients went to the Acadia National Park Wild Gardens. We wound our way through the gardens, identifying numerous species of ferns; including Cinnamon Ferns with the reddish fibers at the base of the stems that hummingbirds like to use for nesting material, Sensitive Fern, Bracken Fern, Royal Fern, Interrupting Fern and Oak fern (a smaller fern that looks like a bracken fern). The trail continued, winding through different habitats of Maine, each with their groups of plants found in that habitat. Some of the plants that were more common were Jack in the Pulpit and Low Bush Blueberry. By now, it was time to head back to the hotel for a delicious dinner and watch a fantastic sunset before nightfall.

## **May 26: Bangor City Forest/ Orono Bog-Millinocket Moose Tour**

After an early breakfast, we set off from Mount Desert Island to head to the North Maine Woods. Our first



birding stop was the Bangor City Forest and Orono bog. As we slowly walked the trails, we had multiple flocks of warblers and vireos, with our first good looks at both Red-eyed Vireo and Blue-headed Vireos while an Eastern Phoebe emphatically called out his name out. Moving on, we came to an opening that had multiple looks at both stunning Black-throated Green and Magnolia Warblers. While looking at the warblers, we felt the low thumping drum of a nearby Ruffed Grouse. At the same time, a few white eyed Least Flycatchers sallied out from low perches. We came to a fork in the trail and took the right side of the trail, heading into a thicker part of the forest. Here, we got good looks at one of the many Ovenbirds as it sang from just off the forest floor. A few steps later, we heard the double parted trill of a Nashville Warbler. With some patience, we got the bird to come in, all getting great looks at this yellow breasted warbler with a bright white eye ring. Further down the trail, we heard the mechanical trill of a Pine Warbler, which we were able to locate it as well, singing from a Pine tree.

From here, it was time to start heading towards the nearby bog. As we walked back, we heard more warblers, including Bay-breasted Warbler and had fantastic looks at both a low foraging Black-throated Green and a Black and White Warbler. While a couple clients were even able to get eyes on a Ruffed Grouse. At the start of the bog, a warble caught our attention, and we soon located a bright yellow breasted warbler with a black necklace—an eye level Canada Warbler, that everyone got great looks at. Continuing down the the board walk, we started to get into a low nutrient forest, with water standing on the bog itself. In the alder portion of the bog, we heard a “chebunk” sounding call from deep in the thick alders, a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. As the bird remained unseen, we continued onwards, eventually getting out into a large wet bog. Here, the dominate tree species was Black Spruce, and the ground was covered in a thick carpet of sphagnum moss. In the clumps of moss, we had 2 species of carnivorous plants—both Pitcher Plants, with the liquid inside the pitcher trapping and slowly digesting any unfortunate insects and, with some closer looks, small sundew plants. There were also shrubs, which consisted of Bog Laurel, and Labrador Tea. As we continued further into the bog, everyone admired this open landscape. Halfway through the board walk, a mechanical trill was heard and with some patience, a Palm Warbler perched out for us. This was the “eastern” race, with an all-yellow breast and rusty cap. We all watched as it wagged its tail while perching in a short black spruce tree. By now, it was time to head back to the van and finish our drive up to Millinocket.

Once at Millinocket, we had a fantastic lunch and siesta before meeting back at the front of the hotel at 5 pm for our Moose tour. The moose tour was fantastic, with a total of 4 moose spotted throughout the 3-hour trip. The





first two were brief looks of adults staying off the road, but the last was of two yearlings on the side of the road, giving great looks at these long-legged mammals of the woods. On our way back, we also had a bobcat slink across the road in front of us. After the moose tour and dinner, we all got ready for tomorrow's exciting day of birding.

## **May 27: Baxter State Park (Sandy Stream Pond Trail/ Nesowadnehunk Field Campground)- Golden and Telos Roads**

Our first full day in the North Maine Woods! After an early breakfast, everyone met to head up for a half day in Baxter State Park. Baxter State Park holds the tallest mountain in Maine; Mount Katahdin and is also the ending or starting point of the Appalachian trail. As we were loading up from NEOC for the day; numerous warblers sang in the early morning light; including our only Chestnut-sided Warbler of the trip. After an hour's drive, we arrived in Baxter State Park and headed straight for the Sandy Stream Pond Trail.

As we started this trail, the birds were all in full song. Working our way down the trail, we had singing Hermit Thrush, White-throated Sparrows, Ovenbirds and Black and White Warblers. As we slowly worked down the trail, we came to a wetter area, where the "free-beer" call of Alder Flycatchers were heard, as well as the squeaky wheel of a Black-and-white Warbler song. The Black-and-white Warbler was soon located, creeping up the trees in the canopy of the forest. Also in the wet area, a complicated warble was heard, the song of a Northern Waterthrush, a common sound from here on down the trail. Further down the trail, a sharp pick was heard, almost like a downy with peanut butter stuck to the roof of its beak. This came from a Black-backed Woodpecker who called a couple more times before flying off, an uncommon bird here in the north woods. We continued onwards, slowly working our way to Sandy Stream Pond. We heard more warblers on the way to the pond; from the high-pitched buzz of the Blackburnian Warbler and Bay-breasted Warblers to the "beer-beer-beer-beeeee" of the Black-throated Blue Warblers. As we got closer to the pond, the harsh check call of several Common Grackles filled the air.

Upon getting to the lake, we had a fantastic view of several ducks as well as Mount Katahdin. But the first thing we noticed was a large head swimming in the pond. We watched as a Moose seemed to be enjoying a little relief from the flies, swimming away from us and hanging out in the pond! We took in the scenery of the whole



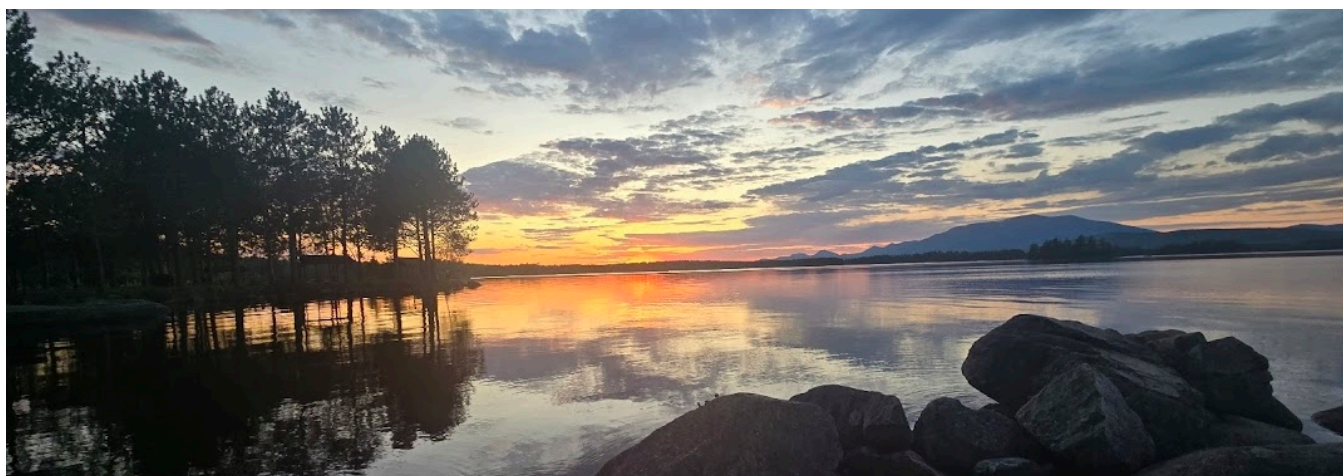
mountain, while watching several Common Goldeneye swim around the pond as several American Black Ducks also flew in. A bit after the black ducks, a rough rattle was heard from across the lake, which came from a Belted Kingfisher as it flew back and forth along the far shoreline. After a while of taking in the views and birds of the lake, we slowly made our way back along the trail to the van.

Once back at the van, we made our way to the opposite side of the park. During the drive, we took in views of northern Maine as we watched the forest turn from an Oak-Maple dominated habitat towards a more Spruce-fir dominated forest that is typical of northern Maine. After a bit of slow driving, we arrived at the Nesowadnehunk Field Campground. This area had a large field that was surrounded by a Spruce-Fir Forest. Upon getting out of the car, we were greeted by the clean sounding call note of several Black-capped Chickadees. As we slowly worked up the road towards the tree line, a large Moose stepped right out in front of us, before continuing on, disappearing in the thick forest. Upon getting to the forest line, we came across a small flock of warblers, including one that had an insanely high-pitched song. After a bit of looking, a bright, male Cape May Warbler emerged on the top of the spruce tree. We watched as it slowly worked around the interior top of the tree, getting good looks at this yellow breasted warbler with a red cheek patch. While watching the Cape May, we had a Yellow-rumped Warbler start to forage lower in a nearby tree. Meanwhile, the warbling call of a Purple Finch sang from further in the forest. As we walked back to the van, a Chipping Sparrow buzzed from nearby in the forest. From the van, we walked west ward over to the trail head that went over a roaring stream. Here we head another plethora of birds, starting with a singing Rose-breasted Grosbeak.

As we were looking for this bird, we heard a loud, emphatic “Quick-three-beers” call of an Olive-sided Flycatchers that remained out of sight. While we were on the middle of the bridge, a vireo called from nearby and then came out into the open. The vireo was singing a Red-eyed type song but had a yellowish wash and plain face—a Philadelphia Vireo. By now, it was time for lunch and then heading out of Baxter State Park.

After lunch, we left Baxter State Park and slowly worked our way along the Golden Road. As we started, we noticed a Pileated Woodpecker flying across the road and landing on the middle of a group of three telephone poles. It appeared to have a nest in the pole, and we watched it go in the hole. Our next stop was Abol Bridge, a bridge spanning a branch of the Penobscot River. We marveled at the view of Katahdin as multiple Barn Swallow flew out from underneath the bridge. Continuing onwards, we stopped further up at the turn off for Telos Road,





watching the raw power of a raging Penobscot River, a little swollen from the previous weeks' rainstorm. We ended the day scanning Ripogenus Lake, finding a Ring-billed Gull flying overhead before heading back to NEOC. After a short break, a few of the clients joined for a short bird walk. Even though it was late in the day, we were able to get good looks at a foraging Blackburnian Warbler, its orange throat glowing in the afternoon sun. After the walk, we gathered the group together for the final dinner, where we talked about all the sightings of the trip and everyone's favorite moments. Bob's favorite moment was being with everyone, seeing the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and seeing a Leach's Storm Petrel on the whale watch. Barbara's was also seeing a Leach's Storm Petrel on the whale watch, while Nancy's was getting her lifer Atlantic Puffin and seeing Mt. Katahdin. Chuck's favorite moment was seeing the moose swimming in the water at the Sandy Stream Pond trail. While heading back from dinner, we were treated to a final fantastic sunset at NEOC.

## **May 28, 2025—Essex Woods**

Our last day. After an early breakfast and packing up, we started our journey south to the Portland Jetport. We did have one final stop for the trip, a birding stop at Essex Woods in Bangor, Maine. Upon arriving here, we started a slow walk down through a Northern Red Oak and Red Maple dominated woodland. The woods were quiet themselves, but we managed to pick up a Eastern Wood Pewee, its sad mournful "Pewee" call repeating through the forest. As we continued down the trail, the repetitive song of a Red-eyed Vireo called, as well as the incessant "teacher, teacher, teacher" call of an Ovenbird.

As we continued through the forest, it slowly opened to a large marsh. Here, the trail split, following the marsh in both directions. From the marsh came the incessant calls of Red-winged Blackbirds and numerous Common Yellowthroats and Yellow Warblers. As we walked down the right side of the split, numerous Song Sparrows flitted ahead of us while a secretive Marsh Wren sputtered from the nearby marsh. With some patience, we were able to get the Marsh Wren to briefly make an appearance before it flitted back into its lair in the reeds. As we worked further down the trail, a warbling call picked up our attention, a Warbling Vireo, singing from what we thought was high in the canopy. To our surprise, we soon located the bird singing from several dead branches just off the ground. We got looks at this plain colored vireo before it flew back up into the canopy.

Over the course of birding this side of the trail, we came across 2 of these vireos and listened as they started to counter sang, across a wide-open part of the trail. By this time, we decided to explore the other side of the trail

before heading back to the van. As we slowly worked our way back and to the other side, a clucking was heard from in the marsh; a Virginia Rail. With some patience, we were able to coax not one, but 2 of these secretive rails out for all to get looks at. Continuing onwards, the habitat changed quickly from open marsh to a dense alder swamp. This afforded us several different species, including several Alder Flycatchers and their “Free Beer” call. As we started to look for the Alder Flycatcher, we noticed a small gray sparrow perched up in the sedges—a Swamp Sparrow that clients got good views of. At our furthest point down the left side of the trail, we heard the high, reedy whistle/buzz of several Cedar Waxwings, and upon looking up, noticed they were right above us, giving all great views of this colorful brown bird. By this time, it was time to head to the Van, to start heading down to Portland. Once down in Portland, it was time to say by after a fantastic trip full of birds, and nature while exploring Maine.

*Photos: Group (James Petersen - JP), Willet (Nancy VanCott - NV), Prairie Warbler (Barbara Shank - BS), Fin Whale (JP), Group Birding (JP), Piping Plover (NV), Common Eider (NV), Troll (BS), Common Loon (NV), Yellow Warbler (NV), Scenic (NV), Squirrel (BS), Black Guillemot (NV), Yellow-rumped Warbler (BS), Cadillac Mountain (NV), Boat Ride (NV), Rhodora (NV), View from Atlantic Oceanside Hotel (NV), Black-and-white Warbler (NV), Bangor Bog (NV), Mount Kathadin (NV), Scenic (JPS)*