

Maine Puffin Extravaganza | June 8-14, 2026

Trip Report by Mollee Brown



With guides Mollee Brown and Vernie Aikins, and participants Lynn, Paul, Tracy, Judy, Chrstine, Dick, Nan, Philippa, Meredith, and Vicki.



Mon., Jun. 8

Arrivals in Portland, Maine

We gathered before lunch to kick off our tour at Gilsland Farm Audubon Center, an excellent place to sample the forests and native meadows right in Portland. June is well into the nesting season for many woodland species, and we were treated with Tufted Titmouse and Eastern Bluebird parents hard at work carrying their food to young in cavities, plus a flock of highly cooperative Wild Turkey. After lunch - the first of many opportunities to try a lobster roll or other fresh-caught seafood - we went to Scarborough Marsh to explore the tidal areas in search of Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows. The latter put on a spectacular show.



Tues., Jun. 9

Kennebunk Plains | Coastal Birding

We started today going to Kennebunk Plains, an arid, open expanse of land left over from glacial melt. The weather was warm and sunny, and our morning arrival coincided with a lot of singing and displaying from the resident birds: Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows, Prairie Warbler, and Brown Thrasher abound. Along the woodland's edge, we had close encounters with Black-and-White Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and a Veery.

Our mindset shifted to the sea as we explored shorelines the rest of the afternoon. Piping Plover are always a treat, and they didn't disappoint. Plus, Common Eider were rafting with their recently fledged chicks, and Black Scoter looked brilliant in perfect light near the rocky water's edge. The coastal views stayed in sight throughout dinner at DeMillo's: a docked ship that was now home to a permanent, fantastic restaurant.

Wed., Jun. 10

Birding the Coast to Machias

The journey up the coast to Machias was part of the adventure in itself. We made several stops as the traffic thinned out and we continued north. The Damariscotta Fish Ladder was still concentrating birds with the last of the year's fish run, and we met a local landowner who enrolled her farmland in a delayed mowing program to protect breeding Bobolink. After lunch, we stopped by the Project Puffin Visitors Center to learn about the successful reintroduction effects that led to puffins returning to the US coast, and the reason we'd be able to witness them the next day. A final stop along the way at Owl's Head State Park provided a scenic view of a picturesque lighthouse, plus great moments with Northern Parula, Black-throated Green Warbler, and our first Harbor Seals.

Thurs., Jun. 11

Machias Seal Island | Puffin Outing

After waking up at our comfy lodge along the Machias River, we bundled up for the adventure we'd all been waiting for. The journey to Machias Seal Island, home to more Atlantic Puffin than any other US island, began with a boat ride through the typical foggy waters of northern Maine's highly tidal zone. Puffins started to appear, dotting the waters as we got closer and closer on our one-hour ride—as well as Common Murre and Razorbill. Finally, the island broke into sight. While we waited for conditions to improve for us to set foot on the island, we circled around to see the thousands of Alcidae that were constantly coming and going. On the shore, bustling Arctic Tern and a few perched Northern Gannet added to the excitement.

Finally, the waters calmed and we set foot on land. Our hour in the puffin blinds was simply incredible. Not only were we surrounded by this colony, but it was all unfolding within arms' reach. In fact, many birds seemed almost curious, coming over to peer into our windows. The pitter-patter of puffin feet on the roof of our blind added to the many whirrs, croaks, and grunts from the birds all around us. Some were just starting to appear with fish-filled beaks for the first time this year—meaning the first eggs within the burrows were starting to hatch.

We had a celebratory feast once we returned to the mainland!



Fri., Jun. 12 Puffin Outing | Down East Exploration

Today, our group ventured in two directions. Half returned to Machais Seal Island to photograph the colony more; we weren't able to make landfall a second time, but we got to enjoy the birds from the water for longer.

The rest of the group sampled boreal habitats as far east as they could manage...as far east as you can get, in fact, to Quoddy Head State Park and Lighthouse! The group had a great time with the region's specialty breeding birds, including Alder Flycatcher and Swainson's Thrush.

Our last evening in the area concluded with one of the region's finest delicacies: blueberry pie!

Sat., Jun. 13 Travel to Portland

Speaking of blueberries, we took a scenic route through miles and miles of blueberry fields as we made our way back to Portland. The foggy morning provided an ethereal backdrop as Common Raven flew by as we searched for our target species. Finally, they appeared: Upland Sandpiper popped onto posts before taking off in display flights, calling all the while.

Then, we moved on to Orono Bog Boardwalk, a peat bog packed with vegetation and birds alike. We couldn't get through the many calling species quickly enough: from Blackburnian and Pine Warbler near the treetops to Canada Warbler and Northern Waterthrush in the dense shrubs, the excitement kept coming. Before long, it was time to continue on, stopping at Sea Dog Brewing Company for a hearty lunch before making the final stretch back to Portland.

Not only were the birds and scenery spectacular all week, but so was the food, and we ended with one more memorable dinner downtown.

Sun., Jun. 14 Departures

The Puffin extravaganza itself was the climax of our tour, but the journey to and from Machias was filled with great moments in nature as well. We ventured from sea to forest as we explored the complex and fragile components of Maine's diverse coastal ecosystems. Along the way, we had a fantastic time viewing many of the local breeding birds. This tour was a delightful blend of gorgeous views, great towns, lovely birding, plenty of seafood, and good company.



Photo Credits: Group photos (Mollee Brown, MB), Atlantic Puffin closeup (Tracy Voelker, TV), Northern Gannet (Vernie Aikins, VA), Lupine (Nanette Patrick, NP), Razorbill with fish (TV), Sailboats (MB), Piping Plover (NP), Lighthouse (MB), Puffins on a rock (TV), Willet (NP), Common Murre (NP), Arctic Tern (TV), Yellow Warbler (NP), Osprey (TV), Blackburnian Warbler (VA).