

Maine Puffin Extravaganza!

with Naturalist Journeys

July 10-16, 2026 | Trip Report

by Bryan Shirley



Guided by Bryan Shirley

Our group included Jenn, Betsi, Lynn, Cynthia, Ben, Darren and Kristen

Friday, July 10 – Welcome to Maine | Scarborough Marsh

We started our tour with a small group today – only 3 of the 7 guests arrived and were ready to go this afternoon. We met at our hotel at 1 PM and headed out for the afternoon. Our main spot today was Scarborough Marsh, a wonderful salt marsh that has lots of waterbirds and is home to breeding Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows. We walked along the Eastern Trail; an old rail line converted into a trail that crosses the marsh. Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and Glossy Ibis were scattered throughout the marsh and Common Terns circled above. The trail was lined with fruiting Serviceberry and Cedar Waxwings, American Robin, and others were enjoying the berries. Once we got a bit down the trail, we started hearing the buzzy calls of Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows. Once considered a single species, this is one of the few areas where both can be observed. It took a bit of patience and studying the field guides, but eventually we were able to see both species well.





Our next stop was at the coast for a few minutes. A large flock of Common Eiders was swimming along the shore and when we put the scope on them, we found a White-winged Scoter mixed in with them!

Darren & Kristen were finally able to make it to Portland, so we picked them up and headed into town for dinner at Woodford's. The remainder of our group arrived at the hotel in the late evening so we were all here now and excited to start the tour!

Saturday, July 11 – Kennebunk Plains | Piping Plovers

Since there were two keen clients that missed the outing yesterday afternoon, we started the day bright and early with a an optional 5 AM pre-breakfast departure to go back to Scarborough for the Nelson's and Saltmarsh Sparrows. It was interesting the difference of one day made – or perhaps afternoon to morning? Yesterday we had almost no swallows and today there were lots of both Tree Swallows and Bank Swallows. We located the sparrows and had a nice walk before heading back to meet the rest of the group for breakfast.

Our first birding spot was the Kennebunk Plains. The ground there is sandy and has a lack of nutrients, so it ends up being a unique non-forested habitat here. It is one of the only reliable places for grassland species like Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, and others. We spent most of the morning here, then tried a spot we had lots of Piping Plovers last year but this year there were none. For lunch we visited a local sandwich shop for what would be the first of several Lobster Buns during our trip lol. After lunch, we went to Biddeford and did a short walk along the beach and found a good number of Piping Plovers there. They have to be the cutest shorebird there is! Along the rocky parts of the shoreline there was also a bunch of eiders feeding in the rocks and they had a bunch of recently hatched chicks to compete with the plovers for the cutest bird there, but I would say the plovers won.

Dinner tonight was at DiLillo's, a floating ferry turned into a nice restaurant. We had a bit of extra time to enjoy the boutique shops along old cobblestone streets before dinner and after dinner went to an ice cream shop in the area for dessert and to cap off the start of our trip.

Sunday, July 12 – Bold Coast Scenery & Birding

Today we traveled north from Portland to Machias with a few stops along the way. Our first stop was about an hour from Portland in Damariscotta Mills. There is a small river there that is dammed and they have created a fish ladder to help the spawning Alewife (also called River Herring). We didn't see



spawning fish, but the birding was good and it was a nice place for a break. We had both Mallards and Black Ducks, which allowed for a nice chance to compare the two. A Belted Kingfisher was also watching for fish and a pair of Eastern Phoebe appeared to be nesting under the bridge. A couple of Horseshoe Crabs were an exciting sight swimming around below the bridge. Our next stop was a field that is under a conservation easement and the grass is allowed to grow to help Bobolinks. It took us a few minutes, but eventually we had several make an appearance. While we were waiting, we also saw a beautiful Kestral and our only Red-bellied Woodpecker of the trip.

From our Bobolink spot it we continued up the coast to Rockland and visited the Audubon's Society Project Puffin Visitor Center. There was a Blues Music Festival in town today so it was very crowded, but we were able to get into the Rockland Café for lunch.

After lunch, we did a short walk to the lighthouse at Owl's Head State Park. A very friendly Northern Parula put on a show for us and kept the photographers busy for a few minutes along the way. From the lighthouse we were able to spot a few Harbor Porpoises and we found our first Black Guillemots of the trip as well. We still had a bit of a drive so most of the remainder of the afternoon was driving and we arrived in Machias in time to check into our hotel before dinner. The hotel is perfect for birders since it is right on the river. One of our group found a Bald Eagle nest on the opposite side of the river and we always had Cormorants, Gulls, and others enjoy when we had a bit of downtime.

Monday, July 13 – Machias Seal Island Seabirds

Today was one of those amazing days that we will never forget! We had a mid-morning departure from Cutler for our trip to Machias Seal Island. The wind was supposed to pick up in the afternoon and landing at the island is far from guaranteed in the first place, so we were a bit nervous about our chances of actually landing. At the boat dock in Cutler, we were greeted by the captain and crew and started on our voyage out. We had barely left the coast into the open ocean and we started seeing Wilson's Storm Petrels. They breed around Antarctica and visit the north Atlantic during the Southern Hemisphere's winter months, so we were excited to see them. As we approached Machias, we started to see more and more Atlantic Puffins and Razorbills and the excitement continued to build. When we reached the island, it was very calm and the captain said that we would be able to go ashore! We had towed a small boat with us and they used it to shuttle us to the shore. Once we all were on island, they divided us into groups of 4 and led us to our photography hides. Birds were everywhere! The island was covered and the skies were filled with more flying to and from their burrows. A few Arctic Terns circled above our heads but they must not have had nests too close since they were just watching us and not dive bombing.

The hides were surround by thousands of Puffins, Razorbills, and a few Common Murre. Birds were even on the roof! One of the hides had a few Northern Gannets in front of it too. They have never nested on the island and they few there now were probably all males hoping to attract a mate, but it is getting late in the season so probably not going to happen this year either. We had over an hour to photograph and enjoy watching the antics and interactions of the birds. It was truly a wonderful experience and we were so lucky. When we got back to the van the wind was picking up and before long trees were swaying and whipping about in the wind making us feel even more lucky that it all worked out so perfectly for us.

Tuesday, July 14 – Quoddy Head and the Easternmost Point in the US

Today we headed to the eastern-most point in the US – Quoddy Head State Park. We started with a group photo at the lighthouse, then followed the trail through the forest. We had lots of Golden-crowned Kinglets and a few Red-breasted Nuthatches. We did pretty well for warblers here too with 6 species including Magnolia, Black-and-White, and several Black-throated Greens. At the Bog we enjoyed the diversity of plants here including the carnivorous Purple Pitcher Plants and Sundew. Lunch today was at an old sardine cannery turned restaurant in Lubec, just a few hundred yards from Canada. Of course, several of us enjoyed lobster again! Back at the hotel we took a bit of a break, then headed out to a couple of parks near the hotel. Bad Little Falls had a massive bunch of spawning Alewife (the same fish we looked for in Damariscotta Mills) so there were lots of birds in the area too. Cormorants, Osprey, and even a Kingfisher were all watching the fish closely. Next, we took a walk at Middle River Park and added Swamp Sparrow to our trip list before an afternoon rainstorm sent us rushing back to the hotel. Dinner was at Helens next to our hotel. Dinner was good, but the pies for dessert were wonderful!



Wednesday, July 15 – Blueberry Barrens | Orono Bog | Back to Portland

After breakfast this morning we started our birding by driving around several miles of Blueberry barrens. We had several groups of Wild Turkey, but few other birds. We were hoping to see some Upland Sandpiper that were reported here by a previous NJ group, but we couldn't ever locate them. It was still fun to see the miles and miles of blueberries and it made me appreciate the pie I had last night! From there we headed into Bangor and took a walk at Orono. There is nice forest park and a wonderful boardwalk through a bog much bigger than the bog we visited at Quoddy Head. The birding started out slow, but the bog had lots of interesting plants to keep us busy. Besides the same plants we saw yesterday, there were several other flowers here including quite a few White-fringed Orchids. We added White-throated Sparrow to our trip list too. On our way back to the van we hit a nice mixed flock of birds that kept us busy while they worked through the bushes around us. We had several Canada Warblers, Magnolia, and Chestnut-sided Warblers. A Veery called frequently from deep in the forest, but we were never able to locate it and just had to enjoy the beautiful song.

Lunch was at a local brewery. We sat on the balcony with nice views of Bangor and the Penobscot River, then made the drive back to Portland. We did our final checklist at the hotel and then headed downtown for our farewell dinner and it was perhaps the favorite meal of the trip. The Lobster Ravioli was fabulous!

Thursday, July 16 – Tour Conclusion and Departures

Everyone went their separate ways this morning with great memories *and* lots of puffin photos to edit!



Trip Report Photos – Page 1: Atlantic Puffin (Jennifer) **Page 2:** Saltmarsh Sparrow (Bryan), Machias Seal Island lighthouse (Bryan) **Page 3:** Ashore on Machias Seal Island (Bryan), Razorbill pair (Jennifer) **Page 4:** Seabird viewing from a Machias Seal Island blind (Bryan), Wilson's Storm-Petrel (Bryan), Gray Seal (Bryan), Atlantic Puffin (Bryan) **Page 5:** Our great group at West Quoddy Head! (More photos from the tour can be viewed [here](#).)