

# Maine Northwoods Retreat | Trip Report

## July 11-17, 2022 | by Michael J. Good



**With Guide Michael Good and participants: Cathy, Debbie, Alfred, Gina, Joye and Susan**



**Mon., Jul. 11**

### **Bangor Airport, Bangor Forest and Orono Bog, Brown Woods, Meet Freddy and Drive to Bar Harbor**

After introductions the inaugural group minus Freddy made our way to the Bangor Forest and Orono Bog. We found our first 25 bird species of the trip and an introduction to the diverse habitat of northern Maine. A good variety of forest birds were found in the Bangor Forest including Black and White Warbler, Northern Parula, Blue-headed Vireo, Veery, American Robin and Canada Warbler which we only heard in the distance. In the Orono bog we found Palm Warbler, Lincoln, Song and White Sparrow, and a Broad-winged Hawk in the distance. One unexpected bird was a Bobolink immature male which I did not expect to be a nesting bird in the bog but perhaps it was just visiting. We saw no sign of other Bobolink. One Red Squirrel was our only mammal. A magical day in the Orono Bog. A variety of Bog plant species included Pitcher Plant and Sundew, Canadian Bunchberry, Sheep Laurel, White-fringed Orchid, Tuberous Grasspink and Horned Bladderwort were identified. In the Bangor Forest we found Crown and Purple Vetch and Cow Parsnip as we walked back to the van for lunch.

**PITCHER PLANTS:** The only pitcher plant native to Maine, the Northern or Purple Pitcher Plant (*Sarracenia purpurea*), is the most common and widespread species and it is also the only one adapted to cold climates. Its range covers New England, down the Atlantic coast into the Carolinas, a portion of the Gulf Coast, the Great

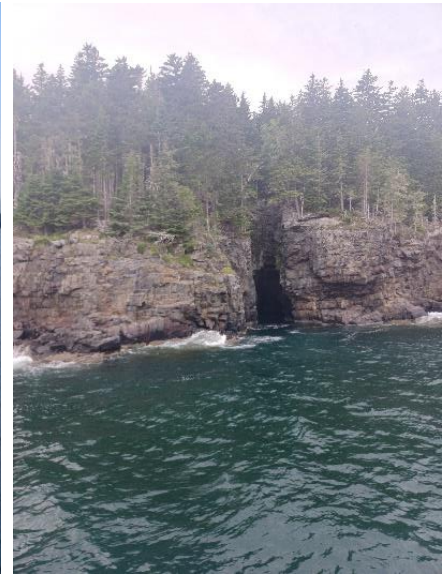


Lakes region, parts of the Pacific Northwest and Alaska, and most of Canada. It is also the provincial flower of Newfoundland and Labrador. Bogs are notoriously highly acidic, low in nutrients, and almost constantly wet, making bogs a challenging place for plants to thrive. The pitcher plant derives most of its nutrients from insects it traps inside its tubular leaves, which form little "pitchers" of rain water. Downward-facing hairs line the inner surface, enticing an insect to follow the path of least resistance toward the basin of water at the leaf's bottom. These hairs, along with sticky leaf walls, make it a struggle for the insect to climb back out again. Studies have shown that most insects *do* actually manage to escape from the pitcher trap. But those few that fail finally fall into the water, where they drown and become plant food.

The pitcher plant isn't just waiting around for a bug to randomly fall into the water it's collected, either. The vivid red veins that run through its shiny, fleshy-looking leaves give them the look of fresh meat, especially when illuminated by sunlight. The leaves also exude an odor. An insect attracted to this potential food source (or, for a fly, this potential place to lay eggs) will land on the slippery, lipped rim of the leaf to check it out. The leaf produces small amounts of digestive enzymes that help dissolve the soft body parts of the insect in the water. (The hard bits accumulate at the bottom of the basin.) This decomposition process is aided by bacteria and other microorganisms living inside the leaf. Larvae of mosquitoes and midges in the water also play a role in eating the drowned insects. They then pass along nutrients in their waste that are more easily absorbed and processed by the plant. By these means the pitcher plant derives the crucial **nitrogen and phosphorus** that it won't get from the stingy bog soil itself. And in this way the plant also hosts an entire food web within its tubular leaves. Pitcher plants are as insectivores are apex predators. They are as crucial to their self-contained little food webs as coyotes are to theirs. The plant's size and relative accessibility thus makes it the perfect model for understanding food webs on a much larger scale. Another study conducted by the National Science Foundation discovered 35 different types of organisms living inside pitcher plants, with the various bacteria comprising just one type. How these food webs assemble "is not random," with the predator-prey interactions inside the pitchers being the critical determining component. That all this ecological drama is going on in one small bog plant seems both amazing and wonderful.

We drove back towards the Bangor airport to meet Freddy and had lunch at the Sea Dog restaurant along the mighty Penobscot River. We found Chimney Swifts and Ring-billed Gull and some good food! In a fortuitous bit





of luck, Susan, with her amazing spotting abilities, found a nail in the sidewall of the back passenger side tire. Thanks to Susan and because we were still in Bangor, we made it back to the airport and switched vans, averting a much greater problem during our week of travels in the north woods. Phew! Thank you, Susan.

A brief walk in the Brown Woods was made near the airport as we waited for Freddy. This small city run park has old growth White Pine and Red Spruce and is a remnant piece of conserved land where Blackburnian and Pine Warblers were found. This was an opportunity to enjoy a small suburban forest on the outskirts of Bangor airport. Freddy is retrieved and we make our way to Bar Harbor and the first glimpses of my Island community. We all enjoyed our inaugural dinner at MacKay's Public House and finished up our first night at the Bar Harbor Town Dock with brief but satisfying sunset photo op at the town pier.

## **Tues., Jul. 12                      Acadian Nature Cruise | New England Outdoor Center**

The scheduled Whale Watch was cancelled due to wind. After the initial shock of no pelagic trip the group decided to go birding for about an hour than we drove over to the Atlantic Oceanside where we had made arrangements to take the Acadian Nature Cruise. It was a sunny puffy cloud day which did deliver some threatening rain clouds as we came back after our 2-hour cruise from Bar Harbor to Great Head to Egg Rock to Ironbound Island, to the Porcupine Islands and back to the Atlantic Oceanside Pier. We saw 25 species from Pier to Pier including some Common Eider, many Bald Eagle, Black Guillemot, Double-crested Cormorant, Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls, and around 175+ Harbor Seal. The gulls and cormorant on Egg Rock are one of the major attractions for Bald Eagle whose numbers have been rebounding since DDT greatly affected top trophic level birds. One of the reasons we saw so many Bald Eagle during this boat trip is because they are actively feeding young of the year eaglets and Herring Gull are on the meal ticket. A variety of prey is eaten but gulls have become a readily accessible source of food as the Bald Eagle population rebound and stabilize in Maine.

Lunch was taken at Mother's Kitchen in Town Hill after a short stop at the Acadia National Park Visitor Center for Gina, who is an ex-National Park guide/ranger/administrator! Home sweet home! Her passport was signed and we continued onto Millinocket Maine. The rest of the day was spent driving to Bangor and north to Millinocket with a short but needed bathroom stop in Lincoln, Maine. After shopping in Millinocket for breakfast foods, we



drove the last 8 miles to the New England Outdoor Center (NEOC) where we heard first, then saw a Merlin mobbing a Bald Eagle near our lodges. Merlin at our cabins would be a reoccurring theme for the rest of the week. The names of our cabins were Eagle, Loon and Moose and we saw all of these creatures during our trip. Hermit Thrush was singing as we ventured off to the Loose Moose for an enjoyable first dinner in the North Woods of Maine. We ended our second day of our trip with a wicked strong thundershower and wind event followed by a crimson orange sunset, a sunset rainbow and Mount Katahdin silhouetted by the setting sun. This was an excellent start to the beginning of our North Woods trip.

**Wed., Jul. 13**

**Baxter State Park | Round Pond | Caverly Pond | Stump Pond | Katahdin Stream Campground | Grassy Pond and Daicey Pond**

I think the consensus is that Baxter State Park is an amazing place, with so much diversity that it is almost overwhelming. We started our day at NEOC with sunny skies, our resident Merlin, a howling Common Loon and a wonderful morning breakfast in our lodges, loon, eagle and moose. Around 8 am we took off for Baxter State Park and began our search for boreal birds, Moose and whatever the day handed us. After stopping at the park ranger station, we started making random stops and short walks at the variety of ponds along the park tote road. Round and Caverly Pond were our first birding stops where we saw some potential moose habitat but no moose. We found a few common warblers, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Pine and Yellow-rumped Warbler to add to our Baxter list. Abol Beach Road led us to Abol Pond which turned into a great stop with excellent looks at recently fledged Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Golden-crowned Kinglet being fed by their parents, a drumming Pileated Woodpecker, a territorial Eastern Wood Pewee and common warblers around Abol Pond. At Stump Pond we found our first Belted Kingfisher and singing White-throated Sparrow. Our next stop at Katahdin Stream Campground produced our first great looks at a Bay-breasted Warbler feeding on caterpillars during our walk along the Appalachian Trail in a location I have found them on past trips. It amazes me how dedicated birds are to habitat and location!

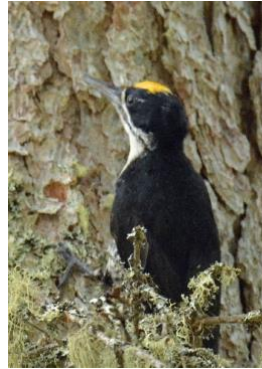




During our lunch break we found a nesting Least Flycatcher with e juvenile birds begging for food and all the attention of the parents. This was a great find and we turned several people on to the nest in the spotting scope. Just before lunch we met several interesting AT thru hikers including Savannah, whose trail name was Song Bird and a young man who had just completed the Triple Crown of Hiking Award for walking the Appalachian, Pacific Crest and Continental Divide Trails. Wow! Our last stop before driving back to NEOC was Daicey Pond where we took in the amazing views of Baxter Peak. We took our time driving back to the New England Outdoor Center to tally up our species list and have dinner at the Loose Moose Restaurant.

## **Thurs., Jul. 14                      NEOC to Katahdin Woods | Water National Monument Stacyville | Whetstone Falls | Sandbank Stream Katahdin Overlook | return to NEOC**

Today's list started and ended with Merlin calling and interacting with each other in our tall dead spruce in front of our cabins at the New England Outdoor Center. We have finally determined that the bird making so much noise is an immature female young-of-the-year Merlin being feed by the adults during early morning and late afternoon when these birds are most actively calling and putting on a show for all to see and hear. After breakfast in out cabins the group left for Katahdin Woods and Water National Monument (KWWNM) at about 8:30 am. This Monument was dedicated during the Obama administration and the land donated by Roxanne Quimby, owner of Burt's Bees. We drove to Millinocket and took a left turn north to Stacyville, Maine and the entrance to KWWNM. We made a quick stop along the East Branch of the Penobscot River then made it to our first stop at the Katahdin overlook at the picturesque Red Barn in Stacyville. Here we heard our elusive Northern Parula (for Cathy) and watched a Pileated Woodpecker flying over the field with Mount Katahdin in the background. We continued on to the Katahdin Loop Road.



Whetstone Falls and the old bridge gave us our first Spotted Sandpipers and an excellent look at two Bald Eagle flying south over the river. This was also a relaxful moment along the East Branch of the Penobscot River where a good collection of Wisconsin glacial till is scattered along the edge of the river. Sandbank Stream campground was the scene of ecstatic enthusiasm when we found a Black-backed Woodpecker flying initial right past our location at the outlet of the wetland pond. We managed to pish it in for good closeups under difficult lighting conditions but we managed some excellent view and added yet another Life Bird to everyone's lists.

From here we ventured a few more miles to Katahdin Overlook where we were greeted by a spectacular view of Mount Katahdin and the Baxter range of mountains. With the rain clouds and white puffy clouds this was an amazing sight to see. The last good stop before making our way to Millinocket was the Lynx Pond wetland stop which produced the Olive-sided Flycatcher and then a bevy of Ruffed Grouse juveniles and the female who scooted the children across the road then she preceded to strut across the road until we tried to get out of the van. Woosh...and she went off with a skitter. We did manage a few reasonable photos.

**Fri., Jul. 15**

## **The Golden Road | Pockwockamus Stream and wetland to Ripogenus Dam/Lake**

Today we woke up to the Merlin again around 6 am. After breakfast in our cabins we ventured off to the Golden Road for a final full day of experiencing the North Woods of Maine. Of course, one focus was on Moose but the birding was pretty good too. We checked out Alder and Olive-sided Flycatchers as we birded the first dead tree beaver impoundment on the Golden Road. Farther down the road we found Wood Duck and Mallards on the Pockwockamus stream and wetlands (Where we would later on find our bull Moose!) As we drove west, I noticed some moving things in the road which turned out to be three baby Raccoon just prior to The Big Eddy on the West Branch of the Penobscot River. Our ultimate goal was the Ripogenus dam where we ate lunch and enjoyed the company of a couple of Common Raven young-of-the-year. One of the more interesting birds we saw was a female Bufflehead, a totally unexpected find for mid-summer. This is either a very early migrant or a bird that had summered in Maine. We drove back to NEOC with a few stops for birds and looking for Moose. After dinner, we turned our attention to Moose finding and sure enough we located one very large bull foraging in the Pockwockamus stream and wetlands at the edge and right up and over its shoulders. This was the





highlight of the evening so we hopped into the van and made it back to NEOC for our last dinner in the North Woods of Maine. An amazingly satisfying day and Gina got her Maine Moose.

**Sat., Jul. 16**

**Baxter State Park | Tote Road | Baxter SP-- Marston \  
Trailhead | Ledges Falls | Park Tote Road | Baxter SP—  
Nesowadnehunk Field Campground | Millinocket Lake  
Moose Cruise**

This morning's first birds at NEOC included Hermit Thrush, Pine Warbler, White-breasted Nuthatch, the ever-present Common Loon and our first Common Tern heard out on the Lake. Of course, the Merlin family gave us a show too. We were completely blessed with amazing weather all week and for our last day, an amazing sunrise and blue sky. After gathering together and saying goodbye to Susan and Joye, we headed off to the Baxter State Park Tote Road with the goal of getting to Nesowadnehunk Field Campground on the west side of Baxter State Park. At Marston Trailhead we found some of saw a Sharp-shinned Hawk flying with food, an excellent indicator of nesting and feeding young birds. The Tote Road follows the Nesowadnehunk Stream which is beautifully seen at Ledges Falls. The only bird we saw here was a Hermit Thrush but the views of Doubletop Mountain are spectacular. Nesowadnehunk Field Campground is a fantastic location for bird as evidenced by the 17 species we recorded. We heard Red Crossbill and found several warblers including Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Black-throated Green and Black-throated Blue and Magnolia Warbler. We dipped on boreal species but greatly enjoyed hearing the ethereal calls of Hermit and Swainson's Thrush. After a long week of birding, we all decided it was time to venture back to NEOC and our final meal of the North Woods Retreat.



**Sun., July 17**

## **Departures from NEOC to Bangor Airport**

After breakfast at NEOC, we packed and loaded for the final time and set off for the Bangor airport. And so ended Naturalist Journeys' first North Woods Retreat tour of 2022.

*Photo Credits – Palm Warbler (Michael Good-MG), Nashville Warbler (MG), Black and White Warbler (MG), Pitcher Plant (MG), Orono Boardwalk photos Joye Norris (JN), Egg Rock Lighthouse (JN), Egg Rock (JN), Ironbound Island Keyhole (MG), Millinocket Lake/Mt Katahdin (MG), Stump Pond Sign (JN), Appalachian trail sign (JN), Blue-headed Vireo (MG), Bay-breasted Warbler (MG), Least Flycatcher adult (MG), Least Flycatcher juvenile (MG), Daicey Pond (JN), Susan listening for Loons (JN), Black-backed Woodpecker (MG), Whetstone Falls Bridge (JN) Raccoon (MG), Olive-sided Flycatcher (MG), Alder Flycatcher (MG), Sunset Moose Tour (MG), Gina on the pontoon boat (MG), Evening Primrose Moth (MG)*