

Monhegan Island & Coastal Maine | Sept. 17-24, 2023 | Trip Report | by Michael Good



With guides Michael Good and Rick Weiman, and participants: Bonnie, Carrie, Dan, Diane, Emily, Estelle, Jan, John, Kathy, Melissa, Nora, Rolf, and Sez



Sun., Sept. 17

Monhegan Maine

Following Hurricane Lee, which luckily left the majority of Maine untouched, we met in the lobby of the Hampton Inn ready and eager for our first walk and our first birds during our afternoon field trip in Portland Maine. We ventured off to Gilsland Farm, Maine Audubon headquarters in Falmouth, Me. Our first birds of the trip were Eastern Bluebirds, White-breasted Nuthatch and the eastern subspecies of Wild Turkey. Our best birds of the afternoon were the Baltimore Oriole, foraging on the many apple trees found on the property behind the gift shop, offering some very cool bird related gifts for family and friends. We saw Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, many Eastern Bluebirds and several Chipping Sparrows. Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier and a Merlin flew by, but there was a dearth of Warblers. Hopefully we will fill in these species as we go through our week.



Mon., Sept. 18 Monhegan Maine

After a drive to Port Clyde, we made our way onto the Elizabeth Ann and the crossing to Monhegan Island. We passed by several islands out to Monhegan including the George's Islands, and Allan Island. The seas were calm, wind out of the Southwest and on the edge of raining. The boat crew was aware that Naturalist Journey's field trip was aboard, so they took the time to show us 5 Bald Eagles on the ledges. Notable birds on the crossing were Black Guillemot, White-winged Scoter, our first White-winged Scoter and Carrie had a Laughing Gull. Coming to Monhegan there is a party of happy people coming to the island, and sad people, wishing they had booked more days! The first birds we saw were two Northern Harriers, a couple of Merlin and the Rare fall migrant, Yellow-throated Warbler, spotted by Rick Weiman and Michael on our walk scouting out lunch places.

We gathered up the group and headed back to fish cove area where the Yellow-throated Warbler was found. We managed to find a couple of Yellow Warbler and a small flock of Common Grackle. Brett Ewald walked by, so Kathy and I joined him walking out to where a group of birders were eyeing other good birds, like Lincoln's Sparrow and a Life Bird for Kathy B, Red-necked Grebe. The Yellow-throated Warbler was quickly relocated and photographed, along with the Lincoln's Sparrow. Going back to our lunch spot, we found our first Palm Warbler bobbing its tail as it foraged madly in the drizzling rain. The temperature was hovering around 59F, so all Warblers we saw were foraging madly. The rain causes us to curtail birding, except for Suz and Dan, who ventured about the island finding Dickcissel, Peregrine Falcon and Spotted Sandpiper. Kathy, Dan and Michael went to the "Influence" house and joined a Monhegan Association gathering. We learn a great deal about the history of the Island, the history of Influence House, built in 1820's and the Land Trust association, which was started some 70 years ago by Ted Edison, Thomas Edison's son, who proposed the conservation movement on Monhegan and the gathering of about 2/3rds of the island for conservation. Glen Burdock gave an overview and Kristin Linnquist offered a few words as well. The Monhegan Land Trust has inspired generations of birders. Most uniquely, the Monhegan Island community has embraced birders and plans to continue this tradition for generations to come, by securing the help of the birding and non-birding communities. Monhegan is an amazing migrant trap due to its location in the Gulf of Maine. Not only birds migrate across the island but dragonflies and butterflies as well. We met for dinner at 5:45 pm, had another excellent meal, followed by the nightly bird list and then sleep before our 6 am birding walk.



Tues., Sept. 19 Monhegan Island First Full Day

Waking up to a spectacular orange sunrise and birds on Monhegan Island, we started our day at 6:00 am again with the morning light shining off Manana, Smutty Nose and the Monhegan Pier. It was an extraordinary day, because it was our first full day of birding on Monhegan and we were relishing every moment. Out intrepid birders ventured off in the direction of Ice Pond, a small, strategically placed pond, that once supplied the entire islands needs for ice, through the hard winter work and traditional winter ice harvest. All the ice was stored in the Ice House, which has been torn down, leaving only a field with shrub wetlands surrounding the western end of the pond. An amazing location for birds, Ice Pond is a mecca this morning for American Redstart, Tennessee, Yellow and Pine, Warbler, a Ruby-crowned Hummingbird.

Our first Lesser and Great Black-backed Gull comparisons were made in the scope on the coast, just beyond Fish Beach during our extended morning walk. Many gulls had gathered here due to a steady blowing southwesterly wind. Here we found 3 Lesser Black-backed Gull on the rocky shoreline and easily saw their yellow legs, one key feature used to distinguish them from the fleshy colored legs of Great Black-backed Gull. Peregrine Falcon and Merlin are a daily treat and this morning we saw them both diving and harassing small passerines, especially the larger flocks of Cedar Waxwing. No one is safe when passing by this island! We made our way to the shoreline of Deadman's Cove where we counted Common Eider, Double-crested Cormorant and a lone Surf Scoter. Pulling ourselves away from this birdy location, we made our way back to Island Inn for breakfast.

Post breakfast birding was amazing with 25 species total. We logged 7 species of warblers, mostly at the Andrew Wyeth house and in the vicinity of Lobster Cove, and not too far from the Monhegan Brewing Company, a favorite focal spot on the Island. One reason we ventured here was the report of a MacGillivray's Warbler by Bill Thompson, just west of the brewery. He does have compelling photos and shows the importance of getting out early on Monhegan. We never located the MGWA but Northern Waterthrush, Prairie, the rarer Yellow-throated, Pine, Magnolia, Cape May and Nashville Warbler were all seen well by most members of our team. Some of the highlights were Black Scoter, Black Guillemot, Lesser Yellowleg, Northern Flicker, several Merlin acrobatically flying about, and a couple of Sharp-shinned Hawk were all seen.

Afternoon birding started at 1:30pm at the Island Inn. We walked back to Ice Pond, one of Monhegan's best hotspots. An Eastern Kingbird and several immature Ring-necked Pheasant greeted us at the pond. We watched a Green-winged Teal female on the pond when all of a sudden, we had Herring Gull, a Great Black-backed Gull and then a Lesser Black-backed showed up to clean and preen. We had an excellent comparison in size between a Lesser Black-backed, Great Black and a few Herring gull. Other gull behavior was observed, as they wash



themselves, drank fresh water and socialized, with our group watching intently. Good observations of the Lesser Black-backed Gulls' yellow feet and legs verified our identification as it flew by. We turned around and found several birds seen around the field including Morning Warbler. We were ecstatic as it showed its mostly olive-green yellow above, with yellow throat and undertail coverts, a weak narrow broken white eye ring and a faint breastband. This might be the best bird of the trip? We spent a good deal of time making sure we identified all the players at the pond before walking towards Lobster Cove again, checking out shrubs and trees and birding along these birdy roads. We met for dinner at 5:45 pm, had another excellent meal, followed by the nightly bird list and then sleep before our 6 am birding walk.

Wed., Sept. 20 Monhegan Island

Our 6 am walk to Ice Pond was quiet, with another grand sunrise starting our 2nd full day on this offshore island. The morning started off relatively quiet with the king of the Bocce court, the male Ring-necked Pheasant, preparing for the day's bocce tournament. At the time we were there, only Song Sparrow's had shown up with a Merlin and a few Mourning Dove. No word on the outcome of the bocce game.

Many in the group wanted to make sure we saw other parts of the Monhegan, so we decided to follow Main Street to trail #10, taking the Black Head Road trail. This intrepid group of made our way to the Cathedral Woods Trail where we discovered our first Black-throated Blue Warbler and Ruby-crowned Kinglet of the trip as we ventured into the depths of this classic Boreal-Temperate forest. 5 species of warblers were seen during this walk. The dominate trees in this forest were Red Spruce and White Pine and a small stream begins here which flows to the sea providing habitat and drinking water for the birds. A few Fairy houses were also seen along this trail and are home to the Little People or "Wanakomehsisok" (pronounced wanna-go-mass-see-sog) in Wabanaki, as they are allowed along this trail.

Coming to a fork in the trail we chose wisely to venture off to Trail #12 taking us to Little White Head cliffs on the eastern shoreline of Monhegan Island where the beauty of Monhegan's eastern shore was revealed. In the distance was the much-pronounced and prominent White Head Cliffs where we saw Common Eider and Black Guillemot. The difficult section of trail along Little Whitehead gave us all a good workout and produced one adult Great Cormorant, a Life Bird for most in the group and our first and only during our trip. At least 2 Merlin were seen diving at one another and making false dives at other bird species. A few Sharp-shinned Hawk were seen diving on flocks of Cedar Waxwing with one resting briefly in a tree near the cliffs. After our group photo,



our next destination was the Monhegan Lighthouse. Offering a 360 view of Monhegan, the lighthouse and the lands around it are prime locations for migratory birds. A single Least Flycatcher, our first and only of the trip, and a Common Yellowthroat, displayed classic desperate foraging behavior of a migratory species coming to Monhegan. So focused on food, the Least Flycatcher paid no attention to the crazed birders eager to see and add this common species to their Maine trip list before going back to town. Eating lunch at the Fish House, we took a few minutes to relax at the Island Inn. I found Rolf standing outside of the Island Inn and had heard that a Lark Sparrow was seen over by the schoolhouse. Sure enough, Rolf and I discover a Lark Sparrow foraging behind the Shining Sails with a few Song Sparrow. We put the message out on the Monhegan list and before you could count to 10, birders were showing up. Especially cool was two young girls came with their parents and we showed them their first ever Lark Sparrow. We saw a few Cape May and Palm Warbler before our group departed for our afternoon walk. The rest of the afternoon was pretty quiet, so we took a little break before our 5:45 dinner at the Island Inn. Our daily bird checklist was the last event of our last full day on Monhegan. Oddly enough, there were no takers for the 6 am bird walk when suggested during the checklist review.

Thurs., Sept. 21 Monhegan Island to Bar Harbor

Michael ventured out early this morning to scout and enjoy some morning birding while our passengers got some much-deserved rest. He was greeted by two immature Great Black-backed Gull, the largest seagull in the world. 33 species were seen in total including Black-billed Cuckoo, who was heard calling briefly. 2 Belted Kingfisher continued to forage at the east end of the pond while it was a passerine bonanza at the western shrub community was bussing with great birds. 8 species of Warbler, a Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Philadelphia Vireo were a couple of highlights. On to a great day of birding!

The group enjoyed breakfast along with a lovely recap of their adventures so far. It is always wonderful to hear all the travel stories, birds found and places visited. We started our mid-morning walk with a trip bird, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Warbling Vireo, and Baltimore Oriole at Lobster Trap corner on the way to Ice Pond. A shy Green Heron was one of the first birds found at the western end of Ice Pond when we arrived. We got eyes on a close by Rose-breasted Grosbeak and then found a Dickcissel who was very accommodating, sitting in several open locations on exposed branches. This was the best views of the mid-western US Dickcissel, which allowed most everyone to see it well. This young bird showed a long supercilium, fine streaking on the chest with only a yellow tinge seen under its throat. This was a Life Bird for some in the group and a great trip bird for almost everyone to see.

We slowly wandered back to the Island Inn to pack up and prepare for the ferry ride to Port Clyde. As we waited at the dock, we had three immature Surf Scoter at the pier. We continued our daily sightings of Ruby-throated Hummingbird and 25 Cedar Waxwing. Dan and Suz Audet picked up Bobolink and a Peregrine Falcon in the field



east of Lobster Trap Corner. These were our last birds on Monhegan Island as we boarded the Elizabeth Ann to Port Clyde. On Sept 28 2023, only days after we passed through this port, there was a devastating fire that burned down most of the building used by Monhegan Boat Line, the Dip Net Restaurant, the Port Clyde General Store and Linda Bean's Maine Wyeth Art Gallery, were destroyed. Nobody was hurt, but the inferno razed the cluster of waterfront buildings that served as the heart of the coastal village for decades. It took the St. George Fire Department 22 hours to put it out with the help of firefighters from several surrounding towns.) The drive to Bar Harbor followed Rt 1 all the way to the Atlantic Oceanside Hotel where we had a little down time before eating our first meal at McKay's Public House before heading back to the Atlantic Oceanside to dream about the mornings Pelagic Trip.

Fri., Sept. 22 Birding Mount Desert Island

The milky orange sun rising over Frenchman Bay from the rooms of the Atlantic Oceanside was spectacular, followed by a hearty Maine breakfast. The first birds of the day were found around the hotel and included Canada Goose, Red and White-breasted Nuthatch and a Red-eyed Vireo. We ventured into Acadia National Park around 8 am, starting first at Sieur de Mont Springs in Acadia National Park and the "Wild Gardens of Acadia". This land was the first property bought by George Dorr and became the core of Sieur De Mont National Monument for the fledgling Department of Interior park system, and the nucleus for Acadia National Park, officially named in 1929.

After a slight change in schedule, we ventured off to some of the hotspots in and around Acadia National Park and the northern coast of MDI. I was aware of a catastrophic Beaver Dam collapse on the Halls Cove Breakneck Road. The beaver dam on Fawn Pond totally collapsed after an extensive rainstorm. Over 2 million gallons of water was suddenly released, wiping out everything in its path along the watershed. Trees, boulders and rock came careening down to and over the Breakneck Road. Along the way we had a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, a couple of Swamp Sparrow and a White-throated Sparrow for Kathy. I think we were all shocked, or at least amused, by the debris field that covered the road and extended into the successional field. The almost 6-acre pond that once covered this valley, was also a beaver impoundment and catastrophically collapsed during another large rain event. Seems like a repetitive theme for these local Beaver. The forest birds were somewhat quiet, so they required a bit of encouragement to show themselves with some gentle pishing. Pishing is an "onomatopoeia" tool for bird survey work, that has been perfected over the last 40 years. These "formation of words in imitation of nature" can be pishes, squeaks, chips, squeals or any number of sounds that attract birds to your location. The plan was to make a few coastal stops, including lunch, then make our way to the top of



Cadillac Mountain, in the mountain range called “Pemetic” by the Wabanaki. Our first location visited is Hadley Point, the northern most point on MDI, about .56 miles from the mainland. To the west of Hadley Point, are two rivers. Northeast Creek from MDI and Jordan River from the mainland, both flowing into these saltwater narrows, bringing nutrients and creating productive estuaries. The mudflats and waters along the Narrows, between the mainland and MDI, were formed by the meltwaters of the Wisconsin Glacial period 11-13,000 years ago. Today, this is a “Mussel Conservation Zone”, highly enriched by the outflow of these rivers into these ocean waters. We hit a particularly quiet day, but everyone saw a Bonaparte’s Gull, our first, and a fine look at one migratory Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, more focused on food then posing for a photograph.

WindAway, a private hotspot on Blue Hill Bay, was where we broke bread and had our Lunch stop. The Mount Desert Oyster Company equipment dominates the space, but our beautiful overview of Blue Hill Bay and Western Mountain in Acadia National Park was special. Entranced by the vistas and our food, we forgot that we had a 2:00pm reservation for Cadillac Mountain so we rushed off quickly and made it to the gate house with 30 seconds to spare! Thanks a lot team!

The vistas along the three-mile Cadillac Mountain road are memorable with views over Eagle Lake to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the south and east. At 1532 feet , it is the tallest point on the coast-line north of Rio de Janeiro. It was fortunate for us that we had a “one-hundred-mile day” and saw Mount Katahdin to the north, and Machias Seal Island to the east. Mount Katahdin is 5,269 feet, home to critically threatened Bicknell’s Thrush and alpine nesting, American Pipit. Machias Seal Island is home to Atlantic Puffin, Razorbill and thousands of Common and Arctic Tern. The exceptional vistas made up for the lack of birds. Mountaintops are stopover habitat for many northern nesting species. As we walked towards the barren peak of Cadillac Mountain, we saw a squat-looking bird with short legs and low-profile body, our first and only Horned Lark. This immature migrant, was mostly sandy-brown with whitish belly, and blurry streaks on sides of breast. Its head pattern was dull, especially the black mask and chest band and the throat path was a dull yellow. Some people still get excited to see one and it was our only one for the trip. Two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds were a treat and we only saw one Sharp-shinned Hawk flying southwest, a typical migration path over our mountains. Thousands of raptors are recorded here through the fall months. One day several years ago, over 3000 Broad-winged Hawk passed by. Our last birding location of the day was Otter Point. Our most southern peninsula on the rocky eastern coastline of MDI is a gem of Acadia National Park and an important Sea watching location to survey fall and winter migrants. The southwest winds blowing today have slowed migration, but once again the



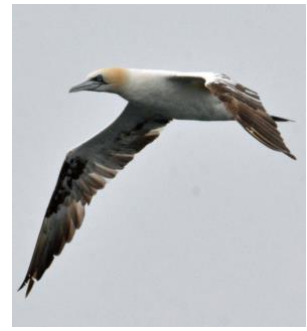
vistas are dramatic. Following on the heels of Hurricane Lee, the majority of MDI neotropical migrants appeared to have already flew south, so it was once again a little quiet, with only 5 species seen. One was a Merlin, so not all was lost. We walked through the woods at Fabbri parking area in Acadia National Park, and made our way to Fish House Road and eventually, Otter Cove. The boat slip and dock at Fish House is owned by Otter Creek Aid Society, who won the right to access the ocean, after Acadia National Park cut off access for the local lobsterman, and the northern half of the cove. There are ecological ramifications which both local community members and park employees are trying to understand and rectify.

Sat., Sept. 23 Three Pines Bird Sanctuary | MDI High School | Gulf of Maine Pelagic trip

Three Pines Bird Sanctuary is a 12-acre mixed forested and shrub wetland habitat in Town Hill, a rural village of western Bar Harbor. Our watershed flows west to Clark Cove and a few years ago we had North American Beaver (*Castor canadensis*) in the neighboring pond. An artesian well flows from the shatter zone bedrock, into the pond built in the 40's and flows across Three Pines to Clark Cove and the ocean. This is a glacial outwash plain with boulders and rocks many feet thick below the 10,000-year-old forest soils. We walked along the Coyote Trail, once roamed by the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot People. They certainly knew about the spring, and the Cedar Bog we walked through, is a deer wintering area (DWA) or a Deer Yard. These are critical winter habitat for white-tailed deer living in these northern forests and have been hunted to modern days.

Looking for migratory birds we made our way to Mount Desert Island High School Ponds where we enjoyed 23 species and clearly, the most birds seen for the morning. Bird species seen included American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal, Ruby-throated hummingbird, a single remaining Osprey from our campus nest, Northern Flicker, Blue-headed Vireo and a Pine Warbler were among the species seen. These retention ponds and their location deep in the forest on a "whalesback" surrounded by wetlands, is one reason why this is a leading birding hotspot on MDI, where Michael has recorded 179 species of the total 199 species recorded here. There is never a bad day at these ponds and they have become popular with the rise of bird watching, and a whole system of trails can be found to the north of the campus.

Our next destination was an 11:00 departure aboard the Bar Harbor Whale Watch boat called "AtlantiCat", for our 4-hour Gulf of Maine pelagic bird and whale watch. The "AtlantiCat" is a 130-foot jet-powered catamaran



that is equipped with three decks, two cabins, and advanced navigation systems. When underway, the vessel travels up to 30 knots or 30.4 mph. It is one of the great boats of Maine and plays a vital role in whale and bird surveys made in local waters. A total of 18 eBird checklist were generated following Pelagic protocol of short distant surveys. Segment 6, 10 and 13 had high species diversity. This was the region of “upwelling” where we had the leaping White-sided Dolphin, 11 Finback, 1 Humpback whales. We tallied 213 Atlantic Puffin, Common Murre, Razorbill, Black-legged kittiwake, Parasitic and Pomarine Jaeger, Wilson’s Storm-Petrel, Red-necked Phalarope, Sooty Shearwater and Northern Gannet. In total, 20 species and 317 individual open ocean birds. We visited Canadian waters and spent a great deal of time on the Gulf of Maine learning about whale and bird behavior. We returned to the Bar harbor Pier around 4:25 pm, with plenty of time for relaxation before dinner. Rick and Carrie found the “Bar Harbor Lobster Bake” where the view can’t be beat, while eating a traditional Downeast lobster bake. We finished up our day with the obligatory bird checklist, summarized the busy week of birding before our departure for Portland in the morning.

Sun., Sept. 24

Departures from Mount Desert Island

After another beautiful sunrise and breakfast at the Atlantic Oceanside, we packed and loaded for the final time and set off for the Portland Airport. We added Red-tailed Hawk and a Pileated Woodpecker to our trip list of 125 species for the week. Laughing and talked all the way to Portland, so ended the successful Naturalist Journeys’ Monhegan Island, Mount Desert Island and Gulf of Maine tour.

Photos: Group Birding (Carrie Miller - CM), Island Inn (Michael Good - MG), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (MG), Butterfly (MG), Fin Whale (MG), Atlantic Puffins (MG), Maine Scenic (CM), Least Flycatcher (MG), Baltimore Oriole (MG), Lincoln Sparrow (MG), Merlin (MG), Magnolia Warbler (MG), Red-eyed Vireo (MG), Eastern Kingbird (MG), Yellow Warbler (Janet Mersey), Great Cormorant (MG), Ring-necked Pheasant (MG), Cormorant (MG), Coastline (MG), Lark Sparrow (MG), Butterfly (MG), Flora (CM), Group Birding (CM), Near Otter Point (NJ Stock), Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (MG), Ruby-throated Hummingbird (MG), Boarding the Boat (CM), White-sided Dolphin (MG), Northern Gannet (MG), Fin Whale (MG)