

In the predawn hours of Friday August 23, seven Natural History Society members gathered with tons of gear and tons of enthusiasm for a weekend of birding and whale watching on Grand Manan Island. The counting began as the sun rose, the first sighting a starling. Sleep wasn't even a consideration as we headed off toward the first ferry crossing, all eyes were trained on fields and wires calling out sightings as we drove.

With sustenance supplied by the ever dependable Tim's, the first serious birding began at the sewage lagoons in Saint John, N.B. This type of lagoon is notorious as a "good" birding spot and didn't let us down. A number of ducks and sandpipers were spotted as well as an elusive hawk, which provided the kind of stimulating banter, both educational and teasing, that would only come from a van load of birders. No conclusion was reached.



At the ferry landing in Blacks Harbour, we took the plunge and rearranged the very tightly packed van to reach the coolers and the food. Lunch was a delightful picnic, so enjoyable, that as we ate and added a few more birds to the list we hardly noticed that, what had been a beautiful sunny day was becoming lost in a thick bank of fog. The fog was to be with us for some time. The ferry crossing proved to be not at all what we expected. The new vessel combined with very calm seas was a pleasant experience for those of us who were worried about motion sickness, on the otherhand, the same conditions proved disappointing in our quest to fill the pelagic section of our checklist. Birds had to pass within a few feet of the boat for us to be able to see them, a loon, a few gulls and the dolphins did give us a look but we all knew there was so much more out there just beyond that fog! On the Island at last, we wasted little time in getting settled, four of us camped at the Anchorage campground, one of the best birding spots we encountered all weekend. The other three stayed in cottages in the Seal Cove area, with the ocean, lots of eider, seals and beautiful sunsets just across the road. Near Bruce's cottage a wild turkey was spotted on the side of the road, these were only introduced to the island in 1987, so we couldn't count it, still a first for me. It also explained that sign in the grocery store, "road kill turkeys 99 cents/lb." Trying to get as much birding in as possible, Castalia Marsh was our evening destination. Shore birds were in abundance and a Peregrine Falcon even perched on a far off fence. I can't speak for the others but just about this time, I was looking for something new, something I hadn't seen before. There had been sightings of a Black-crowned Night Heron in the area, as dusk was upon us we we had decided to go in search of the night heron. As we were leaving the marsh, someone noticed something different in the trees very near the road, the something different turned out not to be one, but six Black-crowned Night Herons. Certainly a highlight of the day for me. A Saw-whet Owl calling late in the evening signaled the end of our birding day. Chef Dan created a feast, that warmed and filled us, a very satisfying day.

Saturday, was to be our whale watching day, but the elements were against us. Rain, wind and heavy fog kept our tour boat at the wharf, but not our spirits down. Two books, one, the Grand Manan Bird Checklist, the other a guide to footpaths and trails on Grand Manan proved invaluable on this day. Some highlights of the-day included an air show performed by at least four Sharp-shinned Hawks, a family of Blue Jays and a Kestrel, who like us preferred to watch from the side of the road. The display lasted for twenty minutes and we were so close we didn't even need field glasses. Awesome is such an overworked word these days I hate to use it, but it does seem appropriate here. Another memorable part of the day was our visit to Dark