



USA/Canada Late Summer 2016

Date: 5th to 16th August 2016

Objective:

Sharon and I wanted to see Northern Right Whales in the Bay of Fundy. The Northern Rights have traditionally used the bay to breed, feed and congregate before moving south to the coasts off Florida for the winter. This is a severely endangered mammal with only around 360 (of the western Atlantic sub-species) left in the world.

It was always a long shot and we failed miserably with none being seen in the bay all year – until a mother and calf were seen off St Andrews a week after we left. It appears animals are now summering further north in the northern area of the St Lawrence estuary. This may be due to a sea temperature rise in the bay being less productive for the swarms of plankton on which the whales feed. We did however see plenty of humpback and fin whales as well as harbour porpoise.

We saw just short of a hundred species of bird.

Weather:

Very little rain and always warm sometimes hot. Around Blacks Harbour there were frequent sea frets and at sea of Grand Manan we encountered fog banks on two of the six occasions we went out on a boat.

Whale Watching:

We booked the whole holiday around six whale watches with 'Whales & Sails' based in the north of the island. One month before our first sailing date we discovered they weren't sailing this season due to boat repairs. Although we had prepaid we did get our money back.

We rebooked with Sea Watch Tours in the south of the island who accommodated us on the 'Days Catch' a small fishing boat used for whale watching in season. We were charged for five of the six trips we went on. Payment was after each trip travelling back to port by card or cash. A good company with excellent skipper and deck hands. The boat accommodated around 50 people and there was always enough room to move around. Trips lasted between four and five hours principally using an area on the edge of the shelf to the south east of the island in an area known as the sugar bowl.

Diary:

4th/5th August

We flew from Heathrow to Boston with British Airways after spending a night at the London Hilton close to Heathrow London Airport. The overnight stay price included car parking for the duration of our holiday. Although the taxi was £14 from the hotel to terminal 5 it was £40 for the 5 mile return trip – we caught the bus back at £5 each! The flight took 5 hours. Boston was 6 hours behind London BST. We had a pre-arranged car hire done through BA with Avis. We upgraded to a Ford Edge – probably the best car I've ever driven.

We made our way to the Best Western Hotel in Freeport a journey of 130 miles. The traffic in and around Boston at rush hour was horrendous. It took us four hours to complete the journey. Most of the road tolls were on this stretch and cost no less than \$1 and no more than \$5. The built in sat nav was essential. We birded in roadside stops along the way where we saw insects and odd birds. The hotel had a decent breakfast café and an even better restaurant nearby. It also had a pond, estuary and woodland nearby for early morning birding.

6th August

After a good night's sleep we made our way north to the US/Canadian border. The best sighting along the way was a roadside Moose and a Turkey. It took us just 10 minutes to make the border crossing. Just after the crossing we had a Northern Saw-whet Owl on a roadside fence. We drove on to Black Harbour where we stayed at the Harbourtide Inn. The journey was just short of 250 miles. This is quaint family run accommodation that did a very good cooked breakfast. There were no locks on the doors; symptomatic of the very trusting community here. We did a little birding around the harbour and nearby woodland and shoreline. Lots of Cedar Waxwing around and Common Loon offshore. We did a little food shopping in Blacks Harbour at the local small supermarket. The staff carried the shopping to the car! We ate at the 'pub' on the approach road to the harbour which offered a decent meal.



Cedar Waxwing near Blacks Harbour

7th August

Prior to breakfast and area of scrub opposite the vegetation gave good views of Grey Catbirds and a Sharp-shinned Hawk as well as a House Finch. After breakfast we did a little birding in roughly the same areas that we did the previous evening. A Bonaparte's Gull was perhaps the best find.

We caught the 11pm ferry to Grand Manan Island which is free going out but cost \$49 for the car and two people to return. Booking was essential via the website no more than 90 days in advance.

The main sightings from the ferry were Great Shearwaters and Harbour Porpoise.

We checked in at our rooms the Surfside Motel a mile from the quay on Grand Manan. Sparse and simple but adequate and some stunning views over the bay.

We spent the rest of the day travelling the length of the island to Seal Cove to search out our whale watching boat. We also called at Castella Marsh where there were three Bald Eagles and a Peregrine to entertain us.

That evening we visited the Swallowtail lighthouse in the north of the island about a mile from where we were staying. A Fin and Minkes were easy to find offshore



Bald Eagle Castella Marsh

8th August

Prior to breakfast I had a walk along the beach which turned up a Yellow Rumped Warbler, Red eyed Vireo and American Redstarts, a Paula, several American Robins and a host of Cedar Waxwings.

Another visit to Castella marsh after breakfast gave a brief view of Nelson's Sparrows. After that we made our way to Seal Cove to catch our first boat. The star of the trip was a young humpback which breached repeatedly at close range. Several Sooty Shearwaters among the ever present Greats.

A call at the supermarket for food on the return trip up the island.



Nelson's Sparrow – they obviously bred in the rushy area at Castella Marsh



A very showy Humpback that repeatedly breached gave a good show

9th August

After breakfast we had a drive to Dark Harbour on the west of the island. A stop to chase an elusive woodpecker gave a few butterflies including our only American Painted Lady as well as a couple of Black throated Green Warblers. There are a couple of ponds on each side of the road where we stopped but other than a flock of American Robins there was little else to see. Our trip out with Sea Watch Tours was eventful with more whales, petrels and phalaropes. On the return trip up the island we called at the Swallowtail light again with views of Fin again and Common Sandpiper flying in.



American Painted Lady – the only one we saw

10th August

Today's trip with Sea Watch Tours was again full of what it was on previous days with the addition of two migrating Great Blue Herons. Moving back up the island we called at Long Pond where an Osprey was fishing. On the trails to the south we had American Wigeon, Wood Ducks and Ring necked Ducks as well as a Shadow Darter. Moving north at Great Pond area there was a Belted Kingfisher fishing. A fall of Yellow Rumped Warblers and a mixture of waders on the beach.



Fin Whale at sea



Osprey at Long Pond with a fish ... or at least half of it

11th August

More whales on this morning's trip with the addition of a pair of Mola Molas. Perhaps the best sighting was of an Audubon's Shearwater, originally called as a Manx, which passed close by the boat. This, if accepted, would be a first for New Brunswick.

A walk and drive at Long Pond gave us Green Winged Teals, Hooded Mergansers, Red necked Grebes, , 3 Bald Eagles, Ruby crowned Kinglets, our first Yellow Warblers, Common Yellowthroat, and American Redstarts.



Audubon's Shearwater a first for the state



Yellow Warbler with Yellow Rumped (Myrtle) Warbler at Long Pond

12th August

A morning walk around the hotel gave a Downy Woodpecker, Alder Flycatcher and 6 Red eyed Vireos, many Yellow Warblers and a Red Cardinal. Another boat trip with more of the same as previous days including a Mola Mola with a subsequent visit to the Woodward area. We finished off the day with a Seawatch off area E at the campground to the north of the Island where Minke and Fin Whales were seen.



Ocean Sunfish – one of two we saw during the day



A couple of the Humpback we saw in the fog



Minke Whale from the Campground looking towards mainland Canada

13th August

An early morning walk on the wooded ridge at the back of the hotel gave me the best passerine sightings of the trip among them two Ruby throated Hummingbirds, Hairy Woodpecker and many Black throated Green Warblers, constituting a large fall. A White tailed Deer was the only one seen.

The boat trip gave us excellent close views of Humpbacks

Again we took a look around the Woodward area.

A sea watch from area E at the Campsite gave a Spotted Sandpiper on the rocks below. Plus on the return to the motel a Solitary Sandpiper on the ponds in the middle of the campground.



Black throated Green Warbler on the ridge behind the motel



Solitary Sandpiper on the Campground Pool

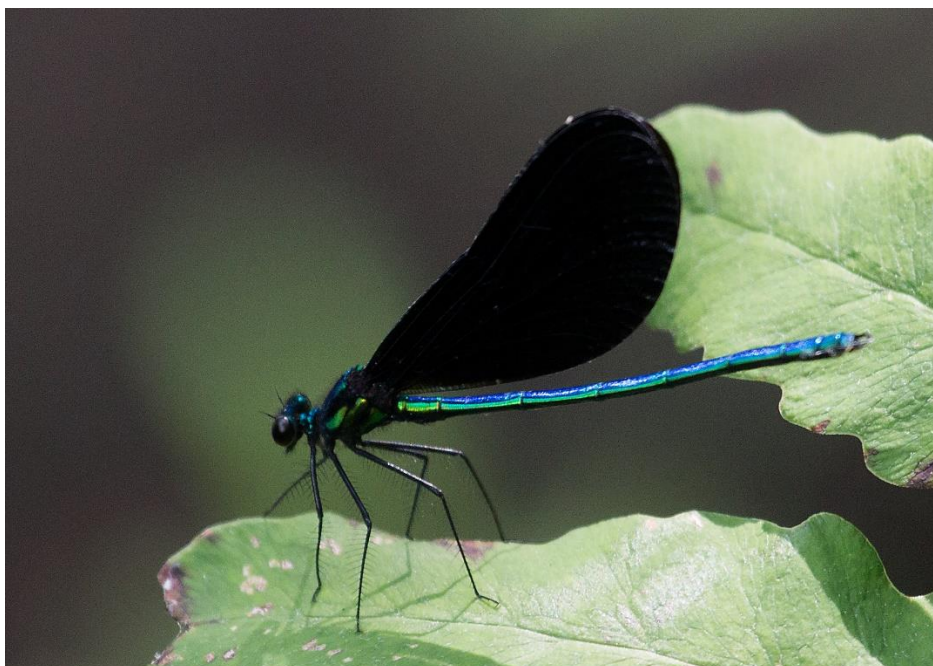
14th August

Today we checked out early and made our way to the quay where we caught the ferry back to Black Harbour. The sailing was uneventful with only Harbour Porpoise, Common Loons and the odd Great Shearwater showing through the mist. On embarkation it was a relatively short drive to the Canadian border which again took only 10 minutes to cross. The drive down to Freeport where we stayed at the same place as on the upward journey was punctuated with stops the best of which gave us Field Sparrows, Brown Creeper and Black and White Warbler and while driving a Wild Turkey.

A drive to the river in Freeport after dinner was worthwhile. Here we saw our only Snowy Egret, Pine Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher and Northern Flicker.



Black & White Warbler just into Maine in the Northern USA



Ebony Jewelwing at the same stopping place

15th August

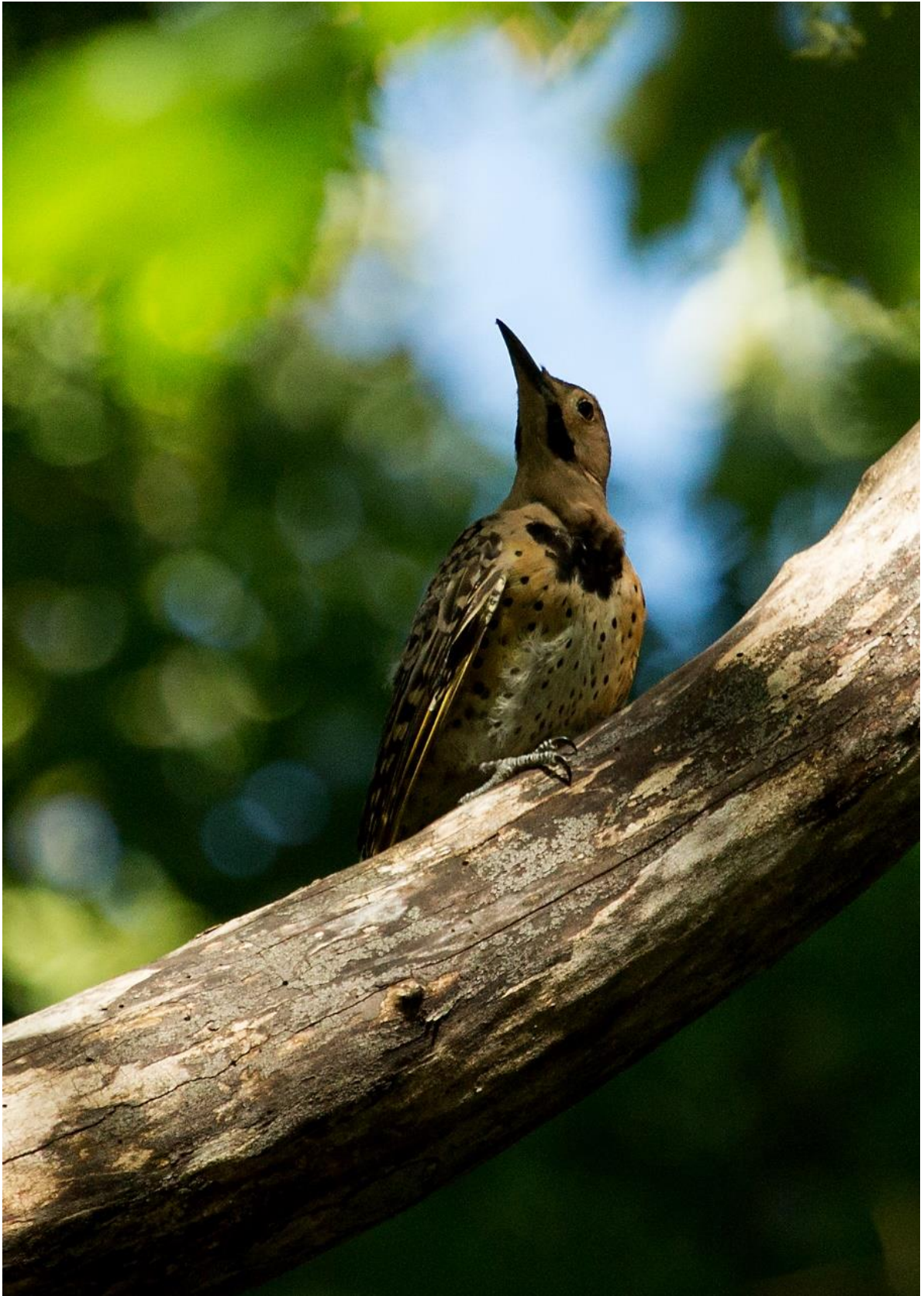
After breakfast a drive down to Boston was quicker than expected so we spent time in the Audubon Field Centre reserve at Mattapan which held a good selection of butterflies. Overhead were two Chimney Swifts and on the walks around this wild inner city area were a couple of Alder Flycatchers, an Eastern Phebe, White breasted Nuthatch, Northern Mockingbird and a Northern Waterthrush as well as a large flock of American Robins.

Moving on after lunch we visited the nearby Arnold Arboretum where we saw several Northern Flickers, 2 Chipping Sparrows and our only House Sparrows. Eastern Grey Squirrel and Chipmunks were also seen here.

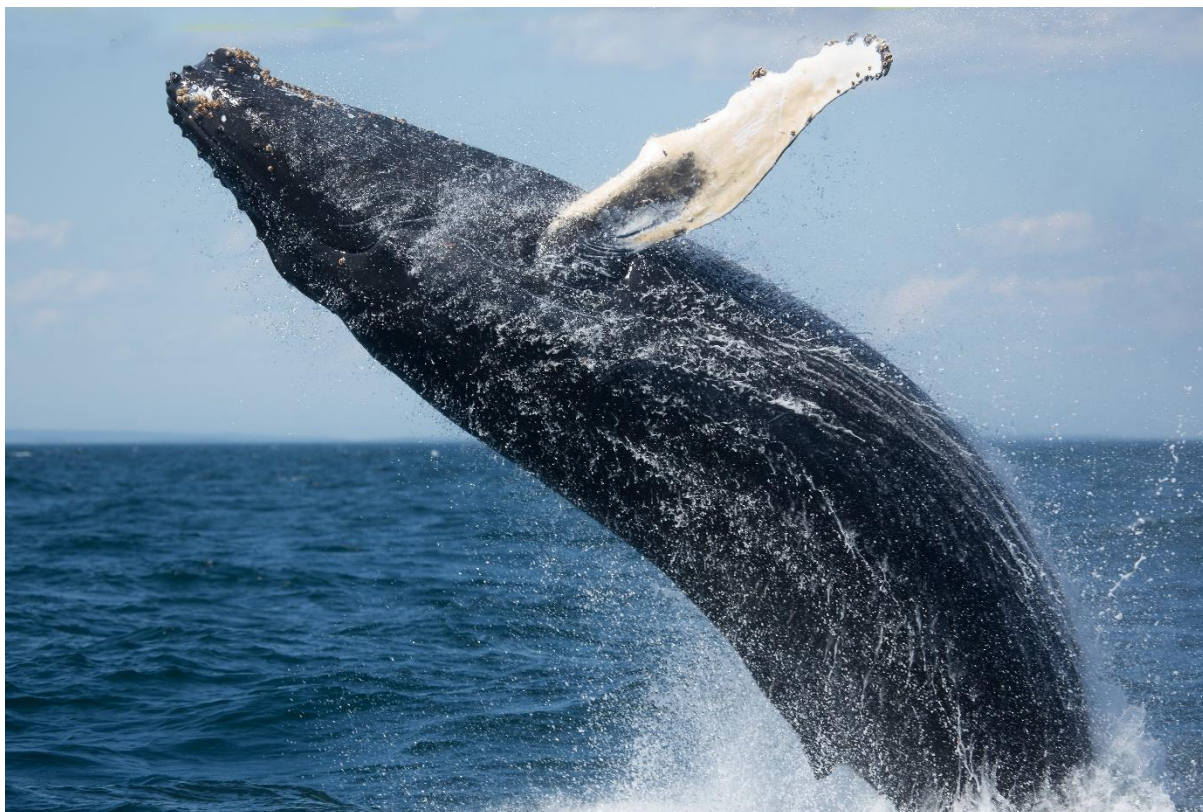
Driving to the car rental return went without a hitch, we then caught the shuttle bus back to the airport for our direct British Airways evening flight home to the UK arriving early morning at Heathrow. Sadly I was in a seat next to the largest US football player in the world and had a very uncomfortable trip back.



Banded Hairstreak at the Audubon Reserve in Boston



Northern Flicker in Boston's Arnold Arboretum



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