Autumn Colours of New England

Naturetrek Tour Report

22nd September – 3rd October 2023







Eatern Chipmunk



Ruby-throated Hummingbird



Grey Catbird

Tour report and images by Rob Williams



Naturetrek Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

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UK

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Tour participants: Rob Williams and Dave Jackson (leaders) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Friday 22nd September

The flight into Boston was slightly delayed due to a ship being in the way for landing - surely a first and an indication on the fascinating juxtaposition of harbour, airport and city that is Boston. Dinner and a drink were much appreciated at the hotel.

Day 2

Saturday 23rd September

It was overcast and the breeze was picking up due to the remnants of a hurricane coming up the coast. Fortunately, its progress had slowed, and we could still get out in the boat, but unfortunately, it did seem to have a severe impact on marine life and despite searching for a couple of hours none of the whale-watching boats found any whales. We picked up a couple of consolation seabirds, Manx Shearwater and Northern Gannet, before heading back into Boston and driving north to New Harbour seeing a few roadside birds along the way and stopping for a sandwich. Arriving in New Harbour, we settled in and then enjoyed a great seafood dinner in the local lobster shack.

Day 3

Sunday 24th September

Before breakfast around the hotel, we found some Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in the grounds of the hotel and also enjoyed an Eastern Chipmunk carrying cheek-fulls of acorns back to its hibernation den.

We took a boat trip out to Monhegan Island located 11 miles offshore and spent the day exploring this beautiful island and seeking out migrant birds. We found a good variety of warblers: Cape May and Yellow Warblers being the most conspicuous and Common Yellowthroat probably the most common by voice with several heard and a few seen. We did manage to get good looks at two Canada Warblers and a very obliging Black-and-white Warbler. A damp area held a Sora and a Swamp Sparrow. A couple of Rusty Blackbirds were with the Common Grackle flock. The garden area held several Cedar Waxwings and a couple of Baltimore Orioles. Several Peregrines, a couple of Merlins and a Northern Harrier were seen during our perambulations. The old ice pond, held a Green-winged Teal, American Black Duck and Belted Kingfisher. Another highlight were several migrating Monarch Butterflies that we watched and marvelled at the journey they were undertaking to overwinter in Mexico. We found lunch in the various cafes and then some sampling the local beer in the island's micro-brewery.

On our return trip we saw several Atlantic Grey Seals, Harbour Porpoises and a single Atlantic White-sided Dolphin. Some of us took a quick sight-seeing trip to Pemaquid Point and the old lighthouse there.

Day 4

Monday 25th September

North of New Harbour, we stopped at an area of farmland with a small lagoon and some salt marsh. The area held good number of small birds and we added Golden-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Phoebe, Grey Catbird and Red-tailed Hawk amongst the 27 species we found.

We spent some time working our way around a beautiful natural lake finding several Wood Duck and seeing a couple of Turkey Vultures passing by. An Eastern Painted Turtle was sunbathing on a distant rock. A couple of Beaver lodges were visible in the distance and finding one was our main objective; we had nearly reached the far end of the lake when Chris called us over having spotted a head. We enjoyed prolonged great views of an American Beaver as it fed on water lilies. Fortunately it moved closer and closer to us, allowing great views and many photos. It then submerged slapping its tail on the water and was gone. A couple of White-throated Sparrows were seen in some spruce bordering the marsh.

Day 5

Tuesday 26th September

Acadia National Park

We spent the day exploring Acadia National Park taking the park loop road and making multiple stops to enjoy the spectacular views, habitats and wildlife of this unique National Park.

We bought lunch in the town of north-east harbour and ate it overlooking Eagle Lake. Whilst eating lunch we saw some interesting grasshoppers and a Pickerel Frog - the only poisonous frog in North America. We took a walk at the north end of Eagle Lake. A couple of American Bullfrogs Frogs were seen. The trees along the water's edge held a flock of White-throated Sparrows and a mobile flock of Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers which also held Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Pine Warbler and a couple of Bay-breasted Warblers. Several Red-breasted Nuthatches were in the trees above us. We watched a few dragonflies and saw a Dragonhunter lying on its back eating a Lake Darner.

In the late afternoon, some of us explored the coast, our first stops not being very productive in terms of new birds. We enjoyed finding a Coyote eating some apples in an orchard. Langley Point gave us great views of a moulting Bonaparte's Gull, a flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers were flying about, two Semipalmated Plovers and a Spotted Sandpiper were on the beach. Offshore we enjoyed scope views of good numbers of Surf, White-winged and Black Scoters.

Day 6

Wednesday 27th September

Cadillac Mountain to Bethel

The highest mountain on the eastern seaboard if the USA is Cadillac Mountain (466 m) and we headed up here after breakfast, with our booked slot to drive the road to the summit. Here we explored the stunted pine forest, open rocky areas and enjoyed the marvellous views down to Bar Harbour and across the Mount Desert Narrows to the Schoodic Peninsula; our viewpoint allowed us to see over most of the 47,000 acres of Acadia National Park and Mount Desert Island. A few Dark-eyed Juncos and a single confiding Savannah Sparrow were seen. Flocks of Pine Siskins were passing overhead with more than 300 being seen. A single Buff-bellied Pipit passed over calling. At 10, we joined the hawk counters at their watch point. The weather was too good and the light wind in the wrong direction for a significant movement, but we saw many Turkey Vultures, a Northern Harrier and a male American Kestrel.

We visited Langley Point on the coast and enjoyed good numbers of Surf Scoters and a small flock of Whitewinged Scoters. Immature and adult Bald Eagles flew overhead.

Across the strait we stopped by a place where a Swainson's Hawk had been seen and spotted it even before our vehicles stopped moving. We enjoyed some 20 minutes watching this vagrant that should have been migrating from the prairies to the pampas of Argentina. An immature bird, it gave great views perched on a wire and dropping to the ground to eat insects, even running on the ground at times. These views allowed us to appreciate its very long wings needed for its incredible migration.

We drove west to the small town of Bethel and settled into our well-equipped and decoratively furnished bed and breakfast. We dined in a nearby Korean restaurant where the owner schooled us in dish preparation - delicious and informative.

Day 7

Thursday 28th September

Umbagog

After our first decadent breakfast courtesy of Jeanette and her baked goods meets eggs and sugar obsession, we drove to Grafton Notch and visited a few of the sites along the road. The spruce dominated forests here held a variety of new species for us, with great views of Canada (Grey) Jay being perhaps the highlight. A Hermit Thrush perched quietly close by, and we all had good looks at the delightful American Red Squirrels. A type 1 (Appalachian) Red Crossbill flew over calling.

We carried on to Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge and spent the day exploring this area. We made several stops and walked some trails, enjoying our lunch at a lookout over the Magalloway river. At the reserve HQ building, we had a decent mixed flock and picked up a bright Black-throated Green Warbler, two Bay-breasted Warblers and nice views of a Tennessee Warbler. A walk in some Spruce Forest gave us the opportunity to hear a distant Spruce Grouse and a flash past Sharp-shinned Hawk. We searched diligently for Moose but only found reasonably fresh tracks.

Day 8

Friday 29th September

Saco valley and Umbagog

We headed south to some farmland in the Saco river valley near the town of Fryeburg. We arrived with quite dense mist lying across the valley, but the sky was bluing and it was clear it would burn off soon. As we waited, we heard Sandhill Cranes calling and soon saw some through the mist. Over the next half hour, more flew in and soon we were enjoying 'scope views of a flock of 22 feeding and occasional dancing and calling. This species is very rare this far east and this was a great sighting of a rare bird. A nearby area of woodland at the edge of the marsh held good numbers of Black-capped Chickadee and White-throated Sparrow. Further investigation revealed two cooperative Common Yellowthroats, a Blue-headed Vireo and a White-crowned Sparrow. We then explored the valley by car and found good numbers of sparrows including several Lincoln's Sparrow, as well as a small group of Eastern Bluebirds still attending a nestbox near a church. Two Cooper's Hawks flashed past.

In the afternoon we returned to Umbagog and explored the roads and some trails near the Magalloway River. We found some fresh Moose tracks and a highlight was repeated good looks at a Pileated Woodpecker.

Day 9

Saturday 30th September

To Jackson and Crawford Notch

Four of us made an early trip to Umbagog area to try driving the road in search of Moose. Despite lack of success we did see a few White-tailed Deer, several Wild Turkeys and a Ruffed Grouse that flew across the road.

After another spectacularly decadent breakfast was served to us, we delayed our departure slightly to avoid getting caught up in the Jeep parade through town and some people did a little shopping at the craft stalls whilst we watched the Jeeps go by and dodged the flying candies they hurled at us - peak American in small town Maine. As soon as the Jeeps cleared the road, we headed to New Hampshire and to Crawford Notch State Park to admire the views and eat our picnic lunch by a small lagoon. It was very hot and sunny and the trees above us held a mating pair of Shadow Darners. Another stop near the pass gave us a suite of good insects including several New England Buckmoths, Monarch and some other butterflies feasting on Hairy Michealmas-Daisy. A Black-billed Cuckoo alarmed as a Raven flew over.

Day 10

Sunday 1st October

Mt Washington and Squam Lake

Another beautiful morning saw us ascending the spectacular Mount Washington Auto Route. We made several stops en route in different altitude zones and were rewarded with Boreal Chickadee. The views from the summit (1,917 m) were spectacular and well worth the trip. A few other birds included a couple of flyover White-winged Crossbills and a brief flight view of a Horned Lark.

After a swift lunch near Jackson, we drove south to Squam Lake and took an afternoon sightseeing and wildlife cruise. This lake was made famous in the film "On Golden Pond" and we enjoyed our tour in nice weather around this impressive lake with great views over its largely protected watersheds. We saw five Common Loons (Great Northern Divers) including several in near full summer plumage, and also a family of Common Mergansers (Goosander). On the route back we took the Kancamagus highway and enjoyed the fall colours in the late afternoon light.

Day 11

Monday 2nd October

Pondicherry and Kancamagus highway

We drove north to the Pondicherry NWR. The morning had a slight autumnal chill in the air but that soon disappeared and we enjoyed another fantastic sunny day walking to the two ponds in the centre of the reserve. Birds included a late female Bay-breasted Warbler and a Ruffed Grouse seen by some. Two newly hatched Common Snapping Turtles and a Common Garter Snake were on the old railway line where we also found a Mourning Cloak (called Camberwell Beauty in Europe).

After some lunch where we were joined by a few more butterflies and a male Northern Parula, we headed to the Kancamagus highway and spent a final afternoon enjoying the fabulous scenery and fall colours and taking a lot of photos. At the very last stop of the day, we marvelled at fresh Beaver work including a new dam and a curiously split part-felled tree.

Day 12

Tuesday 3rd October

Jackson to Walden Pond and Boston

After driving south to Concord, we visited the famous Walden Pond reserve where Thoreau had spent his two years, two months and two days in the woods. A friend of Rob's and local expert on Thoreau and the area showed us around and we enjoyed looking at the cabin reconstruction and seeing this beautiful glacial pond. It was unseasonably hot for October and many people were swimming in the pond. We chatted with a local lady who let us have a look in her garden, but birds were scarce in the heat. Chipmunks were abundant and confiding. We lunched at a nearby farm shop where a few Red-tailed Hawks and 14 Killdeer were welcome sightings and entertained the photographers. A Milk Snake in the car park was an unusual find. Ann had stayed at the pond for some Thoreau-inspired sauntering and a swim, and we returned to pick her up after a quick stop off at Peter's house to see some of the amazing artwork and his impressive library. It was sadly then time to head to the airport and catch our evening flight home which was slightly delayed by a broken-down vehicle being in the way!

We had enjoyed a fabulous tour of New England in mostly glorious weather. This had delayed the fall colours slightly, but the last couple of days gave us a fantastic show in bright sunshine and we really could not have hoped for more. We found good numbers of birds and some decent mammal sightings. Good numbers of butterflies and dragonflies were recorded as well as some other interesting invertebrates. The group had enjoyed each other's company and got on well, even tolerating the senses of humour of the leaders.



Cape May Warbler

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only, ✓ = Common, H = Heard, S = Sign, F = Fur, Feather, Footprint or Faeces, * = Leaders only.)

		September/October 2023											
Common name	Scientific name	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	
Canada Goose	Branta canadensis	100		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5	✓	
Wood Duck	Aix sponsa			8			✓						
Mallard	Anas platyrhynchos	✓	10	2	10		✓	✓	✓	7			
American Black Duck	Anas rubripes		1	16	10		√	√	√	3			
Green-winged Teal	Anas carolinensis		1										
Ring-necked Duck	Aythya collaris						7	7	7		4		
Common Eider	Somateria mollissima		200	√	✓								
Surf Scoter	Melanitta perspicillata				30	83							
White-winged Scoter	Melanitta deglandi	5			7	5							
Black Scoter	Melanitta americana		2		5	2							
Hooded Merganser	Lophodytes cucullatus							1					
Common Merganser	Mergus merganser									8			
Common Pheasant - I	Phasanius colchicus		5										
Wild Turkey	Meleagris gallopavo			1		8		10	30	10			
Ruffed Grouse	Bonasa umbellus								1		1		
Spruce Grouse	Canachites canadensis						Н						
Feral Rock Dove - I	Columba livia	✓	√	√	√	√						√	
Mourning Dove	Zenaida macroura	2	10	√									
Red-necked Grebe	Podiceps grisegena				4								
Sora	Porzana carolina		1										
Sandhill Crane	Antigone canadensis							25					
American Golden Plover	Pluvialis dominica	1											
Semipalmated Plover	Charadrius semipalmatus				2	Н							
Killdeer	Charadrius vociferus											14	
Semipalmated Sandpiper	Calidris pusilla				16								

	Scientific name	September/October 2023											
Common name		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	
Spotted Sandpiper	Actitis macularius		Н										
Bonaparte's Gull	Chroicocephalus philadelphia				1								
Laughing Gull	Leucophaeus atricilla	5	10										
Ring-billed Gull	Larus delawarensis	10	5	2	2	2				80			
Great Black-backed Gull	Larus marinus	20	50	10	20	4							
American Herring Gull	Larus smithsonianus	✓	✓	√	✓	✓						2	
Lesser Black-backed Gull	Larus fuscus		1										
Red-throated Loon	Gavia stellata		3*										
Common Loon	Gavia immer	1	6		5	2				5			
Manx Shearwater	Puffinus puffinus	1											
Northern Gannet	Morus bassanus	3	6										
Great Cormorant	Phalacrocorax carbo	1	1										
Double-crested Cormorant	Nannopterum auritum	✓	√		√								
Great Blue Heron	Ardea herodias	1	Н	3	5	2	3	2	1	1			
Great Egret	Ardea alba	1	1										
Turkey Vulture	Cathartes aura	1		√	5	20	5	2	4	2		2	
Osprey	Pandion haliaetus	2	1	2	2	1	1	1					
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Accipiter striatus	1	1										
Cooper's Hawk	Accipiter cooperii		1					2					
American Goshawk	Accipiter atricapillus						Н						
Northern Harrier	Circus hudsonius		1	2		3	3	2					
Bald Eagle	Haliaeetus leucocephalus		3	1		4	2						
Swainson's Hawk	Buteo swainsoni					1							
Red-tailed Hawk	Buteo jamaicensis	1		2								3	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	Archilochus colubris		3										
Black-billed Cuckoo	Coccyzus erythropthalmus								Н				
Belted Kingfisher	Megaceryle alcyon		1	2	2	1	2	2		1			
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Melanerpes carolinus									Н		Н	
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Sphyrapicus varius		2					1					

Common name	Scientific name	September/October 2023											
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	
Downy Woodpecker	Dryobates pubescens		3	Н	1	Н	1				1		
Hairy Woodpecker	Leuconotopicus villosus						1	1					
Northern Flicker	Colaptes auratus						2	2	1				
Pileated Woodpecker	Dryocopus pileatus							1					
American Kestrel	Falco sparverius					1			2				
Merlin	Falco columbarius		2										
Peregrine Falcon	Falco peregrinus		2										
Eastern Phoebe	Sayornis phoebe		2	20	2	1		1		1			
Least Flycatcher	Empidonax minimus		1										
Eastern Kingbird	Tyrannus tyrannus		Н										
Red-eyed Vireo	Vireo olivaceus		3			1							
Blue-headed Vireo	Vireo solitarius							2		Н			
Canada Jay	Perisoreus canadensis						5						
Blue Jay	Cyanocitta cristata	✓	✓	√	✓	✓	✓	√	√	√	✓	√	
American Crow	Corvus brachyrhynchos	✓	✓	√	✓	✓	✓	√	√	√	✓	√	
Northern Raven	Corvus corax		3	1	2		✓	√	√	√	✓		
Cedar Waxwing	Bombycilla cedrorum		10				5		1		Н		
Tufted Titmouse	Baeolophus bicolor		6				2			2	2		
Boreal Chickadee	Poecile hudsonicus									3			
Black-capped Chickadee	Poecile atricapillus		10	√	✓	✓	✓	√	√	√	✓		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Corthylio calendula		1		4		2				2		
Golden-crowned Kinglet	Regulus satrapa		1		4	2	✓	✓	√	√	✓		
Horned Lark	Eremophila alpestris									1			
Carolina Wren	Thryothorus Iudovicianus		3	2		Н		2				1	
White-breasted Nuthatch	Sitta carolinensis		1	2				2			Н		
Red-breasted Nuthatch	Sitta canadensis		1	Н	4	2	√	√	√	√	√		
Brown Creeper	Certhia americana		1	2									
Grey Catbird	Dumetella carolinensis		10	5									
Common Starling - I	Sturnus vulgaris		√			√		7				√	

	Scientific name	September/October 2023											
Common name		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	
Eastern Bluebird	Sialia sialis			2				5					
Hermit Thrush	Catharus guttatus						1						
American Robin	Turdus migratorius				3		√	✓	√	√	√		
House Sparrow - I	Passer domesticus	✓	√	√								√	
Buff-bellied Pipit	Anthus rubescens					1							
Evening Grosbeak	Hesperiphona vespertina						Н						
House Finch	Haemorhous mexicanus		4	2									
Red Crossbill	Loxia curvirostra						1						
Two-barred Crossbill	Loxia leucoptera									2			
American Goldfinch	Spinus tristis		10	√	√	√							
Pine Siskin	Spinus pinus					300	2						
Chipping Sparrow	Spizella passerina					2	10	20					
Field Sparrow	Spizella pusilla					1							
Dark-eyed Junco	Junco hyemalis		1			5	5						
White-crowned Sparrow	Zonotrichia leucophrys							1		2			
White-throated Sparrow	Zonotrichia albicollis			4	Н	1	√	✓	√	√	√		
Savannah Sparrow	Passerculus sandwichensis					1		30					
Song Sparrow	Melospiza melodia		10	√	√	√	√	√	√	2	5	1	
Lincoln's Sparrow	Melospiza lincolnii			1				15					
Swamp Sparrow	Melospiza georgiana		1	2			2	5			2		
Baltimore Oriole	Icterus galbula		2										
Rusty Blackbird	Euphagus carolinus		1										
Common Grackle	Quiscalus quiscula		20										
Black-and-white Warbler	Mniotilta varia		1				1						
Tennessee Warbler	Leiothlypis peregrina						1						
Common Yellowthroat	Geothlypis trichas		5	5			2	2					
Cape May Warbler	Setophaga tigrina		6	1				1					
Northern Parula	Setophaga americana		2				2	1			1		
Magnolia Warbler	Setophaga magnolia		5										

Common name	Scientific name	September/October 2023												
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3		
Bay-breasted Warbler	Setophaga castanea		10			1		3			1			
Blackburnian Warbler	Setophaga fusca		1*											
Yellow Warbler	Setophaga aestiva		5			1								
Chestnut-sided Warbler	Setophaga pensylvanica		1*											
Blackpoll Warbler	Setophaga striata		1*					1						
Palm Warbler	Setophaga palmarum								1					
Myrtle Warbler	Setophaga coronata			3	10	5	√	✓	✓		✓			
Canada Warbler	Cardellina canadensis		2											
Wilson's Warbler	Cardellina pusilla					1								
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	Pheucticus Iudovicianus		1											
Northern Cardinal	Cardinalis cardinalis		5	5	2	1		1			Н			
Mammals														
Eastern Chipmunk	Tamias striatus		√											
Eastern Grey Squirrel	Sciurus carolinensis		√	√	√	√						√		
American Red Squirrel	Tamiasciurus hudsonicus			1		1	✓	√	✓	√	✓			
American Beaver	Castor canadensis			1					S	S	S			
Coyote	Canis latrans				1									
Fisher	Pekania pennanti			1										
Harbour (Common) Seal	Phoca vitulina	4	1		5	5								
Grey Seal	Halichoerus gryphus		6											
Northern River Otter	Lontra canadensis										F			
White-tailed Deer	Odocoileus virginianus					2		1	2	1	F			
Moose	Alces americanus						F	F			F			
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin	Lagenorhynchus acutus		1											
Harbour Porpoise	Phocoena phocoena		√		/									

Reptiles

Eastern Painted Turtle Chrysemys picta - one basking at Acadia NP.

Common Snapping Turtle Chelydra serpentina - two hatchlings at Pondicherry.

Common Garter Snake Thamnophis sirtalis - one at Pondicherry.

Milk Snake Lampropeltis triangulum - one near Walden Pond.

Amphibians

Pickerel Frog Lithobates palustris - one above Eagle Lake, Acadia NP.

American Bullfrog Lithobates catesbeianus - two in pond by Eagle Lake, Acadia NP.

Fish

Chain Pickerel Sox niger - one seen in shallows at Umbagog.

Atlantic Mackerel Scomber scombrus - shoal in north-east harbour, Mount Desert Island.

Butterflies and Moths

Questionmark Polygonia interrogationis

Eastern Comma Polygon comma

Milbert's Tortoiseshell Aglais milberti

American Lady Vanessa virginiensis

Painted Lady Vanessa cardui

Red Admiral Vanessa atalanta

Pearl Crescent Phyciodes tharos

Orange Sulphur Colias eurytheme

Monarch Danaus plexippus

New England Buckmoth Hemileuca lucina

White-lined Sphinx Holes lineata

Blinded Sphinx Paonias excaecata

Dragonflies and Damselflies

Dragonhunter Hagenius brevistylus

Common Green Darner Anax junius

Lake Darner Aeshna eremita

Black-tipped Darner Aeshna tuberculifer

Shadow Darner Aeshna umbrosa

Variable Darner Aeshna iterrupta

Autumn Meadowhawk Sympetrum vicinum

White-faced Meadowhawk Sympetrum obtrusum

Cherry-faced Meadowhawk Sympetrum internum

Band-winged Meadowhawk Sympetrum semicinctum

Spotted Spreadwing Lestes congener

Slender Spreadwing Lestes rectangularis

Variable Dancer Argia fumipennis

Grasshoppers and Crickets

Crackling Forest Grasshopper Trimerotropis verruculata

Carolina Grasshopper Dissosteira carolina

Miscellaneous Plants

Hairy Michaelmas-daisy Symphyotrichum novae-angliae

Confused Michaelmas Daisy Symphyotrichum novi-belgii