

Autumn Colours of New England

Naturetrek Tour Report

24th September – 6th October 2025



American Bittern



Eastern Chipmunk



Autumn colours



Bar Harbour, Humpback Whale

Tour report by Ben Chapple



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Tour participants: Ben Chapple and Keith Buchanan (leaders) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Wednesday 24th September

London to Boston, then on to Kittery

Most of the group travelled from London Heathrow to Boston on a remarkably smooth flight, although we landed in such thick cloud that we couldn't even see the plane's wing out of the window. Two more of the group, and co-leader Keith, met us at Logan Airport, from which we headed north through New Hampshire (and torrential rain) towards our first night's stop in the town of Kittery, just over the border into the state of Maine.

It was too late by the time we arrived for a substantial dinner, so we satisfied ourselves with the fruit baskets and delicious muffins that the check-in lady kindly provided. Even these didn't keep us up long; it had been a long day of travelling, and we all shortly headed to bed.

Day 2

Thursday 25th September

Kittery to Tenants Harbor, via Scarborough Marsh

Our first morning in the USA dawned damply, with the previous evening's rain still thoroughly settled in. In fact, the forecast (which proved correct) was for non-stop downpour all day, so we opted first for a leisurely breakfast. Despite the wet weather, we set off to Scarborough Marsh, hoping that waterbird activity would be somewhat tolerant of the conditions. On arrival in the car park, an eventually obliging female Common Yellowthroat (our first wood warbler of the trip) made an appearance. Double-crested Cormorants were perched up above the creek, and it wasn't long before we saw both Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, which showed side-by-side, giving us a perfect impression of their differing sizes. Also on the mudflats were a few Semipalmated Plovers.

A little further down the trail, we watched a Belted Kingfisher on a dead tree, and then there was a considerable commotion as a juvenile Bald Eagle flapped over the marsh, sending Great Egrets scattering beneath it. An extremely bedraggled Red-tailed Hawk was right above the path, and a few of us glimpsed a Northern Harrier quartering distantly. We also enjoyed a small flock of pretty Nelson's Sparrows, with their yellowish facial markings. Returning to the vehicles, we felt we had seen an impressive variety of species in challenging conditions.

Our lunch stop was at The Lobster Haul in Damariscotta, where we tucked in to our first serious Maine seafood. Plans for an afternoon stop were abandoned due to the weather, so we pressed on to our beautifully-located hotel in Tenants Harbor, seeing another Bald Eagle and numerous roadside Wild Turkeys along the way. It was still too wet for any further excursions today, but we did manage to see summer plumage Common Loon (aka Great Northern Diver), Common Eider and Laughing Gull from the shelter of the hotel veranda. We reconvened in the evening for our first checklist and a delicious dinner, before heading to bed in hope that we would wake to clear skies.

Day 3

Friday 26th September

Monhegan Island

The skies were not quite clear at dawn, but the initial mist soon burned off, giving us a delightfully sunny day. In fact, we would scarcely see another cloud for the rest of the tour. Having met at 7.00am for a pre-breakfast bird walk, we saw an Osprey circling in front of the hotel, and added Grey Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Great Blue Heron and Dark-eyed Junco nearby.

After breakfast, we drove to nearby Port Clyde to catch our ferry to Monhegan Island, twelve miles offshore. At the dock, adult and immature Bald Eagles showed well, and there were numerous Common Eiders and Double-crested Cormorants on the water. The crossing itself was relatively quiet, but we enjoyed a few flyby Northern Gannets, and an active pod of Harbour Porpoises.

Monhegan is famous as a site for migrant birds: almost anything can turn up at this time of year. After watching Black-capped Chickadee, Black-and-white Warbler, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in harbourside trees, we heard word that an American Bittern had been sighted on a nearby pond. Arriving there, we eventually managed reasonable views of this highly elusive bird. A Solitary Sandpiper was also present, alongside a few more warblers: Myrtle (Yellow-rumped), Wilson's, and American Redstart. A pair of Palm Warblers was a nice addition as we walked to lunch back in the village.

In the afternoon, most of the group hiked around the island's southern coast, finding first a flock of both Red-eyed and Blue-headed Vireos, and then later Red-bellied Woodpecker, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Northern Harrier, American Black Duck and Eastern Phoebe, as well as breathtaking craggy scenery. A small splinter group made a return visit to the pond, where the American Bittern proved much more obliging. When we reconvened in time to catch the return ferry, we all felt rather deserving of our ice creams.

Day 4

Saturday 27th September

Tenants Harbor to Bar Harbor

Today's early walk gave some of us a huge Pileated Woodpecker, as well as flyover Northern Flicker, Tufted Titmouse and our first American Robin. The highlight for most, however, was an adorable Eastern Chipmunk, popping in and out of a drystone wall. After breakfast, we left Tenants Harbor and drove the short distance to Weskeag Marsh, where a viewpoint provided views of Snowy Egret, Savannah Sparrow and distant Greater Yellowlegs. A short trail wound through a quiet meadow, before bringing us to another vista, from which we watched Grey (or Black-bellied) Plover, Semipalmated Sandpiper and (most excitingly) a male Bufflehead.

A two-hour drive to Mt Desert Island, home of Acadia National Park, took us through stunning mixed woodlands. We picked up takeaway sandwiches for lunch and ate them at Hadley Point, where a couple of distant White-winged Scoters were seen, alongside Red-necked Grebe and several Harbour Seals. After checking into our hotel in Bar Harbor, we visited Jordan Pond (a large lake) in the national park, seeing a flock of Wild Turkeys and a White-tailed Deer en route. Although we were unable to find any American Beavers at the lake, the views were

sensational, as was a point-blank pair of Common Loons. Several equally lovely North American Red Squirrels were feeding close to the paths, and we watched a lone Hermit Thrush in the car park at dusk.

Day 5

Sunday 28th September

Whalewatching and Acadia National Park

A pre-breakfast excursion to a local pond saw us enjoying an impressive beaver lodge, although even at 7.00am its inhabitants seemed to have gone to bed for the day. A number of exquisite Wood Ducks were seen, as well as Hooded Merganser, American Black Duck and Spotted Sandpiper.

In the late morning, we gathered at the dock in Bar Harbor for our whalewatching boat, which carried us far out to sea in search of cetaceans. It took a couple of hours, and a crossing into Canadian waters, before we were finally successful in locating a Humpback Whale, a thirty-year-old adult male known as Palmer-Crary. He was fairly relaxed, undertaking short feeding dives for a few minutes at a time, and often showing off his airplane-wing tail flukes. Birds, while not abundant, were reasonably varied for the time of year. Great Shearwater, Northern Fulmar and Atlantic Puffin passed close to the vessel, while Grey (Red) Phalarope, Pomarine Skua and (amazingly, given that we were twenty-five miles from land) a Merlin also made fleeting appearances.

It was already past 4.00pm by the time we returned to Bar Harbor, so we headed back to the hotel for a rest, before making a repeat visit to the morning's pond for a dusk stakeout. Before long, the distinctive profile of an American Beaver appeared close to the lodge, and we all enjoyed excellent views of the animal in the fading light.

Day 6

Monday 29th September

Beaver Dam Pond, Cadillac Mountain, and on to Bethel

Keen for further beaver action, most of us met at 6.00am to visit a different lake, this one (promisingly) named Beaver Dam Pond. A large lodge dominated the far shore, and after just a few minutes a Beaver appeared. For around an hour, we were able to watch two different individuals, although they mostly stayed distant. Then, just as we were preparing to leave, one popped up in the middle of the pond, heading straight for us. Gradually, it came closer and closer, until it was feeding on waterlilies no more than four metres away. Totally relaxed, this amazing animal nibbled its way past us, before disappearing out of sight into the tree-lined bank. We were all agreed that this was one of the standout moments of the whole tour.

After breakfast, we ascended Cadillac Mountain, the highest point on the eastern seaboard of the USA. There was little wildlife to be seen, beside a few Turkey Vultures, American Pipits and Myrtle Warblers, but the vistas were awesome. We then began the long journey inland towards the northern forests, stopping in Bangor for lunch before arriving in the quaint village of Bethel in the late afternoon. Here, we stayed in a wonderful B&B owned by John and Jeanette, the loveliest people (and in Jeanette's case, greatest breakfast chefs) one could ever hope to meet.

Day 7

Tuesday 30th September

Grafton Notch and Lake Umbagog

This morning provided our first experience of Jeanette's luxurious cooking. After digesting, we headed for Grafton Notch State Park, where the Screw Auger Falls car park contained a superb mixed bird flock. Downy Woodpecker, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo and White-breasted Nuthatch were all seen. We then moved further north to Lake Umbagog, where we watched a small flock of American Pipits, one of which narrowly escaped the clutches of a hunting Merlin.

A picnic lunch at the Lake Umbagog National Wildlife Refuge headquarters was followed by an afternoon stroll along the Magalloway River Trail, which added Pine Siskin, White-throated Sparrow and Green-winged Teal to our bird list. The return drive to Bethel was broken up with another visit to Grafton Notch, before we walked over to an excellent local burger joint for dinner.

Day 8

Wednesday 1st October

McNeill Road and Rangeley Lakes

Some of the group made a pre-breakfast drive to Grafton Notch and back, in the hope of Moose, but we had no luck, instead contenting ourselves with a spectacular sunrise over the leafy slopes. Jeanette had once again outdone herself with our morning meal, after which we visited an area of agricultural land, which is something of a rarity in northern New England's densely forested landscape. Here, we soon came across our biggest target: a pair of Sandhill Cranes, which are scarce passage migrants here. Two separate flocks totalling at least 25 birds passed over, their evocative bugling calls echoing across the meadows. We soon relocated some of them, in a wetland behind a local house; not a bad species for the garden list!

In the afternoon, we elected to try a long driving loop, first stopping at the breathtaking Height of Land viewpoint, before passing Rangeley Lake and birding Boy Scout Road, which was disappointingly quiet, apart from some Dark-eyed Juncos. We then continued back through Errol and the Lake Umbagog region, scanning carefully for Moose in roadside wallows, but the world's largest deer continued to elude us. Arriving back in Bethel, we headed straight for dinner at a local restaurant, where we found it to be trivia night, which provided an opportunity for the group to test their general knowledge.

Day 9

Thursday 2nd October

Mount Washington and Cathedral Ledge

After a final breakfast feast from Jeanette, we left Bethel and headed south-west towards the White Mountain National Forest, where we drove the road to the summit of Mount Washington, the highest peak in New England. Stopping briefly on the way up, we had good views of Myrtle Warbler, before an unexpected Killdeer flew overhead, well above the tree line. The summit itself was largely birdless, but the perfect sunny weather, without a breath of wind, more than made up for it: the views were extraordinary.

The descent saw us make several stops on the mountain's wooded lower slopes. Firstly, a group of Red-breasted Nuthatches responded strongly to "pishing", coming within a few feet of us. Then, a Boreal Chickadee was found; although it was mainly within dense foliage, most of the group eventually caught a glimpse of this special northern species. Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Blue-headed Vireo made up the supporting cast.

We had lunch at the base of the mountain, where we gazed in awe at the kaleidoscope of autumnal leaf colours, before reaching our hotel in Intervale. A scenic sunset trip was taken later to the nearby Cathedral Ledge. Setting off again for dinner in the van, we justifiably thought the day's wildlife-viewing was done, but how wrong we were. Not two minutes' drive from the hotel, a gigantic shape loomed into the headlights: Moose! The great beast sauntered across the road in front of us, and although it quickly melted away into the darkness, we were ecstatic finally to have encountered our top mammal target.

Day 10

Friday 3rd October

White Mountain National Forest

This morning, we headed north into the forests of Crawford Notch State Park. A car park here was teeming with Golden-crowned Kinglets, many of them feeding at eye-level; these tiny jewels were fabulous to watch. A few Ruby-crowned Kinglets were mixed in with them. We then drove up Jefferson Notch Road, the highest public thoroughfare in New Hampshire, parking at its zenith and wandering slowly through the spruces. For around an hour we enjoyed only the company of Red-breasted Nuthatches, but eventually we pinned down a Boreal Chickadee, which showed itself much better than yesterday's bird.

After lunch, we returned to the hotel for a small siesta; this was an important addition to the itinerary, as we were planning a late finish tonight. In the evening, we drove down the famous Kancamagus Highway, stopping at several of the most impressive autumn vantage points. At the end of the road, we reached the town of Lincoln, where we took an early dinner before joining up with our guides for a nocturnal Moose tour. Eric and Larry were superb, and although we sadly couldn't find any Moose to add to our previous night's sighting, they kept us thoroughly entertained with their stories, as well as masses of fascinating information about the species. It was past midnight by the time we made it back to Intervale, where we all collapsed gratefully into bed.

Day 11

Saturday 4th October

White Mountain National Forest

Given last night's late finish, we had something of a lie-in today. After breakfast, we headed north to Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge, where a gentle walk took us to a beautiful lake. Canada Geese were the main feature on the water, but they were joined by a single Pied-billed Grebe. A picnic lunch stop featured a hedge full of Myrtle Warblers, and was followed by another walk, this time through boggy spruce forest near the little town of Bethlehem. Unfortunately, bird activity was virtually zero, although there were a great many impressive dragonflies.

Our last dinner of the tour was enjoyed by all at the nearby Grand Summit Hotel, with its dark winding driveway.

Day 12

Sunday 5th October

Wells Reserve at Laudholm, on to Boston

Although the typical last-day stop on this tour is at Walden Pond on the outskirts of Boston, we decided instead to visit a coastal reserve instead, in an attempt to pick up a few new species. So, after our breakfast in Intervale we drove to the Wells Reserve at Laudholm, a beautiful private wildlife refuge. Here, we strolled through pleasant oak woodland, seeing innumerable Eastern Chipmunks and enjoying wonderful views of an Eastern Towhee. A Northern Harrier gave close flyby views; the mudflats held Semipalmated Sandpiper and Greater Yellowlegs, while the beach itself had Semipalmated Plover and a delightful flock of Sanderlings tottering back and forth, before flushing spectacularly as a Merlin duo flashed in from the dunes. Offshore (albeit distant) was an impressive group of Surf Scoters, with a few White-winged Scoters mixed in, as well as several Red-throated Divers. A Harbour Seal also came in close, occasionally showing its whole body in the breaking waves.

All too soon, we had to brave the traffic and return to Boston Airport, where we boarded our flight back to London, and said goodbye to those of the group staying on in the US.

Day 13

Monday 6th October

London

Our flight arrived at Heathrow in the early morning. After collecting our bags, we said our final farewells. It had been a wonderful tour, with superb autumnal scenery, some excellent wildlife, and great company.

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Species lists

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025										
		25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
Canada Goose	<i>Branta canadensis</i>	✓	✓	✓							✓	
Wood Duck	<i>Aix sponsa</i>				✓	✓	✓					
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	
American Black Duck	<i>Anas rubripes</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓					✓
Green-winged Teal	<i>Anas carolinensis</i>						✓					
Common Eider	<i>Somateria mollissima</i>	✓	✓	✓								✓
Surf Scoter	<i>Melanitta perspicillata</i>											✓
White-winged Scoter	<i>Melanitta deglandi</i>			✓								✓
Bufflehead	<i>Bucephala albeola</i>			✓								
Hooded Merganser	<i>Lophodytes cucullatus</i>				✓							
Wild Turkey	<i>Meleagris gallopavo</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Common Pheasant	<i>Phasianus colchicus</i>		✓									
Feral Rock Dove - I	<i>Columba livia</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Mourning Dove	<i>Zenaida macroura</i>		✓	✓		✓						
Sandhill Crane	<i>Antigone canadensis</i>							✓				
Pied-billed Grebe	<i>Podilymbus podiceps</i>										✓	
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>			✓								
Grey Plover	<i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>			✓								
Killdeer	<i>Charadrius vociferus</i>								✓			
Semipalmated Plover	<i>Charadrius semipalmatus</i>	✓		✓								✓
Grey Phalarope	<i>Phalaropus fulicarius</i>				✓							
Solitary Sandpiper	<i>Tringa solitaria</i>		✓				✓					
Lesser Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa flavipes</i>	✓	✓									
Greater Yellowlegs	<i>Tringa melanoleuca</i>	✓	✓	✓								✓
Semipalmated Sandpiper	<i>Calidris pusilla</i>			✓								✓
Laughing Gull	<i>Leucophaeus atricilla</i>	✓										
Ring-billed Gull	<i>Larus delawarensis</i>	✓		✓		✓						✓
Great Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus marinus</i>		✓		✓							✓

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025										
		25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
American Herring Gull	<i>Larus smithsonianus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓
Pomarine Skua	<i>Stercorarius pomarinus</i>				✓							
Atlantic Puffin	<i>Fratercula arctica</i>				✓							
Black Guillemot	<i>Cephus grylle</i>				✓							
Red-throated Loon (Diver)	<i>Gavia stellata</i>											✓
Common Loon (Great Northern Diver)	<i>Gavia immer</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓							✓
Northern Fulmar	<i>Fulmarus glacialis</i>				✓							
Great Shearwater	<i>Ardena gravis</i>				✓							
Northern Gannet	<i>Morus bassanus</i>		✓		✓							
Double-crested Cormorant	<i>Nannopterum auritum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓						✓
American Bittern	<i>Botaurus lentiginosus</i>		✓									
Snowy Egret	<i>Egretta thula</i>	✓		✓								
Great Egret	<i>Ardea alba</i>	✓		✓								✓
Great Blue Heron	<i>Ardea herodias</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓					✓
Turkey Vulture	<i>Cathartes aura</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>		✓									
Sharp-shinned Hawk	<i>Accipiter striatus</i>									✓		
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus hudsonius</i>	✓	✓					✓				✓
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	✓	✓		✓							
Broad-winged Hawk	<i>Buteo platypterus</i>									✓		
Red-tailed Hawk	<i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>	✓										
Belted Kingfisher	<i>Megaceryle alcyon</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓						
Red-bellied Woodpecker	<i>Melanerpes carolinus</i>		✓									
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	<i>Sphyrapicus varius</i>		✓	✓								
Downy Woodpecker	<i>Dryobates pubescens</i>						✓					
Hairy Woodpecker	<i>Leuconotopicus villosus</i>									✓		
Northern Flicker	<i>Colaptes auratus</i>			✓		✓						
Pileated Woodpecker	<i>Dryocopus pileatus</i>			✓								
American Kestrel	<i>Falco sparverius</i>		✓									
Merlin	<i>Falco columbarius</i>				✓		✓		✓			✓
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓									

Common name	Scientific name	September-October 2025										
		25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
Eastern Phoebe	<i>Sayornis phoebe</i>		✓									
Red-eyed Vireo	<i>Vireo olivaceus</i>		✓									
Blue-headed Vireo	<i>Vireo solitarius</i>		✓				✓		✓		✓	
Blue Jay	<i>Cyanocitta cristata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
American Crow	<i>Corvus brachyrhynchos</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>		✓	✓							✓	
Cedar Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla cedrorum</i>		✓	✓								
Tufted Titmouse	<i>Baeolophus bicolor</i>			✓								
Boreal Chickadee	<i>Poecile hudsonicus</i>								✓	✓		
Black-capped Chickadee	<i>Poecile atricapillus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	<i>Corthylio calendula</i>						✓		✓	✓		
Golden-crowned Kinglet	<i>Regulus satrapa</i>						✓		✓	✓	✓	
Carolina Wren	<i>Thryothorus ludovicianus</i>		✓									
Winter Wren	<i>Troglodytes hiemalis</i>						✓					
White-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta carolinensis</i>						✓					
Red-breasted Nuthatch	<i>Sitta canadensis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Brown Creeper	<i>Certhia americana</i>			H								
Grey Catbird	<i>Dumetella carolinensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓				✓	✓
Northern Mockingbird	<i>Mimus polyglottos</i>			✓								
Common Starling - I	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓
Hermit Thrush	<i>Catharus guttatus</i>			✓								
American Robin	<i>Turdus migratorius</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow - I	<i>Passer domesticus</i>		✓				✓					✓
American Pipit	<i>Anthus rubescens</i>					✓	✓		✓			
Purple Finch	<i>Haemorhous purpureus</i>			H			H					
American Goldfinch	<i>Spinus tristis</i>		✓	✓	✓							✓
Pine Siskin	<i>Spinus pinus</i>						✓		✓			
Chipping Sparrow	<i>Spizella passerina</i>		✓									
Dark-eyed Junco	<i>Junco hyemalis</i>		✓				✓	✓				
White-throated Sparrow	<i>Zonotrichia albicollis</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Nelson's Sparrow	<i>Ammospiza nelsoni</i>	✓										

		September-October 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
Savannah Sparrow	<i>Passerculus sandwichensis</i>			✓								
Song Sparrow	<i>Melospiza melodia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		
Swamp Sparrow	<i>Melospiza georgiana</i>							✓				
Eastern Towhee	<i>Pipilo erythrophthalmus</i>											✓
Black-and-white Warbler	<i>Mniotilta varia</i>		✓									
Common Yellowthroat	<i>Geothlypis trichas</i>	✓										
American Redstart	<i>Setophaga ruticilla</i>		✓									
Blackburnian Warbler	<i>Setophaga fusca</i>		✓									
Palm Warbler	<i>Setophaga palmarum</i>		✓				✓					
Myrtle Warbler	<i>Setophaga coronata</i>		✓				✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Black-throated Green Warbler	<i>Setophaga virens</i>						✓					
Wilson's Warbler	<i>Cardellina pusilla</i>		✓									
Northern Cardinal	<i>Cardinalis cardinalis</i>			✓							H	H

Mammals

		September-October 2025										
Common name	Scientific name	25	26	27	28	29	30	1	2	3	4	5
Harbour Seal	<i>Phoca vitulina</i>			✓								
Moose	<i>Alces alces</i>								✓			
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
Humpback Whale	<i>Megaptera novaeangliae</i>				✓							
Harbour Porpoise	<i>Phocoena phocoena</i>		✓		✓							
Eastern Grey Squirrel	<i>Sciurus carolinensis</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eastern Chipmunk - N	<i>Tamias striatus</i>			✓				✓	✓		✓	
North American Red Squirrel	<i>Tamiasciurus hudsonicus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
North American Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>				✓	✓						✓
Common Muskrat	<i>Ondatra zibethicus</i>				✓							