

Birding Saint Andrews

The Saint Andrews Area has some excellent birding. Visiting and resident birders can view a wide variety of sea-birds, migrating hawks, songbirds, shorebirds and more. Roads, trails, waterways and the open waters of the Bay of Fundy provide many avenues of access. This publication is intended to help guide birders/naturalists to some of the best places the area has to offer.

The small community of Saint Andrews is located on the shores of Passamaquoddy Bay, which is part of the Bay of Fundy. Habitats include the open water of the bay, rocky islands with seabird colonies, shorelines with gravel beaches and rocky heads, woodlands, small wetlands, fields, and residential areas. Most of these areas are easily accessible to the birder. Offshore areas can be accessed (seasonally) via the numerous whale watching vessels based at the town wharf. Some of these boats are staffed by skilled birders.

The Bay of Fundy hosts the largest tides in the world. This creates ever changing opportunities to view birds. Low tide exposes large areas of the tidal zone providing avian species with abundant feeding opportunities. High tide tends to concentrate birds. Some areas amongst Western Isles have strong currents and major upwellings adding additional opportunities for birds to feed.

Birding Areas

Indian Point: The waters off the point as well as the shoreline in this area can be excellent for sea-ducks and gulls. The area also produces some shorebirds during late summer/fall. In addition, the woodlands bordering the point tend to hold fair numbers of songbirds during migration. Water Street wraps around the point providing numerous opportunities to view the bay. A small park with picnic tables and a large grassy area is located at the point. Check the small pool of water behind the wooden structure hiding the park's trash dumpster. This shallow pan sits just above the high tide line and can hold shorebirds, especially during high tide. It is quite small, might not look very appealing and occasionally dries up, but is certainly worth checking. The wetlands near it also have potential for the occasional shorebird or wader. Nearby, a spit extends into the bay and it can be very good for gulls. From the far end of the park, the Van Horne Trail can be accessed. It provides access to the Nature Trust's Pagan Point Preserve, which sits at the point.

Sewage Lagoons: The lagoons are located next to the campground and across from the park at Indian Point. A fence surrounds the site making access very limited. However, municipal employers are often friendly and might allow birders to check the lagoons. When the gates are locked, viewing of the upper lagoon is possible from outside the fence on the far right side of the facility. These lagoons have potential for gulls, ducks, and during late summer/fall, a few shorebirds. Bonaparte's Gulls are common here. The shorebirds are most likely to be present around high tide.

Blockhouse: The Blockhouse area can be good for gulls (year-round), sea-ducks (mostly spring and fall), and to a lesser degree shorebirds (late summer/fall). At least a couple of rarities have been observed here (i.e. American Avocet, Marbled Godwit). Peregrine Falcons visit when shorebirds are present. Check both sides of the spit, the sheltered waters behind Navy Island (a

scope will be needed) and Pottery Cove, which is further right. The cove area often holds many gulls and some ducks. High tide concentrates birds, often creating better viewing opportunities. Opposite the Blockhouse is Centennial Park. It is worth checking for migrant songbirds (spring and fall).

Town Wharf: Large concentrations of Common Eider can form near here as the birds shelter behind Navy Island during storms. King Eider can appear during winter months. The breakers on the left side of the wharf attract gulls. Small numbers of shorebirds use the area during low tide. An occasional wader is also possible.

Katy's Cove: This tidal pond can attract ducks as well as shorebirds. Hudsonian Godwits are possible. The rail trail leading to this area has potential for migrant songbirds. The sheltered waters on the bay side of the trail, have potential for good numbers of sea-ducks (fall, winter and spring months are best).

Van Horne Trail: This trail starts on Water Street running past the campground, the sewage lagoons, Indian Point, and Katy's Cove. A variety of habitats are encountered including marshlands, woodlands, residential areas and thickets. Birding along the trail can be very good. Wet thickets found next to this old rail line often hold songbirds including migrants. They are worth checking almost any season.

Bar Road: Large concentrations of sea-ducks often occur at this rather sheltered location. At low tide, the Bar Road provides access to Minister's Island which has potential for migrant songbirds. Driving this 'road' requires caution. The tide comes in fast, so set your watch. If you do not use caution, you could find yourself stranded or worse!

Greenlaw Mountain Hawk Watch: This is the Canadian Maritimes' only regularly staffed hawk watch. It is also the northeastern most fall hawk watch in North America. Migrant raptor counts are conducted here from late August through November. Mid-September to mid-October produces the largest number of raptors. Daily counts of migrating hawks range from several dozen to several thousand. Nineteen species of raptor have been recorded. The hawk watch is on private land. Please contact Todd Watts buteobuz@gmail.com before attempting to access the site. Walking to the site will take 25 to 45 minutes. No vehicular access is allowed.

Passamaquoddy Bay: The bay can hold large numbers of gulls during winter and good numbers of sea-ducks (eiders, loons, grebes, alcids and more) for much of the year. Spring and fall are best.

The Bay of Fundy (not including Passamaquoddy bay):

Whitehorse Island hosts the Western Hemisphere's southern-most colony of Black-legged Kittiwake. Visitors are not allowed on the island. However, the waters off the island can be accessed by boat and some of the local whale watching vessels stop here regularly. The birds nest on near vertical sea cliffs at waters edge providing an excellent opportunity for study (June through early August). Other gull species nest here and the nearshore waters often hold Black Guillemot, Razorbills, the occasional Common Murre and varying numbers of non-breeding Atlantic Puffin (absent some years). The island is also a good place to look for uncommon or rare gulls. Double-crested Cormorant also nest on the island. Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon visit when the kittiwakes are present. The eagles can be numerous here (mid to late summer).

Head Harbour Passage sits between Deer and Campobello Islands and its large upwellings attract very large numbers of gulls as well as smaller numbers of shearwaters and alcids (mid-summer to late fall is best). The passage previously attracted huge numbers of phalarope. However, these birds are now absent most years. East Quoddy Head Lighthouse (also known as Head Harbour Light) marks the entrance to the passage. Kittiwake often roost on the lighthouse rocks. Look low on the more vertical ledges. Other gull species tend to sit higher on these rocks. Northern Gannet are often seen near the entrance to the passage. Deer Island Point has good viewing and some of the highest concentrations of gulls.

The open waters of the Bay of Fundy can hold good numbers of sea-birds. They tend to concentrate off Bliss Island, near South Wolf Island, at Wolf Banks, as well as off East Quoddy Light. Look for Greater, Sooty and possibly Manx Shearwater. Their numbers vary greatly from year to year. Late summer/fall is best. Northern Gannets, jaegers, phalaropes, various sea-ducks and more are possible, if not likely. Large movements of sea-ducks occur during spring and fall. Black Scoter are the most numerous followed by Surf Scoter, Common Eider, Common and Red-throated Loon and Long-tailed Duck. Grebes can be common or even abundant. King Eider are possible, so check all flocks of eider. Areas beyond the Western Isles can be excellent with the possibility of seeing Northern Fulmar, Leach's and Wilson's Storm Petrel and if you are really lucky, skua. Some of these areas can be reached by a few of the whale watching boats. Find yourself a good boat with a skilled birder to visit these places. The experience could easily produce life-long memories.

Further Afield

Caughey-Taylor Nature Preserve, a ten minute drive from town, has several trails passing through its diverse habitats. This 240 hectare preserve hosts numerous songbirds in migration as well as during the breeding season.

The Saint George Marsh, a thirty minute drive from town, has lots of potential for marsh birds. Viewing is best during spring. Although viewing is more restricted in summer or fall, it still can be worth a visit. Two viewing platforms are located in the northern section of the marsh.

Green's Point, a forty five minute drive from town, can be excellent for alcids (fall, winter), gulls, Purple Sandpiper (fall, winter and early spring) and more. King Eider are possible, mostly during fall, winter and early spring.

Selected Species

Black-legged Kittiwake can be easily located from late spring through fall. Finding them usually requires a boat. However, they are often seen from Green's Point (fall), Head Harbour Light (late summer/fall) or from the Grand Manan ferry (late summer/fall). Whitehorse Island hosts the southernmost colony in the Western Hemisphere.

Atlantic Puffin numbers vary from year to year. Locating them can be easy or quite difficult depending on the year and how far you travel. A boat ride to offshore waters is necessary. A breeding colony exists on Machias Seal Island. The island and the surrounding area is an outstanding birding destination. One or more of the local whale watching boats leaving Saint

Andrews can take visitors to the island (but not land). It is an all day trip, but is well worth the time.

Razorbill are usually easy to find on the outer bay.

Murres are generally uncommon on the outer bay, however, the best chance of seeing them is during late summer/fall.

Greater and Sooty Shearwater tend to show up in the outer bay during summer lingering into the fall months. Numbers vary greatly from year to year.

Northern Gannet, like the shearwaters, are often present, but their numbers can vary greatly from year to year.

Red and Red-necked Phalarope are best seen in August and September on the outer bay.

Horned and Red-necked Grebe are common in Passamaquoddy Bay during migration. They can be easily viewed from shore at numerous locations.

Common and Red-throated Loon are also common migrants during spring and fall. Common Loons are local nesters and easy to find almost any day.

Long-tailed Duck can be easily observed on Passamaquoddy Bay as well as the outer bay during migration. Some linger amongst the Western Isles in winter.

Purple Sandpiper can be seen at Green's Point during late fall, winter and early spring.

Shorebirds show up in small numbers annually. The Blockhouse and Indian Point have the best potential.

Songbirds can be almost anywhere. Use area maps to focus on appropriate habitat (satellite images are excellent). Migrants are most abundant during late summer/fall. However, spring can also be good.

Wood Warblers can be abundant summer residents and move through in good numbers during spring and fall migration with fall being best.

Flycatchers and aerial insectivores commonly encountered in or near town include Tree Swallow, Barn Swallow (becoming uncommon), Chimney Swift (also becoming uncommon), Common Nighthawk. Bank Swallow are possible. Eastern Wood Peewee are uncommon. Yellow-bellied Flycatchers are uncommon, but not too hard to find (check the back of Taggart's Marsh). Olive-sided Flycatchers are occasionally seen during migration.

Birds of prey move through the area in good numbers during spring and fall with the latter being best. Under certain conditions, observing from any high point of land could produce numerous sightings (see Greenlaw Mountain). Some of these birds pass right over town. North to Northwest winds are best during late summer/fall. West to southwest winds are best during spring. Any of the eastern species typically observed at hawk watches are possible. Golden Eagle occur, but are rare. Red-shouldered and Rough-Legged Hawk are uncommon. Resident

breeders include Broad-winged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Goshawk, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle and Turkey Vulture.

Marsh birds are in short supply locally. However, investing in a thirty minute drive will get one to the Saint George Marsh which can be very good.

Additional info on the surrounding areas will be part of the upcoming Southern New Brunswick Birding Trail.

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