May 24, 2018: Arrival in Halifax

We arrived in Halifax in the morning, coming from Brussels via Paris and Toronto. We spent the night at an airport motel in Halifax.

May 25, 2018: Chéticamp & Cape Breton Highlands National Park

We left Halifax in the morning in the pouring rain, and headed to Chéticamp, on the west coast of Nova Scotia, as this would be our starting base to visit Cape Breton Highlands National Park, which I had visited in 2011. En route, we stopped in Windsor at Howard Dill’s Farm, home to the world’s greatest pumpkins (!), and got views of American Robin and Ring-necked Pheasant. Another stop near Walton along Minas Basin yielded American Wigeons and our first Belted Kingfishers of the trip. Black Scoters were swimming in the bay https://observation.org/observation/157790203/.

At a stop near the Shubenacadie river mouth we got good views of Greater Yellowlegs (https://observation.org/observation/157790215/). We had lunch in rainy Truro. We saw the trip’s first Bald Eagle high over the Canso Causeway which links mainland Nova Scotia to the Cape Breton peninsula, while a Common Tern was feeding nearby. At the beach of Port Hood Station Provincial Park, we saw about thirty Tree Swallows, a few Sand Martins, a Song Sparrow and two Least Sandpipers (https://observation.org/observation/157790261/).

Further along the road, the small harbour at Chéticamp beach yielded two American Wigeons, and a Northern Harrier which quickly disappeared above a hillcrest. We stayed at the beautiful ‘Boat House’ (15283 Cabot Trail Appartement A, Chéticamp, Nova Scotia B0E 1H0, Canada) along Chéticamp Harbour, with views over the water and Chéticamp Island. The harbour area was teeming with Iceland Gulls and Glaucous Gulls, and two Common Loons were swimming around. We then headed towards Cape Breton Highlands National Park for an evening drive. We were soon rewarded by great views of a lone male Eastern Moose (https://observation.org/observation/157787228/) with an ocean view backdrop. Watching out to sea, we spotted a few Northern Gannets and Common Eiders. Dark-eyed Juncos were also present. When dusk set in, we heard a Great Horned Owl calling (https://observation.org/observation/157787232/), and saw a Myrtle Warbler in the car headlights.

Iceland Gull, Chéticamp Harbour (pic by Peter Van den Bossche)
May 26, 2018: Chéticamp, Cape Breton Highlands National Park, Cabot Trail & Bras d’Or Lake

After a stop in Chéticamp’s fishing harbour to get good views of the many tens of Iceland Gulls, Glaucous Gulls and Common Terns, we headed back towards Cape Breton Highlands National Park. We hiked the scenic 9.2 km Skyline Trail. In the woodlands, we saw Dark-eyed Juncos and Ruby-crowned Kinglets. We also saw White-throated Sparrows, Savannah and Lincoln Sparrows. The hike also yielded three species of woodpeckers: Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker and Northern Flicker. Myrtle Warblers and Black-and-White Warbler were present too. Out at sea, we spotted Common Murre, two Black Guillemots and a distant Common Bottlenose Dolphin, as well as many Common Eiders, Northern Gannets and two Red-breasted Mergansers. Snowshoe Hare were common and confident along the track, and we spotted one female Eastern Moose browsing in the distance. Heading back to the car, we spotted Common Goldeneye on French Lake, and had great views of a grazing bull Eastern Moose along the main road.

Eastern Moose, Cape Breton Highlands National Park

We then left the national park and drove along the scenic Cabot Trail all the way to Ingonish. Having enjoyed sunny weather during our hike, we had many heavy rain showers later in the morning and at noon. A Ruffed Grouse flew over the road near Ingonish, and this was a lifer for us! Along Ingonish North Bay, we spotted Red-breasted Merganser, Common Eider, Double-crested Cormorant, Greater Black-backed Gull, Iceland Gulls and Glaucous Gulls, as well as a large group of Harbour Seals.

Double-crested Cormorants, North Bay Ingonish (pic by Peter Van den Bossche)
In the early evening, we arrived at Bras d’Or Lake and the weather cleared. We stayed at the ‘Bear on the Lake’ guesthouse (https://bearonthelake.com/), where we had great views of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feeding on the feeders. Two Bald Eagles flew by, and Common Mergansers and Common Loons were present on the lake, while American Robins were common on the hotel grounds.

May 27, 2018: Bras d’Or Lake & Antigonish Landing

We started birding under a clear blue sky in the morning, slowly driving and often stopping along the 32 km road between the ‘Bear on the Lake’ guesthouse and the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site, along the banks of Bras d’Or lake. Birdlife was varied and plentiful. We spotted a lone Northern Raven and two Bald Eagles (https://observation.org/observation/157787941/) close to the hotel. We also spotted American Robin, Myrtle Warbler, Yellow Warbler and Magnolia Warbler. Common Loon, Mallards, American Wigeons and Hooded Mergansers swam on the lake, while we saw two more Bald Eagles heading north, and spotted many noisy Red-winged Blackbirds in the reedy areas.

Leaving Cape Breton Highland in early afternoon, we headed to Antigonish Landing https://www.alltrails.com/trail/canada/nova-scotia/antigonish-landing-trail, a short trail along an estuary, fringed by marshy meadows and woodland, part of which is a wildlife sanctuary. Although the trail was busy with locals walking their dogs, birdlife was plentiful and the weather was great. We saw three Bald Eagles in total, including one on its nest https://observation.org/observation/157790114/. Two White-tailed Deer were grazing close by, and a Muskrat was swimming close to the trail. Four Spotted Sandpipers were nervously flying around, while at least 15 Buffleheads could be seen quite far on the river mouth. There were many warblers around, which often showed well in ideal light conditions: Myrtle Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, Blackpoll Warbler, Northern Parula. A few Barn Swallows and a lone Cave Swallow were also present. We also saw Blue-winged Teal, American Black Duck and Gadwall, while the woods held a few Downy Woodpeckers, American Robins and Song Sparrows. After that very enjoyable walk, we headed to Port Mouton, south of Halifax, where we would spend the next few days. En route, we spotted Sharp-shinned Hawk and a few Ring-necked Ducks.
Ring-necked Ducks (left) and Blackpoll Warbler (right), Antigonish Landing

Bald Eagle, Antigonish Landing
May 28, 2018: Stuarts Lake, Port Mouton

We spent most of the day in central Halifax for work. At night, we heard Barred Owl calling a few times, along the shores of Lake Stuart in Port Mouton (https://observation.org/observation/157763810/). We were staying in our friends’ beautiful lakeside house (thanks Tarah & Daniel!), close to Kejimkujik National Park Seaside.

May 29, 2018: Kejimkujik National Park Seaside

We spent most of the day in Kejimkujik National Park Seaside (formerly known as Kejimkujik National Park Seaside Adjunct), a beautiful, protected stretch of coastline teeming with wildlife (https://www.pc.gc.ca/en/pn-np/ns/kejimkujik/visit/seaside-bord-de-mer). We started off with a mid-morning hike, combining the Harbour Rock and the Port Joli trails (see map below).
The area consists of woodland, shrubland, open areas, sandy coves and granite outcrops, and most of the hike is done on a peninsula, which made for a very enjoyable morning. Savannah Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Black-capped Chickadee, Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow and Common Yellowthroat were all seen along the walk. On ‘Harbour Rocks’, Grey Seals, Harbour Seals and Double-crested Cormorants were resting, Osprey and Belted Kingfisher were also roaming that area. A few Northern Ravens flew over, and Common Loon were resting and feeding at sea. Northern Flickers were common, we also spotted two Snowshoe Hares and a lone Natterjack Toad (my first one in North America). All along the trail, we had seen fresh bear prints and scat, which convinced us to hike the trail again at dusk.

This proved to be a great idea. The evening hike was even more rewarding than the morning hike. We had the park entirely to ourselves, and even before starting the hike, on the access road to the park, we spotted an approachable North American Porcupine (lifer!), which later climbed a tree. Starting off on the hike, we soon spotted Eiders and a lone male Harlequin Duck, as well as a large group of seals at Harbour Rocks. Willets, Pectoral Sandpipers and two Black Guillemots could be seen well, when we suddenly saw a panicky White-tailed Deer running in the open area. A few seconds later, a Black Bear appeared, just about 30 meters from the trail. This was the highlight of the day. A male Merlin flying over just before sunset, and eerily calling Common Loons made the evening complete. We celebrated with local beers on a rock overlooking the trail.
May 30, 2018: Stuarts Lake, Port Mouton

We spent most of the day in the wooded Lake Stuart area in Port Mouton, birding, reading and canoeing. In the woods, Northern Parula, Red-eyed Vireo, Swainson’s Thrush, Yellow Warbler, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Myrtle Warbler were present. We also spotted two Snowshoe Hares, a few American Red Squirrels and Eastern Chipmunks. Along the lakeshore, we saw a Lincoln’s Sparrow. Turkey Vultures were regularly flying over and soaring on thermals in the afternoon. Great Blue Herons and Ring-billed Gulls regularly flew over the lake. We spotted one Arctic Tern, and one Common Loon on the lake. At night, two Barred Owls were calling close by.
May 31st, 2018: Lake Stuart, Port Mouton

Our last morning at Stuarts Lake yielded Common Merganser, American Goldfinch, Myrtle Warbler, and four Great Blue Herons flying over. At Mahone Bay, where we had lunch, we had good views of an Osprey [https://observation.org/observation/157787040/] and a few Mourning Doves. After that, we headed to Halifax for our last evening in Nova Scotia.

Friday June 1st, 2018

Departure from Halifax, to Brussels via Toronto and Paris.

Jeanhuge@hotmail.com

Species list (90 species)

American Crow
American Herring Gull
Arctic Tern
American Black Duck
Bald Eagle
Bank Swallow
American Redstart
Barn Swallow
American Goldfinch
American Wigeon
American Robin
Barred Owl
Belted Kingfisher
Black Guillemot
Black Scoter
Black-and-White Warbler
Black-capped Chickadee
Blackpoll Warbler
Blue Jay
Blue-winged Teal
Bonaparte’s Gull
Broad-winged Hawk
Bufflehead
Canada Goose
Cave Swallow
Chimney Swift
Common Grackle
Common Loon
Common Merganser
Common Murre
Common Raven
Common Tern
Common Yellowthroat
Dark-eyed Junco
Double-crested Cormorant
Downy Woodpecker
Eider
European Starling
Gadwall
Glaucous Gull
Great Blue Heron
Great Cormorant
Great Horned Owl
Greater Black-backed Gull
Greater Yellowlegs
Hairy Woodpecker
Harlequin Duck
Hermit Thrush
Hooded Merganser
House Sparrow
Iceland Gull
Least Sandpiper
Lincoln’s Sparrow
Magnolia Warbler
Mallard
Merlin
Mourning Dove
Myrtle Warbler
Northern Flicker
Northern Gannet
Northern Harrier
Northern Parula
Northern Rough-winged Swallow
Osprey
Pectoral Sandpiper
Red-breasted Merganser
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Red-eyed Vireo
Red-shouldered Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-billed Gull
Ring-necked Duck
Ring-necked Pheasant
Rock Dove
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Ruby-throated Hummingbird
Ruffed Grouse
Rusty Blackbird
Savannah Sparrow
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Song Sparrow
Spotted Sandpiper
Swainson's Thrush
Tree Swallow
Turkey Vulture
White-throated Sparrow
Willet
Yellow Warbler