

**LOG OF MV *POLAR STAR***  
**ATLANTIC CANADA**  
**FALL COLOURS VOYAGE**



**October 6-15, 2009**

**Text and Photos by Callum Thomson, Jim Sproull and Jane Sproull Thomson**  
**Wildlife List by Simon Cook**  
**Map by Hannah Lawson**

**[www.polarstarexpeditons.com](http://www.polarstarexpeditons.com)**

***MV Polar Star***  
***Atlantic Canada Fall Colours***  
**October 6-15, 2009**

Captain	Leszek Slawski
Chief Officer	Jacek (Jack) Lisiecki
Chief Engineer	Waclaw Kedziora
Second Officer	Roberto (Bobby) Sainz
Third Officer	Mark Deposoy
Hotel Manager	Natasha Hansen
Head Chef	Robert (Bob) Ward
Office Assistant	Irene Lao
Doctor	Harry Adams
Expedition Leader	Hannah Lawson
Staff	Gilles Bourque
	Kerstin Brauner
	Simon Cook
	John Harrison
	Jane Sproull Thomson
	Callum Thomson
	Ursula Tschertter



**Tuesday October 6, 2009**

**Pier 24, Halifax, Nova Scotia**

**Noon Position: 44°38.1' N 063°34.0' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1013 mb, 15°C**

**Wind and Conditions: NW Force 3 (6-10 knots), seas calm, sunny periods**

A magnificent warm and sunny day greeted us as we arrived at the historic dock area in Halifax to find our little red and white ship the *MV Polar Star* berthed beside the Norwegian ship *Fram* and the new Cunard ship *Queen Mary 2*. After settling into our cabins and exploring the ship, we were brought together in the Observation Lounge to be toasted by Captain Leszek, greeted by Hotel Manager Natasha and Expedition Leader Hannah, and treated to some snacks and bubbly. This was followed by a safety briefing from Chief Officer Jacek (Jack) and Doctor Harry, and the mandatory lifeboat drill.



We had an hour before dinner to watch as the ship sailed out of Halifax Harbour past McNab's Island in company with the *Explorer of the Seas*. By then it was dinnertime and we enjoyed our first meal on board as we headed out towards Sable Island. Around the harbour, and as we sailed, we saw quite a number of bird species including Double-crested Cormorant, Great Blue Heron, Mallard, American Black Duck, Herring Gull, American Crow and European Starling (see the separate Wildlife List compiled by Simon). With more business to attend to, Hannah brought us all together in the Lounge again after dinner for a briefing on the use of the Zodiacs and to hear some details of our planned landing at Sable Island tomorrow; our final activity was the great boot search, trying to match our supply of wellies to myriad feet sizes. With that done, most of us fell gratefully into our beds for a well-earned rest while others met in the Polar Bar.

**Wednesday October 7, 2009**

**Sable Island, Nova Scotia**

**Noon Position: 43°56.9' N 59°59.8' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1015 mb, 18°C**

**Wind and Conditions: SW Force 4 (11-16 knots), slight sea, partly cloudy**



The day dawned full of promise with partly cloudy skies and light winds as we approached Sable Island, otherwise known as the Graveyard of the Atlantic for all the shipwrecks that have occurred on its shoals. Today the weather was benign, with none of the frequent fog banks that have bedeviled shipping for centuries; water and air temperatures were in the high teens, with a light breeze and scattered cloud.

We landed in moderate surf on a long sandy beach backed by well-established dunes below the research and weather station. Several curious grey seals were

bobbing in the swells, wondering about the big black beasts invading their waters. Zoe Lucas, a long time Sable Island researcher, and a warden were on shore to meet us and brief us on the human and natural history of the place, and then we were free to wander at our leisure, careful to keep off the fragile dune vegetation. Many of us saw the famed horses, calmly going about their business of feeding while the sun shone. One story has them as descendants of the herd left by Acadians facing expulsion from their Maritimes farms and villages and another suggests they are survivors of shipwrecks. Most of us caught at least fleeting glimpses of the Ipswich Sparrow and many enjoyed the profuse plants and hidden ponds or simply lazed on the sunny beach. Other

new birds sighted throughout the day included Fulmar, three species of Shearwater, Leach's Storm Petrel, Gannet, Pintail, Peregrine Falcon, Great Skua, Parasitic Jaeger, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Greater Yellowlegs. The magic of our visit to Sable Island was enhanced by the knowledge that only 12 cruise ships have visited in the last 20 years and of those, only four – including ours – have been able to land passengers! Our exodus around noon was made quite exciting by the 1-2 m high



swells crashing on the shelving beach, quite often over the bows of our Zodiacs and boat handlers as we gracefully or otherwise embarked near the stern. Some of the departures were especially hair-raising as incoming rollers broke, raising the bow over 45 degrees – now we

know why those little black ropes are fixed to the pontoons. A huge well done to all – passengers, Zodiac drivers and boat jockeys, especially half-naked Chief Mate Jack!

After lunch, we set sail eastward along the north shore of the island and across The Gully, a deep ocean trench where we encountered many different kinds of wildlife: fin whales arcing smoothly through the water, the great whoosh of an exhaling humpback close to the ship, showing off its massive white flippers, many other unidentified whale blows, short-beaked common dolphins and possibly a tuna leaping high out of the sea. As we left, we could see that the east end of Sable Island was dotted with small groups of horses and harbour seals. Two massive offshore drilling rigs were located southeast of the island and an attendant supply ship bustled busily between them. All too soon we were drawn inside either by the lure of Happy Hour or tonight's Recap, which featured a briefing by Hannah on our plans for Louisbourg tomorrow; a discussion by Ursula on whether the whales' activities visible to us on the surface reflect what is going on underneath, such as whether the amount of time or effort breathing indicates how deep they have dived for prey; a description by Simon of the three species of shearwater we have been keeping company with this afternoon: great, Manx and sooty and how far some of them have travelled to spend the summer off Nova Scotia; and an effervescent account by Kerstin of the formation of Sable Island during the last ice age as the result of sand being deposited by glacial action at the edge of the continental shelf. Our last event of the evening was a well-timed lecture by Ursula entitled *Whales of the Valley*, describing the lives of the cetaceans of the Gulf of St. Lawrence, after which most of us settled in our beds sleepy and satisfied with the day.

**Thursday, October 8, 2009**

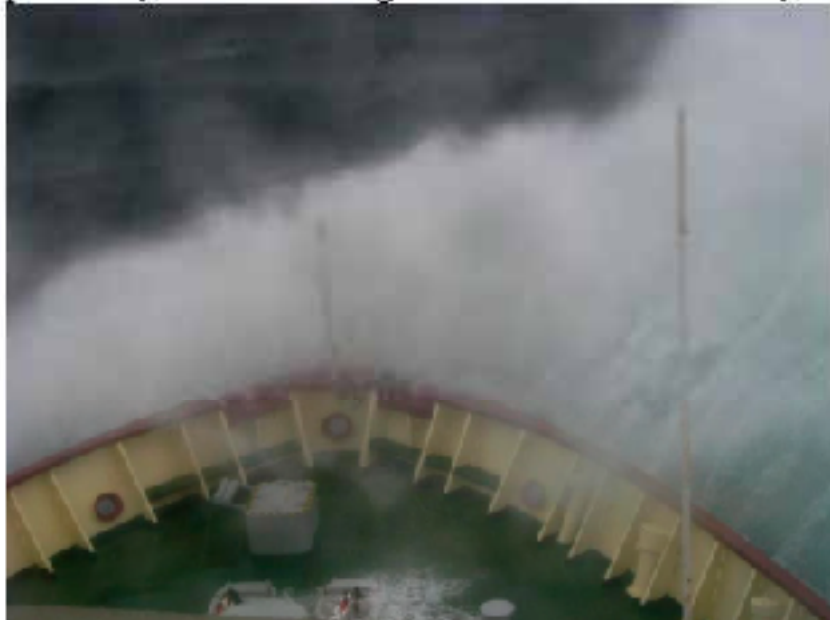
**At Sea**

**Noon Position: 46°17.7' N 59°55.8' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1006 mb, 12°C**

**Wind and Conditions: ENE Force 7/8 (28-40 knots), overcast, very rough seas**

During the night as we steamed up the coast of Cape Breton Island towards Louisbourg our spell of good weather ended and we were back in the rain, fog and high winds so typical of this promontory on the eastern edge of the Maritimes. In the early hours of the morning we made it



in to Louisbourg Harbour and dropped anchor twice but each time the 50-knot winds drove us off our mooring. The Captain and Chief Mate Jack then took the ship back out of the harbour and we sailed into this fierce northeast wind, reaching Force 9-10, while alternatives were sought for tomorrow. The best seemed to be Sydney, a sheltered harbour with lots of space to tie up alongside and from where we might be able to reach Louisbourg by bus, so off we set, making a couple

of course turns which produced great rolls of 15-20 degrees, but only for a short while. Meanwhile, Simon did a lecture on the *Seabirds of the North Atlantic*, with beautiful photos

obtained on previous voyages showing nesting habitats and the birds themselves, many of which we will see on this cruise. Jane followed with a talk on the *Native Peoples of the Atlantic Provinces*, describing how and when native people reached North America and the environments and animals they encountered as they moved into the Atlantic region, finishing with some examples of sites that have been excavated by archaeologists, including herself, from which the past can be pieced together. For a while we bounced around at the entrance to Sydney Harbour but found that the Harbour Pilot would not be on duty until 1600; then we were told that the Pilot boat was out of commission and we would not be allowed to enter on our own, so we turned north once again, now bound for the Magdalen Islands. The wind and swells continued high, with frequent green seas cascading over the bow and sending spray over the bridge windows and decks. However, this did not deter our birders, and new species recorded included Great Cormorant, Pomarine Jaeger, Kittiwake and Puffin. At tea-time we showed the movie *The Shipping News*, set in coastal Newfoundland.

Recap was well attended with people eager to hear of our plans. Hannah told us that we would be off the Magdalen Islands by early morning and hoped to be able to launch Zodiacs to take us ashore for bus tours of four of the six islands that make up the archipelago. Gilles told us a bit more about life on the islands and then we got involved in a humorous discussion about whether the clocks would go forward or backward tonight. John led off the rest of the recap session with a reminder that Giovanni Caboto may have been the first European explorer to sail into these waters (although five hundred years after the Norse) and recounted the exploits of young James Cook who learned his navigation and mapping skills in Louisbourg before setting out to map much of the coastline of Newfoundland. Callum was sandwiched in between John's narrations with a brief discussion of the native occupation of the Magdalen Islands, which preceded any European presence by at least 3000 years. After dinner, in keeping with the stormy day, we showed another movie, *Round Cape Horn*, a brilliant black and white film shot by a sailor on one of the last sailing clippers between Europe and Chile and later narrated over by the sailor, the then retired Captain Johnson.

**Friday, October 9, 2009**

**Les Îles de la Madeleine, Quebec**

**Noon Position: 47°22.2' N 60°05.7' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1019 mb, 10°C**

**Wind and Conditions: N Force 4 (11-16 knots), overcast, slight seas**



Early this morning we dropped anchor at the entrance to Cap aux Meules, one of twelve islands in Les Îles de la Madeleine (Magdalen Islands). A double rainbow to port and a few gleams of sunlight through the clouds to starboard, along with a light breeze, suggested a beautiful day to come in this idyllic archipelago. The Magdalen Islands were first occupied during the Archaic Period, about 4000 years ago. People from Nova Scotia and New Brunswick and possibly the North Shore of the Gulf of St. Lawrence came to harvest the huge herds of walrus that once flourished in the Gulf, as well as seals and mollusks in the intertidal zone. Sporadic use of the islands continued until the historic period, when early explorers such as Cartier met First Nations people. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the islands were occupied permanently by Acadians exiled from the mainland and also

some Scots and Irish, possibly shipwreck survivors; today the ethnic mix is 95% francophone and 5% anglophone. After breakfast we were all anxious to get ashore and the gangway lineup stretched around the stern. We had everyone on the dock by 0900 (don't ask me which time zone that was!) and boarding our three comfortable buses. We each set off in different directions but enjoyed the same experiences as we traversed much of Route 119 over four of the twelve islands, six of which are inhabited.

We visited a fromagerie, where we sampled three different cheeses and were told that all of the milk produced on the islands' dairy farms goes to similar small cheese factories. As we drove, our guides told us that the islands have a population of about 13,000, down about 10% from its high prior to the Cod Moratorium in 1992. We heard about the various fisheries, of which lobster has perhaps been the prevailingly most important since 1875, but may have had a disastrous effect on the natural forests which were used up for fuel and timber in the canning factories as well as lobster traps. Other seafood harvested includes mussels, clams, crabs, cod, herring and mackerel. Fishing is still the number one revenue earner, with tourism a close second.

Other stops involved a visit to l'Artisan du Potier, where we watched a patient potter being photographed a hundred times up to his elbows in flying blobs of wet clay, a quiet fishing port and dryland marina, a park where we had lunch and a chance to stroll on the beach, the second largest wooden church in Canada (after Church Point, NS) and some beautiful views of deserted sandy beaches, long white rollers and sandstone cliffs.

We also stopped at l'Autrefois, a historic recreation of a small farming and fishing community



with an animator giving us the inside scoop on lobster fishing, and finally at an artisans' village where a few shops stayed open to sell their handcrafted soaps, clothing, kitchen-wares and sand sculptures. At 1600 or so we made our way back to the harbour for a dry ride back to the ship in time for tea and donuts. We set a record on this trip for new bird species, due to the varied environments through which we travelled by ship, Zodiac, bus and on our brief walks, including the Black-crowned Night-Heron, Black Scoter, Osprey, Semi-palmated Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Bonaparte's Gull,



Ring-billed Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Common Tern, Black Guillemot, Belted Kingfisher, Blue Jay, Raven, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Palm Warbler and Savannah Sparrow.

At Recap, Hannah attempted with limited success to unuddle the time zones and then described our plans for tomorrow, further up the Gulf. Kerstin graphically explained the formation of the salt domes beneath the islands, upthrusting the sandstone bedrock. Gilles offered an alternative

explanation involving the Creator, a grain of sand, a breath of wind and a Magdalene fisherman named Lucifer – and what a beautiful result occurred (Kerstin declared this explanation 'Rubbish!'). John delved into history to describe Cartier's encounters with walrus and discussed early attempts to combat the ill effects of scurvy and the delight with which the sailors must have greeted such resources as cranberries, fresh meat from walrus and seals, and perhaps spruce for making spruce beer. After dinner, Simon reprised his talk from yesterday on the *Seabirds of the North Atlantic* and then many of us retired to the Polar Bar for *Hawaiian Night*, with decoration and enthusiasm supplied by Sandy.

**Saturday, October 10, 2009**

**Percé Rock and Bonaventure Island, Gaspé Peninsula, Québec**

**Noon Position: 48°31.1' N 064°11.9' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1012 mb, 10°C**

**Wind and Conditions: SW Force 3 (7-10 knots), calm seas, overcast and drizzle**



In light rain and under overcast skies we arrived off the town of Percé, a small town overlooking the famed Rocher Percé and Île Bonaventure. In summer this resort is booming with tourists driving the Gaspé Trail and even this late in the season there were people boarding two tour boats for a spin out to the three main attractions: Rocher Percé, Île Bonaventure for its gannet colony, and the chance of seeing Minke whales, seals and sea birds in the bay. We had guides available to take us on a short tour, visiting the large, century-old stone church and the museum featuring an informative exhibit on cod fishing. Others set off on their own and found a couple of hikes up to lookout points or did a bit of souvenir shopping. Many found a friendly coffee shop in which to warm up and shake off the moisture. On our way back to the ship we cruised along the foot of Percé Rock and framed many photos of the ship and other Zodiacs through the hole in the soft sandstone rock.



We had some good wildlife sightings, with several obliging Minke whales swiftly showing their backs and small fins, many grey seals curiously watching us, and a beautiful little flock of Harlequin Ducks in the white water around the stack off Percé Rock. After a quick lunch of fish and chips we regretfully saw Ursula off to a conference on whales in Québec and began shuttles to Île

Bonaventure. The majority of those landing opted for the 4 km round trip walk out to the Gannet colony, where we were able to come within metres of the most beautiful of seabirds with their golden heads, bright white plumage and black wing tips. Many flew over our heads, coming and going to their nests with a few final feeds for the youngsters before they take off to fend for themselves – sound familiar? Others chose to visit the interpretation centre, where a guide provided ample information on the lives of the gannets, the geology of the island and the history of human occupation.

Jane took one Zodiac group round the island for a look at some grey seals and the gannet nesting site from below, with plenty of the birds busily commuting and some plunge-diving just off shore. Our ride back to the ship was unexpectedly wild, with Force 6-7 winds rising very suddenly and raising 2 m breaking swells. We were all back on board in time for a drink as we sailed round the east side of the island to view the gannet colonies from the sea and then enjoy our barbecue dinner with a good appetite after the day's excursions. Besides Gannets and the Harlequin



Ducks, we had a few new species including Common Eider, Red-breasted Merganser, Bald Eagle, Merlin, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow Warbler, Song Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and Common Grackle. New mammals were also seen: harbour porpoise, red fox and hare. After dinner, Hannah briefed us on our planned visit to Anticosti Island tomorrow and set yet a new time zone, Kerstin explained that the geology on the southeast coast of the island, where we hope to land, is Silurian period limestone very rich in significant fossils from old coral reefs which are recognized world-wide as type sites or strata. Simon took some questions on the seabirds we saw today and clarified that the different stages observed in the young in the colonies reflects different breeding times; later-born chicks may not survive to fledging; the Bonaventure Island colony may be the biggest in the world or only in North America, at 60,000 pairs; the colony members spend the winter at sea as far south as the Gulf of Mexico; the young are recognized by

their call; and the juveniles will likely return to the colony at age three and become sexually mature at age six or seven. John read two of his poems including one on garnets and another with ties to the small village on Bonaventure Island, starting with the evocative line "sea-scored house...". Callum wound up the evening with a few vintage polar questions asked in Zodiacs or at dinner, including our personal favourite, "What is the religion of the people with the patches behind their ears?"

**Sunday, October 11, 2009**

**Anticosti Island, Québec**

**Noon Position: 49°07.2'N 061°40.2'W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1015 mb, 9°C**

**Wind and Conditions: WNW Force 4/5 (11-21 knots), slight seas, sunny**

What a beautiful day and what a picturesque place! At dawn we dropped anchor off the



southeast corner of Anticosti Island and sent two scout boats in to find a suitable place to land and explore. A few miles to the north we could see a telecommunications mast and some buildings and to the south were cliffs, but in between we found a sheltered little beach with a semi-decent approach, fossils from the Ordovician-Silurian Period, easy walking on the beach or in the spruce

woods and a few white-tailed deer browsing in the seaweed. After early breakfast most of us came ashore to enjoy all of this, while a few elected to just cruise the shoreline in Zodiacs. As we returned to the ship we found a few more experiences: baptism by waterfall, a little beach with half a dozen Greater Yellowlegs probing the pebbles for food, several grey seals, beautiful limestone strata, clear water and gradually warming temperatures. All in all, a perfect visit. New bird species for the day included Pectoral Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Common Murre, Mourning Dove, Black-backed Woodpecker, Grey Jay, American Pipit and Snow Bunting. After lunch we steamed along the north shore of Anticosti for a while, past more limestone cliffs, waterfalls and forests, then turned back to the east to cross the mouth of the Gulf towards our next stop – Gros Morne National Park in Bonne Bay. As we sailed we kept an eye out for wildlife, as this is an area frequented by humpbacks and other whales, and showed Part 1 of the movie *Random Passage*, a



story by Bernice Morgan set on the northeast coast of Newfoundland in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, depicting a family's struggles against the fishing merchants of St. John's and the elements. Later, Kerstin presented *Geology Crosscut across the Maritimes*: a look at the geological history of the region and how it relates to the rest of Canada, incorporating some highlights from our voyage. Happy Hour was followed by Hannah's briefing on our visit tomorrow to Gros Mome. Recap featured a description by Hannah of the two species of seals we have encountered, grey and harbour, and a discussion by Jane of the great work done by the Grenfell Mission, featuring a history of the rug-hooking enterprise that contributed cash to the destitute fishing families of northern Newfoundland and southern Labrador. Jane also reminded us that we will be sailing down the Basque coast tomorrow, where whalers would spend a few weeks fishing for cod while waiting for the ice to depart from the Strait of Belle Isle so they could begin their whaling. Many of the place names along the west coast were named by the Basques either because of their geographical features or resemblance to places back home; many others were named by Captain James Cook nearly two centuries later. Recap finished up with a poem by John on fossils, prompted by Carol and by Kerstin's obvious delight at our visit to Anticosti today. After dinner we returned to the Lounge for a showing of one of the Blue Planet series: *The Seasonal Seas*, describing wildlife in the oceans.

**Monday, October 12, 2009**

**Gros Morne National Park, Bonne Bay, Newfoundland**

**Noon Position: 49°29.8' N 057°54.7' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1015 mb, 5° C**

**Wind and Conditions: N Force 4 (11-16 knots), smooth seas, overcast and rain**

We entered beautiful Bonne Bay in early morning and hit the decks to get our first views of this



magnificent national park clothed today in low cloud, rain, snow, sleet and occasional glimpses of a watery sunlight, surrounded by snow-covered mountainsides. We moored halfway into the southern arm of the bay, off Woody Point, put the Zodiacs over the side and had everyone shuttled ashore in 15 minutes – a near-record time. We were whisked off immediately to the Discovery Centre to collect our guides. We then set off to the Tablelands, with a brief stop to watch a small

herd of woodland caribou, an unusual sight even for our experienced guides. We endured some spectacularly foul weather in exchange for the opportunity to get up close and personal with the geological features that Kerstin had told us about earlier. Explanations and illustrations were forthcoming about plate tectonics, continental and oceanic crusts, and a variety of rocks and flora, including Newfoundland's provincial flower, the pitcher plant, which traps and digests insect life to survive.

Although all of Gros Morne National Park is important, the Tablelands are the most significant geological feature in the Park, and the main reason for it being declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. An extensive flat-topped range of hills where the earth's mantle and a complete mid-ocean ridge (ophiolite) has pushed up through its crust, it is composed of ultramafic rock, a rock type that forms the earth's upper mantle and was brought to the surface when the Iapetus Ocean was closed about 470 million years ago during the Ordovician era. We saw a multitude of rock types including pillow lavas, gabbro, peridotite (mantle), serpentinite, interbedded limestone and dolomite. After the tours, we squelched our way back down to the buses and returned to the Discovery Centre, a Parks Canada information and interpretation building that offers



striking views over Bonne Bay.



The hardest amongst us then opted for a strenuous uphill hike with Simon and Kerstin to seek out some of those famous Gros Morne views and feel the pleasant pain that comes with a 300 m steep ascent in less than an hour. The pain was not well rewarded with the views, but we did see a large bull moose calmly grazing less than 100 m from the trail and an abundance of pitcher plants beside the boardwalk. Gros Mome itself, the biggest mountain in the park, remained hidden to view. A few others contented themselves with more leisurely explorations around the

Centre or took a shuttle down to the village for coffee or shopping; everyone arrived back at the dock with smiles on their faces and a few with cases of good Newfoundland beer under their arms. We were back on board by 1300, just in time for lunch, which was as usual fairly raucous, always a sign that a good time was had by all: today, the meal was enlivened even more by a singing of Happy Birthday to our Jane. Other new wildlife sightings were of the American Robin and House Sparrow. As we sailed out of Bonne Bay we were met by Force 6 (28-33 knots) winds and plenty of spray over the bow and a last view of the wooded slopes of Bonne Bay. We continued to enjoy the magnificent scenery of the Long Range Mountains for another hour, including an amazing spectacle of a reversing waterfall with the water being blown upward in the near-gale force winds, but then had to head further offshore past the Port au Port Peninsula, Codroy and Cape Ray (all corrupted Basque names) and along the south coast towards St. Pierre. In mid-afternoon, we resumed our showing of *Random Passage*, which kept us going almost to Happy Hour and Recap. After Hannah's description of our planned activities at St. Pierre tomorrow, Jane recounted a story of an encounter between a US naval fleet and a lighthouse, John described the various uses of whale baleen, sperm whale teeth for scrimshaw, and ambergris; and Kerstin by popular request described her graduate research focus on Forest Rings in northern Ontario. The evening ended for most of us with Hannah's *The Polar Star Year*,

a look at wildlife around the globe as seen during a year aboard *Polar Star*, beginning in Antarctica. While the swells and wind continued to produce a lot of motion on the ship through the evening, the clouds dissipated and the stars came out as we sailed past the small coastal communities of southwest Newfoundland, brightly alight.

**Tuesday, October 13, 2006**

**St. Pierre et Miquelon, France, off the South Coast of Newfoundland**

**Noon Position: 47°06.4' N 56°09.4' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1021 mb, 11°C**

**Wind and Conditions: WSW Force 4 (11-16 knots), partly cloudy, slight seas**

As we rounded Cape Ray in the wee hours, the motion on the ship changed appreciably with the wind behind us and we were able to get some sleep at last. As we rose, we had a beautiful start to the day, with the sun rising over a narrow band of cloud on the horizon, a light breeze and warm temperatures. After breakfast Hannah, Simon and other keen wildlife spotters on the bridge began to see the first of probably a dozen high, narrow spouts in the distance: blue whales feeding. The blue whale is the largest mammal ever, reaching upwards of 30 m in length; despite its rarity it is frequently spotted off the south coast of Newfoundland. Simon and his gang spotted a total of at least twelve blue whales, a mother and calf humpback and a fin whale during the morning – quite a catch on any day's voyage. Callum was able to fit in his talk on *Vikings in Vinland* as the spouts dwindled, discussing the Norse arrival in Greenland in A.D. 985, their brief attempt at a settlement in North America at L'Anse aux Meadows, which was used as a staging post for explorations in the Gulf of St. Lawrence (Vinland) and beyond, and their abandonment of both the Newfoundland site and Greenland. We steamed on at full speed

around the north end of St. Pierre and Miquelon and offered engine-room tours until lunchtime, when we



arrived at St. Pierre.

At about 1400, the Pilot boarded our ship and brought us into the inner harbour. Half the group then set off on a bus tour of St. Pierre, the smaller of the two inhabited islands but the most important as it contains the capital city. Our guide and driver conducted a dual commentary on life on the islands and showed us many beautiful and historic sights. The other half took Zodiacs (our last ride!) across the narrow channel to the little former fishing settlement of Île aux Chiens, renamed more poetically Île aux Marins by an early 20<sup>th</sup> century PR expert. The settlement was abandoned finally in 1963, when the last day in the little one-room classroom was recorded on the blackboard for future tourists. Through the rest of the 1960s and 1970s the houses were allowed to fall to ruin, but then an ambitious tourism initiative funded the rebuilding of many of the structures in the 1980s. Today visitors can see the summertime homes of local residents of

the main islands, a lovely little museum featuring items from the island's long history including a jukebox recovered from the fortuitous 1973 Christmastime wreck of the *Transpacific*, and a restored 1950s era apartment. Outside we also found fishing dories and associated equipment, some impressive but never-fired cannons at the 1854 fort overlooking the approach to St. Pierre, a pretty Catholic church which served the large families common to the little community, the museum, and some vegetable gardens making use of the abundant kelp as fertilizer.

Surrounding most of the houses are hectares of fish flakes – expanses of beach cobbles on which salt fish were laid to dry, interspersed with narrow laneways used to divide the properties and



along which the fish was transported by hand- or wheel-barrow. Some of us decided to pass up either the bus tour or the visit to Sailors' Island prior to the ship's departure to stay in town in search of some French cuisine and wines – we

wish you luck with Canada Customs tomorrow! We were all back on board by 1730, waited another half hour for the Pilot to board and then set sail for Sydney, passing the island of Langlade to starboard. Recap featured a description by Simon of a sparrow, a warbler and a racing pigeon noted today that sent him into raptures and reminded us that the deck and the bridge are the places to make these encounters – not the observation lounge or cabins. John then showed a few slides lampooning French officialdom, and read another of his poems, this one in praise of the Zodiac. After dinner, we finished up a packed day with a showing of *Ocean Deep*, an episode from the BBC series Planet Earth..

**Wednesday, 14 October, 2009**

**Sydney, Baddeck and Louisbourg, Nova Scotia**

**Noon Position: 46°08.5' N 060°12.0' W**

**Pressure and Temperature: 1014 mb, 10°C**

**Wind and Conditions: NNW Force 4/5 (11-21 knots), partly cloudy, smooth seas**

We arrived off Sydney Harbour as dawn was breaking and were met by an enthusiastic whale slapping its tail and an outgoing Marine Atlantic ferry bound for Port aux Basques. By 0730 the Pilot was butting his way out against 25 knot winds, sending his little boat into corkscrew convulsions. We were tied up alongside by 0900 and were boarded by Canada Customs and Immigration for our return from France. After we cleared, we boarded two buses, one to Baddeck and the other to Louisbourg – a tough choice on such a beautiful sunny day – and enjoyed the ride through brilliant fall colours with our knowledgeable guides.

The Fortress of Louisbourg was a busy seaport from 1713 until 1768 when it was abandoned by the British (they too couldn't stand the constant fog, we're told). As a major cod fishing station located at the entrance to the New World, it was of enormous strategic importance to France. Trade was carried on with France, the West Indies, Quebec, Acadia and New England. During the French-English wars for control of North America, the Phoenix Fortress became a military stronghold and reached a population of ten thousand at its height. It was finally lost to Amherst



and Wolfe who mounted a sneaky attack overland in the winter of 1758 (although there are those who said the French who guarded it hated the constant dreary weather along with the isolation so much that they were happy to surrender and quit the place). Because it was never built over after its abandonment, the fortress remained well preserved under the growing overburden of soil through the ensuing centuries.

During the 1960s, Parks Canada began the excavation and accurate period reconstruction of one-fifth of the original settlement -- today explored by hundreds of thousands of

enthusiastic visitors each year. We spent a fascinating couple of hours with our guides strolling the town's streets, interacting with the costumed citizens going about their daily lives, reading the informative interpretation panels and museum exhibits and appreciating the skills of the artisans of forty years ago who assembled this remarkable reconstruction.

Those who decided on the Baddeck option travelled along the shore of the Bras d'Or Lakes, an inland arm of the sea. Mi'kmaq and their predecessors have camped along this body of water for thousands of years, moving seasonally to exploit various fish species, seals, mollusks and shellfish, berries and caribou. Baddeck is on the northwest shore, near the mouth of the Baddeck River. Following an initial settlement by Loyalists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the first Scottish immigrants arrived in Cape Breton in 1802, fleeing the economic and social hardships of the Highlands. By 1850, the small village of Baddeck began to grow and prosper as a region centre of government, shipbuilding and commerce. The beautiful and tranquil community began to attract tourists, including Alexander Graham Bell and his family in 1885. Bell and the town are now forever linked.

From his summer home, Beinn Breagh, the Scottish-born inventor followed up on his earlier success with the telephone by overseeing the flight of the Silver Dart, the first heavier-than-air manned flight in the British Empire in 1909; the first X-rays in Canada; and in 1919 the launch of the hydrofoil HD-4, at over 100 kph the fastest marine craft in the world at the time. His wife Mabel also had a major influence on the community, developing the first library in Cape Breton and founding the Home and School Association and a women's



club. In 1956, the Alexander Graham Bell National Historic Site was opened and today attracts about 150,000 visitors a year. We toured the museum and had a few minutes to sample excellent tea and scones in the Bell Café before boarding our bus back to Sydney. As we sailed out of the harbour, we passed the *Fairley Mowat*, a Greenpeace ship seized last year for interfering with the harp seal hunt in the Gulf and now for sale to raise funds for the subsequent court fine. The wind rose to Force 8 (36-40 knots as we reached open water, the partly cloudy conditions allowed the sun to illuminate the mass of whitecaps. The birders had one last good day with several new additions to the list: Red-throated Loon, Canada Goose, Long-tailed Duck, White-winged Scoter, Surf Scoter, Sharp-shinned Hawk and Rough-legged Hawk, and some beautiful sightings of bald eagles over the Bradd'Or Lakes.



After a late lunch, we settled our accounts with Natasha. The *Random Passage* junkies enjoyed another couple of segments of the series while others packed and then at 1800 we joined Captain Leszek and his crew, Natasha and the hotel staff and Hannah and the expedition staff for a farewell toast. This was followed by a showing of the *Voyage Slideshow*, the best of the thousands of photographs shot by staff on our various adventures during this trip, compiled by Kerstin for the voyage CD. We closed off the night by organizing a talent show

with various acts by staff, crew and passengers in the observation lounge, including some songs and tales relevant to our journey from Halifax around the Gulf of St. Lawrence via St. Pierre and back to Halifax.

**Thursday, 15 October 2009**

**Halifax, Nova Scotia**



In late morning we sailed back into the historic port city of Halifax, the British military stronghold on Nova Scotia's mainland founded in 1749. Our mooring is itself historic, as the piers in this southern part of the entrance to the harbour were where many of the early immigrants to Canada and the United States made their first landfall, overlooked by the historic batteries of George's Island. Today we wish

you all a safe and speedy return home and hope you come back to see us soon.

**During this voyage round the outer Gulf of St. Lawrence we have sailed 1724 nautical miles.**



## FALL COLORS WILDLIFE LIST

6- 15th October 2009

BIRDS	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Red-throated Loon									X	
Northern Fulmar		X	X				X	X	X	
Manx Shearwater		X								
Great Shearwater		X	X					X		
Sooty Shearwater		X								
Leach's Storm-petrel		X	X				X		X	
Northern Gannet		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Double-crested Cormorant	X			X	X	X			X	
Great Cormorant			X	X	X			X		
Great Blue Heron	X			X						
Great Egret		X								
Black-crowned Night-Heron				X						
Canada Goose									X	
Mallard	X									
American Black Duck	X								X	
Northern Pintail		X								
Common Eider					X	X				
Harlequin Duck					X					
Long-tailed Duck									X	
White-winged Scoter									X	
Surf Scoter									X	
Black Scoter				X	X				X	
Red-breasted Merganser					X	X			X	
Common Merganser									X	
Osprey				X						
Sharp-shinned Hawk									X	
Rough-legged Hawk									X	
Bald Eagle					X	X			X	
Merlin					X	X				
Peregrine Falcon		X		X	X			X		
Semipalmated Plover				X		X				
Greater Yellowlegs		X		X		X				
Ruddy Turnstone				X						
Sanderling				X						
Pectoral Sandpiper						X				
White-rumped Sandpiper						X				
Red-necked Phalarope						X				
Great Skua		X								
Pomarine Jaeger			X					X		
Parasitic Jaeger		X								
Black-legged Kittiwake			X	X		X	X	X		
Bonaparte's Gull				X						
Ring-billed Gull				X	X	X			X	
American Herring Gull	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Lesser Black-backed Gull		X								
Great Black-backed Gull				X	X		X		X	
Common Tern				X						
Common Murre						X				
Black Guillemot				X	X	X				
Atlantic Puffin			X							
Mourning Dove						X				
Belted Kingfisher				X						
Black-backed Woodpecker						X				
Blue Jay				X		X	X		X	
Gray Jay						X				

American Crow	X				X	X	X	X	X	
Northern Raven				X					X	
Black-capped Chickadee					X					
Red-breasted Nuthatch					X					
Ruby-crowned Kinglet					X					
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher				X						
American Robin							X		X	
American (Buff-bellied) Pipit						X				
European Starling	X			X				X	X	
Yellow Warbler					X					
Yellow-rumped Warbler				X				X		
Palm Warbler				X						
Savannah Sparrow				X	X					
Spizch' Sparrow		X								
Song Sparrow					X	X		X		
Fox Sparrow					X					
White-throated Sparrow					X	X				
Dark-eyed Junco					X	X				
Snow Bunting						X				
Common Grackle					X					
House Sparrow							X	X		
MAMMALS										
Humpback Whale		X						X	X	
Northern Minke Whale					X					
Fin Whale		X						X		
Blue Whale								X		
Short-beaked Com. Dolphin		X						X		
Atlantic White-sided Dolphin						X				
Harbour Porpoise					X					
Grey Seal		X				X		X		
Harbour Seal		X			X					
Red Fox					X					
Hare					X					
White-tailed Deer						X				
Caribou							X			
Moose							X			
FISH ETC.										
Jellyfish species										
Tuna? species		X	X							