

The Site Guide

Bird Island, Witless Bay, Newfoundland

Location 19 Miles south of St. John's, Newfoundland

Description Three islands lying in a North-South line from Witless Bay to Bauline, namely Gull, Green and Great Islands. 1. Gull Island is the northernmost island approximately one mile long and half a mile wide. Heavily wooded (mainly balsam fir) with a perimeter of grass and rock. Cliffs up to 115 feet. 2. Green Island, 1 mile south of Gull Island. Steep cliffs particularly on south and west sides. Flat top, grass covered. 3. Great Island, 5 miles south of Gull Island. Variety of habitats: grassy slopes, spectacular cliffs and wooded areas.

Access Nearest airport St. John's (rental cars available). Islands by car 17 miles from St. John's. Gull and Green Islands by boat from Witless Bay, Great Island by boat from Bauline (Southern Shore). A permit is required to land on Gull Island, obtainable from Department of Tourism, Confederation Building, St. John's. Only in the most exceptional circumstances will permission be granted for landing on Green and Great Islands.

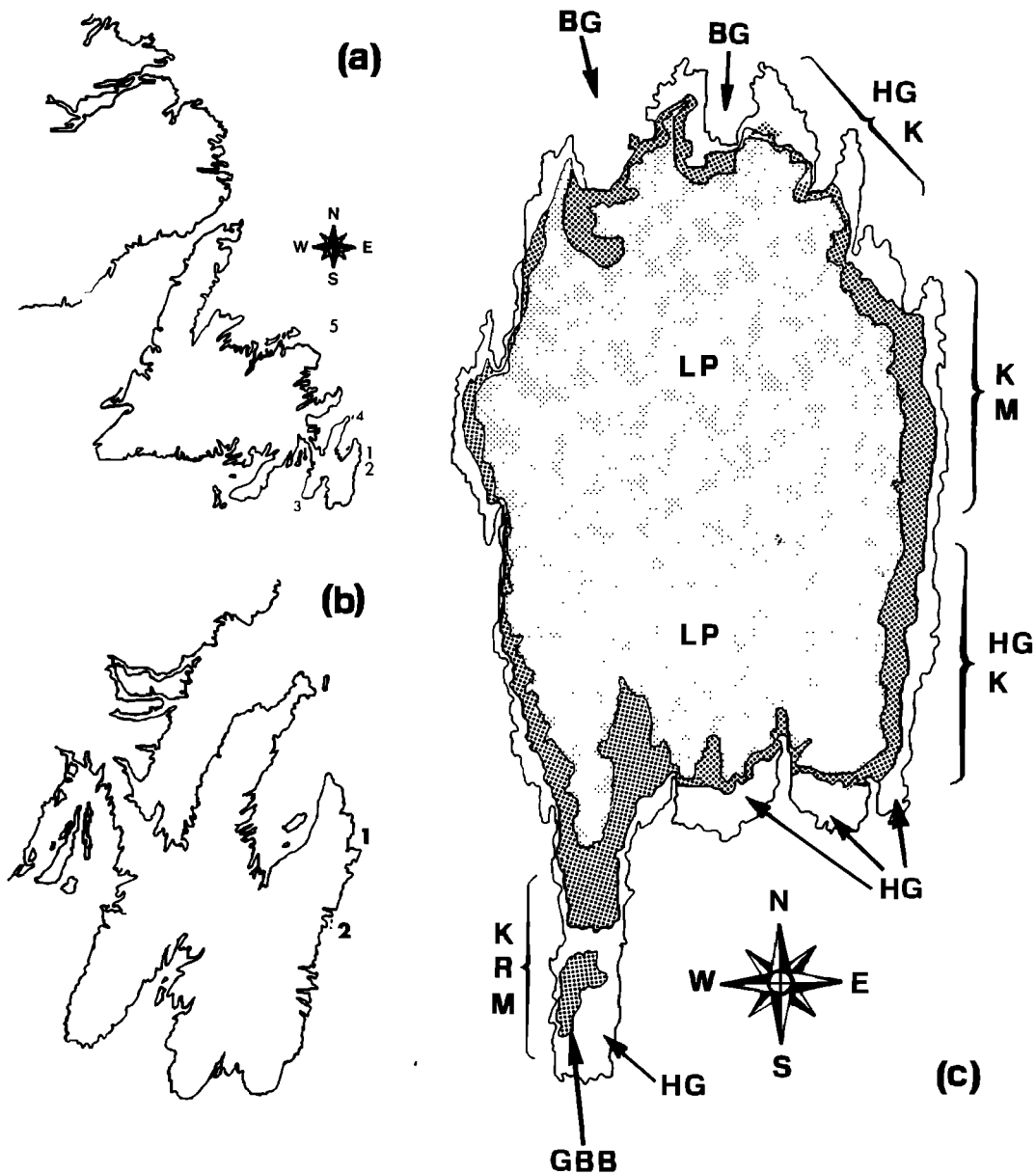
Accommodations Motels, hotels and restaurants in St. John's. (Early booking is advised.) Groceries and gasoline in St. John's and various outposts on way to Witless Bay. Campgrounds in two provincial parks, namely Butterpot Park, 20 miles southwest on Trans-Canada Highway, and La Manche 30 miles south of St. John's, (both fee campgrounds, toilets and water, but no other facilities).

Birdwatching: The area is best known for its vast numbers of breeding seabirds. Gull Island is the most accessible island and the one where visitors, if they keep to the trail, will cause least damage and will be able to observe and photograph the following species of birds: Great Black-backed Gull, Herring Gull, Black-legged Kittiwake, Razorbill, Common Murre and Puffin. Great Black-backed Gulls nest mainly in the

meadow at the southern end of the island, the Herring Gulls on the rocky perimeter and to a certain extent on the grassy slopes, Black-legged Kittiwakes on the cliffs, Razorbills at various locations around the rocky perimeter of the island, Common Murres on the westward facing cliffs at the southern end of the island and on the steep eastward facing cliffs near the northeast corner of the island, Black Guillemots in crevices in the rocky perimeter, particularly in the northwestern corner and Puffins all around the island on the grassy slopes. Leach's Petrels (best "seen" and heard at night) breed in vast numbers in the wooded part of the island. In foggy weather Gannets and Greater and Sooty Shearwaters may be seen near the island, as may Northern Fulmars. The commonest terrestrial birds on the island are Fox Sparrows and Northern Waterthrushes. A trip around Green Island, where a small population of Thick-billed Murres nest, is advised, to see spectacular "flights" of birds from the cliffs. The islands are only accessible after May 14 when the fishing season starts and boats are in the water. The best time to visit is the last two weeks in June and the first two in July. By the second week in August almost all the seabirds have left the island. In winter large flocks of Common Eiders and Black Guillemots may be seen from Witless Bay as may Oldsquaws. Whales are common in the area and are seen on many occasions when visiting the islands. La Manche Provincial Park is well-known for its warblers, especially in spring and fall, while Butterpot Park is a good place to see Willow Ptarmigan.

Rating Summer (May-August)★★★★ Winter (November-February)★★★ Spring (March-April)★★ Fall (September-October)★.

—William Threlfall, Department of Biology, Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, Nfld.



(a) Newfoundland showing, 1. St. John's; 2. Witless Bay Bird Sanctuary; 3. Cape St. Mary's (Gannet Colony); 4. Baccalieu Island; 5. Funk Island.

(b) Avalon Peninsula, Newfoundland showing, 1. St. John's and 2. Witless Bay Bird Sanctuary.

(c) Gull Island, Witless Bay Bird Sanctuary, showing three major habitat types on island i.e. rocky perimeter (no stippling), grassy slopes (heavy stippling) and wooded zone (light stippling). Areas where various bird species may be seen and photographed are indicated. BG, Black Guillemots; GBB, Great Black-backed Gull; HG, Herring Gull; K, Black-legged Kittiwake; LP, Leach's Petrel; M, Common Murre; R, Razor-bill. Puffins (not indicated) around whole island on grassy slopes.



Heavily wooded interior of Gull Island where hundreds of thousands of Leach's Petrels nest. Note part of puffinry in foreground.



Cliff on Green Island, where may be seen thousands of Common Murres (at top), many Black-legged Kittiwakes and a few Thick-billed Murres.

Cliff at north end of Gull Island showing nesting Black-legged Kittiwakes. Black Guillemots are often seen in the water near the cliff.



View looking south on Gull Island. Arrow points to cliffs where Black-legged Kittiwakes, Common Murres and Razorbills may be seen. Green Island may be seen in the centre of the picture while part of Great Island is visible in the right background.