



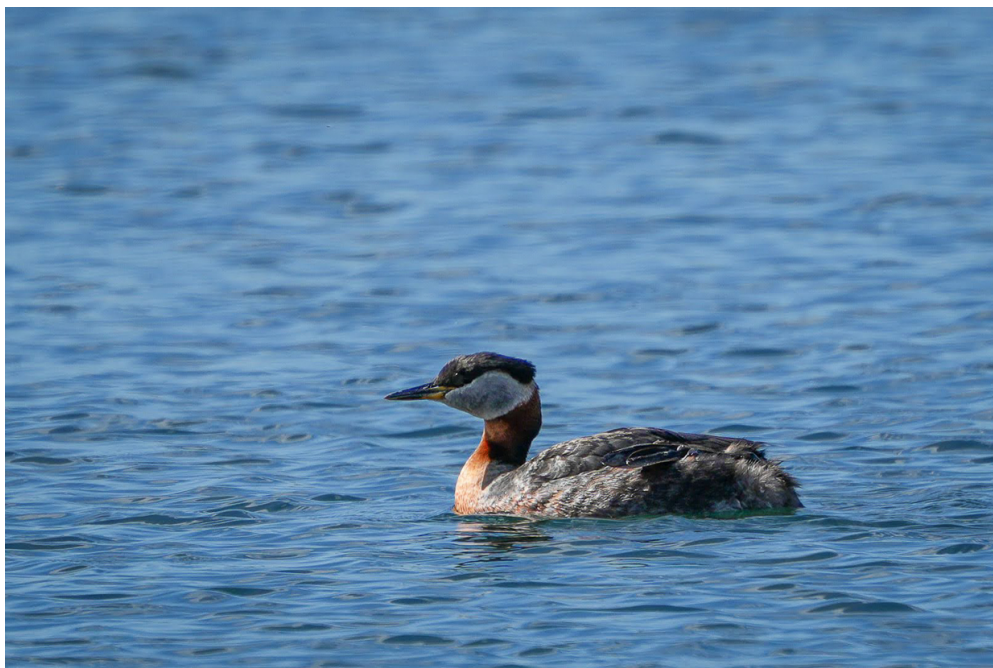
## Lake Erie Spring Migration Trip Report (May 7 - 15, 2024)

[Link: Lake Erie Spring Migration Trip Report \(May 7 - 15, 2024\)](#)

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On the Lake Erie Spring Migration tour, we spent seven days exploring along the north shore of Lake Erie, focusing on three of the best migration hotspots in the world: Point Pelee, Rondeau, and Long Point. The Southern Ontario weather in May can be unpredictable, and this year was no different, but it cooperated for us at just the right times. We began in Point Pelee, a legendary mecca of migration that sticks out into Lake Erie to form the southernmost point of Canada. Here we were treated to overwhelming numbers of orioles and vireos and the much sought after variety of warbler species that makes spring migration in the east so sought after. Our time at Rondeau was cut short because of rain, but that gave us a little extra time to explore Turkey Point, a lesser known spit of sand that overlooks Long Point Bay. Long Point was everything that it was cracked up to be. In the mornings, we explored Long Point itself, the provincial park, and Long Point Bird Observatory's Old Cut field station where we caught up with busy banding operations there. In the afternoons, we explored areas on the mainland known for their unique cocktail of breeding species that are very local in Ontario: Grasshopper Sparrow, Hooded Warbler, and Blue-winged Warbler. In the evenings, we took in sunsets at Big Creek National Wildlife Area and Port Dover. We capped off the tour with a once-in-a-lifetime boat trip to the Tip of Long Point, the first migration monitoring site of the Long Point Bird Observatory. The tip is inaccessible to the public, so this was a rare look into life in one of the most remote places in Southern Ontario! Southern Ontario in the spring is magical, unpredictable, and something that everyone should experience at least once. **Day 1: Toronto to Point Pelee** After a big breakfast, we headed out to make the most out of the morning at Colonel Sam Smith Park along the Toronto lakeshore. Here we looked for new migrants, deeper water ducks, and breeding Red-necked Grebes. Upon arrival, one of the first birds of the day was our only Orange-crowned Warbler of the trip! A species that can be difficult to see in southern Ontario. Warbling Vireos and Baltimore Orioles were everywhere, and we even caught brief views of a Philadelphia Vireo! Scanning the lake yielded our first and only Long-tailed Duck and hundreds of Red-breasted Mergansers as Common Terns buzzed overhead. The real highlight of this spot was in

the harbour, where half a dozen pairs of Red-necked Grebes are breeding. We were able to spend some time with this stunning species in amazing light!



*Red-necked Grebe © Mike Smith*

After cleaning up on our targets and getting a taste of the warblers that were to come, we set off for the long drive to Point Pelee. We arrived in Leamington late in the afternoon, ate dinner and got some rest before the coming blitz of Point Pelee, Rondeau and Long Point. **Day 2: Point Pelee National Park and Hillman Marsh - May 9** We gathered early in the morning to arrived before 6 am in Point Pelee. Despite the busyness, we caught the third tram from the Visitor's Centre to the tip. While we missed the rain, the wind was strong from the East, making the tip a chilly place to stand early in the morning. With the exception of gulls and terns, the birds also avoided the tip, so we decided to check out the North end of the park, where it was more sheltered. After a brief snack at the visitor's centre, we made our way towards the Dunes. Here we had our first Swainson's Thrush, Veery, Cape May Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Northern Parula, and Palm Warbler. But our biggest surprise here was a Summer Tanager!



*Summer Tanager © Tim Lucas*

Summer Tanager can be a very tricky species to see anywhere in Canada and this one was certainly an overshoot. We watched this one catch insects around us for half an hour, giving us awesome views! Riding that high, we went to Freddy's for an awesome lunch of Fish and Chips just as the rain began. After the rain had passed, we decided to check out Hillman Marsh to search for ducks and shorebirds. Here we found Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal, Gadwall, Northern Shoveler, and Sandhill Cranes. We also had great views of Dunlin and a lone Semipalmated Plover. We loved Jose's so much the night before that we decided to try it again.



*Dunlins © Mike Smith*

**Day 3: Point Pelee National Park, Zion Rd. to Chatham - May 10** Day three started much the same as day two, with an early morning and a Tram to the tip of Point Pelee. This morning, the birds were more active and the threat of rain had subsided. The tip was full of gulls, where we spotted two Lesser black-backed Gulls and a Great black-backed Gull among the others. We even got our first good views of Black Tern! However, the North winds had made it tough for looking for songbirds at the tip.



*Blue Jay © Tim Lucas*

We decided to take the Tram halfway and walk the woodland nature trail in search of locals and potential migrants that were seeking shelter. Immediately after arriving we heard a Yellow-throated Vireo. But true to their personality we couldn't get a look. It wasn't long, though, before we were looking at a more impressive species: Prothonotary Warbler! Unlike Yellow-throated Vireos, Prothonotary Warblers can be very obliging, and these two did not disappoint. Continuing on we got our first looks at Eastern Towhee and a few of our target warblers. Blackburnian Warbler was a particular highlight. Perhaps the greatest highlight for the group was walking through one of Canada's rarest ecosystems! We stopped for snacks and coffee at the Visitor's Centre and noticed a steady flight of raptors making their way down the point on the north wind. We also got word of a Mississippi Kite and potentially a Swallow-tailed Kite that was making its way towards us. Before we left the park we walked the Marsh Boardwalk trail and continued to watch for a Kite to fly over. While we didn't see any Kites, half a dozen Bald Eagles entertained us overhead, while Swamp Sparrows and Common Yellowthroats popped in and out of the reeds.



*Tip of Point Pelee © Lee Baillie*



*Birders at the Tip of Point Pelee © Lee Baillie*

With that, it was time to leave Point Pelee, but not before a final lunch at Freddy's while we hopefully scoured the skies for Swallow-tailed Kite. This is one of the lesser talked about draws of Point Pelee: the buzz of chasing rarities around! We then made our way east, stopping along the lake at Zion Road, a locally known spot with great views and awesome hawkwatching. While the hawkwatching was dying down, flocks of Black-bellied Plovers began to come in off of the lake and

land in front of us! Short-billed Dowitchers and Ruddy Turnstones tried to sneak past as well, but we were treated to close views. We also got our first scope views of Horned Larks, a highlight for most of the group!



*Black-bellied Plovers in flight © Tim Lucas*

After leaving Zion Rd. and having dinner at the Chilled Cork in Chatham, we packed in for the night. **Day 4: Rondeau Provincial Park, Port Stanley, Port Burwell, Simcoe - May 11** We had high hopes of a productive morning at Rondeau, but the weather had other plans. We arrived in Rondeau early, only a few minutes before the rain started. Not to be deterred, we set out in the intermittent rain and were still treated to great views of Pileated and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Nesting Purple Martins welcomed us overhead and we heard our first Wood Thrush singing its magical song in the rain. Finally, the rain drove us on towards Long Point, a little early, giving us time to check out the scenic route along the lake. By the time we arrived in Port Burwell, the rain had subsided so we walked into the provincial park and out to the beach that Port Burwell is famous for. On the beach we had our first scope views of Spotted Sandpiper and found another Lesser black-backed Gull. We made it to Simcoe by mid-afternoon, had lunch at Boston Pizza and a short nap.



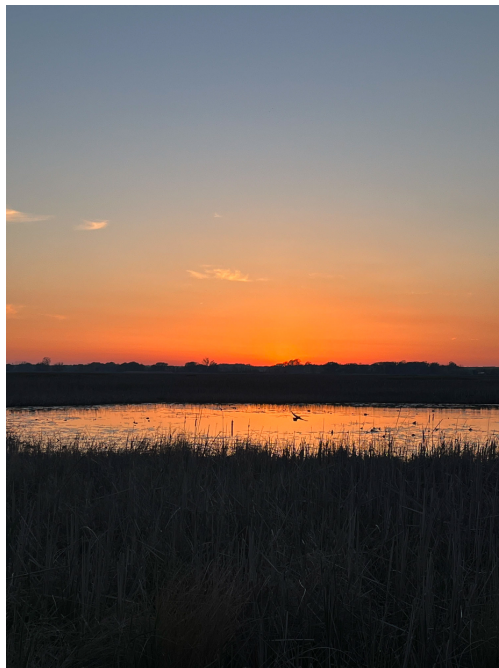
*Birding at Turkey Point © Lee Baillie*

In the evening, we headed down to Turkey Point to check out another of Ontario's best beaches. At this time of year, the beach is devoid of people and the water is cold, but in only a few short weeks, it will be one of the most packed beaches in Southern Ontario. While the beach was beautiful, we were also treated to our best views of Least Sandpiper on our first evening in the Long Point region! We had dinner at the Barrel in Simcoe before rounding up the checklist and heading to bed. **Day 5: Long Point Provincial Park to Turkey Point - May 12** This morning was our first taste of Long Point and it did not disappoint. Our first stop was the New Long Point Provincial Park where we spent the beautiful morning walking the trails and campground. Our first looks at Blackpoll Warbler and Magnolia Warbler were thrilling, but it was another Summer Tanager that had soon stolen the show! We also caught up with Northern Parula and a singing Wilson's Warbler. As we were getting back in the van, we were surprised to find a singing Prairie Warbler! This is a scarce species in Ontario and one that we did not expect! After watching it for a little while we headed towards the Long Point Bird Observatory's Old Cut Field Station.



*Nashville Warbler © Mike Smith*

Long Point Bird Observatory is the oldest bird observatory in the Western Hemisphere, and is a place of ornithology legend. Here we enjoyed watching the banding operations, which afforded us close up views of species like Chestnut-sided Warbler, Nashville Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Veery, and Cape May Warbler. We then made our way further east to stop at Long Point Eco Adventures for lunch in one of the most unique dining options that Norfolk County has to offer! After a brief siesta and dinner at the Blue Elephant, we headed back to Long Point to look for marsh birds at Big Creek National Wildlife Refuge at dusk.



*Sunset at Big Creek Marsh © Lee Baillie*

While rails eluded us, we did catch up with some of our targets like Least Bittern, Marsh Wren, Sandhill Crane, and a spectacle of Bank Swallows rushing past us along the bay. We even spotted a Common Nighthawk that buzzed over our head at nightfall! Satisfied, we headed back to Simcoe to prepare for another two days in this amazing place. **Day 6: Long Point Provincial Park, Backus Woods, Walsingham, Port Dover** Our plan for the second day at Long Point was similar to the first. Although there was rain on the horizon, we arrived early to get as much time in as possible. Upon arriving at the New Provincial Park we noticed an increase in the numbers and species that we had seen the previous day.



*Palm Warbler © Tim Lucas*

Lots of vireos and warblers greeted us along the roadway, including new species like Black-throated Blue Warblers, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Bay-breasted Warblers. We also got great looks at crowd stunners like Scarlet Tanager and Indigo Bunting! One of the rarest species of the morning came in the form of a Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow feeding on the lawn of the campground. This more westerly breeding subspecies of White-crowned Sparrow is a rare visitor in Southern Ontario during migration.



*Philadelphia Vireo* © Tim Lucas

After wrapping up at the provincial park, we made our way to Backus woods, where braving the mosquitos paid off and we were treated to serenading Hooded Warblers, Pine Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and our first Yellow-bellied Sapsucker! We had a picnic lunch by the water at Port Rowan where we watched nesting Ospreys catch fish, and Cliff Swallows building their nests! After lunch we made our way to West Quarter Line Road in search of grassland species. While Vesper Sparrows remained elusive, we did get good looks at Grasshopper Sparrow, and brief glimpses of territorial Blue-winged Warblers. For dinner, we spent the evening in Port Dover taking in the sunset at the beach, ice cream, fish and chips, and excitedly talking about our planned trip to the tip of Long Point the following morning. **Day 7: Tip of Long Point** This morning we went straight to Long Point, where our boats were waiting for us. The weather couldn't have been more cooperative. Light south winds and clear skies promised an easy boat ride out to the tip! After orientation, we set off into the Long Point Bay towards the tip. On the way we were treated to Whimbrel, a close Red-throated Loon, and a Little Gull!



*Approaching the tip of Long Point © Lee Baillie*

Approaching the tip, it was evident that the beaches were full of life! Gulls and terns had packed the tip and surrounding beaches and we were able to pick out a Lesser black-backed Gull, a Semipalmated Plover, and a bunch of Red-throated Loons.



*Tip of Long Point © Lee Baillie*



*Unloading the boat at the tip © Lee Baillie*

Upon landing and orienting ourselves, we began to make the walk towards the cabin at the tip. Birding at the tip was much easier than we had encountered. There were fewer trees, and the leaves had been delayed! We were able to see American Redstart, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Savannah Sparrows, American Pipit and even a perched Merlin! After arriving at the tip cabin, we gathered around to watch the banding operations at Long Point Bird Observatory's first migration monitoring station. Savannah Sparrows, Lincoln Sparrows, and others were pulled out of the bags and processed. Perhaps the greatest banding highlight was two Traill's Flycatchers that were caught at the same time, allowing us to see the variation between species or individuals.



*Bird banding demonstration*

We had a picnic lunch on the deck of the cabin that overlooks the tip dunes, a unique scenery found nowhere else in Canada. After lunch we began our walk back, where we caught up with a Cooper's Hawk, Chimney Swifts, a Short-billed Dowitcher and Bobolinks. After an hour long boat ride back, and a couple of White-winged Scoters later, we made it back to the base of Long Point thoroughly satisfied. We arrived back in Toronto late in the afternoon and wrapped up with checklists, emails and hugs after an amazing 7 days in one of the most outstanding migration hotspots in the world: the north shore of Lake Erie. [Lake Erie Spring Migration bird list \(May 7 - 15, 2024\)](#)