



## Point Pelee & Algonquin 2022 with Jared Clarke & Adam Timpf

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Spring migration is an exciting time for birds & birders alike, and nowhere showcases it better than southern Ontario. Our group of ten enthusiastic travelers, along with guides Jared & Adam, explored some of Canada's busiest and most well-known migration hot-spots along Lake Erie along with the southernmost reaches of the boreal forest from May 10-21.

### May 10-11: Toronto & Niagara Falls

Our group met in Toronto - Canada's largest city and our launching pad into ten days of non-stop birds. Even in this urban jungle, we found delightful birding at Colonel Sam Smith Park and enjoyed our first taste of migrants like Blue-headed Vireo, Nashville Warbler and Black-and-White Warbler. Encounters with local breeders such as Northern Cardinal, Gray Catbird and Eastern Kingbird would become familiar to us over the next few days. We were also entertained by some very vocal Red-necked Grebes nesting near the marina and lingering waterfowl such as Red-breasted Merganser and Long-tailed Duck. We even squeezed in a quick visit to the iconic Niagara Falls - always awe-inspiring, especially on such a beautiful afternoon.



*Colonel Sam Smith Park © Jared Clarke*



*Red-necked Grebe © Jared Clarke*



*Niagara Falls © Jared Clarke*

### **May 12-14: Point Pelee National Park**

After a somewhat leisurely first day (though arguably less-so for those of us driving!), our next few mornings found us up well before the crack of dawn. Eager to experience the legendary migration of Point Pelee National Park, we took advantage of our hotel's convenient "early bird(er) breakfast", checked in at the gate and were sitting on the famous park tram as the first hints of sun trickled in through the trees. Arriving at the "tip" for sunrise, we spent the next few hours birding and soaking in the show (of both birds AND birders) at Canada's most southerly point of land. We spotted a whopping 80+ species that morning alone - including 20 species of warblers such Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Cape May and Northern Parula among others. This was especially exciting for participants hailing from the west and included numerous "lifers", followed by (*respectfully quiet*) cheers and high-fives! Not to be outshone, other dazzling birds such as Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Orchard Orioles popped in for regular visits. Red-headed Woodpeckers crept along branches, Blue-grey Gnatcatchers sallied from the treetops, a gaudy Horned Grebe swam by just off the beach, and a secretive Least Bittern was even spotted napping in a pine tree! This amazing place sure lived up to its reputation.



*Point Pelee sign © Jared Clarke*

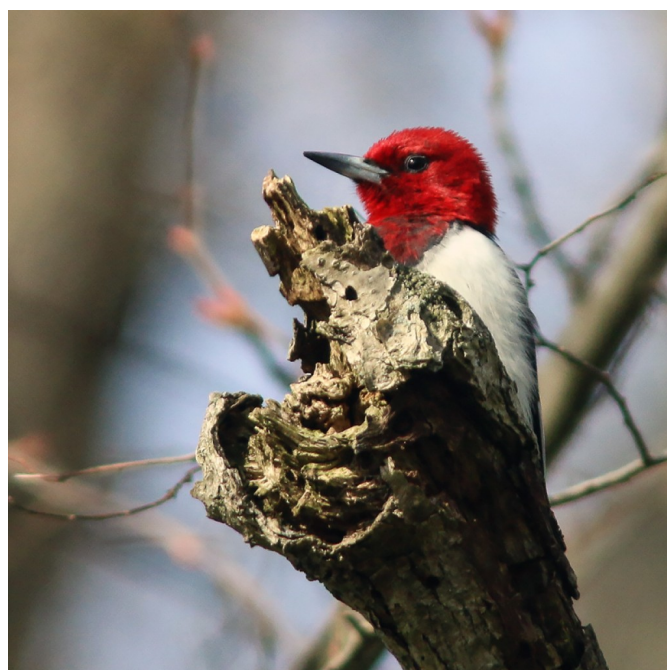


*Group on tram © Jared Clarke*



*Black-throated Blue Warbler* © Jared Clarke

Our early mornings continued, and our group was on the very first tram each day! One morning was rewarded with a light but notable stream of migrants flying south over and along the point - the famous "reverse migration" that sometimes happens here. After three days of birding the tip at sunrise and exploring various other trails throughout Point Pelee, we had easily surpassed the 100 species milestone and earned our celebratory pins to brag about back home ;) Other highlights in the park included Little Gull, Ruddy Turnstone, White-eyed Vireo and Yellow-billed Cuckoo - although it was the general abundance and diversity of birds encountered that really stuck with our group.



*Red-headed Woodpecker* © Jared Clarke



*Birding at the tip © Jared Clarke*

Outside the park, we also visited Kopegaron Woods one evening - a tranquil woodlot that felt almost foreign after all the bustling activity at Point Pelee. A very confiding flock of warblers near the parking lot provided our best and closest views of several species including Common Yellowthroat, Chestnut-sided, Bay-breasted, Magnolia, and Black-throated Blue Warblers. A brilliant Indigo Bunting added some colour to the shady forest, and the variety of blooming wildflowers managed to distract us from birding on several occasions. On another evening, we stopped in at Hillman Marsh to watch a swarm of shorebirds that included Dunlin, Least Sandpiper, Killdeer, Semipalmated Plover and both Greater & Lesser Yellowlegs. We spied our first Black Terns of the trip darting over the water, and a variety of ducks including Gadwall, American Wigeon and Blue-winged Teal. One of our group even had a Groundhog run unexpectedly across the path and disappear in the reeds. While it was difficult to say good-bye Point Pelee, more adventures and interesting places lay ahead - and what is a birding trip without at least one sewage lagoon?!?! Enroute to our next stop at Ridgetown, we checked out the well-known lagoons at Blenheim and found our only Ruddy Ducks and American Pipit of the trip, as well as our first Bobolink and Savannah Sparrows. The mixed flock of shorebirds included dozens of Dunlin and Least Sandpipers, several Short-billed Dowitchers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and single Solitary and Semipalmated Sandpipers among a few other species.



*Dunlin © Jared Clarke*



*Short-billed Dowitcher © Jared Clarke*

### **May 15: Rondeau Provincial Park**

After a traditional “Tim Horton’s” breakfast and a friendly chat with some Ridgetown locals, we headed off to explore Rondeau Provincial Park - another migration hot-spot along the Lake Erie shore. This park may be popular with boaters, campers and cottage-owners but its lush Carolinian

forests and magnetism for migrants makes it equally fun for birders. We spent the morning strolling several areas of the park, bumping into a variety of both migrating birds and local breeders. Even on what felt like a slow morning, we found 18 species of warblers including our first Mourning Warbler of the trip - which, true to its skulky style, managed to elude most of our group. While wandering the South Point trail we heard the distinctive “piz-za” call of the sought-after Acadian Flycatcher, and eventually tracked it down for great views. A walk in the beautiful flooded forest of the Tulip Tree Trail was especially fun, as we encountered several very cooperative Prothonotary Warblers and a Philadelphia Vireo among other great birds. To cap things off, a Black-billed Cuckoo was waiting patiently for us at the end of the trail, right outside the Visitors Centre.



*Prothonotary Warbler © Jared Clarke*



*Acadian Flycatcher © Jared Clarke*



*Snapping Turtle © Jared Clarke*

We enjoyed a tasty and much-deserved lunch at Rondeau Joe's, overlooking the bay and watching fisherman catch "crappies" - as well as several Northern Map Turtles sunbathing on the docks. Leaving the park, we stopped at the nearby Keith Maclean Wetland Conservation Area where two Osprey were lounging on their nest. A small flock of Dunlin and Least Sandpipers were feeding on the field nearly at our feet, while other shorebirds including Short-billed dowitchers and Yellowlegs

fed in the shallow waters. A Horned Lark flushed from the grass, and our first Swamp Sparrow of the week was spotted in the trailside marsh. From here, we continued east to our next base of operations in Simcoe.



*Group at Rhondeau Joe's © Jared Clarke*



*Northern Map Turtles © Jared Clarke*

## May 16-17: Long Point & area

After arriving at Simcoe, some of our group headed out for an “after dark adventure” – starting at the nearby homestead of our guide Adam! At dusk we not only heard several American Woodcock displaying, but heard and saw Eastern Whip-poor-will (a locally scarce bird that is difficult to find in Canada) right outside Adam’s house. A short distance down the road we found Eastern Screech Owl and Barred Owl – both of which popped in for quick but excellent views. To top it off, a neighbour kindly invited us over to watch a family of Southern Flying Squirrels zip around their yard. What an incredible start to our two days in the Long Point area!



*Barred Owl © Jared Clarke*



Over the next two days, we visited several important places and habitats in the region – from wetlands to Carolinian forests and meadows to woodlots. The Old Cut Banding Station is always a fun stop, and this time we enjoyed an excellent banding demonstration from Birds Canada staff that included handheld Mourning Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Canada Warbler and Northern Waterthrush among others. Seeing these birds so up close and learning about the important research being done here is always exciting and enlightening. Strolling the trails of the Old Cut woodlot and nearby Long Point Provincial Parks (both old and new), we found a fun diversity of migrants that were (mostly) stopping by on their journey north. Especially notable were our first Pine Warbler of the trip, several singing Blackpoll Warblers, Mourning Warbler and Grey-cheeked Thrush – but the number and diversity of birds found here was exciting.



*Bird banding demonstration © Jared Clarke*



*Black-throated Blue Warbler in hand © Jared Clarke*



*Canada Warbler © Jared Clarke*

Heading back to Adam's neighbourhood, we searched out a number of grassland and meadow-loving species such as Grasshopper Sparrow, Vesper Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird and American Kestrel. Along the wooded edge we found a beautiful Blue-winged Warbler and a pair of Hooded Warblers. The lush forest of Coppen's Tract rewarded us with Scarlet Tanagers, Ovenbirds and the beautiful song of Winter Wrens. Hiding under a well-placed board we found a stunning

Eastern Foxsnake - a locally endangered species. We all felt a little jealous that Adam gets to live here year-round!



*Scarlet Tanager* © Jared Clarke



*Eastern Fox Snake* © Jared Clarke

Stops at the Port Rowan Wetlands and Big Creek provided our only looks at several species during the tour - Forester's Tern, American Coot, Common Gallinule, Pied-billed Grebe and Bufflehead.

Numerous Great Egrets were feeding in the marsh, and Sandhill Cranes foraged on the berms while Swamp Sparrows sang from the grasses and reeds. Our last stop in this area was a private feeder where we spotted a Tufted Titmouse - a local "specialty" with a very restricted range in Canada.

### **May 18: Carden Alvar**

Having made the pilgrimage north through Toronto the day before, we set out this morning to explore a new and very different landscape - the globally rare "alvars" (a unique type of grasslands with thin soil and poor drainage sitting atop limestone bedrock) of Carden Alvar Provincial Park. We started our visit at "Sedge Wren Marsh", where we flushed a Virginia Rail from the roadside, heard Sora calling and spotted a secretive American Bittern peeking out above the tall grasses. Marsh Wrens were collecting nest material and belting out their buzzy songs, while Wilson's Snipe winnowed overhead.



*Wilson's Snipe © Adam Timpf*

The (mostly) former ranches and pastures of Wylie Road and Cameron Ranch provided opportunities to watch a fun variety of birds - including Upland Sandpiper, Eastern Bluebirds, Eastern Meadowlarks, Bobolink, Grasshopper Sparrows and even a Pileated Woodpecker. Eastern Towhees and Brown Thrashers put in appearances, but we "dipped" on the provincially endangered Loggerhead Shrikes that maintain a stronghold in this region. A stunning Golden-winged Warbler was spotted at the forest edge, and quick stop at the Kirkfield Lift Locks was an interesting aside.

### **May 19-20: Algonquin Provincial Park**

Continuing just a little north, we spent the last two days of our tour exploring Algonquin Provincial Park - a large and breathtakingly beautiful area that represents Canada's southernmost enclave of boreal forest. This land of lakes, rivers and lush forests was very different from any of the habitats we had experienced over the past few days and offered opportunities to find a whole new suite of birds. We began our adventure right away with another night outing - highlighted by the evening chorus of Hermit Thrush, an awesome American Woodcock performance, a very up-close Moose and a roadside Red Fox!



*American Woodcock © Adam Timpf*

Boreal birds have reportedly been getting scarcer in Algonquin in recent years - presumably retreating from these southern fringes of their range due to climate change. We did, however, track down several of our target species including Pine Siskins (at the resort feeders) and both Red & White-winged Crossbills. A Black-backed Woodpecker put in a great showing at the Logger's Museum trail, and we enjoyed an incredible experience with a displaying Spruce Grouse (after not finding it at all the day before). This time, after spotting it high and hidden in the trees, a male grouse flew down and put on an all-out performance for us - sometimes within feet of our gob-smacked crew. At one point it landed on a branch just inches from Adam's face and stared him down - we weren't quite sure if it viewed Adam as a competitor or potential soulmate ;) We also spotted three more Moose that morning, several beautiful Common Loons, and a gazillion blackflies. What a fantastic end to our adventure!!



*Spruce Grouse © Jared Clarke*



*Moose © Jared Clarke*



*Black-backed Woodpecker © Jared Clarke*

Back in Toronto, we reminisced about our trip and shared our highlights, before bidding farewell to each other and heading off in our own directions. What a great trip, with a wonderful group of people!