



Point Pelee & Algonquin trip report 2022 (May 4-15)

[Link: Point Pelee & Algonquin trip report 2022 \(May 4-15\)](#)

With guides: Steve Ogle and Joachim Bertrands 04-15 May 2022 From the shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie up to the mixed boreal forest of Algonquin Park, this tour offered a variety of birds on migration and on the breeding grounds.

May 4 - Arrival

We met at the restaurant of the Toronto airport hotel for dinner. A trip with 5 couples, two hailing from the USA (coincidentally both from Virginia), one from the UK and two from BC. The prospects were good with some cold weather having influenced the migration in the last few days, creating the anticipation for a large event in the next few days. Rarities were around, including a spectacular Marsh Sandpiper on the way to Pelee, a first for Canada and eastern North America. The trees hadn't leaved out yet, the weather would soon turn good - in fact it would materialize in a major heat wave that would linger for the rest of the tour - and birds were about to flood the boreal forest!

May 5 - Lake Ontario and Niagara, as well as an unexpected visitor from Asia

An early start at Colonel Sam Smith produced the first migratory songbirds of the trip. We were lucky to encounter specialties like Red-necked Grebe, Common Tern, Orchard Oriole, Nashville Warbler among other more typical species of the area. The much-hoped Fish Crow wasn't around, but waterfowl was plentiful and some scoping over the lake produced Long-tailed Ducks, Red-breasted Mergansers and a variety of the more common gulls such as Ring-billed- and Herring Gull.



Birders at Colonel Sam Smith Park © Steve Ogle

Niagara was the next stop, and the impressive falls were a highlight of the day for many. Needless to say we couldn't really stop birding and besides taking selfies and photos at the falls, we noticed some Northern Rough-winged Swallows that came in for a quick hunt. A nearby stop at the Niagara Gorge didn't produce the formerly resident Black Vultures but we added some firsts for the tour including Red-bellied Woodpecker, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Blue Jay and even a Woodchuck!



Niagara Falls © Steve Ogle

From here we started the drive down to Leamington, but not without making a small detour at

Thedford Lagoons. This location had been hosting a Marsh Sandpiper for over a week now, and the mega rarity had been drawing quite the crowd. Upon arrival, we weren't only treated with good looks at this rarity, but a cooperative female Wilson's Phalarope was a welcome addition to the list as well! Other shorebirds included Spotted and Solitary Sandpiper, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs as well as a flyover Lesser Black-backed Gull. We enjoyed dinner along the way south and got in at a decent hour at Leamington, which would be our base for the next few days.

May 6 - 8 - Pelee

Our time at Pelee was eventful, as inclement weather influenced our stay. We started off with heavy north winds and rain on the first day, followed by slightly better - but still windy - weather on day 2, with a sunny and great final day prior to our departure. The heavy north winds caused very slow migration during our stay but nevertheless we were able to pick up most warbler species, including even a rare Worm-eating Warbler which had been around for days already.



Worm-eating Warbler © Steve Ogle

The tip of Point Pelee was an experience alone and standing there each morning quickly filled up our trip list. Good birds were Little Gull, Greater Black-backed Gull and Ruddy Turnstone. It was amazing to look at the actively migrating flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls in the morning, as well as the rafts of Double-crested Cormorants and Red-breasted Mergansers. Black Terns occasionally joined the flocks, and Black-bellied Plovers briefly paused their migration. Interesting ducks seen flying by were White-winged Scoters, Surf Scoters and a single Blue-winged Teal who joined one of the merganser rafts. Most of the birding took place in the rest of the park, which consists of a variety of habitats. We mainly aimed for sheltered spots as the winds kept bashing into the point for the first days, which happened to be the right strategy! We ended up with many migrants seen, including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Eastern Phoebe, White-eyed-, Blue-headed- and Warbling Vireo, Northern Mockingbird, Veery, Orchard and Baltimore Oriole, Field Sparrow and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. The warbler list ended up being pretty impressive, with the Worm-eating Warbler being the highlight, rarity-wise, as well as a Prairie Warbler our group was able to find, resulting in quite a twitch by local birders! The list went on with other species such as Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Blue-

winged Warbler, Prothonotary Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-throated Blue Warbler, Palm Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler.



Prothonotary Warbler © Steve Ogle



Black-and-White Warbler © Joachim Bertrands



Black-throated Green Warbler © Joachim Bertrands

Resident birds were not disappointing either, and a roosting American Woodcock which kept a close eye on us, can definitely be considered one of many highlights. A Rusty Blackbird still lingered from earlier that winter, and Red-headed Woodpeckers definitely scored high on the top bird list of our participants. Shorebird spots including Hillman Marsh or Blenheim Lagoons - the latter on the way to Rondeau - were fairly unproductive although we were able to add some good Dunlin numbers to our trip list.



Pelee sunset © Steve Ogle

May 9 - Rondeau

Our visit to Rondeau was marked by beautiful weather but at the same time migration that hadn't picked up yet. We did notice the signs of a good start, as we were able to find different warbler species, yet the big waves were not hitting yet. We started off with a morning walk to the South Point Trail which produced great looks at a singing White-eyed Vireo, Eastern Towhee and our first actual cooperative Chestnut-sided Warbler of the tour.



Walking Old Cut Blvd © Steve Ogle

Yellow Warbler were plentiful, and small flocks of them were foraging once we made it out to the actual tip. On the way back, the local discord app notified us of a Kirtland's Warbler having been seen at the nearby campground, creating a sudden change of plans and had us birding the location for the remainder of the morning. The warbler proved to have vanished soon after the discovery, but other species kept us entertained for the rest of the day: Blackburnian Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, Magnolia Warbler and a low foraging bunch of Cape May Warblers were highlights. We had a great time exploring the forest for other gems, and a stop just outside the park produced better looks on colourful species such as Black-throated Blue Warbler, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Magnolia Warbler.



Cape May Warbler © Steve Ogle

May 10 - 11 Long Point

Our time at Long Point was a memorable one, coinciding with our first real wave of migrants, and quickly filling up our remaining list of to-be-seen warblers. The first day was spent hiking most of the Old Cut area, the new provincial park as well as surrounding woodlots and campgrounds, resulting in an impressive list. The second day we mainly hang out at the Old Cut banding station, which delivered some new birds once again. New warbler highlights were Canada Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Bay-breasted Warbler and Tennessee Warbler. We welcomed some new flycatchers to our list including Eastern Wood-pewee and enjoyed 'eastern' Purple Martins from up close. Local breeding birds were interesting, and some staked out Eastern Screech-owl were a welcome addition to our list. A quick scan of the nearby sheltered parts of Lake Erie added Canvasback and Redhead to our list, and Chimney Swifts were coming in hot thanks to the gorgeous weather. Star of the show was undoubtedly the beautiful male Scarlet Tanagers that graced our group with some up-close views and photographs— a moment to remember.



Scarlet Tanager © Joachim Bertrands



Scarlet Tanager © Steve Ogle

May 12 - Carden

Our stop at Carden ended up being more productive than we had hoped for! After getting in at Orillia the night before, it was a short drive to these limestone semi-prairies and their strange habitat. Upon arrival, it was clear it would once again become a simmering day, as the sun started

burning from an early hour onwards. A North American Porcupine provided great views and was the kickoff of the day. Once we arrived at the reserve, the mesmerizing song of Upland Sandpiper and the winnowing thrill of Wilson's Snipe filled the air. Scanning for 'eastern' Loggerhead Shrike wasn't successful at first, and we continued our way towards the marshes farther north, while Bobolinks, Eastern Bluebirds and Eastern Meadowlarks greeted us. The marsh itself was fairly unproductive and didn't produce the hoped-for Yellow Rails, but a strange buzzing song revealed a singing Golden-winged Warbler which gave away excellent views.



Wilson's Snipe © Joachim Bertrands

The afternoon was filled with searching once again for the enigmatic Loggerhead Shrike, which was eventually found, albeit a distant one. A great addition to the list was a singing Grasshopper Sparrow, which provided great looks from up close.

May 13 - 14 - Algonquin and another unexpected visitor

Algonquin would be our base for the next two days. We stayed at a charming hotel just outside Dwight and explored the park from there. We mainly walked productive trails in the morning and drove around in the evening or early morning, to try and get some birds that hadn't been seen before. Warblers were at the breeding grounds here, and we enjoyed cooperative Northern Parula, Canada Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and - last but not least - Pine Warbler, a specialty from the drier pine woods in Ontario. All gave us excellent views, even with the heat wave now taking grave proportions.



Chestnut-sided Warbler © Joachim Bertrands

An early morning drive finally produced a Moose, something many of our participants had been hoping to see for a while now. American Black Duck was a species that supposedly nested in the boreal bogs, but proved to be fairly difficult at first, until one of our group members spotted a skulking male underneath some willow trees, presumably guarding a nest. Although the tour had technically come to an end at that time, our last morning brought news of a vagrant Hepatic Tanager in downtown Mississauga, a species normally occurring only in Arizona and farther south. Only the third record for Canada, it was a unique opportunity since it did not prove to be much extra driving. We decided to leave Dwight and head straight there, and after a few hours arrived at Shell Park. Small groups of birders immediately gave away where the bird could be found, which apparently had attracted hundreds of people in the morning, right after its discovery. We enjoyed great looks of the bird as it fed often right in front of our feet. We explored the rest of the park, which seemed to host quite a number of migrants, and species such as Bay-breasted Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and Tennessee Warbler were seen as well.



Hepatic Tanager © Steve Ogle



Red Fox © Joachim Bertrands



Spring Lake © Steve Ogle



Black-capped Chickadee taking a closer look

Thank you to the ten 2022 Pelee tour participants for another enjoyable journey through this always-exciting birding zone, where you never know what you'll get around the next bend in the trail or side road. -Joachim



Point Pelee birding group