

## Point Pelee & Algonquin Park Trip Report (May 7 - 18, 2023)

[Link: Point Pelee & Algonquin Park Trip Report \(May 7 - 18, 2023\)](#)

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Guides: Adam Timpf and Steve Ogle

### Toronto to Niagara

Today our group of 11 eager participants plus two guides started around 6am at the airport hotel and made our way to Colonel Samuel Smith park, on the Lake Ontario shoreline. Toronto is one of the largest cities in North America but there are some excellent bird migration hotspots right on the lake. We took a casual stroll out to the shoreline where we could see the entire cityscape, then back again through various landscapes, tallying a fine list of birds for our first morning. Some of these included: Red-necked Grebe, Long-tailed Duck, Common Tern, Field Sparrow and Yellow Warbler. We continued down toward Niagara Falls, but first stopped at a riparian zone near Grimsby to pick up a mix of other warblers including Palm, Black-throated Blue and Tennessee Warbler. Niagara was a quick stop to view the falls, then we b-lined over to Leamington on the 401 highway to arrive for dinner.



*Niagara Falls*

## Point Pelee

We spent three mornings at Point Pelee National Park, Canada's most renowned birding destination. It was quickly evident that this small but significant park is no secret anymore (if ever it was!), with parking lots filling up before 6am, something the guides have not seen in previous years. Despite this, we were able to disperse throughout the park without many problems with crowds. Even the tip area, with lower water and hence more land available, was able to accommodate our group just fine.



*Pelee tip*

The first two days were somewhat quiet on the bird front but this gave us the opportunity to start slowly on getting to know the many birds present here during migration. By slow, we mean just around 80-90 species for the day! Some of the more common species included: Yellow Warbler, Baltimore Oriole and House Wren, which by a few days in were not called out by the guides anymore!



*Scarlet Tanager*

Our third day in the park offered a good push of migration, and while at the tip we viewed a few rarer species flying out over the lake, such as: Red-headed Woodpecker, Orchard Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, Prothonotary Warbler (verified by photos later) and Willow Ptarmigan. Yes, that's right: a Willow Ptarmigan! This individual was likely the same bird sighted in Toronto and Wheatley in previous days, and boy did it put on a show for everyone before deciding enough was enough and Pelee Island looked like a quieter setting. The Tip sure is a wild place to go birding and anything can show up!



*Willow Ptarmigan at Point Pelee*



*Guide Adam Timpf*

All three days we enjoyed lunch at the Marsh Boardwalk/ Blue Heron picnic area where folks had some time to wander into the marsh and look for around for warblers while we had a picnic. On our last morning before departing Pelee we did have quite a session with the warblers on Tilden's Woods trail, where every bush was "dripping" with birds, some of which were not shy whatsoever. This was likely a highlight for most in the group. On one afternoon we decided to visit Hillman Marsh, where plenty of waterbirds were found. These included many Dunlin, two White-rumped Sandpipers, and two species of egret (both Great and Snowy, the latter being a rarity). Some ducks were present too (Northern Shoveler, Blue-winged Teal, etc.). In the afternoon of our third day we left the park and visited another shorebird site: Blenheim Sewage Lagoons. These proved to be an excellent stop, and we had good looks at Bobolink, Black Tern and Short-billed Dowitcher among others. Soon after we continued to Chatham.



*Kopegaron Woods near Pelee*

## Rondeau Provincial Park

This is a perennial favourite and indeed the group seemed to enjoy this nice parcel of Carolinian forest for a morning. Birds were still very active, especially in the interior of the park. Similar to Pelee, most of the warblers were already feeding by mid-morning in areas where small flies, or midges, were abundant.



*Rondeau, South Point Trail*

Many warblers were found along “Warbler Way” trail, for example. The visitor centre did not have much action at the feeders, so instead we did a short loop on the Tulip Tree Trail. After this, we went looking for an Eastern Screech-Owl that was nesting (or simply roosting) in a tree at one of the campsites. It took a lot of searching and finally after asking some friendly campers, we tracked down the camouflaged bird poking out of a cavity!



*Tulip Tree sapling*

We ate lunch at Rondeau Joe's, right on Rondeau Bay, where a Northern Map Turtle that had just hatched nearby was found under one of our tables, and it was released to the wild.



*Northern Map Turtle*

From here we continued to Simcoe, stopping at the Port Stanley Sewage Lagoons where we tracked down Pied-billed Grebe, Common Gallinule, among other species.

## **Long Point**

Norfolk County is known as the most forested part of southwestern Ontario. For the most part, the forest patches are found inland and away from the shores of Lake Erie and Long Point itself. As such, the accessible migration hotspots in the region are mainly smatterings of trees among cottages and campgrounds at the base of the point. Although it does not sound ideal, it has the effect of funneling migrants, making birding exciting at times. Nearby, one can find some excellent woodlot reserves, grassland areas and marshes. Although we didn't have too much action on either of the two mornings around the base of Long Point, we did enjoy some moments of activity, getting our first good looks at Tennessee Warbler, Green Heron and Purple Martin. In the afternoons, we fanned out and explored other parts of the county and ended up with quite a list of birds. We found Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrow, Hooded Warbler and Whip-poor-will on Adam's property. We visited Backus Woods- the site with the most species of breeding birds in Canada- and found Prothonotary Warbler, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers, and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. During our forays at Long Point we encountered some interesting reptiles, including a Blanding's Turtle and Eastern Fox Snake. Two other highlights of our Long Point visit were the lunches. First, we were fed some hearty fare by Adam's mom in their open atrium, and the next day we stopped at a nice patio near Turkey Point. Anywhere with good food and birding in the vicinity is a win!

## **Carden Alvar**

We had a three-hour drive up from Simcoe to Orillia and we managed to navigate around Toronto traffic in fine form. The next morning we finally had a late start (7am!) and continued to the nearby Carden Alvar, a flat limestone plain known for rare plant species, some intact grasslands, and of course, birds. Some of our target species included: Upland Sandpiper, Loggerhead Shrike, Golden-winged Warbler, Wilson's Snipe and Grasshopper Sparrow. We had good luck on all fronts, except for Loggerhead Shrike, which reportedly had been absent of late. We had another fine lunch at a funky place called "Quaker Oaks" before driving up on secondary roads to Dwight, at our hotel on Spring Lake. There was a successful evening drive into Algonquin Park to look for moose and Woodcock.

## **Algonquin Park**



*Algonquin Visitor's Centre*

This very large provincial park is a popular place for folks from Toronto to visit, and it is an excellent birding area on the edge of the boreal forest. Our target birds here were all “boreal specialists,” including Black-backed Woodpecker, Spruce Grouse, Canada Jay and Boreal Chickadee. On the very first trail we walked (Spruce Bog boardwalk) it was staggering to encounter three of these species within the first half an hour! It was almost like we planned it. It was almost like we choreographed that the Spruce Grouse would walk between one person’s legs!



*Spruce Bog Boardwalk, Algonquin*



*Spruce Grouse walking through legs*

During our time in Algonquin we enjoyed several other trails, trailheads, the visitor centre, feeders at the hotel, and a picnic lunch. We saw about half a dozen moose at various roadside wetlands. One particular moment behind the hotel was exciting, when Adam pulled a Canada Warbler out of the woodwork and most of us had an opportunity to view this beauty of a bird. A flock of Veery in a grassy area was also memorable on our last morning before heading south.



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*Moose in Algonquin*



*Veery*

After a full day in the park plus an evening and a morning, we departed. On the way down, we stopped to check out a new area known for the possibility of hosting breeding Kirtland's Warblers. We did not see nor hear any, but the walk helped us understand their habitat nonetheless—not to mention it was an excuse to stretch the legs. A final stop at Happy Valley Reserve (Nature Conservancy Property) was pleasant. What a difference a week makes for the foliage; the leaves were out and it felt like summer underneath a canopy of maturing maple trees. This habitat is the preferred haunt of the Barred Owl, and with this in mind Adam employed a little playback and voilá: a Barred Owl responded and flew in for all to see! A short drive took us back to our airport hotel in Toronto where we enjoyed a final meal together, thus ending a highly successful birding tour!



*Point Pelee Birding Tour*

[See trip checklist](#)