

Point Pelee & Algonquin Park Itinerary

[Link: Point Pelee & Algonquin Park](#)

Tour Overview

Join us for an exciting birding tour of Point Pelee and other spring migration hotspots of southern Ontario, finishing with several days in Algonquin Provincial Park.

On this exciting tour of beautiful Ontario, we rendezvous with the myriad of neotropical and other migrants whose arrival coincides with our own. At Lake Erie's "Big 3" migration hotspots—Point Pelee, Rondeau and Long Point—we search for species such as Red-headed Woodpecker, White-eyed Vireo, Summer Tanager, Kentucky, Hooded and Prothonotary Warblers while sifting through throngs of beautiful Indigo Buntings, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and dozens of warbler species! No place is better for rarities and anything can show up, with each day bringing in a different suite of birds.

Carolinian forest woodlots near Rondeau and Long Point are home to breeders such as Tufted Titmouse, Louisiana Waterthrush and Cerulean Warbler. Further north, the Carden Alvar supports Upland Sandpiper, Bobolink, Golden-winged Warbler and Loggerhead Shrike.

Finally, spectacular Algonquin Park awaits, where we'll look for Boreal Chickadee, Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker and other northern specialties while keeping an eye out for moose, otter and maybe even wolf!

Itinerary

Day 1: Arrival, Toronto



Our Point Pelee & Algonquin Park birding tour begins with arrival in Toronto and an introductory dinner. Night in Toronto. Anyone wishing to visit Niagara Falls should arrive a day early. There are a number of companies that offer a day trip from Toronto to the falls.

Day 2: Lake Ontario to Pelee



Spring in Ontario is an exciting time for birders. Any morning could bring a “fallout” of migrants and we won’t miss our first opportunity to search for these birds making their first landfall after crossing the Great Lakes. We’ll start off today near our hotel in Toronto at a local nature reserve jutting out into Lake Ontario. Beginning on a pleasant footpath, we’ll get our first looks at migrant warblers – perhaps a lovely tiger-striped Cape May or the retina-burning Blackburnian. We’ll scan Lake Ontario for Long-tailed Ducks and Red-breasted Mergansers en route to their arctic breeding grounds. Common and Caspian Terns whirl in front of Toronto’s skyline while Red-necked Grebes attend to their nests in the bay. After this, we’ll pack up for a drive to Pelee. Night in Leamington.

Days 3 - 5: Point Pelee



Point Pelee is a renowned destination hosting birders from around the world who want to witness spring's intense migration spectacle. We'll arrive at the prime time, possibly coinciding with the birding festival—expect kiosks, pancake breakfasts and a birding vibe. However, there is plenty of room to explore on some of the less-trodden parts of the extensive trail network. For photographers, the leaf-out arrives later here, so the birds will be visible in the budding treetops and bushes, especially earlier in May. A light, warm breeze from the south is the first indication that migrants are on the way. On these days we can expect new arrivals in the hundreds, but if this warm air meets a sudden cold front during the night, the resulting conditions can force thousands of passerines to descend upon the diminutive Point Pelee during their nocturnal procession. The famed “reverse migration” can occur at the tip, where an endless procession of birds fly back south over the lake, often to return and land in trees just above our heads. Everything from Wood Stork to Grace’s Warbler to Scissor-tailed Flycatcher has been seen this way, and this is what excites some birders into a twitching frenzy. On an average day in mid-May there are dozens of warblers, thrushes, vireos, sparrows, hawks, owls and others to enjoy at close range, and if you know where to go it can be done without the crowds. Just imagine seeing a Kirtland’s Warbler during the few hours it rests on the way to its miniscule breeding grounds to the north – an annual occurrence at Pelee! We usually start at the tip in the mornings and work our way through the park, visiting surrounding fields and wetlands such as Hillman Marsh in the afternoon for a diversity of migrant shorebirds and waterfowl. In the evening we return to see birds stacked up in the forests at the north end of the park, or we might go out looking for a rare bird that’s been reported. Anything can turn up at Pelee - and usually does. In fact, finding rarities is one of the joys of birding here. Species that do not breed in Canada such as Summer Tanager, Kentucky and Worm-eating Warblers are not too difficult to encounter. Other species such as Kirtland’s Warbler, Swallow-tailed Kite, Henslow’s Sparrow, Lark Bunting, Mottled Duck and many others have been seen by us over the years. Point Pelee is indeed a birder’s dream come true, and 100 species in a day is regular on our tour. One should expect twenty-to-thirty species of warblers, all potentially foraging at eye-level in their neotropical breeding attire! There is also variety; you may see birds like Little Gull, Eastern Screech-Owl, Cerulean Warbler, Bald Eagle, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, White-rumped Sandpiper, Orchard Oriole, and American Golden-Plover all on the same day! Blenheim sewage lagoons are a hotspot where more migrant shorebirds and six species of swallows can be found and we will visit these enroute to Chatham. Two nights in Leamington then one night in Chatham near Rondeau Provincial Park.

Day 6: Rondeau Provincial Park



Considered by many to be as fantastic a birding location as Pelee, Rondeau is a beautiful Carolinian forest that offers a very pleasant experience. We walk some of the trails in the park, looking for resident Red-headed Woodpecker, Wood Thrush, White-breasted Nuthatch, Baltimore Oriole and the prize bird of the park, the Prothonotary Warbler. Sometimes this "Jewel of the Swamp" allows for arms-length looks at the boardwalk! Early on we will sort through the flocks of returning migrants on footpaths that lead past ephemeral sloughs acting as bird magnets. We'll hope for more "spring overshoots" including Yellow-throated Warbler, Blue Grosbeak and maybe even a Chuck-will's-widow! The visitor's centre has a great feeder set-up and nearby picnic areas offer ideal lunch spots and even white-sand beaches. After lunch we will visit some wetlands just outside the park before driving to Simcoe.

Days 7 & 8: Long Point



Our last of the "Big Three" migration hotspots of the northern shore of Lake Erie, Long Point is home to North America's oldest bird observatory, LPBO. We have many options in the area but the focus is on the assortment of large woodlots that harbour breeding specialties such as Hooded, Cerulean, Pine and Blue-winged Warblers, Yellow-throated Vireo and Acadian Flycatcher. In some years, Louisiana Waterthrush may be nesting. The Bird Studies Canada headquarters is an excellent place for lunch and to scope out ducks over Long Point's inner bay. If conditions are good, we visit the "Old Cut" field station one morning to see what migrants have arrived overnight. Usually with the help of LPBO's volunteers we manage to see some exciting birds up close. We'll visit the huge Big Creek Marsh, where Least Bittern and King Rail are real possibilities, amongst an assortment of marsh birds including Sandhill Crane, Black Tern and Northern Harrier. After our second morning of birding we'll pack up and head north. One night in Simcoe then one night in Orillia.

Day 9: Carden Plain



We've made our way further north to the forests and fields where many of those migrants we saw earlier come to nest. This morning we arrive at Carden Alvar, which is an open area of thin soils on limestone bedrock with poor agricultural potential that has just recently been turned into a provincial park. This so-called alvar supports an abundance of birds like Upland Sandpiper, Eastern Bluebird, Golden-winged Warbler, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Grasshopper, Vesper, Field, and Savannah Sparrows, as well as Eastern Kingbird, and Loggerhead Shrike. The shrike is Carden Alvar's most sought-out inhabitant, as there are only a handful of sites in northeastern North America that support this endangered subspecies. Wetlands hold American and Least Bittern, Marsh and Sedge Wren, Sora and Virginia Rail, Osprey and, with much luck, Yellow Rail. This gorgeous area is in stark contrast to the hustle and bustle of the city only an hour and a half to the south. Following Carden, we continue on our way to the Algonquin area to spend the rest of our day in this dramatic last stop of our tour. Night in Dwight.

Days 10 - 11: Algonquin Park



Algonquin Park is one of Canada's premier wildlife viewing sites. The rugged topography of its highlands leads to vast broad-leafed forests more typical of southern areas. Cold, mossy bogs and coniferous forests found throughout most of Canada's north are equally prevalent. This mix of habitats creates a fantastic diversity of birds and other wildlife. Expected birds include 15+ species of wood warblers, Hermit Thrush (one of North America's best singers), Canada Warbler, Northern Parula, Blue-headed Vireo, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, White-throated Sparrow, Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch and many more. We'll have a close-up look at American Woodcock displaying over open areas. In addition, we'll keep an eye out for boreal species such as Common Loon, Spruce Grouse, Canada Jay, Black-backed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, Great Gray Owl and the wanderers of the north, Red and White-winged Crossbills. The extensive hardwood forests of the park are good habitat for residents like the Pileated Woodpecker, Barred Owl, and Ruffed Grouse. Of course we are always on the lookout for the many species of mammals commonly found in the park such as Marten, Black Bear, Red Fox, Eastern Wolf and River Otter. We should encounter Algonquin's largest inhabitant on a daily basis: Moose. At this time of the year, Algonquin is truly an amazing place to explore. Nights in Dwight except the last evening we return to Toronto, 2.5hrs south.

Day 12: Departure from Toronto

Our Point Pelee & Algonquin Park birding tour concludes today in Toronto. You can leave for flights home anytime today.

What to Expect

Overview

Our Point Pelee & Algonquin Park tour is a fast-paced birding tour, where we focus on observing Spring bird migration. The daily travel schedule will vary to account for weather, bird species, habitat and of course the unpredictable nature of migration. We spent long days in the field; most days start quite early in the morning, and in the afternoon, we will either drive to our next location or have a break prior to more birding later in the day.

While this tour offers an incredible bird-watching experience, it's important to note that the long days may be physically demanding for some.

Food

Breakfast is usually at the hotel (early) or in the field, and might include a simple muffin or cookie and coffee. We will have a larger lunch, either picnic or sit-down lunch at a restaurant. Dinner is usually at restaurant hotels or a nearby restaurant. During dinner we usually discuss the day's activities and review the list of birds seen and heard.

Accommodation

Accommodations during the tour vary from basic to standard hotels.

Walking

This tour involves moderate walking on mostly level terrain. However, we could have some slippery or uneven terrain. The longest continuous walk on this tour takes place in Backus Woods, where we search for local breeding birds along a 4 km (2.5-mile) trail through deciduous forest. The most walking in a single day occurs at Point Pelee, where we may cover up to 6 km (3.8 miles) in the park. While the walking is generally flat, the main challenge is the potential fatigue from consecutively long days. That said, the walks are done at a slow pace and this can also be discussed with the guides, and alternatives can be offered where possible.

Driving

This tour covers large parts of Ontario, so inevitably there will be some longer afternoon drives. The longest drive will be roughly 3-4 hours, when headed north into Ontario's boreal lowlands.

Climate

The tour will take place at the peak of spring migration, which means the full onset of spring/summer in Ontario. Although nice weather is likely, we can also expect some rain. Mornings may be cool, while days are generally warm. We recommend packing layers, including sweaters, gloves, a warm hat, sunhat and sunglasses, and a lightweight rain jacket. This is the onset of summer, so bugs may be present. Long-sleeved shirts and trousers are advisable to protect against biting insects.

What's Included

Tour Price Includes

- All accommodation (Lakeside cottages; modern motel accommodation)
- Ground transportation (15-passenger vans)
- All meals and soft drinks
- 4 - 8 participants with one guide, 9 - 12 participants with two guides in two vehicles
- All park, conservation, entrance fees

Tour Price Does Not Include

- Flights to and from Toronto
- Travel Insurance
- Items of a personal nature
- Taxes (13% HST)
- Alcoholic beverages

