



Sunrise Birding, LLC
<http://www.sunrisebirding.com>

Canada & Point Pelee

TRIP REPORT: May 9 - 22, 2008

LEADERS: Gina Nichol & Steve Bird

Day 1 Friday 9th May

Steve, Robbie, Anne, Norman and Josie met at Gatwick in the early morning hours for the flight to Toronto, Canada where Gina and Kathy were waiting for them. We loaded the vehicles and headed down to Niagara Falls for the night. Steve returned to the Toronto airport to pick up Ann, Graham, Delia, and John from a later flight while the rest of us enjoyed a nice dinner. After dinner, we walked down to see the spectacular Niagara Falls at night. Lit by coloured lights, the falls were an incredible sight and we looked forward to our view in the daylight. When the late group arrived, they couldn't resist and walked through town to enjoy their own views of the falls.

Day 2 Saturday 10th May

This morning after breakfast, we explored the area around the Niagara River and the Falls. We parked near a tributary of the roaring river and immediately rounded up our first birds of the trip. A Warbling Vireo showed nicely in a small tree on the side of the stream and there were several Red-winged Blackbirds around as well as Ring-billed Gull, American Robin, and Common Grackle. A Woodchuck was spotted feeding on some grasses near the parking lot. Blue Jays flew over and Baltimore Orioles sat and sang from the tree tops. Barn Swallows whizzed above the water while some Chimney Swifts flew higher. We walked across the road to the bank of the river where we had some good looks at American Goldfinches feeding on the ground and some Northern Rough-winged Swallows perched on the railings around a power plant. We ticked our first of many Black Squirrels (a melanistic form of the Eastern Grey Squirrel) feeding on the open lawns around the power plant. There were Double-crested Cormorants and we could see several Black-crowned Night Herons flying back and forth from the shore over the river and noticed a large colony nesting on an island in the middle of the river. We continued on and found Black-capped Chickadees and a Downy Woodpecker which showed well on a low tree in an open area. At the edge of the river, we scoped Forster's and Common Terns out on the rocks and began to come to grips with their plumage differences.

A flock of Cedar Waxwings flew in and showed well on the top of a tree. On the ground were two sparrows – Song and Chipping and we began to sort out their field marks. A Red-breasted Nuthatch was working the trunk of a pine as we got closer to the falls. A car bridge over a small stream created shelter for several Cliff Swallows nesting it allowing great looks as they flew in and out and perched near their nests. Just beyond the bridge we saw the magnificent falls in the daylight. Horseshoe Falls was shrouded mist but Bridal Veil Falls was lit by bright sunshine. The noise of the crashing water drowned out all other sound and we could feel the force of the massive waterfalls. It was truly a spectacular sight! After some free time to take in the spectacle of the falls, we left the area and drove toward Long Point enjoying a picnic lunch along the way. An Eastern Phoebe was seen at the lunch stop and further on we stopped for our first of many Killdeer. As we drove toward the shore of Lake Erie, we saw several Purple Martins flying over as well as Barn and Tree Swallows which were quite numerous over the marshes.

We arrived at Long Point Bird Observatory in the afternoon and immediately went to the feeders next to the building. Several White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows were feeding and bathing in a small pool. A male Ruby-throated Hummingbird came in to a feeder and moved off quickly before we all got on it. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet worked the trees above the feeders and a pair of House Finches took advantage of the sunflower feeder. There were several Brown-headed Cowbirds around and some Blue Jays came in adding lovely colour to the feeder scene. We walked into the forest where we started to pick up some North American warblers. A Black-and-white Warbler was working a low tree trunk while a Yellow Warbler serenaded us with its song which we would hear many, many times throughout the trip. We also had Blue-headed Vireo, several Grey Catbirds, a Lincoln's Sparrow, and a Red Admiral Butterfly. We walked out to a marsh area and watched a Green Heron fly in and disappear in the reeds and noted a Belted Kingfisher perched on fence across the marsh.

Back into the forest we had nice looks at a male American Redstart and a female Orchard Oriole. We walked toward the entrance of Long Point Provincial Park and picked up a singing Chestnut-sided Warbler

along the entrance road. Across the road was a swampy area that contained our first Swamp Sparrow – something Steve got really excited about. From a viewpoint over the lake, we had three Red-breasted Mergansers and an American Wigeon. It was getting late so we headed back to our hotel. A small flock of Wild Turkeys was spotted at the edge of a farm field but moved off quickly before we could all get on them. We later learned that it was Turkey hunting season which would account for the skittish nature of the turkeys. We returned to the hotel and met later to enjoy a fine meal and review our first full day of birding in southern Canada.

Day 3 Sunday 11th May

After breakfast we drove toward Long Point. Along the way we picked up a pair of Horned Larks in a farm field and stopped in the area where we had seen the turkeys the night before. Steve spotted a pair in another area of the field which “looked rather still”. A second look revealed that they were plastic decoys – not tickable! Further down the road, a Red-tailed Hawk was perched in a tree and while we were scoping it, a Northern harrier flew past. We arrived at the Observatory where the banding (ringing) operation was in progress so we got to see some birds in the hand.

Lincoln's Sparrow was the first out of the bag and the researchers explained how to assess fat reserves of the birds by observing the skin underneath the feathers. The banders went out to check the nets so we walked into the forest and immediately found a tree full of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and a female Scarlet Tanager.

An American Redstart appeared and we added Yellow-rumped Warbler to our list along with two Veerys. A Wood Thrush showed briefly at first but eventually came out where everyone could see it. In the thick brush at ground level a Mourning Warbler was seen by a few people and a calling Ovenbird was very uncooperative. Red Squirrels and Eastern Chipmunks distracted our concentration but we did manage to get a Dark-eyed Junco which was a good find. In the same spot we found a stunning Black-throated Blue Warbler and a more difficult Nashville Warbler. We then took a coffee break and watched a few more species being banded.

Back in the forest, we soon connected with Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, a Great Crested Flycatcher, and some Ruby-crowned Kinglets. A group of Bonaparte's Gulls flew overhead and out of sight quickly. We moved back out toward the marsh where we could hear a Common Yellowthroat which remained skulky. The forest trails yielded more Black-throated Blues, and Yellow-rumped Warblers and odd looking Swainson's Thrush. In another area we had a couple of Pine Siskins and a Magnolia Warbler and a beautiful Cape May Warbler which got our pulses racing. There were a few more Grey Catbirds around and another Swainson's Thrush and then a wave of warblers dropped in. Yellow-rumped was the commonest, with Parula, Black-throated Green, a female Cape May, Bay-headed, Palm, and Blackburnian were all seen well. Downy Woodpecker, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, and Blue-headed Vireo made an appearance and we finally got excellent looks at Common Yellowthroat. It was starting to rain a bit so we took a break at a nearby restaurant for a fantastic buffet lunch in honour of Mother's Day. The rain continued after lunch as we drove back to another area with open fields and a small pond. We added Eastern Kingbird to our list here and a Lesser Yellowlegs and five Least Sandpipers were seen on the pool. There were several Bank Swallows flying over the fields and we spent some time checking them. Moving on we followed a road along the shore of the lake and added Great Egret and Spotted Sandpiper.

Back at observatory it was raining but some of us braved it and found a nice Magnolia Warbler and at least six stunning Ovenbirds, more Veerys and a female Scarlet Tanager. We went back to the restaurant for a coffee break while the rain continued. After awhile, we drove to Big Creek Reserve and scanned the vast expanse of reeds and marsh where two Caspian Terns were flying. Near the observation platform we superb views of a Marsh Wren and we picked up Mute Swan, Great Blue Heron and a nice male Palm Warbler for the day. A Northern Harrier was noted in the distance and a “pig” spotted in the marsh turned out to be a Sandhill Crane – a great end to a superb day of birding.

Day 4 Monday 12th May

On the way to Long Point we made one roadside stop for a Wild Turkey in field (this time not plastic!). Further on, a Red-tailed Hawk flew across the road and landed in a close tree where it was mobbed by Common Grackles. At Long Point it was raining a little so we drove around to the entrance gate area where several American Goldfinches were feeding on the ground. Back at the Observatory, we had Red-breasted Nuthatch at the feeder along with the usual feeder birds. In forest we found Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, an Empidonax-type flycatcher, either Willow or Alder but it did not vocalize to allow a positive identification. Warblers were active in the forest including Black-throated Green, two Parulas, a Yellow-rumped, a nice Nashville, Magnolia, Cape May, and another Blackburnian. Blue-headed Vireo showed well and then a Hermit Thrush appeared. Another area held two White-eyed Vireos, a Swainson's Thrush, and two Brown Thrashers that were on the move all the time. We moved on to another area where we could view the lake which held several Ruddy Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, Greater Scaup, Canvasback, and Redhead. We

walked a trail between the lake and an open field where Eastern Kingbirds were chattering. There was a banding operation going on in a display area in the field as we approached it an immature Bald Eagle flew past along the shore of the lake. We watched a few birds being banded including Eastern Warbling Vireo and Common Grackle but our attention was soon shifted to another two Bald Eagles flying past. Robbie started with his "Yabba-dabba-dos" as he ticked his first eagle. Walking back through the field, Gina spotted an Eastern Meadowlark perched on a stick. A Belted Kingfisher flew off over the pond and a female Hooded Merganser was spotted swimming near the far shore.

From here we drove to one of the Concession Roads where we found a pond with American Wigeon, Gadwall, three Hooded Mergansers, Great Egret, and Canada Goose. Steve spotted nine Sandhill Cranes flying in distance and we could hear them calling as they got closer. Back in the point, we spotted a few shorebirds including Short-billed Dowitcher, two Lesser Yellowlegs and a Spotted Sandpiper. Kathy spotted a Blue-winged Teal preening in front of some Canada Geese. After lunch, we drove the highway toward Point Pelee. Along way we saw several American Kestrels and as we neared Leamington we passed a farm field full of Black-bellied Plovers most of which were in gorgeous breeding plumage. On the other side of the road, two Turkey Vultures were feeding on a deer carcass. Just beyond them, we spotted a Vesper Sparrow sitting on some corn stalks. We reached Leamington and checked into our lovely hotel before going out for dinner.

Day 5 Tuesday 13th May

This morning we had an early breakfast and drove to Point Pelee National Park. By 7 AM the parking lot was full and there was plenty of excitement in the air. As we waited for the tram to the tip, we got nice looks at Orchard Orioles and Eastern Kingbirds. As we got off the tram, there was a lot of activity so we started with a Brown Thrasher singing from top of tree. On the main trail we had amazing looks at Bay-breasted Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler and Nashville. Baltimore and Orchard Orioles were everywhere and every few steps we ticked a new bird for the day. At one point we could see out over the lake where there were several Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Loon. Further down the trail, we had good looks at a Blackpoll Warbler moving low on a tree trunk. A stunning male Red-headed Woodpecker flew into a dead tree not to be outdone by a brilliant male Scarlet Tanager. A scruffy Indigo Bunting made an appearance and was underappreciated in this mix of colourful birds. A Red-eyed Vireo sang and showed well and the orange throats of the Blackburnian Warblers made them look as though they were on fire. More Cape May and Parula Warblers were dropping in and the dull Warbling Vireos and Yellows Warblers vied for attention. A Red-tailed Hawk flew overhead and we all agreed that this was an exhilarating morning of birding.

After lunch we walked the Tilden Trail through the forest near the Visitor Centre. A Northern Waterthrush skulked in a wet area of the forest floor. A stunning male Canada Warbler showed at eye level for us all to marvel at while a Swainson's Thrush landed nearby. A bright Indigo Bunting gave us an appreciation for the gorgeous colour of this bird. We found another Downy Woodpecker here and a Raccoon foraging on the ground under some fallen trees. Later on, we drove out of Pelee stopping at a nature store which had feeders across the road. Red-headed and Red-bellied Woodpeckers were the stars here and we appreciated the chance to compare them.

From here we drove to Hillman Marsh which was loaded with birds. Here we had close looks at Forster's Terns and picked up Great Blue Herons, and Blue-winged and Green-winged Teal. There were large flocks of Black-bellied Plovers in the main pond and in a shallow area there were many bright Dunlin, Lesser Yellowlegs, and Semipalmated Plover. Back in the main pond were several Bonaparte's Gulls, and among them, Steve picked out two Little Gulls - an adult breeding plumage one and a first summer one. Two Black Terns were also found just before the entire flock flew and they were relocated once the flock settled down. An American Pipit was spotted in a dry area near the pond edge. In a marshy area, a Muskrat was spotted and near the shore of the main point a pair of Snapping Turtles was seen mating. As if this wasn't enough for one day, an adult Bald Eagle was perched in a distant tree. Robbie did his yabba dance as we all went back to the hotel high from a day of fantastic birding.

Day 6 Wednesday 14th May

We had breakfast earlier this morning to try to beat the crowds into Point Pelee. Down at the tip, we found a female pheasant on the ground under a log which was later identified as a Lady Amherst Pheasant. The Point was not quite as lively as it was the day before but we were happy with our views of Nashville Warbler, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireo, and Least Flycatcher. The Red-breasted Mergansers were in the waters off the beach but no divers today. A couple of Chimney Swifts flew over followed by a low Red-headed Woodpecker. We got great looks at a small group of Cedar Waxwings flying around and there were plenty of Eastern Kingbirds, Baltimore Orioles, and Orchard Orioles.

We decided to head back to the Visitors Centre and out to Tilden Woods trail again. Here we picked up House Wren, Swainson's Thrush, White-crowned Sparrow for the day and enjoyed good looks at colourful Scarlet Tanagers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Indigo Buntings. A Blackpoll Warbler showed well and this was a day for thrushes. We picked up Veery, Wood, and Swainson's Thrush all within a few feet of each other. At one point, a Golden-winged Warbler was spotted in the forest around some large fallen trees. Some of us had brief looks at it before it disappeared. In the same area, we saw Bay-breasted and Yellow-rumped Warbler, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Blue-headed Vireo, Black-throated Green Warbler, and Magnolia Warbler. We worked our way out toward the east side of the park through some marshy areas. A Sora showed well causing Robbie to break into a dance.

We went back to Leamington for lunch at Subway where a few of us ended up locked in the vehicle only to be rescued by the Subway sandwich maker (Thank you!). After lunch, we headed back into Point Pelee Park and to the tip where we found a female Scarlet Tanager, Least Flycatcher, and a Ruby-throated Hummingbird feeding on some flowers. It was quiet at the tip so we took the tram back to the halfway point to walk a forest trail back to the Visitor Centre. In an open area a dull looking Magnolia Warbler got our hearts pumping as our initial views were poor making the bird resemble a Kirtland's Warbler. Better looks revealed that it was a Maggie and our facing hearts calmed down as we continued on the trail. We picked up Least Flycatcher, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Red-eyed Vireo, and a pair of Wood Ducks preening in a woodland pond. Ann spotted another raccoon up a tree scratching itself and we were surprised that these animals were so visible during the day. On one part of the trail, Gina spotted a greyish looking thrush and after a bit of effort we got good looks at a Gray-cheeked Thrush. Further on, a Carolina Wren came in giving good views and we had two more just down the trail. Just as a crowd of people were approaching from the other direction, we found an Acadian Flycatcher perched on a branch above us. A Least Flycatcher nearby offered a good comparative study.

On the way out of the park, we stopped for two Wild Turkeys - a large tom and a female and enjoyed amazingly close views of them. We headed toward Hillman Marsh stopping along the way to check over a field of Gulls. There was nothing unusual among the gulls but we did find a close Horned Lark.

At Hillman Marsh we picked up a nice breeding plumage Stilt Sandpiper feeding among the Dunlin and Short-billed Dowitchers. There were several Bonaparte's Gulls as well as Forster's and Common Terns. We located a Mottled Duck and picked up Northern Pintail in the same view and we picked up Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers. As the sun was beginning to set, three Willets flew in giving good views. The Bald Eagle as on its perch again and we enjoyed sharing it with a group of birders that has just arrived. We left the marsh and headed back to the hotel after another fine day of birding.

Day 7 Thursday 15th May

This morning we headed into the park and went straight to the tip. Our first bird of the morning was a Brown Thrasher on a tree top followed by two Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feeding on some low flowers. The Red-headed Woodpecker was on its favourite dead tree and then we picked up our first warbler of the day - Nashville. Warbling and Blue-headed Vireos showed well but it was another quiet morning, or perhaps we were spoiled by our first morning here.

Just as we thought it was going to be a slow day, we got a report of a Kirtland's Warbler along a coastal path. We hurried to the area and immediately heard this rare bird calling from some thick undergrowth. We tried to get a position on it and had not been seen by anyone - only heard. After about an hour the bird suddenly called just ten feet away and after much scrutinising of the area it was spotted up about four feet from the ground in a small bush. It came out into the open several times allowing excellent views. Needless to say, this was a highlight of the trip and we were very happy not to have travelled for two days to Michigan to see this species. As we walked back toward the tip we saw several Palm Warblers, a Swainson's Thrush, and a group of Red-breasted Mergansers on the water. An Eastern Wood-Pewee sang and showed well near a female Scarlet Tanager. As we reached the tip, there seemed to be many more birds around. We got good looks at Great Crested Flycatcher, Bay-breasted Warbler, and then a superb Cerulean Warbler appeared and showed well. A Nashville Warbler was brief and nearby we could a Prairie Warbler singing. We searched back and forth until eventually it was spotted low down where it gave a good show, still singing. As we enjoyed this little beauty, a Black-billed Cuckoo flew in and showed very well perched out in the open. A Parula was also singing nearby and another Indigo Bunting showed briefly and flew off.

After another exhilarating morning, we went back to the Visitor Centre for a barbecue lunch. During lunch we got wind of an owl nearby so we jumped into the vehicles and drove a short distance to a spot where an Eastern Screech-Owl was perched against a bare tree trunk. It was amazing to see how camouflaged this bird was and, even when given precise instructions, most people could not see it until they looked through

our scope. Most of our group became impromptu tour guides, pointing out the bird to others that stopped to see it.

In the same area an Eastern Towhee was spotted and by the car park we watched Palm Warblers, a Philadelphia Vireo, Blackpoll Warbler, and a female Cape May. We then drove to Cattail Café for a drink and discussed the possibility of seeing a Wood Guillemot in the area. Perhaps all of this birding was going to our heads!

From here we went to the Sanctuary Trail where there were several Swainson's Thrushes and countless Common Yellowthroats. A Blue-winged Warbler flitted low over the bushes and then disappeared quickly. Along the trail, we found another Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Downy Woodpecker, a perched Northern Waterthrush, a male American Redstart, and then a close showy but brief Hermit Thrush. As we headed back to the car we had two bright Parulas together and nice looks at Chestnut-sided Warbler in the same area. A final check around the car park are found us a Wilson's Warbler, a Field Sparrow that no one else but the leaders got onto, and then very good looks at an Eastern Towhee. As we walked back to the vehicles, two Black Terns flew over. Pleased with our day, we returned to Learnington for dinner.

Day 8 Friday 16th May

After breakfast we set off for Rondeau Park about an hour away. Once there we drove toward Visitor Centre stopping for Turkey Vulture perched in a tree in the campground area. As we slowly passed through wooded swamp, a huge Pileated Woodpecker flew across in front of us. We got out and scanned the forest from the road and were soon enjoying excellent views of this fantastic bird as it climbed and called from a dead tree. At the Centre we checked out the feeders which yielded close views of Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Downy Woodpecker, American Goldfinch, and several Baltimore Orioles. We were surprised to see a Veery out on the open grass in front of the building. From here we drove to the Spicebush Trail and walked through the quiet woodland half wondering just where the birds were. During the course of the walk we picked up Black-throated Blue Warbler, Swainson's Thrush, Chestnut-sided Warbler, and Magnolia Warbler. From a bridge over a woodland swamp, we got good looks at a Hairy Woodpecker, and further on we watched a nice Ovenbird and then a stunning Canada Warbler. On a boardwalk we got Eastern Phoebe and beside the car park a Red-breasted Nuthatch showed well. We went back to Visitor Centre for some soup then on to the Tulip Tree Trail where we immediately keyed in onto a calling White-breasted Nuthatch. There was a "headless" (not really) Snapping Turtle sunning on a log in the forest swamp but nothing more of note. We returned to the parking lot and drove slowly along the beach road, eventually stopping for a singing Field Sparrow gave superb, close views. We also spotted a pair of Eastern Bluebird in a tree by the beach and got nice scope views of them. On the lake there were Bonaparte's Gulls and Forster's Terns and a Brown Thrasher was singing in a tree at the edge of the beach. Three Sandhill Cranes were seen circling out over the water reminding us that this was indeed a lake and not the sea.

We drove to our picnic spot where a Blackburnian Warbler was seen. After lunch, we found a Red-bellied Woodpecker and had good looks at a Carolina Wren near a building. We also added Warbling Vireo and Broad-winged Hawk to our day list. An Eastern Towhee called from the forest and soon showed for us. As we walked along the narrow road, a Five-lined Skink rustled in the leaf litter and we were pleased to get a look at it. Searching around a pond we saw a few warblers including a super male Wilson's Warbler. Back toward the vehicles we saw a Great Crested Flycatcher and another Hairy Woodpecker. It was getting later in the afternoon so we decided to go back and try the Spicebush Trail again. It was still quiet but we saw two Ovenbirds, American Redstarts, Chestnut-sided and Magnolia Warblers, and a Philadelphia Vireo. There were several Veerys and Swainson's Thrushes, a Black-and-white Warbler, and more than 1,376,000 Yellow Warblers (or so it seemed!). A Northern Waterthrush showed briefly as did a Blue-headed Vireo and as we were leaving we added Bay-breasted Warbler. On a board walk we found a Tennessee Warbler that got a mass of instruction from members of our group to others until people either saw the bird or walked away in disgust. Out by the vehicles we finished with good looks at a Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. We left the park driving out past a lake we stopped for very close looks at several Dunlin, a Least Sandpiper, some Short-billed Dowitchers and some large Carp swimming in very shallow water.

Day 9 Saturday 17th May

This morning after breakfast we headed for the tip at Point Pelee where it was surprisingly windy. Very little was moving bar the usual Yellow Warblers, Baltimore and Orchard Orioles. We took a walk to the east beach which was more sheltered and here amongst the Ring-billed, Herring and Bonaparte's Gulls we saw two breeding plumage Laughing Gulls. There were also a couple of Great Northern Divers in all their splendour close into shore. Walking a nearby trail Gina heard a singing Blackpoll Warbler which we eventually saw and a Magnolia Warbler added some colour to the morning. With little else singing or moving we tried another area near Tilden Woods. A pair of courting Rose-breasted Grosbeaks gave a show and then a group of Cedar Waxwings showed up. Again this wood was very quiet, but our slow pace and patience revealed

Black-and-white, Nashville, Black-throated Green, Magnolia, and Yellow-rumped Warblers, and American Redstart. A Swainson's Thrush showed well while a Wood Thrush was only seen and heard in flight. We returned for our barbecue lunch after which we took a nearby trail and saw another perched Eastern Screech-owl. An Eastern Wood-Pewee sang and showed nearby but other than that all was quiet.

We turned around and headed out of the park toward Wheatley Provincial Park. Here we looked out over a marshy area spotted a Belted Kingfisher and a leaning branch doing the same. We walked through a woodland full of flowers and found a Great Crested Flycatcher working around a nest hole. We had nice looks at a perched Ovenbird before crossing a log and coming out of the woods to look out across the vast Lake Erie. Forster's Terns flew back and forth and a Belted Kingfisher went past. Eastern Kingbird was present and as we walked back toward the vehicles we found a small flock which included Tennessee, Blackburnian, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, and Bay-breasted Warbler, and a Least Flycatcher. Further on, a pair of Northern Flickers performed perfectly for us. Looking out across the water again we watched flocks and flocks of Black-bellied Plovers flying north west. We drove back to Point Pelee to check if there had been any more migrants drop in but found it almost deserted.

We took dinner restaurant near the Park and returned to the Park just before dark and positioned ourselves, ready for our evening entertainment. A stunning Indigo Bunting got things started and then two adult Bald Eagles flew around the tree tops. While it was still light Common Nighthawk came out to hawk insects above the field. Suddenly someone spotted an American Woodcock on the grass of the parking lot. We went to have a look and were amazed to see this bird so close and right out in the open with four chicks following it. This was an incredible show which we watched for several minutes. At one point, a raccoon walked past and the adult Woodcock had the chicks freeze at first and then run for cover while she tried to tempt the raccoon away from the tiny family. We couldn't quite believe that we were witness to this. While we realized how vulnerable the chicks were, it was obvious that the mother knew how to protect them and we had no business interfering. The night sky was lit with a beautiful bright full moon and as we turned toward the open field we heard other Woodcocks performing their display flights. We enjoyed several of these unique displays and in between a Common Nighthawk flew so close that it almost buzzed our heads. What a magical evening – another highlight of the trip!

Day 10 Sunday 18th May

This morning after breakfast we headed down to the tip of Point Pelee where it was still very quiet. A singing American Redstart was seen but a Blackpoll would not show itself. On the tip we had Red-breasted Mergansers, Double-crested Cormorants and some Common Terns. An Eastern Bluebird showed well and Warbling Vireos were present as usual. A few Cedar Waxwings flew around and a White-eyed Vireo sang. We took advantage of the quiet birding moment to look more closely at some of the wildflowers that carpeted the forest floor including Sweet Cicely, Large-flowered Bellwort, Blue Phlox, and False Starry Solomon Seal. We decided to try Hillman Marsh so we left the park noting two White-tailed Deer and some Wild Turkeys on the way out. Hillman had more bird life including Great Egrets, Common, Forster's and Caspian Terns and Bonaparte's Gulls. Gina found a breeding plumage White-rumped Sandpiper, which we could compare to nearby Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers, and Dunlin. Then there was a lovely bright Ruddy Turnstone. As we returned to the car park, a Garter Snake made for nice photo opportunities on the lawn of the Nature Centre. Leaving the marsh we drove another road and found three Bald Eagles and an osprey. We had lunch and returned to our hotel for a siesta and time to pack ready for an early departure tomorrow. After dinner, we drove back to Hillman Marsh where the afternoon light was just perfect. Many of the same shorebirds were seen including the White-rumped Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitchers, and three Lesser Yellowlegs. A flock of 32 Whimbrel flew over calling and a little later, Three Sandhill Cranes flew over. Green-winged Teal and Lesser Scaup were noted across the pond and we saw at least one Muskrat. Several of us got superb looks at a Virginia Rail which came out of cover to look around. Two American Coots were seen in another pond and four Wood Ducks flew over as we were leaving.

Day 11 Monday 19th May

We had one last morning at the tip noting three Wild Turkeys on the way in. We went to the tip and noted another Blackpoll singing. At the beach, there were hundreds of Double-crested Cormorants and Bonaparte's Gulls feeding in the rip. There were birds dropping in including Cedar Waxwings, flocks of Blue Jays, Common Grackles, Tree Swallows, and Purple Martins. A male Indigo Bunting flew in and glowed from a perch. A Northern Flicker appeared as did several Blue-grey Gnatcatchers. A few Sanderlings showed up running in between the waves at the tip and we were pleased to see these as they were the first and only of the trip. We said goodbye to Point Pelee and drove to the Carden Alvar birding area north of Toronto. We had several Ospreys along the way with some in nests. Other raptors included American Kestrel and Northern Harrier and we had one nice male "Gray Ghost" flying low over a field. It was quite windy and cold here but the open fields held Eastern Meadowlarks, Eastern Bluebirds, and Savannah Sparrow. Further on we got great looks at Bobolinks, Wilson's Snipe, Upland Sandpiper, Eastern Phoebe, and Least Flycatcher.

A Loggerhead Shrike appeared and disappeared just as quickly. We got quick looks at a very close but very skulky Sedge Wren and we decided we would return to this area on our way back to Toronto in a few days. We continued on to Huntsville outside of Algonquin Park and settled into our hotel after dinner.

Day 12 Tuesday 20th May

This morning we headed off early to Algonquin Provincial Park. On the way we stopped for a Broad-winged Hawk which appeared to be injured on the side of the road. Some of us got out to have a closer look at the bird standing on the side of the road but it soon flew off. As we entered the park we passed several White-tailed Deer along the road and then a massive bull Moose feeding in a swamp. Our first American Black Duck was seen on a pond and we noted the difference in habitat from the Erie shore area. We stopped at the Spruce Bog trail where we saw Snowshoe Hare run across the parking lot and had a close Red Squirrel in a tree above the boardwalk. We had stunning views of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet showing its red crown.

We stopped in at the Visitor Centre and as we got out of the vehicles we could hear woodpeckers drumming in the trees at the edge of the parking lot. It didn't take long for us to find a pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers working the cottonwood trees. As we walked into the Centre, we noted a few Eastern Chipmunks feeding on the ground. We checked the sightings records and then drove the main park road to look for Black-backed Woodpeckers that had been seen working on some power poles. While searching for the woodpeckers, a Red-shouldered Hawk flew over giving nice flight views. At this point we turned back and stopped along the road for a Grey Jay which was soon joined by its partner and three dark youngsters. The bird was very tame and came down and took a snack from John's hand. John spoke to the other adult which also came in for a snack.

Continuing on we saw our first pair of Common Mergansers on a pristine lake. We stopped back at the Visitor Centre for lunch and got more information from a park naturalist about wildlife and bird sightings. We walked the boardwalk of the Spruce Bog Trail where we had Swamp Sparrow, Common Raven, and American Black Duck. In the forest, we heard Blackburnian Warbler singing and many White-throated Sparrows that were working the forest floor. Back on the road we stopped for a mother and calf Moose in a brushy area. While we were looking at the Moose a pair of Purple Finches appeared in a nearby pine tree. From here we went to a campground and located the bird we had been looking for all day - the elusive Black-backed Woodpecker. This bird put on a stunning show as it worked the trees around the car park and we were thrilled with our views. A park ranger came by and was impressed with our photos of the bird. Just before we left, it was joined by a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker working a trunk of a large pine. Again, we were pleased with our finds. We travelled the main road in the evening finding more Moose and a pair of Ring-necked Ducks. We diverted to a side road where we got closer looks at a Beaver feeding in a pond near the side of the road. After dinner at the Mad Musher, we drove back through the park at night stopping to hear the call of a Saw-whet Owl.

Day 13 Wednesday 21st May

This morning we travelled back to Algonquin Park and as we arrived at our first birding spot, a rain/snow mix added to the northern forest atmosphere. We walked the Mizzy Trail and immediately heard Ruffed Grouse drumming. There were several warblers working the evergreen trees including Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Northern Parula, Ovenbird, Yellow-rumped and Magnolia and most of them showed very well. There were at least three Ruffed Grouse drumming as we walked a muddy trail. All at once, a large bird flew on the bank above so we diverged from the trail to try and find it. We reconvened on a small trail that was closer to the bird and after much effort, some of us had stellar looks at the drumming Grouse displaying on a log. It was hard work but worth it!

As we walked back to the main trail we had our first good looks at Golden-crowned Kinglet. There were more warblers and some very vocal Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak made an appearance. The main trail went between some small lakes which held several Painted Turtles with white numbers and letters on their backs. On one of the large lakes we found a pair of Hooded Mergansers with the male showing nicely. A Lincoln's Sparrow perched on a close tree was a welcome sighting and soon we realized that more Grey Jays were following us. The landscape here was wild and beautiful with sprawling ponds bordered by forests. We reached an area where there were some dead trees out in the open water and were thrilled when a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers came into the trees right in front of us! As we walked back we noted two more Ring-necked Ducks on the pond. We arrived at the vehicles and decided to go back to Huntsville for lunch, packing, and a siesta before returning to the park in the afternoon. On the way back there were some Broad-winged Hawks perched on various posts and wires. A Wild Turkey made an appearance as well. We decided to walk the Mizzy Trail again and finally got some quick looks at Boreal Chickadee. There were a few small flocks with the usual birds and we had another nice view of a bright Canada Warbler. American Black Ducks and Mallards were present on the ponds and all the while we walked we could see fresh moose tracks, wolf tracks, wolf scat, and otter scat on the same trail where we

were walking. There were also some turtle nests that had been dug up on the trail. On the way back we encountered another flock which included Nashville Warbler and Black-capped Chickadee. Across the marsh we saw a Moose family with one adult and two yearlings.

Day 14 Thursday 22nd May

We checked out of our hotel after breakfast, loaded the vans and headed back toward Carden Alvar. On the way we had Common Raven, Black Squirrel, an Osprey on a nest, and a male Hooded Merganser on a pond. We went to a large marsh off the main road where we found two Virginia Rails that showed incredibly well and ran among our feet. A Sora called and showed briefly but was not nearly as cooperative as the rails which came out into the open, preened, and went back into the grass repeatedly. Suddenly an American Bittern flew in and stopped in the middle of the marsh. In a few minutes it came even closer and we all had excellent flight views of the bird. We moved on to another area stopping at a Lift Lock that was moving a boat from the higher part of the river to the lower part which was quite interesting to see. Back to birding we drove a dirt road and found an Upland Sandpiper on a post and further on a Wilson's Snipe on another lower post. There were Eastern Bluebirds, Bobolinks, and Barn Swallows and we had good looks at a Loggerhead Shrike perched up on a round bush. We had lunch in the field and then found a Sedge Wren showing well perched on a stick above the marsh grasses. Alas, our trip was coming to an end and it was time to make our way to Toronto Airport. We had enjoyed each others company as well as the many wonderful bird and wildlife sightings and looked forward to future adventures perhaps in Texas or Montana . . .

Many thanks to everyone on this wonderful trip.

Steve & Gina

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