

# Canada

8–23 May 2003

**Participants:**

**Robert and Sonia Adderley**

**Alan Davies**

**Robin and Ann Gordon**

**Stephen Green**

**Tony Morris**

**Peter and Joan Parkin**

**Dave Sharples**

**Pauline Thridgould**

**Alan and Beryl Turner**

**Mary Wright**



**Blackburnian Warbler**

**Leaders: Dave Milsom and Bill Blake**

**Day 1:** Fourteen intrepid birders arrived in Toronto with co-leader, Bill Blake. Birding whilst waiting for the vans produced such birds as Mourning Dove, American Robin, Song Sparrow, Common Grackle and Red-winged Blackbird, all of which were to become everyday birds. However, four Black Ducks flying around were a big surprise. We were soon off to our overnight destination near Tilbury, western Ontario; a few Turkey Vultures and Red-tailed Hawks were seen from the vans.

**Day 2:** The morning started with an early breakfast whilst enjoying a superb deep-red sunrise. During the short drive to Point Pelee a heavy thunderstorm and a spectacular lightning show was our introduction to the rapidly changing weather of the Great Lakes at this time of year. Nevertheless, our rain-gear-ed group enjoyed a super morning at Point Pelee National Park, recording many “lifers”, most seen at very close range. Yellow and Nashville were the dominant warbler species, Gray Catbirds and Baltimore Orioles were numerous and Eastern Kingbirds were “toing and froing” excitedly. A Franklin’s Gull lingered briefly at the tip, joining the Bonaparte’s, Ring-billed, American Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. The sun finally broke through around noon. An adult Bald Eagle, Cooper’s Hawk on the nest, a Merlin near the Tip, eight Sandhill Cranes, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, two nesting pairs of Eastern Phoebe, White-eyed Vireo, two Yellow-throated Vireos, 15 species of wood warbler including Blue-winged, Hooded, Magnolia, Orange-crowned and Cerulean; 150 White-crowned Sparrows and a Grasshopper Sparrow were just some of the highlights.

**Day 3:** Another early breakfast and then back to the tip of Point Pelee, the southernmost point of mainland Canada. On arrival we quickly boarded a tram for the ride to the Tip, strong westerly winds with some rain greeted us but it was a morning those birders present will never forget! Bill Blake, who has birded worldwide, particularly in Asia, had never seen such a “reverse migration” as took place on May 10th. Literally hundreds of birds poured off the Tip heading south, between 9.00 and 11.30 a.m. We “guesstimated” at least 300 Baltimore Orioles, numerous other passerines and warblers. Many birds were “tree-hopping” along the beach edge, landing briefly in the last tree at the tip, and then they were off out across the lake. Tiny Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, looking like large whirring beetles, were shooting straight out across the lake. On Lake Erie, amongst the Lesser Scaup and Surf Scoters, our group located a female Common Eider which got the locals excited. It was difficult to drag ourselves away from this spectacle but when it started to slow down we got the tram back to the Information Centre for lunch; an Eastern Fox Snake found sunning itself in a tree behind the Centre attracted a lot of attention. The afternoon was warm and dry and we walked the Woodland, Chinquapin Oak and Tilden’s Wood Trails. Highlights included a roosting Whip-poor-will right by the path in Tilden’s, a grey-phase Eastern Screech-owl roosting in a Cedar, Acadian Flycatcher, Golden-winged Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, plus two Clay-colored Sparrows and our first Raccoon. 105 species for the day included 19 species of wood warbler.

**Day 4:** We again saw some reverse migration at the Tip but not on yesterday’s scale. Strong WNW winds kept the birds low and in the shelter of Pelee’s East Beach we had some great close-up birding. Warblers showed particularly well and included Tennessee, Northern

Parula, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Canada, Wilson's and American Redstart. Five White-winged Scoters were on the sea and Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher and Summer Tanager were also seen. A superb male Kentucky Warbler showed well for everyone in Tilden's and made it 20 species of wood warbler for the day.

**Day 5:** Today will long be remembered as the "Day of the Swallows". It was very cold with strong north-west winds, prompting an amazing reverse migration of swallows along the east beach. Over 3100 Bank Swallows (Sand Martins), 500 Tree, 400 Cliff and 190 Barn Swallows huddled together on the East beach out of the wind, causing park staff to erect temporary barriers to protect them. Lake Erie, looking more like a sea with waves to make surfers envious, produced two Black Scoters. In the afternoon we visited Wheatley Harbour, the "onion fields" nearby and Hillman Marsh, several duck and shorebird species were added, including Willet, Solitary Sandpiper and six Short-billed Dowitchers of the race "*hendersonii*". We dined early at Wendy's in Leamington before returning to Pelee and heading for the De Laurier parking area. As darkness fell some pig-like "oinking" revealed the presence of American Woodcock about to lek; eight birds were seen as well as a displaying Common Nighthawk. Bill's van group also saw (and heard) a Fish Crow near the park gates on the way to De Laurier.

**Day 6:** We first visited Kopegaron Woods, finding our first Gray-cheeked Thrush, Red-bellied Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch, and many warblers. We then called in at Wheatley Harbour en route to Pelee where a first-winter Glaucous Gull became our third "write-in" so far. The sunshine at the Tip brought more good finds: ten Broad-winged Hawks, a Mississippi Kite and an Osprey overhead, two Yellow-billed Cuckoos, plus Cape May and Blackpoll Warblers. A Little Blue Heron in a tree near the "sparrow field" became our fourth "write-in". In the afternoon a very productive visit to Lake St Clair resulted in several Yellow-headed Blackbirds on a private reserve at Mitchell's Bay. At St Clair National Wildlife Refuge, Least Bitterns, Marsh Wrens, Pied-billed Grebes, Redheads, Buffleheads and a roosting adult and well-grown juvenile Great Horned Owl were seen well.

**Day 7:** This morning saw us on our long drive north to Whitefish Point Observatory in northern Michigan, having successfully negotiated immigration we crossed into the USA and headed north on Interstate 75. We crossed the Mackinac Bridge, separating Lakes Michigan and Huron, and headed into peninsular Michigan. We had left behind the flat "prairie fields" of southern Ontario and were now entering the boreal forest zone of the north. We stopped for a picnic lunch and leg stretch at Trout Lake. A walk around the parking area gave superb views of Red-breasted Nuthatch, Purple Finch and Northern Parula and our first Eastern Chipmunks. We eventually arrived at Whitefish Point, and on exiting the vans it soon became obvious a hawk migration was in progress. Nearly 200 Broad-winged Hawks were migrating overhead in a mixed flock with other raptors. Hawks and feeder birds filled the remainder of our afternoon. Several new species were added including Rough-legged Hawk, Peregrine, Red-necked Grebe, Common Merganser, Pileated Woodpecker, Savannah Sparrow and American Pipit. We made our way back the ten miles or so to a town called Paradise, our base for the next three nights. We ate in the Yukon Bar in Paradise, a real American experience made all the better by the draught beer. We were considerably further north here and it was a lot cooler but myriad stars in the night sky and the peace of the boreal night made it a wonderful location.

**Day 8:** An optional early-morning start saw some of the keener birders "seawatching" at Whitefish Point. Many Red-throated and Common Loons, Long-tailed Ducks and various scoters were seen on passage; a flock of some 40 American Pipits on the beach were somewhat restless, no doubt due to the presence of numerous migrating Sharp-shinned Hawks. As we were leaving for Paradise, a flock of 31 Evening Grosbeaks flew over us calling and then landed in the bushes by the feeders. These beautiful birds gave everyone excellent views on the feeders and birdtables, it was hard to drag ourselves away but breakfast beckoned. Breakfast was taken en route in Newberry as we hurried to Seney National Wildlife Refuge. Seney's autoroute tour produced 80 Trumpeter Swans, three Hooded Mergansers, Ring-necked Ducks, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, Ospreys, our only Wilson's Snipe, singing Pine Warblers and Pine Siskin; both Beaver and River Otter also showed well. An area round the back of the reserve eventually gave good views of Sharp-tailed Grouse, as well as bugling/displaying Sandhill Cranes, Vesper and Savannah Sparrows and Brewer's Blackbirds. A Coyote caused excitement when it put in a brief appearance. An excellent meal at a restaurant in the Taquamenon Falls State Park rounded off a fine day's birding.

**Day 9:** Another optional early start saw us driving down Vermilion Road looking for Grouse; two Moose were surprised by the side of the road but soon sped off into cover. We left the road and drove the narrow sandy tracks in the forest, eventually we found a male Spruce Grouse feeding by the trackside. Everyone was surprised and delighted when, instead of disappearing into the forest, the grouse continued to feed in the open and allow exceptionally confiding views. Continuing on to the lakeshore, Ruffed Grouse, Alder Flycatcher and seven Rusty Blackbirds were all seen, along with a good selection of warblers, but the Piping Plovers had not returned to breed yet. We returned to Paradise for breakfast in the town diner, a real "small-town America" experience. At Clark Lake, Brown Creeper and Golden-crowned Kinglet showed briefly. Back at the Whitefish Point feeders, four new birds were recorded in 20 minutes: a totally out-of-range female Blue Grosbeak (another write-in), Field Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco and a superb red Taiga-race Fox Sparrow. After an all-you-can-eat fish dinner at the Silver Creek Inn, we moved on to the Clark River mouth where superb views were obtained of a calling American Bittern in its boreal breeding habitat. Lastly we attended an American Woodcock lekking area but the display was rather disappointing.

**Day 10:** We breakfasted in Hulbert before moving on to the forest outside of town to look for Gray Jay but, after 90 minutes of searching and torment by the blackfly, we had to move on. Winter Wren, Ruffed Grouse, Evening Grosbeaks and an American

Porcupine were the only significant consolations. Once again the pure, high three-to-five note whistle of the White-throated Sparrow was the dominant song; known as “the song of the North”, and rightly so. A drive to Raco Airfield yielded a recent influx of nine Upland Sandpipers, some of which we saw displaying. We headed south and all too soon we were crossing the Mackinac Bridge into Lower Michigan heading for Grayling. We booked in to the Super 8 Motel in time to clean up and relax before dinner. The feeders behind the motel attracted many birds, in particular fine Rose-breasted Grosbeaks. As dusk drew near the birds were replaced by White-tailed Deer.

**Day 11:** Coffee and doughnuts for breakfast before our presentation/slide show on our main quarry here, the Kirtland’s Warbler. Soon we were in an area of young Jack Pines and brilliant views were had of at least six male Kirtland’s Warblers. Eventually we pulled ourselves away and headed southeast to Tawas Point, a migration watchpoint on Lake Huron. Here numerous Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, both cuckoos, a Northern Mockingbird, various *Empidonax* flycatchers and many well-seen warblers were the highlights. 20 species was the warbler count for the day and a Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel was new for the growing mammal list. The feeders near the car park gave photographers an excellent opportunity to take shots of the commoner birds. Once again it was hard to leave such an interesting area but we had to head south and back into Canada. Leaving Detroit and Michigan behind, we entered Ontario again through the Windsor Tunnel. We booked into the charming Adams Golden Acre Motel in Kingsville, our home for the next three nights and only 10–15 minutes from Pelee.

**Day 12:** Back into the groove: Tim Horton's for breakfast then on to Pelee. The Tip was a lot quieter than when we were last here six days ago, nevertheless a good selection of passerines were still present. We moved on to Rondeau Provincial Park where, along the “Tulip Tree Trail”, a stunning male Prothonotary Warbler showed extremely well to the delight of everyone. A grey-phase Eastern Screech-owl and Red-bellied, Downy, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers headed a strong supporting cast. Black-crowned Night-herons were seen en route to Blenheim Sewage Lagoons where a small but well-armoured Snapping Turtle greeted us. Greater and Lesser Scaups, Redhead, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Eastern Meadowlark and displaying Bobolinks were added to the day's list of 116 species. Dinner was at the pleasant Arragon restaurant in Kingsville, our discovery of the previous evening.

**Day 13:** Our final full day at Pelee on May 20th started with rain but when walking from the Tip’s tram stop to the Tip it was soon obvious that many more birds were “down” than yesterday. We added two great finds near the Tip: a Sedge Wren and a Henslow’s Sparrow both seen well by all participants. The latter was particularly welcome as it has become a rare bird due to habitat loss. There were more Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos than before and a good selection of warblers included another Cape May and another Cerulean, plus many more Bay-breasted than previously seen. One of our group was fortunate enough to connect with one of two male Mourning Warblers present near the Tip. As the day wore on it warmed up and the rain turned to intermittent showers; we went on to Hillman Marsh to check the wader habitat. Two Black Ducks and more “peeps” were of note here and they pushed the day's total to 106 species. The Arragon restaurant again served up an excellent dinner.

**Day 14:** A quick trip to Pelee proved uneventful as a cold north wind was blowing and the Tip was quiet. We headed east to Long Point Provincial Park, a journey of some 130 miles. Here a displaying Hooded Warbler was the “cream” but Louisiana Waterthrush and Mourning Warbler proved elusive for most. A fish supper at the Harbour Lights restaurant was followed (for most) by an evening walk at Big Creek Marsh which produced no rails but we gained good views of Black Tern, American Bittern, Marsh Wren and Common Nighthawk.

**Day 15:** On our last day, a pre-breakfast stop at the Long Point banding (ringing) station produced both male and female Black-throated Blue Warblers and Blue Jay in the hand. The wind however meant little else of note was seen in the field. A final stop at the “scrape” in front of the visitor centre produced our only White-rumped Sandpiper amongst the peeps we'd already seen, and Purple Martins were gathering nesting material for their high-rise block. A stop at Turkey Point gave terrific views of one of two singing male Prairie Warblers and an American Woodcock was flushed from its daytime roost nearby. Our final destination was the Niagara Falls, where our tourist visit produced a few birds, notably a stooping Peregrine. There were still many gulls in the gorge with Ring-billed Gull being the commonest. The awesome spectacle of the Horseshoe Falls proved a fitting climax for most of the group. Then suddenly it was over; Toronto Airport beckoned and all too soon we were queuing to board our plane home.

**Day 16:** We arrived back at Gatwick Airport early in the morning, where it was time to say our goodbyes.

**A group list of 227 birds was the second-highest total ever recorded for this tour. Notable were the 33 species of wood warbler.**

# ANIMALS RECORDED BY THE GROUP

## MAMMALS

Snowshoe Hare (*Lepus americanus*)  
Eastern Cottontail (*Sylvilagus floridanus*)  
American Porcupine (*Erithizon dorsatum*)  
Eastern Grey Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*)  
American Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*)  
Thirteen-lined Ground Squirrel (*Citellus tridecemlineatus*)  
Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*)  
Woodchuck/Groundhog (*Marmota monax*)  
Beaver (*Castor canadensis*)  
Muskrat (*Ondatra zibethica*)  
Coyote (*Canis latrans*)  
Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*)  
River Otter (*Lutra canadensis*)  
White-tailed Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)  
Moose (*Alces americana*)

## BUTTERFLIES

Question Mark  
American Red Admiral  
American Painted Lady  
Juvenal's Dusky Wing  
Cabbage White  
Alfalfa  
Orange Sulphur  
Clouded Sulphur  
Monarch  
Mourning Cloak

## REPTILES

American Common Snapping Turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*)  
Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sauritus*)  
Eastern Fox Snake (*Elaphe vulpina*)

## AMPHIBIANS

Green Frog  
Bull Frog  
Spring Peeper  
Chorus Frog  
American Toad