

Canada

Point Pelee and Michigan

10–25 May 2001

Participants:

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Sallie Bottomley

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Picture: Spruce Grouse

Leaders:

Vaughan Ashby

Dave Milsom

Day 1: A flight via Halifax took us to Toronto arriving at 18.45 from where we made the two-hour drive to Tilbury, our base for the next seven nights. Common species seen en-route included an American Kestrel hovering over a field in Brampton.

Day 2: The 30-minute drive to Point Pelee National Park and tram from the Visitors' Centre to the tip became routine over the next few days. It is here that the serious birding begins! We soon located our first wood warblers in their spectacular breeding plumages: Yellow, Tennessee, Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Cape May, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped (Myrtle), Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted, Blackpoll, Black-and-white, American Redstart and Common Yellowthroat were all found during this memorable first day at Pelee. More difficult to find but eventually well seen was a male Cerulean Warbler on the path to Tilden's Woods and a "warbler tree" on the De Laurier trail yielded 7 species alone! In the afternoon, we visited Hillman Marsh, where notable sightings were Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Black-bellied (Grey) and Semipalmated Plovers, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper and Least Sandpipers, Dunlin, 52 Short-billed Dowitchers and a female Wilson's Phalarope. Other good finds today were a Little Gull at the tip, a Common Nighthawk sitting on a branch at De Laurier, A Great Horned Owl with its young on a nest on the Schuster Trail, a controversial Alder Flycatcher, plus the first of many Baltimore and Orchard Orioles, and Scarlet Tanagers.

Day 3: We stayed the entire day at Pelee with good results – a total of 95 species! The best birding was north of the boardwalk in Tilden's up to the cemetery. Very good finds were 3 Yellow-breasted Chats, Eastern Phoebe, Gray-cheeked Thrush, Eastern Screech-owl, Eastern Wood-pewee, White-eyed, Warbling, Blue-headed, Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos, Northern Parula, Orange-crowned, Prairie, Wilson's and Canada Warblers and 20 Ovenbirds (after much time was

spent finding our first one!). But the star of the show had to be the amazingly cooperative Yellow-throated Warbler seen well by many birders near the tip train station, an extremely rare bird in Canada!

Day 4: Undoubtedly the top bird of the day (and perhaps the entire trip) was the Chuck-will's-widow perched on a log near the halfway tram stop. Fortunately a volunteer warden monitored the site so photographers did not flush the bird and we had incredible views of the bristles around the bird's bill through the telescope! Other good finds were Hooded and Golden-winged Warblers and a Cooper's Hawk near the tip. Moving on to Wheatley Harbour, excellent views were obtained of Forster's Terns and Bonaparte's Gulls in breeding plumage.

Day 5: We started the day with some close-up views of waders behind the Day's Inn including White-rumped and Pectoral Sandpipers and Eastern Meadowlark. At the tip, we had distant views of Willet and Sanderling whilst Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Northern Waterthrush and Lincoln's Sparrow were all found in the woods. A quiet walk around the Hillman's Marsh produced little except 10 Wood Ducks and a Black Tern before we prepared ourselves for the evening display of American Woodcock. Unfortunately however, we only had fleeting views in the twilight.

Day 6: As Point Pelee was slow today, we headed for Rondeau via Blenheim Sewage Lagoons where we saw our only American Wigeon and a field full of Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows. At Rondeau superb views were gained of our main target bird, a stunning male Prothonotary Warbler in full song! This only took 5 minutes to find so we spent additional time walking the beautiful Spicebush Trail and photographing birds at the Visitors' Centre feeders. New finds at Rondeau included White-breasted Nuthatch, Hairy Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Hermit and Wood Thrushes, Northern Flicker, and Belted Kingfisher. We then decided to return to look for the American Woodcock again at De Laurier, capping off a super day with a wonderful territorial aerial display.

Day 7: Our highest daily total of 98 species was in part due to our visit to the excellent St Clair National Wildlife Refuge, where superb views were had of male Yellow-headed Blackbirds and Least Bitterns. We also scoped Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Common Moorhen, Redhead, Ruddy Duck, Solitary Sandpiper, Cliff Swallow and heard Sora Rail. Back at Point Pelee, our first Broad-winged Hawk and Ruby-throated Hummingbird were seen.

Day 8: Today was the day for our drive to northern Michigan via Windsor and Detroit. Unfortunately, a thick mist along Lake Erie made driving difficult and to rub salt in the wounds, brought hordes of migrants onto the tip at Point Pelee when we were heading in the opposite direction! Reaching the Mackinac Bridge, we crossed over the meeting point of Lakes Huron and Michigan and proceeded towards Lake Superior in the Upper Peninsula. After stopping off briefly to check into our motel, we continued on to Whitefish Point where a small mixed flock of warblers gave terrific views and included our first Palm Warbler. By the lakeshore, American Pipits and White-winged Scoters were nice additions to the list.

Day 9: An early trip to a forest site near Paradise gained superb looks at both displaying Spruce and Ruffed Grouse, plus Sandhill Crane, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Red Crossbill and Pine Warbler. At Whitefish Point, a great hawk flight brought Golden and Bald Eagle, Osprey, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Merlin and Northern Harrier amongst others, Common (Wilson's) Snipe and a skulking but eventually well seen Le Conte's Sparrow. In the afternoon, a further forest walk brought new species in the form of Brown Creeper and Red-breasted Nuthatch. An evening foray into the forest and marshes resulted in hearing the amazing call of the American Bittern as well as Boreal Owl. The undoubted highlight however, was a displaying American Woodcock within 8 feet of us!

Day 10: Today we drove to Seney National Wildlife Refuge where at times the mosquitoes and blackflies seemed to outnumber the birds! Despite this, we saw 2 Sharp-tailed Grouse, Ruffed Grouse, displaying Upland Sandpiper, Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked and American Black Ducks, 12 Brewer's Blackbirds, Pine Siskins, 2 Pileated Woodpeckers, 2 Vesper and 10 Clay-colored Sparrows, up to 90 Trumpeter Swans and Bald Eagle!

Day 11: A walk in Tahquamenon Falls State Park brought new sightings in Purple Finch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, and finally we SAW a Sedge Wren! Earlier, a “seawatch” at Whitefish Point brought numerous White-winged Scoters, 12 Red-throated and 10 Common Loons plus a pair of Long-tailed Ducks. On the beach were 2 Hudsonian Whimbrel. Heading back south, a stop at Hulbert’s Marsh resulted in 3 close Gray Jays and a Winter Wren. Gadwall and Mute Swans, plus Indian Paintbrush and Dwarf Lake Iris were encountered at the Mackinac Bridge before driving onto Grayling for the night.

Day 12: After an informative audio-visual presentation, we headed out to our Kirtland’s Warbler site. After a fairly long wait, superb views of up to 10 birds were obtained. Other new birds were Wild Turkey, Eastern Bluebird and a calling Dark-eyed Junco. Continuing on to Tawas Point, many Cedar Waxwings flew about and a large flock of Whimbrel on the point contained 5 Red Knot. Northern Mockingbird was a local rarity here and seen well by some. As we drove out of Tawas, 15 Black and 2 Caspian Terns were seen as the winds increased. Alabaster Road looked promising for Henslow’s Sparrow but the rain defeated us although several Bobolinks were found. As we hurried south, tornadoes were just behind us and the local radio stations told us to get out fast! We finally reached the Canadian border in Detroit and then drove on to our new motel in Kingsville by 21.30.

Day 13: Returning to Point Pelee seemed like visiting an old friend after an absence of 5 days! A lengthy stakeout produced fleeting glimpses of a first-summer Mourning Warbler whilst at the Tip were over 600 Cedar Waxwings plus our first Yellow-bellied Flycatcher. At Hillman’s Marsh we scoped 2 Semipalmated and a Baird’s Sandpiper. In the evening, after a fine meal, Eric led us to a chimney where 30+ Chimney Swifts hurtled in at dusk, a truly spectacular sight.

Day 14: Our final day at Pelee. A Lesser Black-backed Gull on the Tip and wonderful views of a male Mourning Warbler on Schuster Trail provided the only major highlights. We therefore tried to add new species to the list with an after-lunch drive to Essex and Harrow sewage lagoons. The former was quiet but we got very good looks at a Ruddy Turnstone in full breeding plumage at Harrow, a much under-rated bird. Tufted Titmouse called briefly but gave no views at Cedar Creek Conservation Area.

Day 15: A hectic day leaving early for Long Point on Lake Erie, then on for a brief session at Niagara Falls, before driving through rush-hour to Toronto Airport. At Long Point, fine views of Prairie, Cerulean and Blue-winged Warblers, Alder Flycatcher and 2 Grasshopper Sparrows made it all seem worthwhile however! By the time we reached Niagara the birding was over but the stunning views of the falls somewhat made up for this. Our final group total of species seen/heard was 214, exceeding the previous record by 14 birds!

- 1) Black/Grey Squirrel
- 2) Red Squirrel
- 3) Muskrat
- 4) Groundhog
- 5) Cottontail Rabbit
- 6) Eastern Chipmunk
- 7) Raccoon
- 8) Opossum
- 9) White-tailed Deer
- 10) Moose
- 11) Red Fox
- 12) Coyote
- 13) Long-tailed Weasel
- 14) Mink
- 15) Beaver

- 1) Question Mark
- 2) American Red Admiral
- 3) American Painted Lady
- 4) Cabbage White
- 5) Spicebush Swallowtail
- 6) Eastern Tiger Swallowtail
- 7) Black Swallowtail
- 8) Juvenile's Duskywing
- 9) Spring Azure
- 11) Eastern-tailed Blue
- 11) Olive Hairstreak
- 12) Alfalfa
- 13) Orange Sulphur
- 14) Monarch
- 15) Common Sootywing
- 16) Pearl Crescent
- 17) Mourning Cloak
- 18) Gray Comma

AMPHIBIANS / REPTILES

- 1) Eastern Fox Snake
- 2) Garter Snake
- 3) Northern Water Snake
- 4) Northern Leopard Frog
- 5) Green Frog
- 6) Bullfrog
- 7) Mink Frog
- 8) Spring Peeper
- 9) Cope's Gray Tree Frog
- 10) Chorus Frog
- 11) American Toad
- 12) Five-lined Skink

DRAGONFLIES

- 1) Doubleday Bluet
- 2) Common Green Darner
- 3) Common Baskettail