

POINT PELEE & KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

MAY 9-17, 2011

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After a lapse of many years I was pleased to have the opportunity to lead a full tour of this region again. There were, however, some surprises, because over the years the itinerary has changed (for the better) and now includes the interesting Crane Creek/Magee Marsh area—the Lake Erie south shore counterpart to Point Pelee, fewer days at Pelee, and a final extra day in the Grayling (or Detroit) area as a backup in case weather conditions do not permit viewing of the Kirtland's Warbler on the first day.

The weather was delightful during our visits to Pelee and the Crane Creek area, but turned decidedly unpleasant during the last three days of the trip in the Detroit and Grayling area with intermittent rain, unseasonably cold temperatures (into the 30s at night and rising barely above 40 during the day), and strong winds. Nevertheless, we observed one Kirtland's Warbler in the scope and later obtained excellent and extended views of a second Kirtland's Warbler foraging on the ground at point-blank range despite (or because of) unseasonably cold and windy conditions. As a consequence, we used our last day to visit or revisit several areas in the Saginaw Bay and Detroit areas, as well as an area west of Ann Arbor—areas mostly new to me and involving some distinct navigational challenges.

Pelee itself is a phenomenon of birds and birders that everyone (if you are a birder) ought to witness at least once in their lifetime. Some might argue that it should be experienced every spring, and occasionally in the fall as well. Less well-known, perhaps, but rapidly gaining in popularity, is its counterpart on the south shore of Lake Erie, the Crane Creek/Magee area. A pity, perhaps, that it isn't larger because we experienced a truly remarkable day there—warblers in astonishing abundance and mostly quite low and easy to see. Alas, however, the Magee Marsh Boardwalk, which winds lazily through a pleasant seven-acre tract of woodland, now has its own army of birder devotees which, by late morning, were almost as numerous as the birds. Wonderful, of course, because so many people come to enjoy the spring warbler migration, but perhaps now threatening to overtax the limited facilities.

For our smallish group, trip highlights revolved around (1) the Kirtland's Warbler itself (we couldn't have had a better viewing of it), (2) the amazing spectacle of warblers at the Magee Marsh Boardwalk on the day of our visit (apparently one of the best days of the week), (3) several good days and one truly spectacular day at Pelee with warblers arriving throughout the morning hours and, (4) at least for some of us, a highlight was the opportunity to observe an ermine (not a long-tailed weasel: see mammal list) at length and close up as it repeatedly returned to raid an eastern chipmunk's nest and carry away the young chipmunks (one at a time) to its own nest burrow (or complex of burrows) which was about 30 to 40 yards away in open forest. While such a scene may seem shocking to some, it is, in fact, real life drama played out millions of times daily

throughout the natural world. An event such as this is something rarely observed by those of us in the modern world who are now largely sheltered from the dynamics of the natural world.

ITINERARY:

May 9: Arrival in Detroit

May 10: Crane Creek, Magee Marsh and boardwalk, and Metzger Marsh, Ohio

May 11: Early morning departure from Detroit to Leamington, Ontario with mid-morning and afternoon at Point Pelee National Park

May 12-13: Visits to Point Pelee National Park, the Onion fields, Hillman Marsh, and an evening with woodcocks

May 14: Depart early for birding in Indian Springs Metropark north of Pontiac; mixed rain, wind and cold temperatures characterized our day but with good warbler numbers despite the weather

May 15: The Kirtland's Warbler (Yea!). More cold temperatures and wind but success with the warbler. Late morning and afternoon at Hartwick Pines State Park and nearby areas

May 16: Early departure for Tobico Marsh, Bay City Recreational Area, Indian Springs Metro Park, and some old field habitat near Manchester to conclude our day

May 17. Departure

KEY:

Ohio [Crane creek/Magee Marsh boardwalk and visitor's center area]

Canada [Point Pelee; Hillman Marsh; Onion fields etc]

Indian Springs Metropark; Pontiac Lake Metropark area (briefly); Grayling-Hartwick area; Tobico March; Bay City State Park; and Manchester area]

Boldface = significant highlights representing rarities, specialties or exceptional observation experiences

Asterisk (*) = heard only

BIRD LIST:

Canada Goose, all areas

Mute Swan, Hillman Marsh; Tobico etc

Wood Duck, Ohio; Pelee; Manchester

Mallard, all areas

Blue-winged Teal, Ohio (Metzgar Marsh; 1 pair)

Northern Shoveler, Hillman Marsh (5-6)

Northern Pintail, Hillman Marsh (only 1)

Greater Scaup, Pelee (2 with mergansers; observed in flight and on water)

White-winged Scoter, Pelee (3 birds)

Red-breasted Merganser, Pelee

Ring-necked Pheasant, Leamington (onion fields)

Wild Turkey, Pelee; Grayling; heard at Indian Springs Metropark

Common Loon, Pelee (breeding plumage adult and one still in winter plumage)
 Pied-billed Grebe, Ohio (Metzgar Marsh)
 Double-crested Cormorant, Ohio (Magee; Metzgar; and Pelee)
 Great Blue Heron, Ohio (all areas); Pelee area
 Great Egret, all areas and surprisingly numerous
 Turkey Vulture, all areas
 Bald Eagle, observed soaring at Magee and also one adult on a nest at the Magee
 Visitor's center; also one seen soaring near the Day's Inn hotel just outside Pelee
 Northern Harrier, male and female over onion fields at Pelee
 Sharp-shinned Hawk, Magee; Pelee (at least 3) and one near Grayling
 Cooper's Hawk, one adult observed perched at length along Cross Road in northeastern
 corner of Pontiac Lake Metropark area
 Red-tailed Hawk, one near Pelee; Grayling; Indian Springs Metropark
 Common Moorhen, Metzgar Marsh (only 2)
 American Coot, Metzgar Marsh (8-10)
 Sandhill Crane, Pelee (1 in onion fields); a very rusty pair with 2 very rusty chicks at
 Indian Springs Metropark
 Black-bellied Plover, 6-7 at Hillman Marsh
 Semipalmated Plover, 10-12 at Hillman Marsh
 Killdeer, 1-6 or more daily in virtually all areas
 Spotted Sandpiper, 1 (still in unspotted plumage) along shores of Pelee
 Lesser Yellowlegs, 3-4 at Hillman Marsh
 Upland Sandpiper, at least 8 seen in Grayling/Hartwick area (one pair very well in scope)
 Least Sandpiper, 12 or more in Magee area; 25+ at Hillman Marsh
 Dunlin, 12+ in onion fields; 70+ at Hillman Marsh
 Short-billed Dowitcher, 20+ at Hillman Marsh
American Woodcock, at least 3 seen in wet field near Leamington (including close look
 at a bird twice on ground, and twice flying close to us as well as aerial display)
 Wilson's Phalarope, 1 female at Hillman Marsh
 Bonaparte's Gull, daily in large numbers at Pelee and Hillman and adjacent onion fields
 Ring-billed Gull, daily in large numbers in all areas
 Herring Gull, Metzgar Marsh; Pelee (especially the point)
Lesser Black-backed Gull, Pelee point (1 first year bird which showed its yellow legs,
 intermediate size (compared to Ring-billed and larger Herring Gulls) and overall
 darker back than those of other immature gulls present; this bird observed by a large
 number of people at the Pelee point; generally scarce here
 Common Tern, 2-3 at Hillman Marsh
 Forester's Tern, 1 at Magee Marsh; 45+ at Hillman Marsh
 Rock Pigeon, daily in all areas
 Mourning Dove, daily in all areas
 Eastern Screech-Owl, 1 gray-phase bird at Magee Marsh boardwalk
 *Barred Owl, 1 heard (calling spontaneously) mid-morning at Indian Springs Metropark
 Chimney Swift, finally 3 seen the last day at Indian Springs Metropark
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird, daily at Pelee and Grayling and Indian Springs Metropark
 Belted Kingfisher, only 1 seen (near Days Inn hotel south of Leamington)

Red-headed Woodpecker, 1 near the “Wild Wings” store near Pelee; others in Pelee National Park

Red-bellied Woodpecker, heard and/or seen daily at Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, 1 adult seen by SH and part of group at a rest stop south of Grayling

Downy Woodpecker, 1-2 seen daily in all areas

Hairy Woodpecker, 1 seen at a feeder assembly in front of a private home north of Hartwick Pines State Park

Northern (Yellow-shafted) Flicker, daily at Pelee and points northward

Pileated Woodpecker, 1 seen in flight and perched distantly (by some) at Indian Springs Metropark

Eastern Wood Pewee, Magee Marsh; a couple at Pelee; 1 at Pontiac Lake Metropark (Cross Road)

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Magee Marsh boardwalk (1 seen by SH; not seen by group)

Alder Flycatcher, Pelee (1 or 2 seen but no vocalization); one heard by SH in Indian Springs Metropark area (but not seen)

Willow Flycatcher, 1 heard and seen quite well in wet thickets near Days Inn at Leamington

Least Flycatcher, 3-4 seen/heard at Pelee (1 seen by everyone)

Eastern Phoebe, a couple at Magee Marsh area; 1 near Park Office at Indian Springs Metropark

Great Crested Flycatcher, 3 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk and others daily at Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark

Eastern Kingbird, daily at Pelee and points northward

White-eyed Vireo, 1 seen by SH at Pelee but, alas, apparently never seen well by the group

*Yellow-throated Vireo, 2 heard at Indian Springs Metropark

Blue-headed Vireo, 5 or more at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 2-3 daily at Pelee

Warbling Vireo, at least 30+ at Magee Marsh boardwalk; up to 6 on one or more days at Pelee

Philadelphia Vireo, 4-5 seen at Pelee (including 1 near the tram station at the point which quickly attracted a crowd) and 4-5 more mainly at the Sleepy Hollow visitor trails); all of which is a surprisingly good number of this generally low density species

Red-eyed Vireo, 3+ at Magee Marsh; 10-15 on last 2 days at Point Pelee (but none on the first day there!); also Indian Springs Metropark were common (especially the last day)

Blue Jay, Pelee and all areas northward (mostly singles or scattered small loose groups)

American Crow, Pelee and all areas northward

Common Raven, a couple heard and seen in flight east of Grayling

Horned Lark, a dozen in black earth onion fields near Pelee

Purple Martin, large colonies at Magee Visitor’s Center; also seen near Leamington

Tree Swallow, seen daily in all areas although only 1-2 at Grayling (east of town)

Northern Rough-winged Swallow, 1 seen in Indian Springs Metropark area by one person (surprisingly scarce)

Cliff Swallow, a small colony under a bridge in onion fields east of Leamington

Barn Swallow, seen in all areas although possibly not seen near Grayling

Black-capped Chickadee, daily at Pelee; also Indian Springs Metropark; Hartwick etc

Tufted Titmouse, heard at Magee Marsh boardwalk; seen at Pontiac Lake Metropark (Cross Road)

Red-breasted Nuthatch, heard and or seen almost daily including Magee; Pelee; Indian Springs Metropark; Hartwick (at feeders) etc

White-breasted Nuthatch, seen at Indian Springs Metropark; also heard at Bay City state Park (in cold wind)

Brown Creeper, Hartwick Pines State Park (3 seen); another at Indian Springs Metropark

*Carolina Wren, heard daily at Pelee and also at Bay City State Park but apparently never seen

House Wren, Magee Marsh area and Pelee

Marsh Wren, 1 seen near Day's Inn hotel at Leamington; others heard at Tobico etc

Ruby-crowned Kinglet, 8-10 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 12-15 or more daily at Pelee; also at Indian Springs Metropark

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, 1 at Magee Marsh; then 12-15+ daily at Pelee; several in Indian Springs Metropark

Eastern Bluebird, two pair (rather distant) in open fields north of Hartwick Pines State Park; another pair seen west of Manchester, Michigan

Veery, 3-4 at Magee Marsh boardwalk; total of 3 at Pelee (1 first day; 2 the second day)

Gray-cheeked Thrush, 1 seen fairly well at Pelee although not without some patience; always scarce

Swainson's Thrush, 2-3 at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 1-2 daily at Pelee; 4 last day at Indian Springs Metropark

Wood Thrush, 1 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk; heard daily at Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark and at Bay City State Park

American Robin, daily in all areas

Gray Catbird, daily in all areas; up to 25 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk (where obviously we were observing a major northward movement)

Northern Mockingbird, 1 at Point Pelee

Brown Thrasher, 1 at Point Pelee; a couple heard and seen east of Grayling

European Starling, daily in all areas

American Pipit, 12+ at Hillman Marsh

Cedar Waxwing, 4+ flocks (est. 15-40 individuals) daily at Point Pelee totaling perhaps 100+ birds; pair at Indian Springs Metropark

Blue-winged Warbler, 1 seen at Pelee by one person; another seen by SH (others?) at Indian Springs Metropark

Tennessee Warbler, 2-3 seen at Point Pelee; also one heard at Indian Springs Metropark

Orange-crowned Warbler, total of ca. 4 seen at Point Pelee (at least 2 were high and difficult to see)

Nashville Warbler, 12+ at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 5-30+ daily at Pelee; also seen at virtually all areas in Michigan

Northern Parula, 2 at Magee Marsh Boardwalk; peak of 8-10 seen on May 12 at Pelee; otherwise 1-2 daily

Yellow Warbler, est. 35+ at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 25-100+ daily at Pelee where by far the most numerous parulid; smaller numbers at Indian Springs Metropark and Grayling

Chestnut-sided Warbler, ca. 12 at Magee; peak of 11 at Pelee on May 12; also 4-5 at Indian Springs Metropark on both visits

Magnolia Warbler, est. 12+ seen at Magee; peak of 15+ on May 12 at Pelee with smaller numbers on other days; also seen at Indian Springs Metropark

Cape May Warbler, 1 seen at Magee by one of group participants; high of 3 seen on May 12 at Point Pelee (but not seen on any other days)

Black-throated Blue Warbler, 8-10 seen at Magee; otherwise 1-3 seen daily at Point Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark

Yellow-rumped Warbler, est. 50+ seen at Magee; high of 15+ seen at Point Pelee on May 12; only 1 female seen at Indian Springs Metropark on our return on May 16

Black-throated Green Warbler, est. 7-8 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk; peak of 8-10 seen on May 12 at Point Pelee but otherwise mostly 1-2 seen daily including at Indian Springs Metropark

Blackburnian Warbler, 3 males seen at Magee Marsh Boardwalk; 1-2 seen daily at Point Pelee; high of 4-5+ males seen at Indian Springs Metropark on May 14; 1 female seen at Indian Springs Metropark on May 16

Pine Warbler, 1 very cold, sluggish and silent bird seen at Hartwick Pines State Park

Kirtland's Warbler, 1 seen in scope east of Grayling at Staley Lake Road and M-72; a second bird seen ca. 0.5 mi east of Stephan Br. Road and ca. 3-4 mi south of M-72; this second bird was seen foraging on ground for several minutes at point blank range provided one of the highlights of the trip; the world population is now estimated at ca. 1800 pairs (up from ca. 200 pairs in the early 1970s)

Palm Warbler, 12-14 seen at Magee Marsh boardwalk; 1 or 1 at Point Pelee and 2 at Indian Springs Metropark

Bay-breasted Warbler, 1 (or 2?) at Sleepy Hollow in Point Pelee but 12-15 seen at Pontiac Lake State Recreational Area and at Indian Springs Metropark where we saw many on both visits; highlighted because of the large number of Bay-breasted Warblers we saw along Cross Road in Pontiac Lake State Park and Indian Springs Metropark

Blackpoll Warbler, two seen at Point Pelee and another heard and seen at Indian Springs Metropark on our last day

Black-and-white Warbler, 4-5 at Magee Marsh; up to 15 on our peak day at Point Pelee

American Redstart, 15+ at Magee Marsh and 8-15+ daily at Point Pelee; 3-4 at Indian Springs Metropark

Prothonotary Warbler, 8+ at Magee Marsh (but nowhere else)

Ovenbird, 4-5 at Magee Marsh; 1-2 daily at Point Pelee; 1 at Indian Springs Metropark

Northern Waterthrush, 1 seen and ca. 6 heard at Magee Marsh; heard and 1 seen at Point Pelee (Tildon Woods Trail); also heard at Indian Springs Metropark

Louisiana Waterthrush, 2 heard and 1 seen well our last day at Indian Springs Metropark

Mourning Warbler, 1 seen (female) at Point Pelee (Tildon Woods Trail)

Common Yellowthroat, seen in all areas including 8+ at Magee Marsh; 1-10 daily at Point Pelee; and also at Indian Springs Metropark and Grayling

Hooded Warbler, 2 males seen at Point Pelee; scarce here

Wilson's Warbler, 3-4 at Magee Marsh; from 1 to 4+ daily at Point Pelee; also seen at Indian Springs Metropark

Canada Warbler, 2-3 at Magee Marsh; 1 along Sleepy Hollow trail at Point Pelee

Eastern Towhee (yes, no longer called Rufous-sided Towhee), 1-2 heard or seen daily at Point Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark

Chipping Sparrow, 4 at Magee Marsh; scattered birds at Point Pelee and northward in Michigan

Clay-colored Sparrow, 1 seen by one person (DB) on the initial Kirtland's Warbler walk

Field Sparrow, 1 seen at Point Pelee by SH; a pair seen by everyone in the old field west of Manchester

Savanna Sparrow, 3-4 seen on two separate days at Point Pelee

Song Sparrow, heard and seen in all areas

Lincoln's Sparrow, 1 at Magee Marsh; 1 at Point Pelee; 1 near Grayling

Swampy Sparrow, 2-5 heard and/or seen on first 2 days at Pelee

White-throated Sparrow, 40-50 at Magee Marsh boardwalk; and 20-35 on two consecutive days at Point Pelee; a couple at Indian Springs Metropark and Grayling

White-crowned Sparrow, none at Magee but 30-50 daily at Point Pelee and smaller numbers northward in Michigan

Dark-eyed Junco, 1 seen in Indian Springs Metropark by one person (DB); another at the Kirtland's Warbler site

Scarlet Tanager, 2 males and a female at Magee Marsh; 1-6+ daily at Point Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark although of the estimated 16-18 seen in these latter two areas only 3-4 were females

Northern Cardinal, daily in all areas except Grayling

Rose-breasted Grosbeak, 2 heard at Magee; 5-20+ daily at Point Pelee and all other sites including Hartwick Pines State Park where several males and a female or two were practically monopolizing the sunflower seed feeders

Indigo Bunting, 1 at Magee; a total of 6 seen (all males) at Point Pelee

Dickcissel, 1 seen beneath a feeder at the Wild Wings Birding and Optical store near Point Pelee; scarce this far north

Bobolink, 1 seen by 1 person (JS) flying over the prairie and old field country west of Manchester on our last day; unfortunately we were unable to find it in the fields north of Hartwick Pines State Park

Red-winged Blackbird, daily in large numbers and especially so at Point Pelee where we much have seen 250-500 daily (they were everywhere)

Eastern Meadowlark, seen at Indian Springs Metropark and in Grayling area

Common Grackle, daily in large numbers (almost as numerous as Red-winged Blackbirds)

Brown-headed Cowbird, another species altogether too common; some 50 large cage traps are maintained in the Kirtland's Warbler area to control their numbers and provide opportunities for the Kirtlands's to successfully fledge young

Orchard Oriole, none at Magee Marsh but 25-40+ daily at Point Pelee' 2-3 in Indian Springs Metropark area

Baltimore Oriole, est. 15+ at Magee Marsh but up to 75+ daily at Point Pelee; 1-2 at Indian Springs Metropark and 1 in Grayling area

Purple Finch, pair seen at feeders at Hartwick Pines State Park

House Finch, heard in vicinity of Magee Marsh (visitor's center); 3-4 in residential Pelee/Leamington area

Pine Siskin, 2 at Hartwick Pines State Park

American Goldfinch, all areas

Evening Grosbeak, several at feeders and in vicinity of visitor's center at Hartwick Pines state park; not rare but always exciting to see

MAMMALS:

Eastern Cottontail, daily at Point Pelee

White-tailed Deer, Magee Marsh and Point Pelee

Northern Raccoon, 1 curled up asleep in tree fork at Point Pelee and another seen on ground

Eastern Chipmunk, several in Indian Springs Metropark (seen on both visits)

Ermine [alas, not a Long-tailed Weasel as originally thought because this animal was entirely white below, not buff], spectacular opportunity to observe this creature foraging at close range (they are quite near-sighted so if you stand still they will not recognize a human form) on forest floor at Indian Springs Metropark and then observed raiding an Eastern Chipmunk's nest where we saw it carry away a baby chipmunk and carry it to its own nest burrow about 30-40 yards away, and then return and take a second baby chipmunk and repeat the process; later we saw it scamper about 12 feet up the side of a tree trunk, and forage rapidly over the forest floor in the same area. The opportunity to observe any "weasel" foraging for such an extended period is truly rare. My mammal reference book (Kays and Wilson, Mammals of North America) indicates it hunts mainly at night (obviously not the case on the day we were there).

Thirteen-lined Ground-Squirrel, 1 seen beneath a bird feeder north of Hartwick Pines State Park; this species is here at or close to the northeastern limit of its range

Red Squirrel, a couple around feeders at Hartwick Pines State Park visitor's center

Eastern Gray Squirrel, common at Point Pelee where we saw gray ones and some black or dusky ones; perhaps also seen at Indian Springs Metropark

Fox Squirrel, at least one or more seen at Indian Springs Metropark (the more or less normal orangish brown ones with orangish tinge to tail; this species also has black and dusky morphs similar to the Eastern Gray Squirrel and some of the blackish ones we were seeing both at Point Pelee and Indian Springs Metropark may have also been this species because other than size I am unsure how to distinguish them

[North American Porcupine, several road kills in Grayling area but none seen alive]