

POINT PELEE & KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

MAY 12-20, 2007

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Leader: Kim Eckert

This tour has always been about warblers, and 30 species is invariably the target. Don't get me wrong, though: I seldom consider a tour's species count a true measure of how well things went. It's always more important to consider what those species were and how well they were seen. But still, in this case, 30 is the target, and most years we're able to meet expectations. If we have a loftier goal, the hope is to match or surpass the 33 warblers we had on two of our tours in the 1990s. Conversely, the fear is to finish with the modest total we had in 2000: "only" 26 species, and three of those were heard-only.

To begin this warbler quest, we started out down in Ohio at the boardwalk at Magee Marsh (a.k.a. Crane Creek). It's only a bit more than an hour's drive from our hotel by the Detroit airport, and we tried this for the first time last year. Again this year the trip was worth it, as we came up with 20 warbler species (one was heard-only) in this relatively small area of trees on the south shore of Lake Erie—that is, the opposite side of the lake from Point Pelee.

This was an especially nice way to start things out before joining the legions of birders at Pelee, but equally impressive were those American Woodcocks foraging for earthworms within a few feet of the boardwalk. We would again witness the woodcock display at dusk a few days later, but to see this unique species so well and so close by day is something I seldom see. Also significant on our Ohio day were Snowy Egrets and Glossy Ibis: these southern waders are rarely seen this far north, and this was only the second time these had ever been listed on this tour.

So, twenty warblers down and ten to go as we spent the next three days at Point Pelee and nearby Rondeau Provincial Park. During this time we came up with 28 warblers in all, although one of these (Worm-eating) was seen well by only one of the participants, and two others (Hooded and Yellow-breasted Chat) were just leader-only/heard-only entries. But these less-than-satisfactory finds were more than offset by a female Kirtland's Warbler which dropped in at Pelee on its way north and flitted across our path, our first Golden-winged (a difficult species here and one of my favorites), and a beautiful Prothonotary by its nesting box at Rondeau.

Speaking of Rondeau, it was there we had our best looks at Red-headed Woodpeckers, saw and heard our only Acadian Flycatcher, had good studies of often-elusive Gray-cheeked Thrushes, and observed Clay-colored Sparrow, a species quite unusual this far east. In addition on this day, we checked the nearby community of Erieau and vicinity and came up with an especially handsome American Golden-Plover in a field among some Black-bellieds, some equally handsome Sanderlings on a beach sporting their rusty-toned breeding plumage, and a Northern Mockingbird by some houses where this locally rare species curiously appears each year.

The next day we were on our way to Michigan with a composite total of 29 warbler species, and it was a virtual cinch that Pine Warbler would make 30, since it commonly breeds where we were headed. But still, three of our 29 were heard-only and another was a single-observer find, leaving us with a solid and satisfactory list of “only” 25. Would we make it? On our way up to Grayling, there was a singing male Blue-winged (26), but no Cerulean where we had one in 2005. The next morning near Grayling we saw singing male Kirtland’s Warblers (not new, but more striking than the female back at Pelee), and an especially cooperative Mourning (27; previously heard-only) singing by only our second Golden-winged. And that afternoon there was our expected Pine Warbler (28) at beautiful Hartwick Pines State Park, along with two baby Barred Owls (aw!) and Evening Grosbeaks.

One day to go with just enough time to check a few recommended breeding warbler spots on our way back to Detroit. Besides a lack of time, our problem was I had never been to these places before, but the first one we tried worked out. At Rose Lake near Lansing, the promised Ceruleans were not there, but an unexpected Hooded appeared (29) along with a better look at a Blue-winged. Nearby Legg Park was next, but no Louisiana Waterthrush. Time for one last spot—ironically named Waterloo—and one last possibility. And there they were: along with another Hooded, and two singing male Ceruleans at eye level. Thirty!

Our Michigan warbler list reached 19 species (no migrants; all of them on breeding grounds), and, including the Worm-eating and chat, we now had 32 in all for the trip. It was almost anticlimactic as we finished the tour that day with some highly sought Henslow’s Sparrows singing from the weed stalks.

Itinerary:

- May 12. Arrival in Detroit.
- May 13. All day in Ohio at Crane Creek State Park/Magee Marsh WMA and vicinity, including Ottawa NWR (briefly) and Metzger Marsh.
- May 14. Drive to Leamington, and birding most of day at Point Pelee National Park, including Sanctuary picnic area, Tilden Woods, and West Beach/Camp Henry area (for a Kirtland’s!).
- May 15. Return to Point Pelee: The Tip and return hike via the Woodland Trail, Tilden Woods (briefly), the old headquarters site near the entrance, and Blue Heron picnic area.
- May 16. All-day trip to Rondeau Provincial Park (especially Bennett Road, the Visitor Center (Centre?)/Tulip Tree Trail, and Spicebush Trail), with stops en route back to Leamington at Erieau and Erie Beach; evening with displaying woodcocks by the Day’s Inn.
- May 17. Final morning visit to Point Pelee (The Tip and Woodland Trail), followed by 250-mile drive to Grayling via a stop at Pontiac Lake Recreation Area.
- May 18. Morning Kirtland’s Warbler tour southeast of Grayling (Stephan Bridge Rd.), followed by birding in Houghton Lakes area of Roscommon Co. and Hartwick Pines State Park.
- May 19. Return to Detroit via Rose Lake Wildlife Area, Legg Park, Waterloo State Recreation Area (for Ceruleans!), and Sharonville State Game Area (for Henslow’s!).
- May 20. Departure for home.

Key:

O = seen/heard in Ohio, primarily Crane Creek/Magee Marsh (May 13)

C = seen/heard in Canada, primarily Point Pelee and Rondeau Provincial Park & vicinity (May 14-17)

M = seen/heard in Michigan (May 17-19)

Species in **boldfaced type** are significant highlights of the tour, either as unexpected rarities or as the specialties of this tour.

Bird List:

Canada Goose OCM (with lots of – too many? – babies)

Mute Swan OCM (a.k.a.oh, never mind)

Wood Duck OCM

(Gadwall M / leader-only)

American Wigeon CM

Mallard OCM

Blue-winged Teal O

Canvasback CM

Ring-necked Duck M

Hooded Merganser O

Red-breasted Merganser C

Ruffed Grouse M (heard-only)

Wild Turkey M

Common Loon C (one fly-by at The Tip)

Pied-billed Grebe OM

Double-crested Cormorant OCM

American Bittern M (heard-only)

Great Blue Heron OCM

Great Egret OCM

Snowy Egret O (Magee Marsh; only the second time seen on this tour)

(Green Heron C / leader-only in Leamington)

Glossy Ibis O (several at Metzger Marsh; another second record for this tour)

Turkey Vulture OCM

Osprey M (incl. active nests)

Bald Eagle OCM

Broad-winged Hawk M

Red-tailed Hawk OCM

American Kestrel O (only one seen)

Virginia Rail M (heard-only)

Sora OM (excellent view at Magee Marsh)

American Coot OCM

Sandhill Crane M (heard by all – and seen by Ethel – at Rose Lake)

Black-bellied Plover C (several near Erieau)

American Golden-Plover C (a handsome adult with the Black-bellieds!)

Semipalmated Plover O

Killdeer OCM

Spotted Sandpiper OC

Lesser Yellowlegs O

Upland Sandpiper M (again in the usual field near Hartwick Pines)

Ruddy Turnstone OC

Sanderling C (incl. handsome breeding-plumaged birds at Erieau!)
 Least Sandpiper O
 Dunlin OC (abundant at Metzger Marsh)
 Short-billed Dowitcher O
 Wilson's Snipe M (perched up on a snag)
American Woodcock OC (seen by day at Crane Creek, and displaying by the Day's Inn)
 Bonaparte's Gull C
 Ring-billed Gull OCM
 Herring Gull OC
 Great Black-backed Gull C (Erieau)
 Caspian Tern OC
 Common Tern OC
 Forster's Tern OC
 Black Tern OCM (especially at the flowage by Houghton Lakes)
 Rock Pigeon OCM
 Mourning Dove OCM
 Yellow-billed Cuckoo CM (best view at Legg Park)
 Eastern Screech-Owl O (roosting by the boardwalk at Crane Creek)
Barred Owl M (two cute juveniles at Hartwick; nice spotting, Sid!)
 Common Nighthawk C (en route to Rondeau)
 Chimney Swift OC
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird OCM
 Belted Kingfisher OM
 Red-headed Woodpecker CM (excellent views at Rondeau)
 Red-bellied Woodpecker CM
 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker M (at our Houghton Lakes picnic site)
 Downy Woodpecker OCM
 Hairy Woodpecker CM
 Northern Flicker CM
 (Pileated Woodpecker C / leader-only at Rondeau)
 Olive-sided Flycatcher M (heard-only at the Kirtland's spot)
 Eastern Wood-Pewee CM
 Acadian Flycatcher C (singing male at Rondeau)
 Alder Flycatcher M
 Willow Flycatcher C (a silent probable at Pelee; also singing at dusk by the woodcocks)
 Least Flycatcher OCM
 Eastern Phoebe CM
 Great Crested Flycatcher CM
 Eastern Kingbird OCM
 (White-eyed Vireo C / leader-only, heard-only at Pelee)
 Yellow-throated Vireo CM
 Blue-headed Vireo C
 Warbling Vireo OCM
 Philadelphia Vireo OC (more than usual, especially at Pelee)
 Red-eyed Vireo CM
 Blue Jay OCM

American Crow OCM
 Common Raven M
 Horned Lark CM (incl. one in the woods in Michigan!)
 Purple Martin CM
 Tree Swallow OCM
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow C
 Bank Swallow C
 Barn Swallow OCM
 Cliff Swallow C
 Black-capped Chickadee CM
 Tufted Titmouse CM
 Red-breasted Nuthatch M
 White-breasted Nuthatch CM
 Brown Creeper M (singing male at Legg Park)
 Carolina Wren C (finally seen on the Woodland Trail at Pelee)
 House Wren OCM
 Sedge Wren M (nice close views)
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet OCM
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher OCM
 Eastern Bluebird M (only one on the last afternoon)
 Veery OCM
Gray-cheeked Thrush C (excellent views of this often-elusive migrant at Rondeau)
 Swainson's Thrush C
 Hermit Thrush CM
 Wood Thrush OCM
 American Robin OCM
 Gray Catbird OCM
Northern Mockingbird C (once again, only near Erieau: why?)
 Brown Thrasher OM
 European Starling OCM
 Cedar Waxwing C
 Blue-winged Warbler M (singing males at the Pontiac Lake and Rose Lake areas)
 Golden-winged Warbler CM (migrant at Tilden Woods and singing in Michigan by the Mourning)
 Tennessee Warbler C
 Orange-crowned Warbler OC
 Nashville Warbler CM
 Northern Parula OCM
 Yellow Warbler OCM (as ubiquitous as ever)
 Chestnut-sided Warbler OCM
 Magnolia Warbler OCM
 Cape May Warbler OC (best views at Blue Heron picnic area)
 Black-throated Blue Warbler OC
 Yellow-rumped Warbler OCM
 Black-throated Green Warbler OCM
 Blackburnian Warbler OC
 Pine Warbler M (excellent view at Hartwick Pines)

Kirtland's Warbler CM (a dull female at Pelee, but handsome singing males near Grayling)
 Palm Warbler OC
 Bay-breasted Warbler OC
 Blackpoll Warbler C
Cerulean Warbler M (two singing males on McLure Rd. at Waterloo State Recreation Area)
 Black-and-white Warbler OCM
 American Redstart OCM
 Prothonotary Warbler C (a singing male at Rondeau – finally!)
 Worm-eating Warbler C (only seen by Barrett, alas, at Rondeau)
 Ovenbird OCM
 Northern Waterthrush OCM
Mourning Warbler OM (cooperative singing male on territory seen by all in Michigan)
 Common Yellowthroat OCM
Hooded Warbler CM (singing males on territory at Rose Lake and Waterloo; heard at Rondeau)
 Wilson's Warbler OC
 Canada Warbler OC
 (Yellow-breasted Chat C / leader-only, heard-only at Pelee)
Summer Tanager C (a rarity at Pelee)
 Scarlet Tanager CM
 Eastern Towhee CM
 Chipping Sparrow CM
 Clay-colored Sparrow C (a rarity at Rondeau)
 Field Sparrow M
 Vesper Sparrow M
 Savannah Sparrow CM
Henslow's Sparrow M (great views again at Sharonville State Game Area)
 Song Sparrow OCM
 Lincoln's Sparrow C
 Swamp Sparrow OM
 White-throated Sparrow OCM
 White-crowned Sparrow OCM
 Northern Cardinal OCM
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak OCM
 Indigo Bunting CM
 Bobolink M (again in the Upland Sandpiper field near Hartwick)
 Red-winged Blackbird OCM
 Eastern Meadowlark M
 Common Grackle OCM
 Brown-headed Cowbird OCM
 Orchard Oriole C
 Baltimore Oriole OCM
 Purple Finch M
 House Finch CM (heard-only)
 American Goldfinch OCM
 Evening Grosbeak M (at Hartwick's feeders)
 House Sparrow OCM