

POINT PELEE & KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

MAY 12 - 20, 2008

LEADERS: KIM ECKERT AND BRENNAN MULROONEY

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Leaders: Kim Eckert and Brennan Mulrooney

After leading this tour for some 20 years, I would think there could hardly be anything new for me to experience in the areas we visit in Ontario and Michigan. (We also spend a day in and around Crane Creek/Magee Marsh in Ohio, but this was only our third time we've done this productive day, not the 20th.) So, it was certainly a profound surprise when we visited the world-famous Tip at Point Pelee National Park—and found no Tip!

This southernmost point in all of Canada, a natural magnet for northbound migrants each spring, normally includes a sand bar pointing south into Lake Erie. Depending on currents and wave actions, some years "The Tip's" sand bar curves a bit to the east, other years it bends to the west, and it can extend out a couple of hundred "metres" (remember, this is Canada) when lake levels are low. (I still remember such a year when we even saw a Ross's Gull loafing here amid the other gulls, terns, and shorebirds.) But with Lake Erie water levels so high this time, the sand bar was entirely gone, with the waves now lapping up right next to the southernmost trees. (No Ross's Gull for us this year.) All the trees were still there, of course, still a magnet for warblers and other passerines crossing the lake. But during the time of our tour, it seems Pelee was having a hard time attracting much. The migration was very much delayed this spring, not only in southwestern Ontario but also in Michigan and the rest of the Midwest. Birding listserv, normally full of reports of warbler waves in mid-May, were uncharacteristically quiet due to a mostly cold and wet weather pattern.

Don't get me wrong, though, there were still plenty of warblers to see: you'll find 29 species on our list. But it was a struggle to find many of them, there were a few conspicuous misses, and we had to rely on places in Michigan (some I'd never been to after 20 years!) to round out our list with birds on their breeding grounds. Indeed, our struggles were often weather-related: witness the rainy day on Day 3; the high winds on Day 6; and the extreme cold on our Kirtland's Warbler day in Michigan. Thankfully, at least some of the male Kirtland's were back on territory, singing atop the jack pines for us.

We had even been in the right place at the right time at Point Pelee a few days earlier when we and many others saw and admired a migrant Kirtland's Warbler near "The Tip". So, we had one in the bank with no need to worry just in case they were late getting to Michigan or the weather was bad during our search. (About the only cause for concern was not being trampled by the crowd of birders passing us by when word of the Kirtland's arrived!)

Point Pelee, nearby Hillman Marsh, and other areas in the vicinity held many other highlights for us as well. Most significant among these had to be Canada's first record ever of a Mottled Duck, several hundred kilometres (we're still in Canada) out of range, which had shown up at Hillman the previous week. At the same place we were able to find two Little Gulls among a large

flock of Bonaparte's Gulls, plus a nice variety of shorebirds, which helped push our shorebird total to an above-average 15 species. Among these was a most cooperative American Woodcock displaying right next door to our hotel in Leamington—though the looks we had were not new for me, co-leader Brennan said this was indeed the best view he'd ever had.

And there were many other memorable sights: the sick or injured and quite lost Black Vulture at Pelee which was caught and sent for rehabilitation soon after we saw it; a Ruffed Grouse strutting ceremoniously across a back Michigan road; the very nice views of such oft-elusive warblers as Golden-winged, Cerulean, and Yellow-breasted Chat; the two male Chestnut-sided Warblers locked in aerial combat over territory—they almost looked like two diminutive eagles locking talons as they tumbled to the ground.

In a way, though, perhaps the most telling sight of all during this cold spring was at Hartwick Pines State Park. On that dark and windy afternoon, with the temperature no higher than the mid-40s, an Ovenbird walked along the forest floor to a small snag, settled down on his chosen perch, and proceeded to simply fall asleep as we watched. He apparently had enough of the day's weather and decided to go to roost with hours of daylight still remaining.

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).

May 14: Drive to Leamington, and birding in the rain most of day at Point Pelee National Park: including Northwest Beach/Sanctuary woods, Visitors Centre, Shuster Trail, and Blue Heron picnic grounds; also Hillman Marsh (again in the rain) in the afternoon.

May 15: Return to Point Pelee (in better weather): The Tip (or what was left of it!) and return hike via the Woodland Trail, and a successful afternoon Kirtland's search along West Beach; evening woodcock display by the Days Inn (!).

May 16: All-day trip to Rondeau Provincial Park, with stops en route back to Leamington at Erieau and Erie Beach.

May 17: Morning visit to Ojibway Park in Windsor, followed by a very windy 200-mile drive to Grayling via a rainy stop at Indian Springs Metropark.

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 & vicinity – all in windy (NW winds 15-25 mph), cold (high for the day was 48°, or 20° below normal), and occasionally rainy (but not snowy!) weather.

May 19: Return to Detroit via Gratiot-Saginaw & Maple River state game areas, Waterloo State Recreation Area, Waterloo State Recreation Area, and Four Mile Lake.

May 20: Option to Crosswinds Marsh (for a chat!) and briefly to Oakwoods Metropark; departure for home.

KEY:

O = seen/heard in Ohio: Crane Creek/Magee Marsh & vicinity (May 13)

C = seen/heard in Canada: Point Pelee National Park, Hillman Marsh, Rondeau Provincial Park, Eireau, Ojibway Park & vicinity (May 14-17)

M = seen/heard in Michigan: Indian Springs Metropark, Grayling-Houghton Lakes-Hartwick Pines & vicinity, Gratiot-Saginaw & Maple River state game areas, Waterloo State Recreation Area, Four Mile Lake, and Crosswinds Marsh option (May 17-20)

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

BIRDLIST:

Canada Goose OCM (a.k.a. Honker)

Mute Swan CM (a.k.a. White Starling)

Trumpeter Swan OM (individuals from recent introductions; countable?)

Wood Duck OCM

Gadwall C

American Wigeon C

American Black Duck C (nice comparison with the Mottled Duck)

Mallard OCM

Mottled Duck C (an amazing first Canada record at Hillman Marsh)

Blue-winged Teal OC

Ring-necked Duck M

Lesser Scaup C

Red-breasted Merganser C

Ring-necked Pheasant M (May 20 at Crosswinds Marsh)

Ruffed Grouse M (drumming & crossing the road)

Wild Turkey M (sort of wild, anyway)

Common Loon C

Pied-billed Grebe OC

Double-crested Cormorant OCM

Great Blue Heron OCM

Great Egret OCM

Green Heron OCM

Black Vulture C (sick/injured and way out of range)

Turkey Vulture OCM

Osprey M (including active nests)

Bald Eagle OM

Northern Harrier O

Sharp-shinned Hawk OCM

Cooper's Hawk M (May 20 at Oakwoods Metropark)

Red-tailed Hawk OCM

American Kestrel M

Merlin C (or was it a fly-by Peregrine?)

Sora O (heard-only)

American Coot OC

Sandhill Crane M

Black-bellied Plover C (several in breeding plumage near Eireau)

Semipalmated Plover C
 Killdeer OCM
 Spotted Sandpiper OCM
 Solitary Sandpiper O
Willet C (unusual in Ontario)
 Lesser Yellowlegs OC
 Upland Sandpiper M (in the usual field near Hartwick Pines)
 Ruddy Turnstone OC
 Sanderling C
 Semipalmated Sandpiper C
 Least Sandpiper C
 Dunlin C
 Short-billed Dowitcher C
American Woodcock C (displaying again by the Day's Inn)
Little Gull C (2 immatures with Bonaparte's at Hillman Marsh)
 Bonaparte's Gull C
 Ring-billed Gull OCM
 Herring Gull OC
 Great Black-backed Gull C (Erieau only)
 Caspian Tern C
 Common Tern C
 Forster's Tern OC
 Black Tern C
 Rock Pigeon OCM
 Mourning Dove OCM
Eastern Screech-Owl OC (seen at roost at Magee Marsh; heard at Rondeau)
 Chimney Swift OCM
 Ruby-throated Hummingbird OCM
 Belted Kingfisher CM
 Red-headed Woodpecker C (best views at Rondeau)
 Red-bellied Woodpecker CM
 (Yellow-bellied Sapsucker / leader-only)
 Downy Woodpecker OCM
 Hairy Woodpecker OCM
 Northern Flicker OCM
 Pileated Woodpecker M (consolation prize at Four Mile Lake)
 Eastern Wood-Pewee C
 Acadian Flycatcher CM (silent migrant at Pelee; singing on territory at Indian Springs)
 Willow Flycatcher CM (silent migrant at Rondeau; singing on territory at Crosswinds May 20)
 Least Flycatcher OCM
 Eastern Phoebe OCM
 Great Crested Flycatcher CM
 Eastern Kingbird CM
 White-eyed Vireo O (heard-only)
 Yellow-throated Vireo CM

Blue-headed Vireo OC
 Warbling Vireo OCM
Philadelphia Vireo C (very nice view at Rondeau)
 Red-eyed Vireo OCM
 Blue Jay OCM
 American Crow OCM
 Common Raven M
 Horned Lark C
 Purple Martin OCM
 Tree Swallow OCM
 Northern Rough-winged Swallow CM
 Bank Swallow CM
 Barn Swallow OCM
 Cliff Swallow CM
 Black-capped Chickadee CM
 Tufted Titmouse OCM
 Red-breasted Nuthatch CM
 White-breasted Nuthatch CM
 Brown Creeper M
 Carolina Wren C (excellent view at Ojibway Park)
 House Wren OC
 Sedge Wren M (heard-only)
 Ruby-crowned Kinglet OC
 Blue-gray Gnatcatcher OCM
 Eastern Bluebird M (May 20 at Oakwoods)
 Veery OCM
Gray-cheeked Thrush C (often-elusive migrant seen at Rondeau)
 Swainson's Thrush OC
 Wood Thrush OCM
 American Robin OCM
 Gray Catbird OCM
 Brown Thrasher CM
 European Starling OCM
 Cedar Waxwing C
 Blue-winged Warbler C (Woodland Trail)
Golden-winged Warbler M (singing male in perfect light at Gratiot-Saginaw SGA)
 Tennessee Warbler OC
 Orange-crowned Warbler C (late migrant)
 Nashville Warbler OCM
 Northern Parula OC
 Yellow Warbler OCM (as ubiquitous as ever)
 Chestnut-sided Warbler OCM (including 2 males locked in a prolonged aerial battle)
 Magnolia Warbler OCM
 Cape May Warbler OC (best view at Ojibway Park)
 Black-throated Blue Warbler OC
 Yellow-rumped Warbler OCM

Black-throated Green Warbler OCM
 Blackburnian Warbler OCM
 Pine Warbler M
Kirtland's Warbler CM (close views of a Pelee migrant and singing males in Michigan)
 Palm Warbler OC
 Bay-breasted Warbler OCM
 Blackpoll Warbler OC
Cerulean Warbler CM (singing males at Pelee and at Waterloo SRA)
 Black-and-white Warbler OCM
 American Redstart OCM
 Ovenbird OCM (including one falling asleep at Hartwick Pines!)
 Northern Waterthrush OCM
 Common Yellowthroat OCM
Hooded Warbler CM (briefly at Rondeau; best views at Waterloo SRA)
 Wilson's Warbler OC
 Canada Warbler C (only seen by a few at Ojibway Park)
Yellow-breasted Chat M (great view at Crosswinds Marsh May 20)
 Scarlet Tanager OCM
 Eastern Towhee CM
 Chipping Sparrow CM
Clay-colored Sparrow C (unusual at Pelee)
 Field Sparrow M (May 20 at Oakwoods)
 Vesper Sparrow M
 Savannah Sparrow CM
 Song Sparrow OCM
 Lincoln's Sparrow O
 Swamp Sparrow CM
 White-throated Sparrow OCM
 White-crowned Sparrow OCM
 Northern Cardinal OCM
 Rose-breasted Grosbeak OCM
 Indigo Bunting CM
 Bobolink M (still in the Upland Sandpiper field near Hartwick)
 Red-winged Blackbird OCM
 Eastern Meadowlark M (best views May 20 at Oakwoods)
 Common Grackle OCM
 Brown-headed Cowbird OCM
 Orchard Oriole CM
 Baltimore Oriole OCM
 Purple Finch M
 House Finch M
 American Goldfinch OCM
 Evening Grosbeak M (at Hartwick's feeders)
 House Sparrow OCM

ALSO SEEN/HEARD:

White-tailed Deer
Muskrat
Eastern Cottontail
Fox Squirrel
Gray Squirrel (including black-morphs)
Red Squirrel (Hartwick Pines)
Eastern Chipmunk
Snapping Turtle
Painted Turtle
Red-eared Slider (escaped/introduced)
Water Snake (sp.?)
Garter Snake
Bullfrog
Green Frog
Gray Tree Frog
American Toad