

# POINT PELEE & THE KIRTLAND'S WARBLER

MAY 11 – 19, 2009

© 2008

*Predictable, yet puzzling and mysterious, the spectacle of avian migration is among the most fascinating in nature. Each spring and fall we witness the passage of tens of thousands of birds: the distances they travel are often vast, the path beset with the hardships of an unyielding environment, the schedule set.*

*Point Pelee has long been famous as one of the most remarkable migration concentration points in North America. Extending some nine miles into the western end of Lake Erie, Pelee represents a funnel of land which birds follow on their way south in the autumn and the first available land to be reached on their spring flight north. The great variety of habitats in the relatively small Point Pelee area further heightens the species diversity and actual numbers of birds using the Point as a stop-over.*

*The middle of May is perhaps the most exciting time of year to be at Point Pelee. If weather conditions are good (i.e., a front from the north and/or nighttime rains), the concentration of grounded migrants will provide some of the most thrilling birding in North America. The woods north of the tip can be teeming with hundreds of flycatchers, vireos, thrushes, warblers, tanagers, grosbeaks, buntings, orioles, and others on their way north with the spring. Indeed, some previous tours have seen over 30 species of warblers at Pelee! The fervor of the nesting season is high as these birds near their destinations and the morning chorus at Pelee is among North America's finest. Furthermore, nearly every species we see will be in full breeding plumage.*

*In recent years, our list of migrants has been augmented by a day at Crane Creek State Park/Magee Marsh Wildlife Area in Ohio, about a one-hour drive from our hotel in Detroit. Also, over the years, we find the time to add several species at Rondeau Provincial Park, about an hour east of Pelee.*

*Following our stay at Point Pelee, we will travel to the jack pine forests of north-central Michigan in search of the endangered Kirtland's Warbler on its breeding grounds. Michigan is also home to several interesting breeding species which often elude us as migrants farther south: e.g., Upland Sandpiper, both cuckoos, Alder and Willow flycatchers, Sedge Wren, several warblers (including Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Pine, Cerulean, Mourning, Hooded, and both waterthrushes), Henslow's Sparrow, and Bobolink.*

**May 11, Day 1: Arrival in Detroit.** Participants should make arrangements to arrive in Detroit today and transfer to the Metropolitan Hotel, which has complimentary shuttle service from the Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW). We will then gather in the hotel lobby for a get-acquainted dinner at 6:30 p.m.

NIGHT: Metropolitan Hotel, Romulus

*Point Pelee & the Kirtland's Warbler, Page 2*

**May 12, Day 2: Crane Creek and Magee Marsh, Ohio.** Although Point Pelee is the primary focus of this tour, we will spend our first birding day at a place not nearly as well known but often just as exciting as Pelee. Just over an hour's drive south of Detroit is Crane Creek State Park and adjacent Magee Marsh State Wildlife Area on the south shore of Lake Erie, just east of Toledo. These locations share a parking lot and loop trail which are no more than a half mile in length, but this modest area is enough to attract a couple dozen species of warblers and many more migrants on a good day. Given the relatively small size of this area, it can be covered well within this single day, and it is generally less crowded than Pelee. Thus, it is an ideal place to begin the tour and introduce participants to the migration of this Great Lakes region. Since it is farther south than Pelee, Crane Creek may have more potential for the more difficult "southern" warblers, such as Yellow-throated, Prairie, Worm-eating, Kentucky, and Hooded. In addition, time permitting, we may be able to turn up a variety of shorebirds and other water birds in the marshes, mudflats, and Lake Erie beaches in the vicinity.

NIGHT: Metropolitan Hotel, Romulus

**May 13-15, Days 3-5: Point Pelee National Park and Vicinity.** We will again leave early this morning and drive to Point Pelee. We will have three days to explore the area, at first simply marveling at the scale of the movement we are seeing, then gradually channeling our efforts toward locating rare or secretive species we especially wish to see. A typical day will see us up very early for breakfast before the short drive to the park visitor's center. From here we will make our way to the tip of Pelee at dawn, using the convenient national park service tram. At first it is chilly and very quiet, but gradually, as the sun's first rays reach the treetops, the woods come alive with the dawn chorus of migrants and resident songbirds.

At or near the tip, we will watch for warblers and other northbound migrants coming in over the lake. (We may also encounter a variety of ducks, shorebirds, gulls, and other waterbirds.) The trees and shrubs nearest the tip, the first shelter a bird reaches after the long crossing of Lake Erie, often harbor many species of songbirds and it is not unusual to observe 25 species of warblers in a single day. Conversely, given clear skies with no fronts, the migration can be less eventful, but there are new migrants to be seen virtually every day.

Depending upon the weather and our assessment of the migration, we then will bird elsewhere in the park for migrant landbirds, or check Hillman Marsh just north of the park for shorebirds. Better locations will be checked more than once in order to increase our chances of locating the more unusual species. Some rarities in and around Pelee we will be on the lookout for are Sandhill Crane; Little, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous gulls; Cerulean and Connecticut warblers; and Dickcissel. More likely possibilities include American Golden-Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper, American Woodcock (in aerial courtship display!), Black Tern, both cuckoos, Eastern Screech-Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Philadelphia Vireo, Gray-cheeked Thrush, several uncommon warblers (like Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Prothonotary, Mourning, Hooded, Canada, and Yellow-breasted Chat), and Bobolink.

During the course of our three days we will visit other areas in southwestern Ontario, the areas selected determined in large part by weather and local reports of birds in the area. We will especially hope to find time to bird Rondeau Provincial Park, about an hour east of Pelee, which includes the finest remaining tract of Carolinian forest in Canada and typically offers our best chance to see Red-headed and Pileated woodpeckers, and Prothonotary Warblers.

Throughout our stay in the Point Pelee area, we will be hearing an abundance and variety of bird songs and calls. For many people, learning bird songs is a much-desired but frustratingly difficult talent to develop. Guidance, basic technique, and practice are all important factors in learning bird songs, and Point Pelee is a perfect place to study.

NIGHTS: Pelee Days Inn, Leamington

**May 16, Day 6: Point Pelee to Grayling, Michigan.** Depending upon the weather (for example, if it has rained the previous night), we will either bird Pelee this morning or make an earlier departure for Grayling, a drive of about five hours. Time permitting, we will make a few birding stops en route, possibly including a search for the

elusive and declining Henslow's Sparrow; a stop at a Detroit-area park for breeding warblers and other woods birds which had eluded us at Pelee; or a check for still more migrants along Saginaw Bay.

NIGHT: Ramada Inn, Grayling

**May 17, Day 7: In Search of the Kirtland's Warbler.** On this morning we will visit with a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service guide and learn about the breeding ecology and present status of the Kirtland's Warbler. Following a short but informative slide show, we will head for the jack pine region around Grayling. Male Kirtland's Warblers are persistent singers, and with a fairly clear and calm day we should have no trouble locating this special bird. (Please note, however, if it is rainy or windy, or if the migration is unusually late, they can be much more of a challenge to find.) Tame and often perching conspicuously atop small jack pines and snags, the males loudly proclaim their breeding territories; individuals are known to return for years until the habitat finally becomes unsuitable and they move on. We also will learn about the control measures enacted against the Kirtland's Warbler's number-one enemy, the parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird.

Following our visit to the Kirtland's breeding grounds, we will spend the remainder of the day in other habitats near Grayling, including Hartwick Pines State Park. Hartwick Pines has Michigan's only remaining uncut tract of white pines, and it is a treat to walk among this magnificent forest. Some of the pines and hemlocks are nearly 175 feet high and three feet in diameter. We should hear the songs of several species of warblers such as Pine, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, and Northern Parula, and have a good chance to find Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Blue-headed Vireo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Purple Finch, and Evening Grosbeak. Upland Sandpiper, Sedge Wren, Eastern Bluebird, and Bobolink can also be found in the fields in this part of the state.

NIGHT: Ramada Inn, Grayling

**May 18, Day 8: Return to Detroit.** A return trip for Kirtland's Warbler might be needed this morning if we encountered inclement weather the previous day. Otherwise, we will begin our return to Detroit after breakfast, with birding stops as time permits along the way. Such interesting species as Mute Swan, Wild Turkey, American Bittern, Broad-winged Hawk, Virginia Rail, Sandhill Crane, Alder and Willow flycatchers, Yellow-throated Vireo, Winter and Marsh wrens, Clay-colored and Field sparrows, and Yellow-headed Blackbird are some of the possibilities which may round out our trip list. A Henslow's Sparrow search may still be needed and we may find a warbler or two on its Michigan breeding grounds which had eluded us at Pelee (e.g., Blue-winged, Golden-winged, Cerulean, Prothonotary, Ovenbird, both waterthrushes, Hooded, and Mourning).

NIGHT: Metropolitan Hotel, Romulus

**May 19, Day 9: Departure for Home.** Participants may plan to depart for home any time today.

**EXTRA ARRANGEMENTS:** Should you wish to make arrangements to arrive early or extend your stay, please contact the VENT office at least two months prior to your departure date. We can very easily make hotel arrangements and often at our group rate, if we receive your request with enough advance time.

**TOUR SIZE:** This tour will be limited to 12 participants.

**TOUR LEADERS: Kim Eckert and Brennan Mulrooney**

**Kim Eckert**, with over 40 years of birding experience throughout the U.S. and Canada, has now been guiding birders or teaching bird identification classes for more than 25 of those years. Since the 1980s, he has annually led VENT tours to Newfoundland, Churchill, various locations in the Great Lakes and Great Plains, and to Texas—a favorite and frequent winter destination. He has authored four editions of *A Birder's Guide to Minnesota*, and has written numerous articles, notes, and seasonal reports for the Minnesota Ornithologists' Union journal, *The Loon*, and other publications such as *Birding* and *North American Birds*. Kim also operates the

***Point Pelee & the Kirtland's Warbler, Page 4***

Minnesota Birding Weekends program of birding tours, has been a member for three decades of Minnesota's Records Committee, and for 20 years served as Naturalist at Hawk Ridge Nature Reserve in Duluth. A Minnesota resident since the 1960s, he has resided in Duluth since 1977—winters included.

**Brennan Mulrooney** was born and raised in San Diego, California. Growing up, his heart and mind were captured by the ocean. He split his summer days between helping out behind the scenes at southern California's leading aquarium and working on sport fishing vessels off the coast. As a wildlife and fisheries biology major at UC Davis, he developed his fascination with birds and love of birding while taking a required ornithology course. Since graduating from UC Davis, Brennan has traveled throughout the United States working on widespread ornithological field studies. His work has taken him from the mountains of northern California to the Salton Sea in southern California, and from Cape May, New Jersey to Key Largo, Florida. Currently Brennan lives in San Diego with his wife Brynne and their son Declan. Participants often comment that Brennan's sharp eyes, sharper wit, and easygoing attitude make it a pleasure to bird with him.

**FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS:** The fee for the tour is **\$2545** per person in double occupancy. This includes all meals from dinner on Day 1 to dinner on Day 8, accommodations as stated in the itinerary, ground transportation during the tour, gratuities, and guide services provided by the tour leaders. It does not include airfare from your home to Detroit and return, airport departure taxes, alcoholic beverages, special gratuities, phone calls, laundry, or items of a personal nature.

The single supplement for this tour is **\$485**. You will be charged a single supplement if you desire single accommodations, or if you prefer to share but have no roommate and we cannot provide one for you.

**TOUR REGISTRATION:** To register for this tour, please contact the VENT office. The deposit for this tour is **\$300** per person. If you prefer to pay your deposit by check, your tour space will be held for 10 days to allow time for the VENT office to receive your deposit and completed registration form. If you prefer to pay your deposit using a credit card, your deposit must be made with MasterCard or Visa at the time of registration. The VENT registration form should then be completed, signed, and returned to the VENT office. Full payment of the tour fee is due 120 days prior to the tour departure date.

**EXCHANGE RATE SURCHARGES (CANADA):** In the erratic global financial markets of today, it is difficult to predict foreign currency exchange rates over the long term or at the time of operation of a tour or cruise departure. Tour prices are based upon the rate of exchange at the time of itinerary publication. If exchange rates change drastically, it may be necessary to implement a surcharge. If a surcharge is necessary, every effort will be made to minimize the amount. In many cases, these additional foreign exchange rate surcharges are passed to VENT by its vendors and suppliers.

**CANCELLATION POLICY:** Cancellation Penalties and Refunds are based on the following schedule: If cancellation is made 120 days or more before the tour departure date, the deposit less **\$150** per person is refundable. If cancellation is made between 120 and 90 days before departure date, the deposit is not refundable, but any payments covering the balance of the fee will be refunded. If cancellation is made fewer than 90 days before departure date, no refund is available. Cancellations received fewer than 90 days before departure date will result in 100% cancellation penalty of the entire tour fee whether previously paid or not. This policy and fee schedule also applies to pre-trip and post-trip extensions, as well as any transfers from one tour to another. ***We strongly recommend the purchase of trip cancellation insurance for your protection.***

**If you cancel:**

120 days or more before departure date  
Between 120 and 90 days before departure  
  
Fewer than 90 days before departure date

**Your refund will be:**

Your deposit minus \$150.  
No refund of the deposit, but any payments on the balance will be refunded.  
No refund available.

**FUEL AND FUEL SURCHARGES:** In the uncertain, often volatile oil market of late, it is difficult – if not impossible – to predict fuel costs over the long term, and more specifically, at the time of operation of this departure. Our prices are based upon the prevailing fuel rates at the time of itinerary publication. While we will do everything possible to maintain our prices, if the fuel rates increase significantly, it may be necessary to institute a fuel surcharge.

**TRIP CANCELLATION INSURANCE:** Application forms for optional coverage for baggage, illness, and trip cancellation can be obtained through the VENT office. We **strongly recommend** that you purchase trip cancellation insurance to protect yourself against losses due to accidents or illness. Check with your insurance agent regarding coverage you may presently have via other insurance policies that may cover illness during your trip. **Waiver for pre-existing conditions are available, however, stipulations apply, usually requiring the purchase of the insurance soon after registering. Contact the VENT office prior to registration for details.**

**Victor Emanuel Nature Tours is not a participant in the California Travel Consumer Restitution Fund. California law requires certain sellers of travel to have a trust account or bond. This business has a bond issued by Travelers in the amount of \$50,000. CST #2014998-50.**

**AIR INFORMATION:** Victor Emanuel Travel is a full-service travel agency and wholly owned subsidiary of Victor Emanuel Nature Tours (VENT). Victor Emanuel Travel will be happy to make any domestic or international air travel arrangements from your home and return. Please feel free to call the VENT office to confirm your air arrangements.

**BAGGAGE:** As space in the vehicles is limited, we ask that you restrict your baggage to one medium-sized suitcase and a carry-on bag.

**CLOTHING/CLIMATE:** Dress will be informal and light field clothing is recommended, as normal temperatures will be in the 60s or 70s. However, mornings can be quite chilly, especially when we are on the shores of Lake Erie and at Grayling, so you should bring a warm jacket, hat, and gloves. Layers, including a sweater, are recommended. Comfortable boots, walking shoes, or tennis shoes are sufficient. Mosquitoes can be present and insect repellent might be necessary. Be sure to pack a raincoat or rain poncho. Since all three hotels have indoor swimming pools, some may also want to bring a swimsuit.

**CURRENCY:** Canadian dollars are recommended in Ontario, although many places will accept U.S. dollars.

**DOCUMENTS:** Citizens of the United States are now required to have a passport valid for at least six months beyond your planned departure for international crossings between the United States and Canada. Non United States citizens should check with their consulate/embassy for instructions.

**EQUIPMENT:** Other items that would be useful include an alarm clock and a water bottle. The leaders will bring a spotting scope; however, if you have one and want to bring it, please do so.

**HEALTH:** If you are taking prescription medication or over-the-counter medicine, be sure to bring an ample supply that will allow you to get through the tour safely. Please consult your physician as necessary. Remember to pack all medication in your carry-on baggage, preferably in original containers or packaging. As airline baggage restrictions can change without warning, please check with your airline for procedures for packing medication.

As standard travel precautions, you should always be up to date with tetanus shots, and strongly consider inoculations against Hepatitis types A and B.

In addition to your physician, a good source of general health information for travelers is the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta. The CDC operates a 24-hour recorded Travelers' Information Line 877-FYI-TRIP (394-8747) or you can check their website at [www.cdc.gov/travel](http://www.cdc.gov/travel).

## ***Point Pelee & the Kirtland's Warbler, Page 6***

Canadian citizens should check the website of the Public Health Agency of Canada: [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new\\_e.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/new_e.html) (click on travel health).

**SUGGESTED READING:** Our website, [www.ventbird.com](http://www.ventbird.com) offers an affiliated online store that carries a wide variety of items for birding and nature lovers, including over 6,000 books. A portion of the sales from the store benefits the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. You may also visit such other online stores such as [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com), and for those out-of-print or hard-to-find titles, [www.abebooks.com](http://www.abebooks.com) or [www.buteobooks.com](http://www.buteobooks.com) which specializes in ornithology books.

Chartier, Alan and Jerry Ziarno. *A Birder's Guide to Michigan*. Colorado Springs: American Birding Association, 2004.

Dunn, Jon L. et al. *Field Guide to the Birds of North America*. (4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> edition.). Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2002 or 2006.

Hince, Tom. *A Birder's Guide to Point Pelee*. Wheatley, Ont.: Wild Rose Guest House, 1999. Available at Point Pelee National Park's bookstore.

Line, Les. "Clarion Call". *Audubon*, May 2004, p.62-66. An article summarizing the status and management of the Kirtland's Warbler.

Point Pelee National Park staff. *Seasonal Status of Birds*. Booklet available at Point Pelee National Park's bookstore.

Sibley, David A. *The Sibley Guide to Birds*. New York: Knopf, 2000. Some may prefer to bring the smaller and more portable *Eastern* guide (2003).

Walkinshaw, Lawrence H. *Kirtland's Warbler: The Natural History of an Endangered Species*. Cranbrook Institute of Science, 1984.

**TIPPING:** Tipping (restaurants, porters, drivers, and local guides) is included on VENT tours. However, if you feel one or both of your VENT leaders or any local guides have given you exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are not expected and are entirely optional.

**RESPONSIBILITY:** Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Inc. (VENT) and/or its Agents act only as agents for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, or airplane and assume no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity which may be occasioned either by reason of defect in any vehicle or for any reason whatsoever, or through the acts or default of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. VENT and its agents can accept no responsibility for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. All such losses or expenses will have to be borne by the passenger, as tour rates provide for arrangements only for the time stated. The right is reserved to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure, in which case full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. The right is reserved to substitute leaders on any tour. When this is necessary, notification will be given to tour members. No refund will be made for any unused portion of the tour unless arrangements are made in sufficient time to avoid penalties. The prices of the tours are based on tariffs and exchange rates in effect on September 3, 2008 and are subject to adjustment in the event of any change therein. The right is reserved to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely. The airlines concerned and their agents and affiliates are not to be held responsible for any act, omission, or event during the time passengers are not on board their aircraft. The passenger ticket in use by said airlines, when issued, shall constitute the sole contract between the airlines and the purchaser of these tickets and/or passenger. The services of any I.A.T.A.N. carrier may be used for these tours, and transportation within the United States may be provided by any member carrier of the Airline Reporting Corporation.