

## Southern Ontario, Canada, August 4-18<sup>th</sup> 2014

By Chris Harper and Vicky Sumner

Having previously travelled across Canada from Toronto to Vancouver (see report from 2010) with my kids, this trip was organised to be a little less rushed and a little more wildlife viewing friendly. We researched the best birding areas using both the internet and a copy of Clive Goodwin's 'A Bird Finding Guide to Ontario'. Although old, the book proved a really valuable reference when booking campsites and visiting specific spots within important birding areas. What follows is a report of the main birds and other wildlife seen on the trip, with photos when available. The main pictures were taken by phone scoping, with others from my hit and miss Nikon Coolpix L120. A minority of images were close enough just to use the phone by itself.

### Aug 4<sup>th</sup>-Manchester to Niagara Falls

The flight direct from Manchester to Toronto started well with a Peregrine over Terminal 1. Chris's favourite bird and a lucky omen for the trip we hoped. On arrival in Toronto we were greeted by intense heat and threatening skies. The car was collected and during the wait a few lonely Monarch butterflies battled against the increasing wind above the pick-up point. The main freeways en route to Niagara were almost like rivers in the 2 hour storm that followed us, but the journey produced some great birds. Thousands of Double Crested Cormorants lined Lake Ontario around Hamilton, with many Ring Billed Gulls accompanying them. Birds of prey were well represented on the 2 hour trip too, with American Kestrel and Red Tailed Hawk on roadside posts and a Sharp Shinned Hawk after Common Starlings in the rain. As we got nearer to our first campsite near Niagara a flyover Great Blue Heron was a treat and hundreds of Red Winged Blackbirds feeding in farmland signalled an end to the deluge.

A dry evening after 2 hours of rain usually means good birding in our experience and a stroll around the campsite and its' environs after a snack in Chippawa didn't disappoint. (The diversion to this pretty little town was worth it as we were greeted by 50+ Chimney Swifts screaming around the rooftops). In the trees and on the lawns around the pitch were many American Robin, beautiful Northern Cardinals sounding like 'our' Robin, noisy Common Grackles and squabbling Blue Jays. These were followed around by 'Black' Grey Squirrels. Harder to see in the tree tops were parties of House Finches and roving Black Capped Chickadees, with Mourning Doves providing a melancholic soundtrack. At the campsite building was a large colony of Purple Martins, with Swainson's Thrush, Brewer's Blackbird and Killdeer with young in the neighbouring fields. As the sun set a stroll by the Niagara River produced flyby Caspian Tern, fly catching Eastern Kingbirds in the taller trees, roosting American Crows and a final Chipping Sparrow ordering us to our tent. As night fell many bats fed around the camp, one large species and one a lot smaller. We assumed Big Brown and Eastern Pipistrelle respectively. The night was restless and jet lagged, not helped by the eerie sound of many Coyotes' howling as a raucous group at various times in the darkness. Still, at least it was now dry.



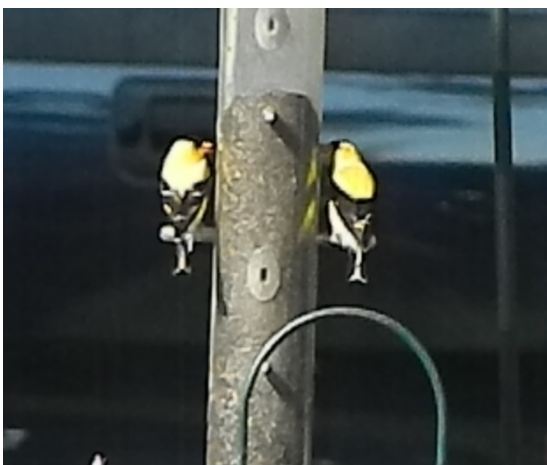
Left: American Robin; Right: Common Grackle



Top left: Blue Jay; Top right Mourning Dove; Bottom Left: Purple Martin

#### Aug 5<sup>th</sup> - Niagara Falls

As jetlag had started to prevail we woke at 5.30 (10.30 Manc time!) and took advantage by having an early walk in the areas surrounding the campsite, mainly along highway 25 between the river and Snyder. We weren't disappointed as we enjoyed a glorious sunny morning with ample birding highlights! The first birds seen were American Goldfinch busily searching for insects amongst the thistles and on feeders. A Killdeer was heard calling in the adjoining farmland and after some searching was revealed. The adjacent road to the campsite held vast scrubby areas which proved to be a bird haven with many species detected. An unexpected find here was an adult female Dickcissel, seen busily feeding on the tops of tall grass. This was followed by views of a stunning male Rose-Breasted Grosbeak in the distance on a prominent perch. Further along the road were good numbers of House Finch and several flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds numbering 100+, including many young. As our walk drew to a close we were greeted by a Yellow Warbler flitting amongst the bushes and a female Common Yellowthroat. So far so good to what would prove to be an amazing and memorable day.



American Goldfinch

On returning to the campsite, breakfast was enjoyed whilst surrounded by American Robins, Northern Cardinals and Common Grackles accompanied by the raucous of Blue Jays calling above.

As the weather changed and rain began to descend we set off on our next leg of the journey – Niagara Falls. The weather did not disenchant as we arrived at Niagara. On arrival plentiful Cliff Swallow were showing off their aerobatic skills as they sped across the surface of the water at the edge of the falls. Almost tame Ring Billed Gulls came within a few feet begging for food. It was a joy to watch the swallows' expeditious antics as we made our way to the Niagara River cruise. We set off on the 'Hornblower' vessel equipped with rather swanky pink raincoats which were a definite necessity. On the approach to the falls Bonaparte Gulls were witnessed hunkered to a rock with the company of several Ring-billed Gulls not fazed by the passing vessel which allowed exceptional views. The view from underneath the falls was amazing and it was a time to stand in admiration enjoying its full might and majesty. As the vessel navigated its way through the turbulent waters to our boarding platform it was a surprise to see two Velvet Scoters bobbing unperturbed in the receding surge.



Ring-billed Gull

Lunchtime was beckoning and so the search was on for a decent picnic spot. The meander back towards Niagara Park produced the first Cedar Waxwing of the journey feeding on berries oblivious to the hordes of tourists passing by. In an adjacent tree a rather apprehensive Baltimore Oriole zipped amongst the upper branches showing off its radiant orange plumage. On reaching Niagara Park to settle for a bite to eat a Common Grackle allowed decent views as it eyed up our lunch which we reluctantly shared. An Eastern Chipmunk soon joined in. As lunch was devoured, a Least Flycatcher flitted nimbly amongst the neighbouring fir trees and was soon joined by a Warbling Vireo.

With clear skies and after taking in the views from the Skylon tower, we embarked on a 2 hour walk upstream of the falls following the river. The highlight on the river was definitely the huge amount of hirundines present. Hundreds of Swallows (Barn), Cliff Swallows and Purple Martins were busy feeding, joined by a few Northern Rough Winged Swallows and higher above more Chimney Swift. On the river was a close range Great Blue Heron and Spotted Sandpiper. Amongst the trees were many Eastern Kingbirds and Cedar Waxwing together with our first woodpecker species of the trip in the form of a Hairy.



Lined up hirundines



A detour to Dufferin Island Park just off the main road bought very little initially but close scrutiny of one of the lakes showed a dainty Green Heron eyeing up a meal. Whilst finding a good spot to view it, out of the trees flew a Coopers Hawk and made several attempts to grab one of the Ring Billed Gulls from the lake. It failed, but gave us a memorable experience. Two other new birds for the day were a Great (White) Egret and (Black Crowned) Night Heron both from the same lake. Great stuff and a signal for us to find some food and a roosting spot.

#### August 6<sup>th</sup> Niagara– Long Point

Before setting off for Long Point a brief early morning walk along the Niagara River produced a Downy Woodpecker, a Song Sparrow, and on returning to our tent the first Red-breasted Nuthatch of the trip in the tree opposite.

The journey to Long Point was pleasant and involved seeing numerous Turkey Vultures, with at one point 10 perched together in a dead tree. The photo opportunity couldn't be resisted and on leaving the car we also spotted a Grey Catbird, Northern Mockingbird and a stunning Indigo Bunting on a telephone wire. Set us wondering how many more birds would be seen at just a random stop at the side of the road. Lunch was had at Turkey Point, and en route to this lovely spot we also had a Wood Thrush flying near a garden hedge and (although rare and not supposed to be in the area) a possible Wood Stork in someone's large garden pond. Pity we couldn't stop to confirm as it was on a busy and fast route.

Lunch at the point was spent with a few Spotted Sandpiper, a Dark Eyed Junco and many amazing butterflies, including Spicebush Swallowtail.



Left: Turkey Vulture; Right: Spicebush Swallowtail

On arrival at the Ontario Parks campsite at Long Point, we were greeted by some stunning habitat and very warm temperatures. Trees by the check in held Baltimore Oriole, whilst 2 Northern Flickers fed on the grass verge leading to the pitch. In the scrub next to them was a beautiful Black Billed Cuckoo, and a few distant Forster's Terns. Best of all a first year Promothory Warbler was flitting in the trees. The pitch itself was surrounded by trees and very near the beach, and provided excellent bird watching for the two days we were here. After tea we observed Cedar Waxwing, many Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Wood Peewee, juvenile Red Winged Blackbird, Tennessee Warbler, Warbling Vireo, and Black Capped Chickadee. Up to 30 Tree Swallows fed overhead, and just as we got the fire going an American Woodcock flew overhead, looking like a large bat, obviously heading for the marsh.

On top of these wonderful birds we were mesmerised by fire flies among the dunes, amused by the very different looking North American Red Squirrels, and brave Eastern Chipmunks. A stunning view of the Milky Way and 2 shooting stars brought the day to a lovely end in an amazing setting.



Top left: Forster's Tern; Top right: Eastern Kingbird; Bottom left: juvenile Red-winged Blackbird; Bottom right: Eastern Chipmunk

#### August 7<sup>th</sup>-Long Point area

Morning at the camp brought Brown Thrasher, Baltimore Oriole, House Finch and Northern Flicker, all near the tent, whilst a Killdeer was on the shore of Lake Erie. An early short journey to Big Creek Marsh saw us following a Raccoon down the road, and on arrival a friendly chat was had with 4 conservationists who were radio tracking the rare Blanding's Turtles in the vicinity.

A circular walk provided some lasting birding highlights, the best of which was probably the highlight of the trip when two Ruby Throated Hummingbirds came within a foot of us whilst searching for nectar. They really seemed to be looking us in the eye as they manoeuvred side to side and back and forth for what seemed like minutes amongst the Trumpet Creeper flowers. From here on in, whenever we noticed these flowers, often Hummingbirds would be around within a short time. Lifers for both of us, and a really special moment of 'time standing still'.

In addition the walk brought Yellow Billed Cuckoo, Marsh and Sedge Wren, Caspian Tern, Swamp Sparrow, Eastern Phoebe, Common Yellowthroat, Wood Duck, Great Blue Heron, Rusty Blackbird, Wood Duck, and Bank Swallow (Sand Martin). Added to this was a flyover Osprey and our only Bald Eagle of the trip. Other wildlife included Monarch, Question Mark and Painted Lady Butterflies, Northern Leopard Frogs by the dozen and Midland Painted Turtles. A really fantastic piece of habitat.

A lack of wildfowl on the reserve, according to our 'Bird Finding in Ontario' book advised us to check out Port Rowan sewage lagoons just down the road. This proved to be sound advice. Hundreds of Tree Swallow greeted us on arrival, but the highlight was the lagoons themselves. Hooded Merganser, Blue Winged and Green Winged Teal, Redhead, Bufflehead, Wood Duck and many Black Duck were all present, and a Northern Waterthrush completed a nice half hour.





Top left: Great Blue Heron; Top right: Monarch Butterfly; Bottom left: Northern Leopard Frog; Bottom right: Eastern Painted Turtle

We decided to have lunch at the Backus Woods heritage area. In the surrounding countryside we found a stunning Blackburnian Warbler, with many slightly washed out Eastern Bluebirds, together with a passing Sharp Shinned Hawk. On arrival a showy Belted Kingfisher was perched on a post by the main lake, a Great Blue Heron seemed unconcerned by our presence and a child showed off his catch - a Decay's Brown Snake! In the very informative visitor centre a warden showed us the caterpillar of the huge Cecropia Moth which was a bonus.

On arrival at the historic Wild Turkey release site we were greeted by our only Orchard Oriole of the trip, and another much closer gorgeous Indigo Bunting. Cedar Waxwings were again ubiquitous. A walk through the forest had to be cut short as the mosquitos became overwhelming. This gave us a bit of extra time to scope from the causeway en route back to the campsite, and the birds didn't disappoint. Pied Billed Grebe showed well, and many Forster's and Common Tern were about, as well as Mute Swans, Double Crested Cormorants and a Brown Headed Cowbird on the shore.

At camp we passed a few Eastern Cottontail before arrival at the pitch. A large flock of birds then passed through the canopy, a little reminiscent of the 'tit' flocks in the UK. The main birds present were beautiful Blue Grey Gnatcatchers, but also a few each of both Pine and Mourning Warblers. An evening walk after tea gave a view of the localised Spotted Towhee and skulking Swainson's Thrushes near the marsh.



Top left: Belted Kingfisher; Top right: Cecropia Moth Caterpillar; Bottom left: Pied-billed Grebe

#### August 8<sup>th</sup> Long Point-Tottenham

Breakfast East on Concession Road 6 brought close views of Eastern Bluebird, noisy Grey Catbirds, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, Northern Flickers, Baltimore Oriole, Veery, Wood Thrush and a perched Broad Shouldered Hawk. Again, the benefits of an early start paying off.

The journey North to relatives in Tottenham involved a stop near Campbellville, passing many Turkey Vultures on the way. On the Niagara Escarpment near Mountsberg was a pair of Solitary Sandpipers and a White Breasted Nuthatch. Nearby at Halton Lake was an Osprey, Belted Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, Spotted Sandpiper, Hooded Merganser, Horned (Slavonian) Grebe, and best of all our first Trumpeter Swan of the trip. Many Caspian Tern fished as we ate lunch, and another White Breasted Nuthatch and a Swallowtail butterfly guided us back to the car park.

On arrival in Tottenham in the surrounding bog/farmland we saw further House Finch and Chipping Sparrow, and over the house we were staying at in the centre of the town a flyover Wilson's Phalarope provided the last bird of a great day. By night we watched the International Space Station track across the sky to the accompaniment of Crickets and very hot weather.

#### August 9<sup>th</sup> - Luther Marsh

An Osprey flying low over the house in the morning was a good omen as we prepared for a day at nearby (1 hour) Luther Marsh. En route were a scattering of Brown Headed Cowbirds and a roadside Groundhog (Woodchuck), and just before the visitor centre a pair of marvellous Sandhill Cranes giving excellent views, along with a Great (White) Egret. At the car park was an accessible nest box containing an active House Wren busy feeding young, whilst the viewing tower over the main lake gave views of Pied Billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfisher. However, undoubtedly the best birding moments came



during a sandwich break at a picnic table, when an obliging Great Crested Flycatcher entertained us for a few minutes, together with a brief Ruby Throated Hummingbird and a flyover Red Shouldered Hawk. Top stuff.

On return to Tottenham my uncle promised us a visit to neighbours that were said to have Wild Turkeys feeding regularly. As we arrived we were greeted by a family of 14 in the garden (I say 'garden' the house was more like a fully-fledged nature reserve). A wander around the grounds also produced Pine Warbler, Chipping Sparrow and 3 squabbling Blue Jays, as well as an Eastern Chipmunk after the biscuits provided by our welcoming hosts.

An evening Chinese with a trip back at dusk provided opportunities to look for Common Nighthawk, but again, no luck with this species.



Top left: Sandhill Crane; Top right: Great Egret; Bottom left: Wild Turkey

#### August 10<sup>th</sup> - Tottenham to Awenda Provincial Park

The route North to Awenda produced some lovely stopping points. The journey to Minesing Marsh gave passing Dark Eyed Junco, another wild Turkey and more Brown Headed Cowbirds. The marsh itself had a lovely walk along a river, and after narrowly avoiding stepping on a Northern Red Bellied Snake near the start we had good views of Savannah Sparrow, Alder Flycatcher, Grey Catbirds, Cedar Waxwings and another Hummingbird, as well as a flyover Black Crowned Night Heron.

Even better was a 3 hour walk around Tiny Marsh (not tiny at all). A 'friend of Tiny Marsh' showed us around the visitor centre and pointed out the best birding spots and this proved to be a great help on another very hot day. The birding followed the usual pattern of long periods of quiet with spells of frenetic activity. Black Terns were showing well, and on the lake were Black Duck, Pied Billed Grebe, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, a single American Coot and a fishing Osprey with accompanying nest platform. On the marsh, in a moment of 'time stood still' birding, a flyover Northern Harrier caused a mass mobbing by Black Tern and a possible Least Bittern, as well as unnerving an American Bittern, which flew for about 10 seconds before diving back into the reeds.

Around the fringes of the lake were Willow and Alder Flycatcher, more Cedar Waxwing, another Hummingbird, Song Sparrow, Savannah Sparrow and a Northern Flicker. In one of the dead trees an American Kestrel was seen, and a single Black Crowned Night Heron. A fantastic Spot if you have plenty of mozzie spray.



Arrival at Awenda produced a Raven on the campsite, and a rush to see the sunset on Lake Huron gave a skulking Wood Thrush. Tent up, early night, and making sure to avoid the knots of Poison Ivy all over the ground.

#### August 11<sup>th</sup> - Awenda

Kettle Lake is a part of the PP, and we decided to have our breakfast there to see if any wildlife was about. The 5 minute car journey gave us excellent views of White Tailed Deer and on arrival a Great Northern Diver (Common Loon) was near the back of the lake. Three Osprey were enjoying the early conditions, and a Belted Kingfisher and Wood Duck made this choice a good one.

Most of the remainder of the day was spent at nearby Wye Marsh. The birding here was excellent, with Yellow Warbler, Swamp Sparrow, Grey Catbird, Belted Kingfisher, Sedge Wren, Yellow Bellied Sapsucker, Black Crowned Night Heron, Green Heron, circling Turkey Vultures, and best of all 2 showy American Bittern. Add to this numerous frog species, Painted Turtles (Image 30), another Woodchuck feeding on the car park verges, and a huge Northern Water Snake and the small entrance fee was very worthwhile.

After a visit to see the lovely Trumpeter Swan statue and wall murals in Midland (including one of the marsh), we did a quick tour of the Beaver Pond trail at Awenda, which gave us good views of Olive Sided Flycatcher.

The birding finished with dusk on Kettle Lake. A family of Wood Duck was now present, along with both Common and Caspian Tern and a hunting Sharp Shinned Hawk. The Loons calling brought the day to a close, with that eerie sound making the hairs on your neck stand up, and reminding us of happy times watching Grizzly Adams as kids. Slept tight.



Top left: White-tailed Deer; Top right: Great Northern Diver (Common Loon); Bottom left: Osprey; Bottom right: Woodchuck (Groundhog)

## August 12<sup>th</sup> - Awenda PP to Kilbear PP

Another lovely breakfast at Kettle Lake bought 4 Common Loon calling and flying around, and even closer White Tailed Deer, before the journey to Kilbear Provincial Park further North. After a few unproductive stops birding wise on the way we were impressed by the change of scenery, with the land opening out to look more like your beautiful typical Canadian Shield that inspired the 'Group of 7' landscape painters.

A Barred Owl flying right in front of us was a sign of the good wildlife to come, but less birds and more of the 'other wildlife' variety. A stop at a Beaver dam just near the entrance produced our first sight of this gorgeous mammal, busy collecting plant material. A dusk drive bought a very scrawny Red Fox, Southern Red Backed Vole, view of a captive Mississauga Rattlesnake and many more White Tailed Deer, with the only bird of note being Hairy Woodpecker. Maybe the birds knew something we didn't, as did the Eastern Chipmunk hiding under the tent. The night was wild. Thunder and strong winds blew away the heat, and marked a change to cooler conditions as we prepared for the next 3 nights in Algonquin.



Mississauga Rattlesnake

## August 13<sup>th</sup> - Kilbear PP- Algonquin NP

After being warned of one in the area, we were incredibly lucky to see a Black Bear on our early exit from the campsite. It was a juvenile, meandering out of the woods and across near a ranger's area. Managed some distant shots, but the adrenaline shot lasted for the rest of the day, and was another highlight of the trip.

Algonquin is a huge area spread along Highway 60, and as you enter each km is marked along the route, which makes it pretty easy to find some of the key areas. A lunch stop near our entrance at the West Gate at Oxtongue River picnic grounds proved excellent for warblers, which appeared to like the cool and drizzly conditions even if we didn't. In the trees around the car park was a cracking male American Redstart, stunning Magnolia Warblers, and more Blue Jay. A small walk at the start of one of the trails gave us Black and White Warbler, a first female American Redstart, Palm Warbler and White Breasted Nuthatch. An afternoon stop and walk of the Lookout Trail proved to be almost wildlife free, but the tree interpretation boards were excellent, as were all the tourist facilities in this National Park.

The journey to our campsite for the next 3 days at Pog Lake produced another Turkey on the roadside verge, and on arrival were a few Ravens and circling Turkey Vultures. An evening drying off and sorting was enlivened by many squabbling Red Squirrels. They needed to with the temperature down to 6 degrees Celsius.



Above left: Black Bear; Above right: Welcome to Algonquin

## August 14<sup>th</sup> - Algonquin NP

We were informed that to see Moose, the best chance was to get up early and drive the highway, and that strategy certainly paid off as by km post 18 we were lucky to see a cow with her calf right next to the road. Thanks to one driver who had stopped to take pictures we had excellent views for a few minutes before they sloped back into cover. A few seconds later you would never know there had been a great wildlife scene there at all.

Another Turkey was all we saw as we went to the excellent visitor centre, which only opened at 9am, but served green tea and had Wi-Fi and excellent views and displays. A great rain break. As well as this there was a Rusty Blackbird flying about, so well worth the stop.

A quick tootle up the road towards Lake Openogo gave us Northern Flicker, Sharp Shinned Hawk, and stunning views of a Spruce Grouse right next to the road. Our first of Algonquin's 'big 4' ticked off.

With four layers on as we were venturing outside, we decided to brave the Beaver Pond Trail before lunch and we were not disappointed. In the first of two large mixed flocks of passerines was Palm Warbler, many Black Capped Chickadee, Magnolia Warbler, White Breasted Nuthatch and best of all one of the handsomest birds I think we've ever seen in the shape of a gorgeous male Black Throated Blue Warbler. A lifer for both of us, and up there with the Hummingbird and Bear moment as a trip highlight. On a lake a little further on we heard Loons calling and sure enough within a few seconds 3 were landing in the middle. A Spotted Sandpiper and Great Blue Heron on the far bank drew our attention to a racket higher up, where 6 Blue Jays were mobbing what looked like a Great Grey Shrike. On closer inspection it turned out to be two Grey Jays, and this brought our 'Big 4' now up to 2. The second flock of passerines on return held Tennessee Warbler and a Ruby Crowned Kinglet, as well as Black Capped Chickadees. Find the Chickadees, find the Warblers!

A quick lunch break at 'Lake of Two Rivers' bought three more Common Loons, Great Blue Heron, Ring Billed Gull and American Herring Gull.

Back at camp we decided to explore the grounds as far as the old railway track, now a multi user path. Again the birds came in fits and starts, with no activity for ages, followed by frenetic neck stretching. Seen were Cedar Waxwing, Black Duck, Blue Jay, White Breasted Nuthatch, Yellow Warbler, a single Black Throated Green Warbler, Black Capped Chickadee and best of all amongst the pines two Boreal Chickadee. Three of the 'Big 4' seen in a day. Get in!

A dusk drive up the Lake Openogo road saw scuttling Deer Mice, Red Fox cub, a huge species of Frog, and a mesmerised American Woodcock. So still was it, it allowed us to wind down the window and get half decent shots after spectacular views. A lovely way to end a superb if cold and wet day of wildlife watching.



Above left: Cow Moose with calf in the rain; Above right: From Algonquin visitor centre





Top left: Wold Diorama; Top right: Spruce Grouse; Bottom left: American Woodcock

#### August 15<sup>th</sup> - Algonquin

Another cool day started off with a breakfast stop near km 19. A roadside Turkey and an excellent warbler flock were the highlights, with another glorious male Black Throated Blue, a Yellow Rumped, Black and White doing its usual Tree creeper impression, and a Hairy Woodpecker.

The main part of the day was spent walking the full length of the Mizzy Lake trail, which by all accounts was the best for wildlife, and it certainly lived up to its billing. The walk is 11km long and we were prepared for a full 6 hours, with what we knew would be regular wildlife watching stops. Trail guide maps are available at the start of all the walks, and this one proved invaluable as a map and an interpretive leaflet.

Many lakes were walked past, and birds here included Great Blue Heron, Black Duck, Wood Duck, and Ring Necked Duck. Mammals in them included 2 almost tame American Otters, a stunning Bull Moose, and tagged Painted Turtles.

More marshy areas gave up a lovely male Common Yellowthroat, Lincoln's Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, our first Yellow Breasted Flycatcher and Pitcher plants.

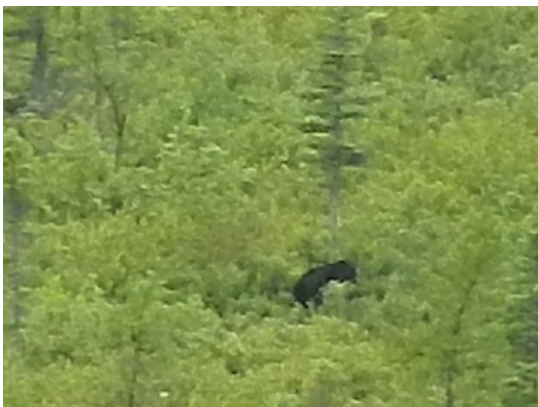
However it was the woodland which provided the best birding, and coined our phrase of the holiday: 'Never ignore a peep', as any faint noise in the trees often meant a torrent of different birds and a strained neck.

Various flocks included Hairy Woodpecker, Alder Flycatcher, Blue Headed Vireo, Black Capped Chickadee, Red Breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper(at last), Ruby Crowned Kinglet, Northern Parula, Blackburnian, Black Throated Blue(almost common?), Black Throated Green, Yellow Rumped, Pine, Canada and Black and White Warblers. Flying above or below the tree tops at various points were Blue Jay, Raven, Hermit Thrush, Northern Flicker, Coopers Hawk, Broad Winged Hawk as well as a single Ruffed Grouse and a Northern Hawk Owl springing off the ground with prey. Add to this a few Eastern Heather Voles and an amazing Bobcat peering from distance and you can see why this as a whole was definitely worth 6 hours of the day.

A warm cuppa at the visitor centre gave a unique view looking from above at a Sandhill Crane as it came in to feed, and as we were looking for its landing position, others noticed a Black Bear in the berry bushes. Ravens were also around, as usual.

We were disappointed that the public 'Wolf Howl' had been cancelled due to the weather, but looking at the sightings board in the centre we noticed that some good wildlife had been seen at the old Mew Lake Airfield, so decided to check this out after tea. On arrival we met a very gemmed up guy who showed us stunning pictures of Black Bear at the sight and said he had just seen a wolf pack there. He also mentioned it was a good place to see Black Backed and Pileated Woodpecker. As we went in search of these we saw little on this almost grassy area, very different from the rest of the Park in terms of habitat cover. As we headed back in the twilight, out of the trees appeared a lone Eastern Canadian Wolf, noticed us and walked ahead of us allowing a quick shot with the camera. It then went back into the trees, and doubled back behind us, causing every sense of the body to come alive as it bobbed in and out of sight. Just for a short while it felt like the hunter had become the hunted, and was an awesome experience.

Luckily we made it back to the car before dark, and vowed to get up at dawn the next day to re visit the area. An early night followed with the best view of the Milky Way so far, and a chorus of Wolf howls in the night. Unless they were lying about the cancellation!



Top left: American Otter; Top right: Bull Moose; Bottom left: Black Bear; Bottom right: Eastern Canadian Wolf

#### August 16<sup>th</sup> - Algonquin NP- Presqu'ile PP via Petroglyphs PP

As dawn broke we headed to the airfield to be rewarded with many bird species, but apart from an American Water Shrew and Bear tracks in the sand, no mammals. Best bird was a close flypast Pileated Woodpecker, looking like a mini Cormorant, heading into the forest from the shorter grass. Common Loons were on Mew Lake, along with hawking Tree Swallows, and the usual Canada Geese and Ring Billed Gulls. Many Northern Flickers on the paths around the blueberry fields were joined by skulking White Throated Sparrows at the base of the taller trees. Together with the more common Blue Jays, Cedar Waxwing and American Robins this was a lovely way to end our stay in this beautiful area. The Black Backed Woodpecker would have to be the only one of the 'big four' we would come back for another day.

A chilled out stopover at Petroglyphs PP provided some spiritual re charging, as well as the chance to see Native American rock art dating back many hundreds of years. Birds there include a flyover Osprey, Cliff Swallows, roadside Turkey on approach and 1000's of Redwing Blackbirds in the fields en route.

The journey to Presqu'ile Point PP was met with constant heavy rain, and we just about managed to find a place to pitch our tent on arrival. The rain did have the bonus of causing a bedraggled American Woodcock to wander onto our pitch, almost being stood on by Vicky as she prepared tea. The weather had lifted a little after eating to drizzle only, and from the marsh viewing



platform we managed to see a Brewer's Blackbird, American Coot, Pied Billed Grebe, wet Merlin, and Mute Swans (controversial here according to the display boards).

Our final wander was on the Owen's Point trail, and the night was clearing so we were lucky the light had improved. The dry weather certainly brought out the birds in the evening too. The viewing point over Lake Ontario from the end of the trail was excellent. Feeding on the beach were Lesser Yellowlegs, Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpipers, White Rumped Sandpipers, a single Pectoral Sandpiper, and 4 Semipalmated Plover. At 'sea' were Caspian Terns, Lesser Black Backed Gulls, distant unidentified ducks with a distinct white rump, and probable groups of flyby Black Scoter.

The walk back to the car park in dimming light gave more excellent birds with a close Least Bittern, huge Great Horned Owl, and another American Woodcock. The latter bird was heard calling regularly all night from the tent, and provided an early morning call for a hopeful early migration watch at Lighthouse point.



Top left: Semipalmated Sandpiper; Top middle: larger feeding flock of Semipalmated Sandpipers; Top right: Semipalmated Plover

#### August 17<sup>th</sup> - Presqu'ile PP- Glen Rouge Toronto

The weather was perfectly still as we wandered to the point almost stepping on a Long Tailed Shrew. On arrival we were met with a plaque remembering a local birder and his '20 warbler days'. Although not quite up to that spectacle, the place was buzzing with activity. In the trees and shrubs we saw up to 4 Canada Warblers, Black and White Warbler, Red Eyed Vireo, Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher, Yellow Throated Vireo, Tennessee Warbler, Yellow Rumped Warbler and Nashville Warbler. Amongst the Cedar Waxwing present was a fleeting glimpse of a largish reddish tinged bird which remains unidentified, the closest I can see being American Pipit. If only the blighters would keep still for longer. On the lake were Double Crested Cormorant, Common Loons, Ring Billed Gull, Black Scoter and flypast Osprey. Lakeside were Northern Flicker.

After breakfast we decided to return to Owen's Point where a photographer was busy getting excellent shots of the birds. These included Great Blue Heron, Broad Winged Hawk, Semipalmated Plover, Sanderling, Semipalmated Sandpiper, a single Baird's Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Caspian Tern, Tree Swallow, Ruby Throated Hummingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Grey Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, House Wren, Northern Waterthrush, Northern Flicker, Wilson's Warbler, Song Sparrow and Baltimore Oriole. Truly an amazing place.

Our final hour or so at the reserve was spent doing the boardwalk trail in warming sunshine. Birds included a Great White Egret, Mute Swan, Green Winged Teal, Wood Duck, Moorhen, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Wood Peewee, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling Vireo, Red Eyed Vireo, Grey Catbird, Red Breasted Nuthatch and large Red Winged Blackbird Roost. We were also pretty sure we heard an American Bittern gulping away, but couldn't spot it. The warm weather bought out an Eastern Garter Snake to soak up some rays, giving great views at last as this species had eluded us all trip.

Tea on our way to the final campsite in Glen Rouge (the only camping in the city of Toronto) took us to Pickering. Although much developed since our birding guide book was written, it was still a good place for a wander with Osprey patrolling the Lakeshore, nesting Caspian Tern and Common Tern, a lake with a confiding Killdeer, Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfisher. Towards the nuclear power station was parkland with Cedar Waxwing, Northern Mockingbird, Eastern Kingbird, Warbling Vireo and a large party of Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher. A Mink by the lakeshore bar provided a suitable send off as we headed to Glen Rouge late on.





Top left: Red-winged Blackbird; Top middle: Eastern Red-sided Garter Snake; Top right: Caspian Gull; Bottom left: Killdeer; Bottom right: fleeing American Mink

#### August 18<sup>th</sup> Glen Rouge- Manchester

Before we packed up for Manchester, we walked the first few kilometres of the Glen Rouge Trail. Campsite birds were similar to Niagara, with Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, Common Grackle and American Goldfinch. Black squirrels were common. As usual, an early start paid dividends, with a very close Beaver swimming under the bridge near the campsite with us looking right down on it. The trail proved surprisingly productive, with the best bird being our first and only Golden Winged Warbler of the trip. Along with it in a mixed flock were Black and White Warbler, Red Eyed Vireo, Black Capped Chickadee and Downy Woodpecker. A Ruby Throated Hummingbird gave its usual fleeting view, with other birds including Eastern Wood Peewee, Northern Flicker, Northern Mockingbird, Hairy Woodpecker and Chipping Sparrow. Flying above were many Cliff Swallow and a single Red Tailed Hawk.

The rest of the day was spent exploring downtown Toronto, sorting out cars and cases and returning to the airport, where a flypast Peregrine brought with it thoughts of home, and the birding full circle.

The trip had been an amazing experience, with less rest than we hoped, but what do you expect with such amazing wildlife on display. To anybody thinking of going, a few pieces of advice for what it's worth. Long Point and Presqu'ile Point were amazing spots and you could easily spend a week at each and still have places and wildlife to find. Algonquin is a National Park bar none. Not just in name, but in nature too, and could well be worth a holiday in itself. Chatting to fellow birders there are some great Canadian birding blogs and websites out there, so if you have a better 'phone package than us, you could get on there and chase some real beauties. (We were less than 10 miles from a Summering Snowy Owl in Hamilton, only finding out about it on our penultimate day!)

Last but not least, it was really worth doing a bit of research before the trip, both in terms of places to go, but also in bird identification skills, and again there are some great books and apps out there for anyone going. You will not regret spending the money. Blackpool for us next year.

As a PS and personal 'thank you' to you, Ian, we got engaged on this trip. We met through a mutual use of the site, and hold you personally responsible for all that great birding ☺. If it wasn't for the brilliance of the site this trip would never have happened. So if you don't pat yourself on the back, we will. Thanks so much.

**Chris Harper and Vicky Sumner, September 2014**

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