



Field Guides Tour Report

Point Pelee Migration Spectacle 2016

May 9, 2016 to May 16, 2016

Jay VanderGaast

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This superlative Golden-winged Warbler was the last of our 29 warbler species to be seen. Luckily, his raging hormones meant he came out to sing, even on a chilly and very unspringlike day. (Photo by participant Grace Donald)

Point Pelee in spring has to be one of the most exciting places to bird. The feeling of anticipation one gets when entering the park each morning is incomparable; there is nothing like the buzz you get, wondering what might have turned up overnight. It's a bit like gambling I suppose; you never know if you'll hit the jackpot, so you keep coming back day after day to try your luck. Sometimes it's a bit of a bust, too, relatively speaking, but the difference is that even on those quieter days you can still pocket some nice "winnings".

Keeping the gambling metaphor alive, we arrived at the "casino" that first morning full of excitement about what was to come. With warblers as the big prize, we arrived at the peninsula's tip to find that we had definitely not hit the jackpot. Things were quiet that first morning, with warblers tough to find. But, by working at it, we were eventually rewarded with a few prizes, the best being that stunning male Hooded Warbler that performed so well for us at Tilden's Woods. A red morph Eastern Screech-Owl and a couple of young Great Horned Owls in a nest were among the other treasures that kept the morning interesting.

The jackpot on day 2 came as a surprise to everyone. We had all read the weather wrong, and no one expected the day to be any different than the previous one, as the cool temperatures and north winds seemed to indicate that there would be little to no migrational movement northward across the lake. It didn't take long to figure out how wrong we were; in our first 5 minutes after stopping, we saw more warblers (species and numbers) than we had the entire previous day. Between the morning at Sanctuary and an afternoon visit to the tip, we tallied nearly 20 species of warblers, and had incredible views of all of them! Highlights included vibrant males of both Cape May and Bay-breasted warblers, and more Palm Warblers than I've ever seen before. Our final day at Pelee was a bit quieter, as a lot of birds had continued northward, but there were some good quality finds to be had, and we enjoyed a singing male Kirtland's Warbler along the West Beach Trail, (for the second year in a row!), plus an obliging male Cerulean Warbler and two cooperative cuckoos (one of each species) at the tip.

Meanwhile, nearby Hillman Marsh and some flooded fields offered up a shorebird bonanza, giving us super views of gorgeous Black-bellied Plovers, numerous Short-billed Dowitchers, and a handful of handsome Ruddy Turnstones, along with a Pectoral Sandpiper and a Willet, both scarce here in the spring. And back at the hotel, a wonderful American Woodcock gave a superb performance, calling from the grassy field adjacent to the hotel, then launching off into the sky for his aerial display. All in all it was a nearly perfect Pelee experience!

Leaving Point Pelee behind definitely did not mean leaving the warblers behind, and our visit to Rondeau Provincial Park actually gave us more warbler species than any other day did. After dropping by the swamp forest on the Tulip Tree Trail for some close encounters with a couple of glowing male Prothonotary Warblers, we zipped down to the South Point, where warblers were popping out everywhere. We tallied 21 species that day, with a male Mourning Warbler the undisputed star, though it took some patience to track him down. Our only Tufted Titmouse and a memorable encounter with a Red-headed Woodpecker were just a couple of the other high points of our brief visit.

The weather turned cold when we got to the Long Point region, ultimately costing us a couple of warbler species, as there was very little singing going on in the frigid temperatures. The Old Cut banding station had a fair number of migrants, and a Summer Tanager there was a good tick for Canada. But Backus Woods was tough, and we had to content ourselves with woodpeckers (Hairy, Pileated, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker) as little else was moving about. The cold temperatures worsened the next day, and we made the decision to stay along the lakeshore looking for migrants, as it seemed unlikely that much would be going on inland and further north. It turned out to be a good decision, as we had even more awesome sightings of warblers, including a male Pine Warbler singing at eye level in Thickson's Woods. Our final morning, also quite chilly, was spent on the lovely Carden Alvar, and while the late spring and cool weather suppressed some activity, we were still thrilled to tally our 29th warbler species, a striking male Golden-winged, as well as a number of other local breeding specialties, including Upland Sandpipers, Eastern Bluebirds, Sedge Wrens, and the endangered eastern race of Loggerhead Shrike.

Looking back, I don't think we could have hit a better three-day period for migrants than we did at Point Pelee, and the numbers of birds and the views we enjoyed of so many colorful, fresh-plumaged birds were what this tour is really all about. And it was a real pleasure for me to get to share all of these sightings with a very easygoing, appreciative, and compatible small group of birders. Thanks to each one of you for signing up for this tour. It was my pleasure to introduce you to Point Pelee and all the other fine areas we visited on this tour -- not to mention peameal bacon and Lake Erie perch! Hope we can do it again sometime!

-- Jay

KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: * = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

BIRDS

Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl)

CANADA GOOSE (*Branta canadensis*) – Not many in Point Pelee NP itself, but numerous elsewhere, with plenty of goslings about as well. [N]

MUTE SWAN (*Cygnus olor*) – Up to seven of these graceful swans were at Hillman Marsh, and one was seen on a huge platform nest at Cranberry Marsh. [IN]

TRUMPETER SWAN (*Cygnus buccinator*) – A pair flew past at Oshawa Second Marsh, and a lone bird was looking right at home on a small marsh near Orillia. [I]

WOOD DUCK (*Aix sponsa*) – We heard one at Backus Woods, but it never showed itself. [*]

GADWALL (*Anas strepera*) – Small numbers at Hillman and most other marshes we visited.

AMERICAN WIGEON (*Anas americana*) – A lone drake at the Blenheim sewage ponds vanished before anyone else could look through the scope; a second lone drake at Cranberry wasn't so sneaky.

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK (*Anas rubripes*) – A single bird at Hillman Marsh was a rather late in the season for this species.

MALLARD (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Common throughout.

NORTHERN SHOVELER (*Anas clypeata*) – As many as 12, mainly males, were at Hillman on our first visit, with numbers significantly lower on the next visit.

GREEN-WINGED TEAL (AMERICAN) (*Anas crecca carolinensis*) – Four of these small ducks were seen at Hillman on each visit.

CANVASBACK (*Aythya valisineria*) – A female at Hillman was swimming alongside the drake Redhead that was also present.

REDHEAD (*Aythya americana*) – Besides the lone male at Hillman, there were up to 3 pairs at Cranberry Marsh. One of the males there had a very pale orange head which got us wondering if it was something else. I admit that Common Pochard or some odd hybrid crossed my mind, but I believe it was just a Redhead with some pigment issues.

RING-NECKED DUCK (*Aythya collaris*) – A lone male at Cranberry was pretty late for this species.

GREATER SCAUP (*Aythya marila*) – The three scaup seen offshore at Pelee were probably this species, while some distant birds at Cranberry Marsh were too far off to be certain of.

LONG-TAILED DUCK (*Clangula hyemalis*) – Fair numbers offshore in Lake Ontario, including several quite close into shore that allowed some awesome scope views.

BUFFLEHEAD (*Bucephala albeola*) – Margaret spotted a pair at Blenheim, and three birds were on Cranberry Marsh.

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER (*Mergus serrator*) – The most numerous waterfowl offshore at Pelee and along Lake Ontario.

RUDDY DUCK (*Oxyura jamaicensis*) – We counted at least 32 of these spiffy ducks at the Blenheim sewage ponds.

Phasianidae (Pheasants, Grouse, and Allies)

WILD TURKEY (*Meleagris gallopavo*) – Seen daily at Pelee, with a few elsewhere, though perhaps ironically, we missed seeing any near the historic 1984 release site at Backus Woods.

Gaviidae (Loons)

COMMON LOON (*Gavia immer*) – Three birds offshore at Pelee one day were the only ones we encountered.

Podicipedidae (Grebes)

PIED-BILLED GREBE (*Podilymbus podiceps*) – A lone bird was swimming along the shoreline as we crossed the Long Point Causeway.

RED-NECKED GREBE (*Podiceps grisegena*) – A gorgeous pair along the shore in Burlington were attending a nest on an old tire anchored there for that purpose. Though one bird was on the nest, there was clearly still some nest-building going on. [N]

Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags)

DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – Numerous in both Lake Erie and Ontario.

Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns)

GREAT BLUE HERON (*Ardea herodias*) – Seen mainly at Pelee where we had one or two daily.

GREAT EGRET (*Ardea alba*) – A lone bird showed well at Hillman, and a couple were seen along the water near Wheatley harbor.

Cathartidae (New World Vultures)

TURKEY VULTURE (*Cathartes aura*) – Common and seen daily.

Pandionidae (Osprey)

OSPREY (*Pandion haliaetus*) – A couple of active nests at Orillia, and a couple of sightings of low perching birds (one on a fencepost) along the way to Carden Alvar. [N]

Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites)

NORTHERN HARRIER (*Circus cyaneus*) – A lovely male flew low across the road ahead of the van as we drove north towards Orillia.

COOPER'S HAWK (*Accipiter cooperii*) – Two birds flew northward over us as we birded at Sanctuary, with one turning back and racing overhead back towards the south, seemingly in pursuit of some small bird.

BALD EAGLE (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – An immature bird flew past as we birded at Hillman on our first afternoon.

RED-TAILED HAWK (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – It always seems a bit surprising that we rarely see these in Pelee, as they are common elsewhere in southern Ontario. We saw several around Long Point and further north towards Burlington.

Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots)

COMMON GALLINULE (*Gallinula galeata*) – A lone bird swam in the canal at Big Creek Refuge (along the Long Point Causeway).

AMERICAN COOT (*Fulica americana*) – A single bird at Hillman on our first day.

Gruidae (Cranes)

SANDHILL CRANE (*Grus canadensis*) – Heard distantly at both Long Point and the Carden plain, but no sightings were had. [*]

Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings)

BLACK-BELLIED PLOVER (*Pluvialis squatarola*) – Passing through in small numbers during our visit, with 21 at Hillman our first day, and 32 on the newly plowed fields on the outskirts of Leamington a couple of days later, most in fine breeding plumage. Reports from Hillman show there were 1500 of them there on May 17th!

SEMIPALMATED PLOVER (*Charadrius semipalmatus*) – More than usual were about, with 20+ birds at the flooded fields near Leamington being the high count.

KILLDEER (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Common and recorded almost daily.

Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies)

SPOTTED SANDPIPER (*Actitis macularius*) – A few along the beaches at Pelee, and on the verges of the sewage ponds at Blenheim.

WILLET (EASTERN) (*Tringa semipalmata semipalmata*) – A rather rare migrant in southern Ontario, though there'd been several about this spring. We saw just one at Hillman. Most of the birds found here, including the one we saw, belong to the eastern nominate subspecies.

LESSER YELLOWLEGS (*Tringa flavipes*) – A single bird at Hillman, and another single in the Carden plains.

UPLAND SANDPIPER (*Bartramia longicauda*) – This wonderful bird can be tough to find at Carden, but that wasn't the case this trip, as a couple responded to my whistles by coming right out to the road and showing beautifully. Grace spotted another one perched on a rock in another section of the alvar, and all told we saw 5 of these birds.

RUDDY TURNSTONE (*Arenaria interpres*) – A trio of these attractive shorebirds came in with Black-bellied Plovers at Hillman our first afternoon. Aren't they stunning in breeding plumage?

DUNLIN (*Calidris alpina*) – As usual, the most numerous sandpiper about, though the numbers weren't as impressive as I've seen here. Still, we had flocks of 100+ birds at Hillman, with most in beautiful breeding plumage.

LEAST SANDPIPER (*Calidris minutilla*) – Just a couple of these small peeps were seen at Hillman, with closer views of another pair at the flooded fields later in the week.

PECTORAL SANDPIPER (*Calidris melanotos*) – A lone bird at the flooded fields was a bit sneaky, but we eventually tracked it down for some good scope views. Not a commonly seen species here in spring migration.

SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER (*Calidris pusilla*) – Excellent close scope views of a single bird at the flooded fields.

SHORT-BILLED DOWITCHER (*Limnodromus griseus*) – These were passing through mainly in small numbers, though there was a report of 147 at Blenheim the day before we visited. Only 3 remained by the time we arrived, but we saw them well there as well as at the flooded fields, seeing them well enough to be certain they weren't Long-billed (which was also reported from the flooded fields during our stay). All the birds we saw were of the race hendersoni.

WILSON'S SNIFE (*Gallinago delicata*) – There wasn't a whole lot of displaying going on in the Carden alvar, perhaps due to the unusually cold weather, but these birds were calling from the ground, and we eventually managed to spot one tucked into the tall grass on the edge of a marshy area.

AMERICAN WOODCOCK (*Scolopax minor*) – It's really handy having these birds calling and launching their display flights from the grassy lawn next to our hotel, and they're pretty easy to spot, too. Of course the views were far better the second evening when I had fresh batteries in my flashlight! And we just managed to see one before the big thunderstorm hit!

Laridae (Gulls, Terns, and Skimmers)

BONAPARTE'S GULL (*Chroicocephalus philadelphia*) – Seen in small numbers at several sites along the lakeshores, with good scope views of several in breeding plumage at Hillman.

RING-BILLED GULL (*Larus delawarensis*) – The most common gull in the region.

GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL (*Larus marinus*) – We only saw this huge gull at Wheatley harbor, where a couple of subadult birds were loafing on a rocky offshore islet.

CASPIAN TERN (*Hydroprogne caspia*) – Plenty of these large terns were about, both at Hillman and along the shores of Lake Ontario.

BLACK TERN (*Chlidonias niger*) – We saw only three of these beautiful terns flying along with a flock of Bonaparte's Gulls offshore at Pelee.

COMMON TERN (*Sterna hirundo*) – The most commonly seen tern, with good numbers offshore at Pelee and along Lake Ontario.

FORSTER'S TERN (*Sterna forsteri*) – Though overall outnumbered by Common Tern, this was the most numerous species at Hillman, where at least 15 birds were loafing on the mud, with 3 or 4 Common Terns nearby for comparison.

Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves)

ROCK PIGEON (*Columba livia*) [H]

WHITE-WINGED DOVE (*Zenaida asiatica*) – Though this long-staying bird was not a priority at Rondeau, it was still fun to see it there, as it was a Canada tick for me!

MOURNING DOVE (*Zenaida macroura*) – Common throughout.

Cuculidae (Cuckoos)

YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus americanus*) – Getting either of the two cuckoo species is a real coup on this tour, and on the past several tours, one species is all we managed, so we were extremely fortunate to see both this year, and even luckier that both sat out for good scope studies on our final day at the tip of Point Pelee. They were obviously recovering from the long flight across the lake.

BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) – There was a bit of confusion when I called out "Black-billed Cuckoo!" and a bunch of other observers replied "No, it's a Yellow-billed." It took some convincing to get them to look at the second cuckoo that had flown in and landed 20 feet from the Yellow-billed Cuckoo everyone was looking at!

Strigidae (Owls)

EASTERN SCREECH-OWL (*Megascops asio*) – A roosting rufous morph bird was tricky to see, but we managed some good scope views after finding the best spot to set up. This bird was in the same area as one we had on last year's tour, and could well have been the very same bird.

GREAT HORNED OWL (*Bubo virginianus*) – A couple of large fuzzy youngsters were in a nest along Point Pelee's Woodland Trail, but there was no adult to be found, though undoubtedly it was somewhere nearby. [N]

Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)

COMMON NIGHTHAWK (*Chordeiles minor*) – While at Hillman on our first afternoon, word went around about a roosting nighthawk at Blue Heron in the park, so we made a detour back to the park on our way to dinner and got some great studies of a bird sleeping on a bare branch over the picnic site.

EASTERN WHIP-POOR-WILL (*Antrostomus vociferus*) – Margaret and I made the effort to find this species in the Long Point area, but all we got were some wonderful vocalizations from a couple of birds. Still, it's pretty nice just hearing them call. [*]

Apodidae (Swifts)

CHIMNEY SWIFT (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Just a couple of birds were seen on two days at Point Pelee.

Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)

RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD (*Archilochus colubris*) – Seen in small numbers every day of the trip, with all the birds we saw well enough to sex being males. The cold weather must have been hard on them; one male at Oshawa Second Marsh was clearly struggling, and we watched it flying feebly from dandelion to dandelion along the trail, sitting on the ground to feed on them. I'd never seen one feeding on dandelions before.

Alcedinidae (Kingfishers)

BELTED KINGFISHER (*Megaceryle alcyon*) – Not seen until we left the Lake Erie region. One male was seen nicely at Cranberry Marsh, and another bird was at a small marsh near Orillia.

Picidae (Woodpeckers)

RED-HEADED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*) – A bird at the tip one morning was seen only briefly, and not very satisfyingly. Then as we were leaving Rondeau, I stopped at the park entrance because I thought I'd heard a White-eyed Vireo. No vireo was found, but one of these flew in and gave us beautiful views. Finally, Sue spotted one as we birded at Thicksen's Woods on the shores of Lake Ontario. This species has become quite scarce in Ontario, so it's always a good one to find.

RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – We only saw one bird at Rondeau, a female that visited the feeders at the visitor centre, though we heard a few others at Backus Woods and Paletta Park in Burlington.

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – Though we saw a fair bit of sign of sapsucker activity at Pelee, the only bird we saw was a lone female that showed well at Backus Woods.

DOWNY WOODPECKER (*Picoides pubescens*) – The most common woodpecker in the region, with good views daily on the tour.

HAIRY WOODPECKER (*Picoides villosus*) – Though rare at Pelee, this bird breeds at Rondeau, and in the Long Point region. We saw a female at Backus Woods, then a male at Paletta Park in Burlington.

NORTHERN FLICKER (*Colaptes auratus*) – One bird flew over as we birded at Sanctuary picnic area on our second day at Pelee. A few more were seen after we left the Pelee area.

PILEATED WOODPECKER (*Dryocopus pileatus*) – A responsive bird at Backus Woods came in quickly, but left almost before we could get bins on it. Still, there was no mistaking that huge woodpecker! We heard another calling and drumming at the Sedge Wren Marsh at Carden.

Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)

AMERICAN KESTREL (*Falco sparverius*) – A male was seen perched on a roadside power line on our way north from the Long Point area.

MERLIN (*Falco columbarius*) – A female zipped by overhead as we birded the Sanctuary picnic area at Pelee. With all those birds about, it must have been easy pickings for a meal.

Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)

OLIVE-SIDED FLYCATCHER (*Contopus cooperi*) – A scarce migrant at Pelee, and the one we found and scoped at Sanctuary was one of only two seen during our time at the park. The other was seen much closer to the tip on the very same morning.

EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE (*Contopus virens*) – Overall flycatchers were pretty scarce this trip; the cold weather and northerly winds having delayed the migration of most species. This was no exception, and we saw only three of these at Pelee, and heard a single bird on territory at Rondeau.

LEAST FLYCATCHER (*Empidonax minimus*) – This is the earliest of the Empid flycatchers to migrate through, and they were just starting to come in in numbers. Though we saw none our first day at Pelee, there were loads of them the next, and the on the following few days. Our only other Empidonax was seen at Rondeau, and though I thought it might be an Acadian Flycatcher, the photos seem to suggest it was an Alder/Willow type instead, though I guess we'll never know which one.

EASTERN PHOEBE (*Sayornis phoebe*) – The earliest arriving of all the flycatchers, with most birds having already been on territory for several weeks, which is why we didn't see these birds at Pelee. We had some nice views, though, at Rondeau, where they breed, and also saw one up on the Carden plain.

GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – Seems to me that these birds were just straggling in this year, and we saw single birds only on two days at Pelee. None were recorded at Rondeau, and just a single was heard at Backus Woods, both sites where these birds are common breeders.

EASTERN KINGBIRD (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Started arriving in decent numbers at Pelee on our final day there, and we recorded them daily from then on.

Laniidae (Shrikes)

LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE (*Lanius ludovicianus migrans*) – This bird has declined rapidly in eastern Canada, and is considered endangered here, with only a handful of breeding pairs in two main areas remaining. An intensive recovery program with captive breeding and release efforts seemingly working to increase the numbers, but there is still a lot of work to be done. All things considered, it was wonderful to see two birds at the Carden alvar, the main breeding area remaining for these striking birds.

Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)

YELLOW-THROATED VIREO (*Vireo flavifrons*) – A lone bird perched low near the trail at the Dunes picnic site at Pelee was the only one of the trip.

BLUE-HEADED VIREO (*Vireo solitarius*) – An easy species to miss on this tour, as it is an early migrant with most birds having already passed through by this time. They were obviously delayed this year though, as there were lots around, and it was the most numerous vireo at Pelee this year.

WARBLING VIREO (*Vireo gilvus*) – Usually one of the most numerous vireos we see, but not this year. We did see them just about every day, but only in very small numbers overall.

RED-EYED VIREO (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Normally by this time, this common species has also arrived in numbers, but they were just trickling in during our visit, and we only saw one or two each day at Pelee, including one very tired looking individual at the tip one morning.

Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)

BLUE JAY (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Missed our first day out at Pelee, but seen daily after that, though I think the bulk of them had already migrated through.

AMERICAN CROW (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Crows of any sort are uncommon at Pelee, but away from the park this species is hard to miss.

FISH CROW (*Corvus ossifragus*) – A silent crow that flew over on the second day had me thinking Fish Crow, only because I rarely see any crow in the park, and it seems this species is a regular, if rare visitor. Luckily, the next day we heard the distinctive calls of this species, then saw it fly over several times at the tip. A long-awaited country tick for me!

Alaudidae (Larks)

HORNED LARK (*Eremophila alpestris*) – A couple of birds showed well in the agricultural fields behind the flooded area where we were scoping shorebirds.

Hirundinidae (Swallows)

NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – Small numbers daily at Pelee.

PURPLE MARTIN (*Progne subis*) – I think we saw only one bird as it flew over while we scoped the flooded field near Leamington.

TREE SWALLOW (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – One of the most numerous swallows, with plenty seen daily. [N]

BANK SWALLOW (*Riparia riparia*) – That first morning at the tip saw a flock of 50+ birds feeding low over the water. After that we saw just a few more through the rest of the trip.

BARN SWALLOW (*Hirundo rustica*) – Very common and seen in good numbers daily, with a handful of birds nesting under the shelter at the tip's tram stop. Hard to believe this is a "Species of Special Concern" here in Ontario, but it's true. [N]

CLIFF SWALLOW (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – A few birds among other swallows at Hillman Marsh and the Blenheim sewage ponds.

Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Surprisingly scarce in Point Pelee, where we saw just a single pair over three days in the park. After we left there, we saw them often.

TUFTED TITMOUSE (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – A local bird in the province, and we saw just one, a bird I heard, then whistled in close, along the South Point Trail at Rondeau.

Sittidae (Nuthatches)

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta canadensis*) – A lone bird feeding on the ground during our lunch break at the Dunes picnic area was our only one; most of these early migrants had passed through much earlier in the season.

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH (*Sitta carolinensis*) – A couple at Rondeau were our first, with a few sightings afterwards in the Long Point area and at Burlington.

Troglodytidae (Wrens)

HOUSE WREN (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Though we recorded them daily, we heard far more than we actually saw.

SEDGE WREN (*Cistothorus platensis*) – The aptly-named "Sedge Wren Marsh" on the Carden alvar gave us our only ones. Though they were elusive at first, staying low due to the strong, cold winds, we finally managed to track three birds down for some fine views.

MARSH WREN (*Cistothorus palustris*) – A tired bird was feeding on the ground under the dense low vegetation on that spectacular fall-out day at the tip. It was hard to see some times, but eventually moved out of the dense cover and right into the open a few times, seemingly oblivious to all the birders watching from a few feet away.

CAROLINA WREN (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – These birds evidently breed pretty early here, as our only sightings included recently fledged young.

One juvenile was seen (with a parent singing nearby) at the Old Cut banding Station at Long Point, while at Paletta Park in Burlington, we had good views of a pair of youngsters and a singing adult.

Poliptilidae (Gnatcatchers)

BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER (*Poliptila caerulea*) – More common in southern Ontario than most people realize, as they can be pretty inconspicuous. With almost no foliage out to obscure them this year, though, they weren't too hard to see and we saw them daily except on our last morning at Carden.

Regulidae (Kinglets)

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET (*Regulus calendula*) – A normal spring would have seen most of these birds already passing through before our tour, with just a few stragglers around for us to see. This was not a normal spring, and many kinglets were still in the south. We saw them daily along the lakeshores, some days in good numbers.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies)

EASTERN BLUEBIRD (*Sialia sialis*) – We waited until the end to see these gorgeous birds, but we finally caught up with them on the Carden alvar, where there were plenty of nest boxes for them to choose from. [N]

VEERY (*Catharus fuscescens*) – A few birds over the first couple of days at Pelee, with an excellent scope view of one obliging one along the Woodland Trail.

SWAINSON'S THRUSH (*Catharus ustulatus*) – Small numbers were passing through, and we had decent looks at several birds.

WOOD THRUSH (*Hylocichla mustelina*) – Our only one at Pelee performed beautifully, and we had good scope views of it as it sang from a mostly open perch in a dense clump of cedars near the visitor center. A few more birds showed nicely at Rondeau, with a sparring pair on the trail showing particularly well.

AMERICAN ROBIN (*Turdus migratorius*) – Many, many birds every day. [N]

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers)

GRAY CATBIRD (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – There was no shortage of these birds either, and we saw them daily.

BROWN THRASHER (*Toxostoma rufum*) – A trio along the West Beach Trail at Pelee were our first. A couple of others were seen at Rondeau and a single along the Lake Ontario shoreline.

Sturnidae (Starlings)

EUROPEAN STARLING (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Sadly common throughout. [I]

Motacillidae (Wagtails and Pipits)

AMERICAN PIPIT (*Anthus rubescens*) – A couple of birds in the same agricultural fields as the Horned Larks were seen quite nicely through the scope.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings)

CEDAR WAXWING (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Surprisingly few at Pelee, where we had just one group of 5 or 6 birds along the West Beach trail (in cedars, appropriately). Our only others were another flock of 5 or 6 at Paletta Park in Burlington.

Parulidae (New World Warblers)

OVENBIRD (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – Though we heard them several times, we only managed to see one bird. That one, though, gave us a great view as it walked along on and between the paths and below the mist nets at Old Cut banding station.

NORTHERN WATERTHRUSH (*Parkesia noveboracensis*) – Primarily a heard bird, though Sue did see one while we were searching for the Mourning Warbler at Rondeau. I thought we'd pick one up in the Long Point area or the Carden region, but the low temps and cool winds seemed to inhibit them from singing and showing themselves in their breeding areas, and we failed to even hear them in those areas.

GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) – Our final of 29 species of warblers seen on the trip. Despite the cold temperatures and windy conditions, we managed to lure out a gorgeous male for a brief bout of song in the Carden region on our final day.

BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER (*Mniotilta varia*) – Not especially common this trip, but we still saw them most days in small numbers.

PROTHONOTARY WARBLER (*Protonotaria citrea*) – Absolutely stunning views of two males in the gorgeous swamp forest along the Tulip Tree Trail at Rondeau. This is a scarce breeding bird in southern Ontario, and Rondeau is one of the best places to see them here.

TENNESSEE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis peregrina*) – Not especially numerous, but we saw a few, many very well, on most days. Almost all the ones we saw were males, with clean white underparts, and I only recall seeing one female plumaged bird, with more yellow in the face and throat.

ORANGE-CROWNED WARBLER (*Oreothlypis celata*) – Overall this is quite a scarce migrant, and one we don't see every year, so it was good to pick up a lone bird along the very birdy South Point Trail at Rondeau.

NASHVILLE WARBLER (*Oreothlypis ruficapilla*) – Many of these warblers have normally already migrated through by the time we do this tour, but the cool spring apparently delayed them, and there were many about, with this being one of the more numerous species seen on a couple of days. We even managed to see the usually concealed orange crown spot on one bird.

MOURNING WARBLER (*Geothlypis philadelphia*) – We've missed this skulker on each of the last three trips, as they generally pass through a bit later, and are never really numerous in passage anyway. We almost missed it this trip, too, but with patience and persistence, we eventually got super looks at a male along Rondeau's South Point Trail.

COMMON YELLOWTHROAT (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Common it is, and we had them daily, with especially large numbers along the trails at Sanctuary on the incredible fall out day.

HOODED WARBLER (*Setophaga citrina*) – Warbler watching got off to a pretty slow start on the first morning at Pelee, and we struggled to find much besides the ubiquitous Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats. This handsome bird saved the day, and the effort to finally see it was well worth it. Our only other one was also a male, this one showing well, eventually along the South Point Trail at Rondeau.

AMERICAN REDSTART (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Few at Pelee, with just a handful of birds on the amazing fall out day, but we saw plenty more after leaving Pelee behind, with several good close views of beautiful males.

KIRTLAND'S WARBLER (*Setophaga kirtlandii*) – This was the third time we've recorded this rare species in the past 4 years, a testament to the fine work done in the US to secure this rare species, which has now been removed from the Endangered Species list. After walking the northern section of the West Beach Trail on our final morning at Pelee, we returned to the Visitor Center to learn that a male had been discovered along the southern portion of the trail. So, we went back out and soon found a crowd of birders gathered around watching this bird moving along through the treetops

(unusual for this more terrestrial species) and singing (unusual here at Pelee). The lighting was a bit tough, but by maneuvering around the group and using the scope, we had some fine views of it before it vanished, I think never to be refound that day! Probably the highlight bird of the trip for everyone, as I believe it was a lifer for all but me, and it was only my second.

CAPE MAY WARBLER (*Setophaga tigrina*) – Word from the tip on the fall out morning was that there were large numbers of these around compared to the usual ones and twos. Though some of these had dispersed before we got down to the tip, we still had incredible views of a few, including several striking males in full breeding dress. Several more at Rondeau, and a couple of birds at Paletta Park made for an incredibly good showing of this sometimes difficult species.

CERULEAN WARBLER (*Setophaga cerulea*) – A lovely male had been seen and heard sporadically at the tip on our final day at Pelee, and a return visit to the tip area after we'd found the Kirtland's Warbler eventually netted us excellent views of this tricky bird. Had it not been for this one, we'd likely have missed this species, as I doubt we could have found one in the breeding area at Backus Woods due to the incredibly cold conditions.

NORTHERN PARULA (*Setophaga americana*) – We encountered this warbler more often than usual this year, and had many fine looks at both males and females. Most memorable may have been that stellar male at eye level in some cedars along the trail to the shorebird area at Hillman Marsh, but it was really just one of many.

MAGNOLIA WARBLER (*Setophaga magnolia*) – Though usually one of the more numerous migrant warblers on this trip, I wouldn't say that was the case this year. Still they were about in small numbers, and we had plenty of nice encounters with Maggies. Most of the birds we saw were males.

BAY-BREASTED WARBLER (*Setophaga castanea*) – Usually one of the scarcer species of warblers at Pelee, and we only saw two there, both of which were spectacular males, and both of which were near the tip on the fall out day. Our only other sightings were of a couple of other lovely males at Paletta Park in Burlington.

BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER (*Setophaga fusca*) – There weren't that many about, just a few at Pelee on the fallout day, and a few more at Rondeau, Old Cut, and a few other sites, but those that were around gave us plenty of time to enjoy their exquisite colors.

YELLOW WARBLER (*Setophaga petechia*) – Incredibly abundant throughout. One morning I counted singing birds as we drove from the park entrance down to the visitor center parking lot and ended up with about 60 individuals, a small fraction of the actual number in the park during our stay!

CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – Seen most days, with a high of about a dozen at Rondeau, where they were one of the more common species.

BLACKPOLL WARBLER (*Setophaga striata*) – It was a good thing we tracked down that singing male (after a great deal of work!) along the West Beach Trail our final morning at Pelee, as it turned out to be the only one of the tour. This is generally one of the later migrant warblers, and we rarely encounter more than one on this trip.

BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER (*Setophaga caerulescens*) – Last year we struggled with this species, and only found one our final day on breeding territory in the north. Not so this year, as there were plenty about, and we enjoyed many fine views of both sexes on a daily basis.

PALM WARBLER (*Setophaga palmarum*) – We hit the peak migration period for this species this year. It is among the earlier warbler migrants and normally most have already passed through by this time, but there was no shortage of them on the fallout day. They were seemingly everywhere we looked along the West Beach Trail, and I can honestly say I've never seen so many in a single day in Ontario as we saw on that walk! We also saw them in small numbers most other days.

PINE WARBLER (*Setophaga pinus*) – A female in Tilden's Woods at Pelee our first morning was our only one of these early migrants until our last full day, when we had up close and personal eye level views of a lovely singing male at Thickson's Woods in Whitby.

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER (*Setophaga coronata*) – Another early migrant that was around in good numbers this year.

BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER (*Setophaga virens*) – It seems to me we saw fewer of these than most other warblers, though we still had a handful most days.

CANADA WARBLER (*Cardellina canadensis*) – Always a toughie, and it took some work to track down a couple of birds along the West Beach Trail, but we were eventually rewarded with awesome views of this beauty. Another showed briefly at the wet area along the South Point Trail at Rondeau.

WILSON'S WARBLER (*Cardellina pusilla*) – Never among the more common migrants at Pelee, but we contented ourselves with good looks at a couple of males at Rondeau.

Emberizidae (Buntings and New World Sparrows)

CHIPPING SPARROW (*Spizella passerina*) – Though we saw a few pretty much every day, they were always in fairly small numbers.

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW (*Spizella pallida*) – I heard one singing softly from the grassy verges of the West Beach Trail; we may have walked right by it otherwise, but instead we got a nice look at it. This was the only one of the tour.

FIELD SPARROW (*Spizella pusilla*) – One feeding in the ground at the Dunes picnic spot, and another pair at the tip were all seen on the big fallout day at Pelee. Elsewhere we also saw a couple in the old field habitat on the Carden alvar.

DARK-EYED JUNCO (*Junco hyemalis*) – A very late female-plumaged bird was right at the tip of Point Pelee on the big fallout day.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia leucophrys*) – These were coming through in good numbers during the trip, and we saw plenty of them every day.

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW (*Zonotrichia albicollis*) – Usually these sparrows pass through a little before the preceding species, though there were still quite a few of them on the move and we saw them every day, though generally in smaller numbers than the White-crowns.

SAVANNAH SPARROW (*Passerculus sandwichensis*) – One crisply-plumaged bird was at the tip at Pelee on the fallout day, while quite a few others were seen in appropriate grassland areas after we left Pelee behind.

SONG SPARROW (*Melospiza melodia*) – It always surprises me how scarce this common species is at Pelee. We saw none at all there (though I heard one distant singing bird), but had loads of them further to the north.

LINCOLN'S SPARROW (*Melospiza lincolni*) – Though I saw a couple of these sneaky sparrows at Pelee, I was never able to get anyone on them, but one at Rondeau, then another at the Old Cut banding station were more obliging and seen well by all.

SWAMP SPARROW (*Melospiza georgiana*) – One was seen along the trails at Sanctuary, then plenty more in swampy areas to the north such as Oshawa Second Marsh and the Sedge Wren Marsh at Carden.

EASTERN TOWHEE (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – Like Brown Thrasher and Field Sparrow, this species is best looked for in old field habitat in southern Ontario. In Pelee, along the west side of the point is one of the better areas, and this is where we ran into this bird several times. Also seen briefly in the Carden alvar.

Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)

SUMMER TANAGER (*Piranga rubra*) – An annual rarity in Ontario, and possible scarce breeder, though there are currently no breeding sites known in the province. A female that had been hanging around at Old Cut for 4 days showed nicely for us as she moved through the wood lot along with a couple of male Scarlet Tanagers. I think this was my first ever in the province (and country!)

SCARLET TANAGER (*Piranga olivacea*) – Good numbers dropped in at Pelee on the fallout day, though that was the only day we saw them there. There were also a bunch of these brightening up the woods at Rondeau, and a couple each at Old Cut and Tup along the Lake Ontario shoreline. With the lack of foliage, and the fact that they are generally pretty pooped from the flight over the lake, they often stay low and show up extremely well. Once those leaves pop out and they get into the canopy, it's another story.

NORTHERN CARDINAL (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Common throughout, and seen daily.

ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – Like the Scarlet Tanager, this species is pretty visible and quite approachable at Pelee, though these are usually much more numerous. We saw several of these each day at Pelee, then had a high count of 20+ at Rondeau, with smaller numbers again at the other migration sites visited.

INDIGO BUNTING (*Passerina cyanea*) – Just a few were trickling through during our visit, and our first looks at a quartet of males feeding along the roadside near the Sanctuary picnic area on the fallout day were our most satisfying.

Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)

BOBOLINK (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – A flock of about 20 birds flew high overhead singing as we birded at Sanctuary. These were the only migrants we saw, and almost the only ones. We had a brief look at a pair of males chasing each other around at Carden, though we were a bit distracted by the snipe we had just found. Normally by this time there would have been several males on territory here, but those two were the only ones we encountered on that cold, blustery morning.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – Numerous throughout, and often quite distracting at Pelee when you're trying to find more important targets.

EASTERN MEADOWLARK (*Sturnella magna*) – Quite a few were seen on the Carden alvar, where they didn't seem to be bothered all that much by the cold weather.

COMMON GRACKLE (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Quite numerous throughout, though we missed them the final morning at Carden. Or maybe we just overlooked them.

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD (*Molothrus ater*) – Small numbers were seen pretty much daily, though again, we either missed them outright or overlooked them on the very first day at Pelee.

ORCHARD ORIOLE (*Icterus spurius*) – Pelee is one of the most reliable places to see this species in Canada, and we saw them daily, though in much smaller numbers than I'm accustomed to here. I guess they hadn't really arrived in numbers yet.

BALTIMORE ORIOLE (*Icterus galbula*) – Numbers of these were also much lower than I'm used to here, but we did see them daily. Those that were around usually showed pretty well as they fed low to the ground and often quite close to the trail.

Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)

PURPLE FINCH (*Haemorhous purpureus*) – A female at the Dunes picnic area was our first of three. Our other two were fine males, one each at Rondeau and on the Carden alvar.

PINE SISKIN (*Spinus pinus*) – A couple of late birds at the tip were probably the best find of the first early morning visit to the tip. Elsewhere a single bird visited the feeders at Rondeau, and a group of 4 were seen at Paletta Park in Burlington.

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH (*Spinus tristis*) – Somehow we missed this common species the first day, but we saw plenty daily after that.

Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)

HOUSE SPARROW (*Passer domesticus*) – Common, though a female perched near the visitor center was a bit unusual for that part of the park. They're much more common in the residential areas just outside the park. [H]

MAMMALS

EASTERN COTTONTAIL (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – A few bunnies were spotted at Pelee and elsewhere.

PLAIN EASTERN CHIPMUNK (*Tamias striatus*) – Pretty common at Rondeau, Long Point, and at sites along the Lake Ontario shoreline, but we saw none at Pelee.

EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Very common throughout, with more of the black, melanistic ones seen than the standard grays.

RED SQUIRREL (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – A few in wood lots with conifers such as the pine plantation at Backus Woods, and a couple of sites along the Lake Ontario shoreline.

NORTHERN RACCOON (*Procyon lotor*) – Everyone but me saw one at Pelee, though there were plenty of road killed specimens throughout the tour.

AMERICAN MINK (*Mustela vison*) – We surprised one along the canal during a brief stop at Big Creek reserve, and had a quick view of it splashing across a small channel and disappearing among the cattails.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Totals for the tour: 174 bird taxa and 6 mammal taxa