

Canada 2002 May

Waders, Woodpeckers & Wood Warblers

This was the second annual overseas trip of the disabled birders association

The trips are designed for dba (now called 'Birding For All') members and others who have mobility problems. This trip had 8 participants, 3 wheelchair users (including one person who cannot stand or walk at all), three people with moderate walking difficulty and two able bodied people. In fact, there were 4 married couples. Participants were Bo & Maggie Crombet-Beolens (Bo is otherwise known as the [Fatbirder](#)), Brian & Joanna Anderson, Lawrence & Anne Robinson [all of whom went on the previous dba trip to Kenya] and John & Selina Cook.

The trip was organised by the dba through the agency of [SARUS Bird Tours](#) and a ground guide who is a Canadian national – [Blake Maybank](#) of White's Lake, Nova Scotia. Prices were relatively low principally as SARUS offered to operate on a non-profit basis. The destination was chosen partly as Canada has such a good reputation for accessibility and was time to coincide with normal peak migration at the famous Point Pelee on the northern shores of Lake Eyrie. The trip started on 9th May and ended May 23rd 2002.

Background

Hotels were booked based on accessibility and price and a vehicle hired to accommodate disabled travellers. In fact, the original plan had been to have two vehicles and drivers and to hire them through a specialist group in the USA. Unfortunately border crossing times since 11/9 made that plan less attractive and a last-minute withdrawal of the second driver led to the group having to use just one (cramped) vehicle.

Itinerary

9th May – Flight from London, Heathrow to Pearson, Toronto.

10th May – Arrival Toronto, staying at the Heritage Inn

11th May – Travel to Simcoe staying at Best Western Little River Inn & first visit to Long Point

12th May – Long Point & area

13th May – Drive to Chatham staying at Comfort Inn

14th May – First visit to Pelee

15th May – Pelee

16th May – Rondeau Provincial Park

17th May – Pelee & St Clair

18th May – Ojibway & St Clair

19th May – Drive to Niagara and stay at Sheraton Falls View Hotel

20th May – Drive to Trenton and stay at Comfort Inn

21st May – Presqu'ile and area – night trip looking for night birds

22nd May – Kingston area

23rd May – Drive to Toronto airport and flight to London.

Hotels

We have included this section in the report as a guide to any user but with a particular emphasis on accessibility as we found them rather less accessible than advertised. We quickly found out that hotels at the cheaper end of the market do not deliver the accessibility one is led to expect from their advertising and websites.

Heritage Inns and Comfort Inns tend not to be used by tourist but by people travelling within Canada on business. Breakfasts were basic and rooms clean and in good order but fairly basic. All advertise accessible rooms but this does not quite mean what one might think. We have criticisms but this is tempered by a common experience of very helpful and friendly staff. Indeed, this seems to be a cultural norm in Canada where people are friendly, polite, helpful and not pushy.

In general, all the 'disabled' toilets were too low; not only for wheelchair customers but also for elderly people or ambulant disabled who have difficulty with rising from low seats. The placing of toilet handrails was generally ok but there was often a handrail at the back of the toilet i.e. over the cistern which is of no use whatever!

It was an annoyance not to have had coffee making facilities in rooms, especially 'disabled' rooms. A wheelchair user would have found it difficult, and possibly hazardous, to carry hot coffee from the reception areas (where most hotels had a free coffee service) to rooms, especially as all of the doors to the rooms used had very strong springs on them.

Heritage Inn

Heritage Inn, 385 Rexdale Bl, Etobicoke, ON M9W 1R9, (416) 742 5510.

This hotel is conveniently situated near the airport. It is quite basic and breakfast is by voucher in their coffee shop. A continental breakfast could be supplemented by other additions if one is willing to pay a little extra. The rooms were adequate if uninspiring and views urban. There was no restaurant for evening meals so we dined at a local Japanese restaurant.

In general, the disabled room was large enough for the wheelchair to get to both sides of the bed and the room was provided with a coffee maker. The beds were a little high – in all hotels – for wheelchair users to reach whose seats are of standard height and there was nothing to pull on to get on to the beds. Also, the wardrobes – for a disabled room – were the wrong height and additionally the 'security hangers' are quite difficult for a wheelchair person to manage.

The bathroom was large enough for the wheelchair and access was good because the door opened outwards. An inner handle or bar ought to be fitted to the bathroom door so that a wheelchair user can easily shut the door behind them. The concept of this inner handle/handrail seems to be an alien one wherever we go. For many, many years I have used this inner handle when I go outside through my backdoor. [One of our party writes: I merely have to reach behind me and pull on the handle rather than turn around and go back inside a little to reach the original door handle and then reverse outside again still holding the handle to shut the door].

The sink was too high for a wheelchair user and the laminated top surrounding the sink made it difficult for shaving and hair washing. This particular sink had no provision for a plug or lever to stop water running away, [important when washing hair or wet shaving]. The bath was too low to enable one to get out without a struggle.

Because we were there for only one night we did not bother to see if bath stools/chairs were available. There was inadequate provision of handrails over the bath. A vertical handrail was provided in the shower region, but there should have been a horizontal bar provided at bath edge level where the bath edge by the wall was very narrow and slippery. Additionally, there should have been another vertical handrail fitted at the other end of the bath. This may have enabled one to pull oneself out of the bath and in to a wheelchair.

Best Western Little River Inn

Best Western Little River Inn, 203 Queensway W, Simcoe, ON N3Y 2M9, (519) 426 2125.

This hotel is in the (rather pretty) town of Simcoe and backs on to the river with a large car park and neighbouring gardens. Rooms were roomy, of a good standard and comfortable. Breakfast was DIY toast and continental. Our second day breakfast coincided with Mother's day Brunch (a big deal in Canada) and we had to take it in the vestibule so it was rather awkward.

The restaurant was pretty good and we dined here both evenings. The rooms we used here were not 'disabled' rooms so we cannot comment on 'disabled' provision. Thankfully, each was roomy with an outward opening bathroom door.

Comfort Inn – Chatham

Comfort Inn, 1100 Richmond, Chatham, ON N7M 5J5, (519) 352 5500.

We stayed at the Chatham Comfort Inn for a week as it was as near (1 hour's drive) as we could get to stay near Pelee. [Pelee hotels are booked up at this period for many years ahead by larger tour companies, although it is worth trying for cancellations if you are travelling as a small party without special needs]. It is a hotel used by commerce rather than tourism and is adequate but fairly basic. They are used to birders and do offer birders deals with a freebie carry case for your bins and a badge and a pack on local birding places. The staff were very helpful and responded very quickly to requests and sent out for bath stools etc. Breakfast was continental in a small seating area but tolerable.

The basic details re the bathroom as already described at the Heritage were relevant to the 'disabled' room provided at this hotel. The toilet was too low, the sink too high etc., and the bath too low with inadequate provision of handrails.

The bathroom, as before, was roomy, and this time a bath stool was provided on request to enable disabled members to use the bath. However, the stool was highly precarious as one could only use one hand to use the shower and hold a soap and/or flannel whilst the other hand was used to grip on to the handrail to enable one to keep one's balance. Getting off the stool onto the wheelchair was particularly hazardous as the stool is liable to move just as one is transferring to a wheelchair. Ironically, it was

only sometime afterwards that we were informed that there was a choice of bath stools and chairs. A chair with a back and/or sides would have enabled one to have both hands free to use for bathing.

This particular room was provided with a moveable, hanging-rail that was parked against a wall near the bed. It was a low height rail that was ok except that the bed was too near to it to enable a wheelchair user to get to it. This was not an insurmountable problem as presumably the bed could have been moved to provide more space. There was a large double bed that was too high, which provided a spacious area for the wheelchair user and also a settee (chesterfield).

Comfort Inn – Trenton

Comfort Inn, 68 Monogram Place, Trenton, On. (613) 965 6660.

The Comfort Inn Trenton was even more basic than the other Comfort Inn and had no seating to eat an even more basic breakfast. Staff were a lot less helpful than elsewhere and we insisted on a refund for one room user as problems were not put right quickly. The same difficulties were experienced at this establishment as with the previous Comfort Inn.

Additionally, there were extra problems in that the toilet seat would not stay up on its own and no plug system was provided for the bathroom sink. Vociferous complaints were made and a refund promised. The room was large and was furnished in the same way as the Chatham room. The bed was too high as before. The wardrobe was of the 'high' variety and so difficult for disabled people to use.

The Chatham hotel provided continental breakfast in the reception area and tables were provided to eat breakfast from. There was even an assistant to make the toast for customers. The Trenton hotel provided no tables and toast had to be made by the customer. This arrangement was inadequate for able-bodied customers and very difficult indeed for the disabled clientele.

The difference between the standards of provision and service between the two Comfort Inns was surprising and a poor reflection on the management of Comfort Inns ability to provide a good standard service.

Sheraton

Sheraton Fallsview Hotel & Conference centre, 6755 Fallsview, Nfls, On L2G 7W3, (905) 374 1077

The Sheraton felt like absolute luxury after the other hotels. In fact, the rooms are a standard design but attractive, spacious, well-appointed and (we paid £30 extra) had stunning views of the falls. Beware there are no less than three Sheraton Hotels in Niagara and two are called Fallsview, and both are on similarly named streets. We had half unloaded at the wrong one before anyone even asked us if we were at the right place!

Because we all wanted a 'Falls View' room [£30 extra] we were not able to have a disabled room. However, the room was large and roomy but again the bed was too high. The bathroom was adequate and this time the door opened inside and there was

just enough room to get into the bathroom and close the door. The gap between the toilet and the bathroom door was so tight that one of our party nearly got stuck and could not manoeuvre the wheelchair enough to re-open the door without a real struggle.

Dining

We ate in hotels in some places but where this was not available we ate out. For the most part it was a choice between very expensive 'good' restaurants or cheap chains of 'fast' food. However, there were some 'family' restaurants offering good, wholesome but cheap fare. Below are a number of places we tried. Some of us also sent out for meals that were delivered to hotels. It was hard to find fish let alone vegetarian fare anywhere. Portion size was a shock and definitely of North American proportions – try children's portions or 'lunch' portions if you cannot manage it.

We mostly ate 'Subs' otherwise known as 'Subways' or 'Submarines' for lunch. This is a six-inch or 12 inch filled baguette. We also snacked on 'Tim Bits' or 'Donut Holes' from the very plentiful 'Tim Horton's' chain of coffee and donut places. They do excellent fresh coffee to go in their own branded mugs and all had accessible toilets – a godsend for our group as no hamlet, however small, can do without its 'Timmies'.

Chatham

Crabby Joe's Tap & Grill – 395 *Grand Avenue West*. This was a cheap place with food mostly based on Pasta. The speciality were "cheese sizzlers" which turned out to be flambéed cheese with a sort of salsa and pitta bread – OK if you like very salty cheese. It was however cheap and the pasta was OK.

Kelsey's – 804 *Richmond Street*. Kelsey's is a chain of fast food restaurants. We ate here twice which is, I guess, a recommendation. Chicken wings, salmon, burgers, beer and deserts all in HUGE portions. The beer was good and plentiful bought in jugs.

Pranovi's – 49 *Keil Drive South* The best restaurant in town and a place we ate in three times. This had lovely Italian cooking with a friendly chef/owner who could accommodate variations to suit any palette – highly recommended.

Trenton

Britannia We went to the Britannia on two occasions and can recommend it highly. Food is very "British" but none the worse for that. Traditional, fish & chips, pasties and mushy peas, but also very well cooked scallops and prawns etc., with excellent desserts and, joy of joys, Guinness or other stouts and English ales.

Holiday Inn The paucity of breakfast at the Comfort Inn led us to breakfast twice at the Trenton Holiday Inn and very good it was too with the usual offer of stacks of pancakes and maple syrup with hash browns and eggs over easy, yummy!

Transport

We took a disabled permit with us and this was never challenged for parking etc. Just as well as we could not get a local permit as the whole of the civil service (including the parks dept) had been on strike up to a week before our arrival.

Our original plan had been to have two vehicles and drivers and to hire them through a specialist group in the USA. Unfortunately border crossing times since 11/9 made that plan less attractive and a last-minute withdrawal of the second driver led to the group having to use just one (cramped) vehicle.

A 15-seater with front and back rows removed meant that we could accommodate luggage and wheelchairs etc. but it left the seating very, very cramped and uncomfortable and this was the worst aspect of the trip. It did not stop us birding or ruin the holiday but it came close at some times for some of the group. ALL PARTICIPANTS WOULD HAVE HAPPILY PAID EXTRA TO HAVE TWO VEHICLES. It was not just that travelling was uncomfortable it also meant that birding from the vehicle (a must a times for a group with limited mobility) was difficult and views very restricted, especially as we had been promised that everyone will get a window seat.

It is worth noting that Pelee closes when the car park is full but an exception was made for our group. Many people arrive very early and staying a long way off is even more of a problem when participants need more than average time to ready themselves in the mornings.

Access to the vehicle was by a set of ramps of ingenious robust design supplied by Jerry Dick of Engineering Applications Ltd. Of 42 Ellesboro Drive, Mississauga, Ontario. Tel: (905) 826-2492 [email](#).

Birding Areas Accessibility

Access to birding areas was a disappointment. Canada does, undoubtedly, do better than many countries but is still trapped in a non-social model of disability just like the rest of the world. Disability is, like most places, still synonymous with 'wheelchair user' and what provisions are made are for wheelchair users not those with other mobility problems let alone other disabilities. Only Pelee had any mobility aids (push wheelchairs) on offer and run an accessible road train out the two kilometres or so to the point. Unlike at the British Bird Fair or National Trust there are no self-propelled or motorised chairs available.

Some trails are wheelchair accessible and have boardwalks etc. I was disappointed by the lack of places for the 'hard of walking' to rest. I do not expect or want proper seating but, as the President of our US branch often says, they could leave some of the larger fallen trees in places where we can perch on them! Having said that some places (such as Rondeau) does have short trails with some seating and others, such as Ojibway makes some provision.

Pelee away from the point has many wooded areas with access, accessible toilets and short trails that are usable by groups such as ours.

Weather

Canadians celebrate Queen Victoria's Birthday each May. In 2002 the holiday weekend was the coldest for 50 years! For almost our entire trip the weather was unkind although the most persistent rain was on days of travelling which did not interrupt our birding. We also had several days of showers at Pelee but managed to

bird in relatively sheltered areas. The weather was unseasonably cold and the real enemy of birding, wind, was a problem almost throughout. The last two days of the trip were warm, sunny and virtually wind free. We had all been advised to bring a range of clothing to cover all eventualities, as weather is so unpredictable. However, the shorts and T-shirts never had an airing and warm waterproof clothing was at a premium.

Because of the weather there were no 'big fall days' at Pelee but the migration was still happening and varied from light to moderate. [Moderate for N American birders seemed very busy to us Brits].

Weather might have been a factor in keeping back some over wintering birds in small numbers such as ducks which added to our variety. However, other birds, such as raptors had already passed through and we did not see high numbers. It is worth researching exact times of migration if one wishes to see particular species.

Leading dba Groups

This was our second overseas trip and we have learnt a great deal through both trips to inaccessible Kenya and accessible Canada – not least not to take ones prejudices with one. Third world countries may have less purpose provision but are often very adaptable and helpful and more able to offer low tech solutions to mobility problems.

We have also learned much about how groups such as ours function and what leadership should be like for such groups. I offer guidelines for future trips and anyone interested in leading birding groups elsewhere on this website.

Sites

The body of this report is not set out as a daily diary but rather by the sites visited; refer to the itinerary above for exact dates of visits.

We birded from the vehicle, on the side of the road, by 'walking' some trails and sitting around in some reserves.

Long Point & Port Rowan

Long Point sticks out into Lake Erie from around the small settlement of the same name. Birding can be at the park at the point, within the marshy area just before the peninsular begins or around the small town and its ringing (banding) station. We stayed in the town of Simcoe about 30 minutes' drive away. The area is flat farmland interspersed with woodlots, some private some 'crown' land.

Our first trip was a drive on a windy day through the marsh to the park that was still closed to vehicles. We walked around the park entrance by a small wood bordered by sand dunes. Just before we parked we saw our first woodpecker – a Northern Flicker on someone's lawn and Brown-headed Cowbirds on the roadside. Once we parked we saw our first wood warblers; Yellow, Black-throated Green, and Black and White Warblers. In close attendance were Red-breasted Nuthatches. As we neared the dunes we spotted a stunning Redheaded Woodpecker clinging to a dead tree sticking up from the sand. Further exploration brought Purple Martins, Killdeer, Palm Warbler, Chipping Sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers to our notice. A supporting cast of

other birds common throughout our trip were Barn and Bank Swallows, Goldfinches, our first Cardinal, and many Ruby-crowned Kinglets. A short drive through the hamlet gave close up views of Purple and House Finches, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Chipping and Song Sparrows and Blue Jays. We made a slight detour to find the whereabouts of the local sewage lagoons at Port Rowan off Highway 42 one kilometre east of Highway 59 on the north side, which were very productive. Not only many waders including Short-billed Dowitcher, Least, Semi-palmated and Solitary Sandpipers, and Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs but also a stunning view of a Sora Rail that came out into the open for us. Under a river bridge were nesting Cliff Swallows and Northern Rough-winged Swallows

Our second day at Long Point covered more ground and was even more productive. We started the day with a visit to the ringing station and the area around it, which was alive (not in their terms) with migrants. Around the ringing centre were Willow/Alder and Least Flycatchers and Red-eyed and White-eyed Vireos – the latter being a “good” bird. Our first Blue-grey Gnatcatchers were a delight and we enjoyed the creeping through the wooded area despite the cold. We moved on into an area of open housing with gardens full of feeders.

The locals do not seem to mind the hoards of birders looking around their patch and we were rewarded with Baltimore Orioles, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, a Lincoln’s Sparrow, Winter Wren, our first Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Eastern Phoebe, and a stunning Magnolia Warbler. After a warming coffee we repaired to the sewage lagoons again for lunch – a number of our party were up to a walk to see a Black-crowned Night Heron but the rest of us were satisfied with further looks at the cast of waders and swallows, the Sora remained elusive.

After lunch (of ‘subways’ which were to become our staple lunch) we went back to the marsh. There are several places to view from the road and we accessed one area along a raised bank with a path suitable for wheelchairs and searched for American Coot, American Tree Sparrow, Common Yellowthroat, Red-tailed Hawk and Northern Harrier as well as a cast of left over ducks such as Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Redhead, Ring-necked and so forth. A few Forster’s Terns hunted in the shallows.

The group split here with two of the party spending a few hours with their Canadian friends birding a small woodlot near Simcoe, which gave up Veery, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and some warblers although only the Canadians saw Wood Thrush and Blue-winged Warbler.

Point Pelee National Park

[Point Pelee National Park](#) is, of course, one of the most noted observation points for migration in the whole of North America. We stayed at Chatham for a week and made four visits to Pelee and it always added more species to our growing list.

We had poor weather for all the days we visited although the best day was dry and bright but windy. None of our visits were “big fall” days but one of the days had a good fall and two of the others were busy compared to birding in non-migratory areas.

The day when we had most birds was very busy by European standards and even the persistent light rain did not put us off. On this day we did not go out to the point but birded in several of the wooded areas between the park entrance and the Visitor centre. Each of those areas had covered picnic tables and parking with a series of trails going off that were sometimes traversable for all including wheelchair users. One or two of these car parks had fairly accessible toilets although the best washrooms are at the visitor centre where there is also a shop and a stall selling snacks as well as a number of "interpretation" areas. This day saw a large movement of White-crowned and White-throated Sparrows that seemed to be everywhere one looked. There was also a good movement of warblers, flycatchers, orioles and other species.

The best aspect of the birding was that the rain often kept the birds way down in the canopy or even at eye-level and below, as the weather improved the birds tended to move higher into the trees making ID more difficult. At times warblers, thrushes and orioles etc. were as close a foot or two away and slowly feeding giving what are called, even by disabled birders, "crippling" views! We saw Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Downy Woodpeckers, Gray Catbirds, Orchard and Baltimore Orioles, Least and Willow/Alder Flycatchers, Swamp, Chipping, Field, Song, White-throated, and White-crowned Sparrows. Warblers included Bay-breasted, Chestnut-sided, Yellow, Blackburnian, Nashville, Orange-crowned, Cerulean, Ovenbirds and Black-throated Blue. Other birds included Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes, Wood Duck, Caspian Terns, and Pine Siskin.

On three occasions we birded the 'Tip' area that can be accessed by virtue of a road train that can take wheelchairs as well as foot passengers. From terminal to terminal is two kilometres or so and there is a stop off point half way. The point is about 700 metres beyond the point at which the train turns to return to the visitor centre. At the point is a shingle/sand bank of a couple of hundred metres. The bank was covered with (c.5000) Common Terns with a scattering of Black Terns and a few hundred Gulls (mostly Bonaparte's and Ring-billed but a few Great Black-backs and Herring too). We also saw Red Knot, Willet, Sanderling and Turnstones as well as passerines resting trying to make up their minds to stay in chilly Canada or head back to the states. At one point there were several dozen Baltimore and Orchard Orioles sitting on the bar looking way out of place.

The woodland between the tip and the terminal was a great area and, even although when we visited there were not great numbers of birds, the variety was terrific. On various visits we saw, Red-headed Woodpecker, many Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and both Orioles, Marsh Wren (falsely identified as a rarer Sedge Wren by some), Least, Alder/Willow Flycatchers, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Cedar Waxwings, and a number of sparrows and warblers including Blackpoll, Black-and-White, Yellow, Wilson's, Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Redstarts, Chestnut-sided and etc.

On one occasion we got off the train half way back and walked to the centre. En-route we saw Scarlet Tanagers, House Wrens, Black-throated Blue Warblers, etc. Birding was almost as good anywhere in the park and trails around the car park and Visitor Centre were also productive producing, at different times, Northern Parula,

Philadelphia Vireo, Pine Warbler, nesting American Robin and Common Grackle, Black-throated Green Warbler etc.

A stop at a picnic site on one occasion produced the only views we had of a passing immature Bald Eagle as well as Broad-winged and Red-tailed Hawks and the Turkey Vultures which we saw everyday. That site also held very confiding Eastern Kingbird too.

Point Pelee in May is perhaps the most crowded birding area in the whole of North America with scenes familiar to British birders but unlike other venues. When the car park is full the entrance gate is closed and you have to wait to enter or do so on foot. This means that around 5000 birders are working the area but it rarely gets as crowded as an English twitch. One could happily spend all day every day in May at the place and would turn up many species with 30 or more wood warblers being the target for many.

Rondeau Provincial Park

[Rondeau Provincial Park](#) is an area close to Point Pelee good for migration and breeding birds including the wonderful Prothonotary Warbler.

We visited on just one occasion and birded around the Park Centre and along two trails; one of which is recommended for nest Prothonotary Warblers. This short trail (1½ K) was a delight. The woodland here is open and deciduous with areas of standing water (ideal habitat for Prothonotary) and there are nest boxes provided for the warblers although we watched a pair of Prothonotary Warblers competing on the one hand with House Wrens and on the other with Black and White Warblers.

We also saw other warblers on this trail including Yellow-rumped, Yellow, Magnolia, Wilson's, Blackburnian, and other species such as Great-crested and Least Flycatchers, Eastern Towhee, White-breasted and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Gray Catbirds, Ovenbirds, Swainson's Thrush and Veery, American Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds and etc. Near the Park centre are some picnic tables and several feeders which were being well used by Downy, Hairy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatches, Purple and House Finches, Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Song, Lincoln's and Chipping Sparrows, Black-capped Chickadees, Goldfinches and so forth.

We lunched at the edge of the park against the Lake and added hirundines, and waterfowl to our day-list. If you visit this part of Canada do not miss out Rondeau no matter how much it is overshadowed by its more famed neighbour Pelee as it is worth a visit for the nesting Prothonotary Warblers alone.

Blenheim Sewage Lagoons

Blenheim lies between Rondeau and Chatham and we visited it after our time at Rondeau.

These lagoons are sometimes lowered to attract waders but, during our visit water levels were high on them all and the only waders present were Dunlin. However, the high levels did mean a number of duck species were present including our only Shoveler and Ruddy Duck for the trip as well as other species such as Bufflehead, Gadwall, Mallard etc.

All around the lagoons and on nearby wires and fences were hirundines including one Purple Martin and many Bank, Barn and Tree Swallows. One lifer was our first Bobolink that sat on a lagoon-side bush giving good views.

As we drove away from the lagoons we saw our first Eastern Meadowlark fly across the road with a jizz reminiscent of partridges. There were also a few Horned Lark, a bird we had previously glimpsed in the flat agricultural lands near Long Point.

St Clair National Wildlife Area

We visited St Clair National Wildlife Area near Chatham on two occasions – one being a return visit to try and catch a view of Virginia Rail and for one of our party who had been unwell to catch up with some of its specialities.

The main reason for the visit was to see the scarce breeding Yellow-headed Blackbird that is often out competed by Red-winged Blackbirds.

The road into the area is not well signposted and on minor back roads used by the local farmers. There is a sign into the area but this is down a side road and is a small sign so directions are useful. For our party there was no reasonable access and we viewed in (or for the more mobile) around the vehicle.

The best place to view for the blackbirds is just before the main car park accessed by driving down the entrance track past an area of marsh to the right (good for calling Virginia rail) and turning right over a bridge and right again toward the car park; viewing is to the left just before the car park across a lake to extensive reed-beds. On both occasions of our visits we saw Yellow-headed Blackbirds showing well at the top of reeds, their heads shining brightly making no problem to separate them from the ever-present Red-winged Blackbirds.

The lake also produced our only Common Moorhens and Pied-billed Grebes of the trip as well as many Black Terns, hirundines, a few ducks etc. In the reeds and around ditches were Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Kingbirds, Yellow Warblers and Song and Swamp Sparrows. We also saw our first Muskrats were swimming across the dykes.

Ojibway Park & Nature Centre

[Ojibway Park & Nature Centre](#) is located on the edge of the large city of Windsor from which one can access a bridge into the United States.

There are a number of areas here worth a visit including a preserved area of tall-grass prairie, which is almost unique in Canada. When we visited it there were none of the specialist birds we hoped for but it did hold lots of warblers on the edge of the wood and sparrows and woodpeckers on the open grassland. Species included Red-bellied

and Red-headed Woodpeckers, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Wilson's, Nashville, Yellow, and Warblers and Northern Parula.

The visitor centre area has a flat wheelchair accessible short trail as well as feeders which were frequented by one target species (Tufted Titmouse) as well as White-breasted Nuthatch, Black-capped Chickadee, White-crowned Sparrow, Blue Jays and others.

The accessible trail produced a small fall of warblers including, Cerulean, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Blue, Nashville, Yellow, Yellow-rumped, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Redstart, and Black-and-White as well as Eastern Towhee, many Downy Woodpeckers and more Tufted Titmice. Our only Belted Kingfisher of the trip was seen by some on the dyke adjacent to the centre as were many Painted Turtles.

Niagara Falls

Niagara is not renowned for birding and was on our itinerary as one of the wonders of the world too close to drive by without visiting. For the non-birders it was a high point in the tour and we were lucky to be in a hotel with wonderful views of the falls on a holiday weekend when they are lit up at night by laser light and there was a fabulous firework display. It was a truly excellent tourist attraction. The town has other attractions and could be described as kitsch or naff depending on your point of view with a lurid strip of neon with 4D 'museums' and casinos etc.

This is a great autumn/winter birding location with 12 species of gulls being possible. For our group there were some trip birds such as the many Black-crowned Night Herons roosting on the tiny islands above the Canada falls and the few left over ducks near the 'whirlpool' such as Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser etc.

Presqu'ile Provincial Park & Trenton Area

[Presqu'ile Provincial Park](#) was not overflowing with birds on our brief windswept and cold visit. Some had a Hairy Woodpecker and a supporting cast of sparrows and hirundines but nothing to cause us to stay beyond a windswept lunch.

We were lucky that a friend of Blake's, [Jim Taylor](#), was able to take us around the Trenton area to find some of the birds that we had not seen elsewhere. He is the local Atlaser for two 10K squares and took us to areas where birds had nested the year before. Many more birds were heard than seen and Waterthrushes and Wood Thrushes frustrated us here too.

However, we were able to see nesting Eastern Bluebirds, and Virginia Rail and a brief glimpse of a Least Bittern. En route we passed a nest of Osprey – the only ones we saw throughout the trip. Another friend had told him of a nest of a Great Horned Owl which could be viewed from the road and we were able to see the chicks very well.

In the evening Jim took us to a number of places in search of night birds but it proved too early for Whip-poor-will. We did hear American Woodcock and watched Nighthawks around the church spire and supermarket car par lights in Trenton. The

night outing was good for critters with Snow-shoe Hare and Raccoon being seen in the headlights.

Kingston – Canoe Lake Road

We spent the greater part of a day in the Kingston area along Canoe Lake Road birding farm roads for Loggerhead Shrike and Savannah Sparrows and moving on to Canoe Lake for breeding warblers and thrushes etc. The Loggerhead Shrike was clearly nesting and the area has been protected for that reason. We did not find Upland Sandpiper but did get fine views of Northern Harrier whilst looking. The road where we saw the shrike also produced our only Brown Thrasher of the trip. It also gave us good views of Eastern Meadowlark, birds that some members of the party had not before managed to see.

This was by far and away the prettiest place we visited on the tour being close to the edge of the old glacial shield with hilly wooded areas with outcropping rocks etc. We drove slowly along the Canoe Lake Road making many stops and were delighted by fine views of a nesting pair of Common Loons (Great Northern Divers) on the lake. The wooded hills behind the Lake also produced our only views of Red-shouldered Hawk.

En route we had superb views of Golden-winged Warblers among more common birds and excellent views of Hairy Woodpecker and a fleeing but unmistakable view of a Pileated Woodpecker that flew along the road in front of us.

We heard a number of Ruffed Grouse but did not have to settle for 'heard only' when one raced across the road just in front of us.

Indigo Bunting was a first for one of the party who had missed the Pelee birds.

Once more we managed to hear Louisiana and Northern Waterthrush without actually ever seeing them.

Other Wildlife

Whilst the group was primarily interested in birds we all (including the non-birders) were keen to see any aspect of nature. We managed to see quite a few mammals, a few butterflies and on (maybe more) species of turtle. The following were seen:

1. Gray (Black) Squirrel (numerous everywhere).
2. Raccoon (Mostly as road-kill but one live one at night)
3. Coyote (one in the day near Canoe lake)
4. Snow-shoe Hare (one at night)
5. Vole sp. (one on Canoe Lake Road)
6. Water Shrew (several at Rondeau)
7. Muskrat (mostly associated with water in a number of locations)
8. Chipmunk (Rondeau etc.)
9. White-tailed Deer (Several locations)
10. Groundhog (Several at a number of locations)
11. Painted Turtle (on all standing water)

There are a number of common birds which we saw throughout the trip and which will be dismissed after you add them to your life list on your first day, although I never tired of some.

These include the inevitable introduced European Starling, Rock Dove and House Sparrow as ubiquitous here as all over the world. Others seen daily are Common Grackle, Yellow Warbler, Double-crested Cormorant, Canada geese, Mallard, American Crow, Ring-billed Gull and Mourning Dove. Other very common species are Chipping Sparrow, Brown-headed Cowbird, American Robin, Red-winged Blackbird, Great-blue Heron, Killdeer, Bank, Barn and Tree Swallows and Blue Jay.

Birds Seen

1. Common Loon *Gavia immer*
2. Pied-billed Grebe *Podilymbus podiceps*
3. Double-crested Cormorant *Phalacrocorax auritus*
4. Great Blue Heron *Ardea herodias*
5. Great Egret *Ardea alba*
6. Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis*
7. Green Heron *Butorides virescens*
8. Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*
9. Least Bittern *Ixobrychus exilis*
10. Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*
11. Canada Goose *Branta canadensis*
12. Wood Duck *Aix sponsa*
13. Gadwall *Anas strepera*
14. Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*
15. Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*
16. Canvasback *Aythya valisineria*
17. Redhead *Aythya americana*
18. Ring-necked Duck *Aythya collaris*
19. Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*
20. Oldsquaw *Clangula hyemalis*
21. White-winged Scoter *Melanitta fusca*
22. Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*
23. Bufflehead *Bucephala albeola*
24. Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*
25. Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*
26. Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*
27. Turkey Vulture *Cathartes aura*
28. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*
29. Bald Eagle *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*
30. Northern Harrier *Circus cyaneus*
31. Red-shouldered Hawk *Buteo lineatus*
32. Broad-winged Hawk *Buteo platypterus*
33. Red-tailed Hawk *Buteo jamaicensis*
34. American Kestrel *Falco sparverius*
35. Wild Turkey *Meleagris gallopavo*
36. Ruffed Grouse *Bonasa umbellus*
37. Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*

38. Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*
39. Sora *Porzana carolina*
40. Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*
41. American Coot *Fulica americana*
42. American Golden-Plover *Pluvialis dominica*
43. Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*
44. Semipalmated Plover *Charadrius semipalmatus*
45. Killdeer *Charadrius vociferus*
46. American Woodcock *Scolopax minor*
47. Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus*
48. Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*
49. Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*
50. Solitary Sandpiper *Tringa solitaria*
51. Spotted Sandpiper *Actitis macularia*
52. Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*
53. Sanderling *Calidris alba*
54. Least Sandpiper *Calidris minutilla*
55. Dunlin *Calidris alpina*
56. Ring-billed Gull *Larus delawarensis*
57. Great Black-backed Gull *Larus marinus*
58. Herring Gull *Larus argentatus*
59. Bonaparte's Gull *Larus philadelphia*
60. Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*
61. Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*
62. Forster's Tern *Sterna forsteri*
63. Black Tern *Chlidonias niger*
64. Mourning Dove *Zenaida macroura*
65. Great Horned Owl *Bubo virginianus*
66. Common Nighthawk *Chordeiles minor*
67. Chimney Swift *Chaetura pelagica*
68. Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*
69. Belted Kingfisher *Ceryle alcyon*
70. Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*
71. Red-bellied Woodpecker *Melanerpes carolinus*
72. Yellow-bellied Sapsucker *Sphyrapicus varius*
73. Downy Woodpecker *Picoides pubescens*
74. Hairy Woodpecker *Picoides villosus*
75. Northern Flicker *Colaptes auratus*
76. Pileated Woodpecker *Dryocopus pileatus*
77. Eastern Wood-Pewee *Contopus virens*
78. Yellow-bellied Flycatcher *Empidonax flaviventris*
79. Alder Flycatcher *Empidonax alnorum*
80. Willow Flycatcher *Empidonax traillii*
81. Least Flycatcher *Empidonax minimus*
82. Eastern Phoebe *Sayornis phoebe*
83. Great Crested Flycatcher *Myiarchus crinitus*
84. Eastern Kingbird *Tyrannus tyrannus*
85. Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris*
86. Purple Martin *Progne subis*
87. Tree Swallow *Tachycineta bicolor*

88. Northern Rough-winged Swallow *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*
89. Bank Swallow *Riparia riparia*
90. Cliff Swallow *Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*
91. Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*
92. Ruby-crowned Kinglet *Regulus calendula*
93. Cedar Waxwing *Bombcilla cedrorum*
94. Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus*
95. Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*
96. House Wren *Troglodytes aedon*
97. Marsh Wren *Cistothorus palustris*
98. Gray Catbird *Dumetella carolinensis*
99. Brown Thrasher *Toxostoma rufum*
100. Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialis*
101. Veery *Catharus fuscescens*
102. Swainson's Thrush *Catharus ustulatus*
103. Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*
104. American Robin *Turdus migratorius*
105. Blue-gray Gnatcatcher *Poliophtila caerulea*
106. Black-capped Chickadee *Poecile atricapillus*
107. Tufted Titmouse *Baeolophus bicolor*
108. Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis*
109. White-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta carolinensis*
110. Loggerhead Shrike *Lanius ludovicianus*
111. Blue Jay *Cyanocitta cristata*
112. American Crow *Corvus brachyrhynchos*
113. Common Raven *Corvus corax*
114. European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*
115. House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*
116. White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*
117. Warbling Vireo *Vireo gilvus*
118. Philadelphia Vireo *Vireo philadelphicus*
119. Red-eyed Vireo *Vireo olivaceus*
120. Purple Finch *Carpodacus purpureus*
121. House Finch *Carpodacus mexicanus*
122. Pine Siskin *Carduelis pinus*
123. American Goldfinch *Carduelis tristis*
124. Blue-winged Warbler *Vermivora pinus*
125. Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*
126. Tennessee Warbler *Vermivora peregrina*
127. Orange-crowned Warbler *Vermivora celata*
128. Nashville Warbler *Vermivora ruficapilla*
129. Northern Parula *Parula americana*
130. Yellow Warbler *Dendroica petechia*
131. Chestnut-sided Warbler *Dendroica pensylvanica*
132. Magnolia Warbler *Dendroica magnolia*
133. Black-throated Blue Warbler *Dendroica caerulescens*
134. Yellow-rumped Warbler *Dendroica coronata*
135. Black-throated Green Warbler *Dendroica virens*
136. Blackburnian Warbler *Dendroica fusca*
137. Pine Warbler *Dendroica pinus*

138. Palm Warbler *Dendroica palmarum*
139. Bay-breasted Warbler *Dendroica castanea*
140. Blackpoll Warbler *Dendroica striata*
141. Cerulean Warbler *Dendroica cerulea*
142. Black-and-white Warbler *Mniotilta varia*
143. American Redstart *Setophaga ruticilla*
144. Prothonotary Warbler *Protonotaria citrea*
145. Ovenbird *Seiurus aurocapillus*
146. Mourning Warbler *Oporornis philadelphia*
147. Common Yellowthroat *Geothlypis trichas*
148. Wilson's Warbler *Wilsonia pusilla*
149. Scarlet Tanager *Piranga olivacea*
150. Eastern Towhee *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*
151. American Tree Sparrow *Spizella arborea*
152. Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*
153. Field Sparrow *Spizella pusilla*
154. Savannah Sparrow *Passerculus sandwichensis*
155. Song Sparrow *Melospiza melodia*
156. Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolnii*
157. Swamp Sparrow *Melospiza georgiana*
158. White-crowned Sparrow *Zonotrichia leucophrys*
159. White-throated Sparrow *Zonotrichia albicollis*
160. Northern Cardinal *Cardinalis cardinalis*
161. Rose-breasted Grosbeak *Pheucticus ludovicianus*
162. Indigo Bunting *Passerina cyanea*
163. Bobolink *Dolichonyx oryzivorus*
164. Red-winged Blackbird *Agelaius phoeniceus*
165. Eastern Meadowlark *Sturnella magna*
166. Yellow-headed Blackbird *Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*
167. Common Grackle *Quiscalus quiscula*
168. Brown-headed Cowbird *Molothrus ater*
169. Baltimore Oriole *Icterus galbula*
170. Orchard Oriole *Icterus spurius*