

Spring migration at Long Point, Ontario

Following past successful visits to Long Point in Ontario, we are once again returning to this beautiful, bird-rich area of Canada. For those fortunate to have witnessed it, a fall of North American songbirds in springtime is an exciting and memorable experience. Warblers, orioles, tanagers and grosbeaks frequently abound, their colours and characters defying adequate description. This holiday offers the opportunity to encounter many such visually stunning species. Our visit is timed to coincide with the spring migration of songbirds, mid-May being the prime period. We also search for breeding species in southern Ontario and lingering winter migrants around the Great Lakes. We have extended the tour by two days to visit the Algonquin and Carden Alvar areas which hold several scarce species and migrants during May.

Day 1: We fly from London to Toronto in the Canadian province of Ontario. On arrival, we transfer to Orilla for a two-night stay.

Day 2: A visit to the beautiful wilderness of Algonquin Provincial Park. Near the park entrance, fields attract mixed flocks of sparrows: White-crowned, Chipping, Savannah and White-throated. The forest edge has Eastern Phoebe, Northern Raven and Grey Jay. Opeongo Road is a good area for American Black-backed Woodpecker and Ruffed Grouse, while Boreal Chickadee and Spruce Grouse are both possibilities. Other species include Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Spruce Bog Trail has tame Black-capped Chickadees and Red-breasted Nuthatches and mammals in the form of Moose and Groundhog.

Day 3: We start our exploration of Carden Alvar by visiting Kirkfield Lift Lock which has Cliff and Northern Rough-winged Swallows. Nearby, a check of meadow habitats may reveal the presence of Northern Harrier, Wilson's Snipe, Upland Sandpiper, Cedar Waxwing, the endangered eastern race of Loggerhead Shrike, Grasshopper Sparrow and Bobolink. Patches of marsh are worth checking for the highly localised Sedge Wren and we may hear the calls of Yellow, Virginia and Sora Rails and glimpse an American

Dates

Thursday May 7th – Saturday May
16th 2020

Leader: Simon Papps

Group size: 6

Birds: 160-190

Bittern. Drier sections of the marsh with scrub may attract Golden-winged Warbler, Indigo Bunting and Clay-coloured and Field Sparrows whilst in recent years rarities have included Lark Sparrow and Prairie Warbler. Transfer to Port Rowan

Day 4: Long Point is our first destination today. This site is world famous for migrant songbirds and rarities which occur during spring migration. Falls of migrants occur with regularity at the time of our visit. One area of woodland, on a good day, can hold in excess of a hundred species. On occasions it can be difficult to know where to look next as birds of every colour adorn the trees. For many, however, it is the flocks of warblers which are the biggest draw. At Long Point in springtime you stand the best chance of observing large mixed flocks of these birds which are always stunning both in their diversity and in the brightness of their plumage. Several species occur on a regular basis: Magnolia, Black-throated Blue and Black-throated Green Warblers, Palm and Mourning Warblers, American



Blackburnian Warbler Photo: Simon Papps

Redstart, the enigmatic Black-and-white Warbler and the stunning Blackburnian Warbler. Other species which are regularly recorded include Baltimore Oriole, Indigo Bunting, Scarlet Tanager, Grey Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Brown Thrasher and American Robin. The undergrowth can be alive with Grey-cheeked and Swainson's Thrushes, Ovenbirds, Lincoln's and White-throated Sparrows. Rarities encountered on previous tours include Worm-eating Warbler and Harris's Sparrow. We visit Long Point and Old Cut several times during the week in order to stand the greatest chance of witnessing songbird migration at its best.

Day 5: Today we head straight for Wilson Tract, an area of old Carolinian forest. It will be an early start to this birding hotspot with breeding Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoos, Blue-winged, Black-throated Blue, Cerulean, Prothonotary and Hooded Warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush.

Broad-winged and Cooper's Hawks can also be found. Nearby, an old orchard holds Eastern Bluebirds and meadows are home to Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows. Later in the day, after a stop at Long Point to discover the state of the day's migration, we progress to nearby Port Rowan and birdwatch around the pond and the cemetery where Orchard Orioles occur on a regular basis. Port Rowan sewage ponds are close by where shorebirds rest on their northward migration. Wilson's Phalarope, Lesser Yellowlegs, Least Sandpiper and Short-billed Dowitcher often turn up along with American Black Tern and Common Nighthawk. Lake Erie itself often has Great Northern Diver, Ring-necked Duck, Lesser Scaup, Redhead and Caspian Terns.

Day 6: After a visit to Long Point to check on the day's migration potential, we head north-east to Turkey Point. En route, we visit Spooky Hollow which, along with typical woodland species, provides the oppor-



Yellow-rumped Warbler Photo: Simon Papps

tunity to discover Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Cerulean and Canada Warblers and, on occasions, Louisiana Waterthrush, Carolina Wren and Yellow-billed Cuckoo. Turkey Point itself is an excellent site for shorebirds, gulls and terns. We can expect Killdeer, Greater Yellowlegs, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers. The overlook of Turkey Point Marsh is a reliable site for Wood Duck and the impressive Bald Eagle. Along the roadside we search for Red-bellied Woodpecker and Carolina Wren. The forest at Normandale should provide us with Least Flycatcher, Black-throated Green Warbler, Nashville Warbler, and Wood and Hermit Thrushes.

Day 7: After our morning visit to Long Point we progress to the extensive areas of wetlands at Big Creek Reserve and Hahn Marshes. Several species of interest are present including American Bittern, American Wigeon, Green-winged Teal,

American Black Duck, Sandhill Crane, Forster's Tern, Purple Martin, Marsh Wren and Common Yellowthroat. Woodland tracts sometimes have a few migrants including Brown Creeper, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Acadian Flycatcher and Solitary Vireo.

Day 8: Rondeau is west of Simcoe, a peninsula facing south-west into Lake Erie. Rondeau is a noted migration hotspot although not as well known as Long Point. The entrance road can be a reliable place to see Great Horned Owls. However, our main interest is the feeders outside the visitor centre. On our last visit we recorded Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Red-headed, Red-bellied, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, American Goldfinch, White-crowned Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Northern Cardinal. A walk along a boardwalk through a swamp should provide us with Prothonotary Warbler and Winter



American Woodcock Photo: Simon Papps

Wren. There are several trails at Rondeau providing good access to woodland, scrub and the shore of Lake Erie. Walking along South Beach Trail, we may encounter Field Sparrow, Pileated Woodpecker, Bay-breasted Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Brown Thrasher. After an early dinner, we return to Rondeau to observe the remarkable display flight and feeding actions of American Woodcocks. Common Nighthawk is also a distinct possibility as dusk falls.

Day 9: Today we head towards Backus Woods to look for Blackburnian, Canada, Cerulean, Blue-winged and Black-throated Green Warblers. Backus Woods also provides us with a chance of locating Red-shouldered Hawk, Wild Turkey, Barred Owl, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and Orchard Oriole. Lakeland Drive follows the shoreline of Lake Erie with several vantage points. We may locate lingering Bufflehead offshore and Semipalmated Plovers along the muddy shore. Fields and weedy areas may hold Savannah Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink.

Day 10: After a final visit to Long Point, we head for Niagara Falls. Sightseeing at Niagara will be arranged to suit the group. Visually, the falls are a stunning spectacle

with rainbows in the spray. The force of the falling water is astounding. Nearby are towers that have been erected to give the very best viewpoint from which to survey the falls. Niagara is noted for Bonaparte's Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. The gorge below the falls attracts Ring-billed Gulls in their thousands and, occasionally, Great Black-backed Gull. We then travel to Toronto Airport for our flight home with arrival on the next morning.

Prices

Ground Price: £2,295
 Single room: £230
 Deposit: £250
 *Air Fare: £520

This holiday is fully inclusive of flights, accommodation and meals, transport, permit fees, guidance, tips and taxes.

Not included: Visa to enter Canada, drinks, insurance, and items of a personal nature.

**Please refer to our terms and conditions relating to flights*