

Birdathons Around Ontario

Pelee Island is a great place to visit if you're already in or willing to make the trip to southwestern Ontario. But what about other regions of our large province? Our editors offer here short guides to some of their favourite but lesser-known regional birding destinations, perfect for a day out to do your Birdathon in May – or a visit at any other time of year.

Niagara Region

Steve Gillis

Short Hills Provincial Park is a 735 hectare park located on top of the Niagara Escarpment on the southwest edge of St. Catharines and is part of the Twelve Mile Creek Headwaters Important Bird Area.

Short Hills offers a wide variety of habitats and birding opportunities as a result of the historical carving out of glacial debris along Twelve Mile Creek to create a complex series of upland ridges, low valley slopes and rich bottomlands.

Many of the trails are multi-use and can be used by hikers, bikers and horses, and there is also a wheelchair accessible trail. All seven trails are accessible from parking lots off Pelham (north and west), Wiley (east) and Roland (south) roads as well as by foot off of First Street Louth. There is no fee for using the park. Seven trails covering over 23 kilometres take you through lush Carolinian forest that covers half of the park, while remaining vegetation has come in after previous farming and reforestation activities.

The lower slopes of the park are dominated by Sugar Maple and mixed forests of Eastern Hemlock and American Beech, with scattered Tulip Trees and Sweet Chestnut. It is here that you'll find breeding Carolinian speciality species like Scarlet Tanagers and Indigo Buntings. The rich bottomlands are made up of forests of Black Walnut, Red Maple and White Pine with thickets of Spicebush and Alder and understory species including trillium, trout lilies and skunk cabbage. On the upper ridges you'll find open shrubby habitat, where there are breeding Blue-winged Warblers, Eastern Towhees, Red-bellied Woodpeckers and Carolina Wrens. Other species reliably found within the park are Wood Thrush, Veery, Ovenbird, Eastern Bluebird, Belted Kingfisher and possibly breeding Hooded Warblers, as well as thousands of migrants in the spring. On a normal day in Short Hills you could probably expect a count anywhere from 50 to 100 species, depending on how many habitats you visit.

Short Hills Provincial Park

Seabrooke Leckie



Whimbrel migration, Colonel Sam Smith Park
Jean Iron

Toronto Region

Christian Friis

Despite the veritable concrete jungle that is the Greater Toronto Area, there are a number of great locales worth birding in the City of Toronto, most of which are accessible by public transit. Chief among them are **Colonel Sam Smith Park**, Humber Bay Park, High Park and Grenadier Pond, the Leslie St. Spit/Tommy Thompson Park, and Ashbridges Bay. Past issues of *OFO News* have highlighted a few of these locations in the Favourite Birding Hotspots features.

One location that has become better birded since I started keeping tabs on locations around Toronto is Colonel Samuel Smith Park. Located in the west end of the city at the end of Kipling Ave., just south of Lakeshore Blvd. W., the roughly 78.75 ha park hosts a range of habitats known to produce a good variety of species. A visit here in mid-May is sure to boost your Birdathon's species list. Parking is available at the end of Kipling. There is no fee for entering the park, and main trails are paved.

Carolinian tree and shrub plantings and the creation of a 3.6 ha wetland have made this a great place to find birds throughout the year, and a must-visit location on your Birdathon around Toronto. The wetland habitat offers an opportunity to find some of the elusive marsh birds; the trees and shrubs offer spots for flycatchers, warblers, and other passerines to fatten up; while the waterfront trail provides grasses for migrant sparrows and a great view of the lake to scope out some waterfowl and waterbirds. Red-necked Grebe has nested by the park – a good pick-up for your Birdathon list. The Toronto Ornithological Club conducts a spring count of migrant Whimbrel, as the park boasts excellent viewing for this species' annual passage north.

Central Ontario

Mike Burrell

Achray Campground is a hidden gem tucked away on the east side of Algonquin Park, and is a great birding location at many times of the year. Unlike the primary Highway 60 corridor, Achray is under-visited by both campers and especially birders. The forest is much different from that of Highway 60; expansive Jack Pine forest and much Red and White Pine is present, a result of the ancient outwash plain that sits under your feet.

Achray is located on Grand Lake on the north-east side of the park, and is accessed from Highway 17 at Pembroke. Take Barron Canyon Road west to the Sand Lake Gate, and follow the appropriate signage. There are 45 campsites and a yurt available, and the campground has running water and a store on site. Birders should visit multiple locations along Sand Lake Road from the park gate to Lake Travers. Other key spots to stop and check are (from west to east, starting at Lake Travers) the hydro cut, Grand Lake marsh (if you have access to a canoe), Berm Lake Trail, and the Barron Canyon trail.

A birdathon in May in the Achray area should be able to yield at least one hundred species, but with some luck and effort an observant birder could potentially get close to 130. Red Crossbill and other conifer specialists are virtually always present, at least in low numbers, feeding on the cones of Red and White Pine. Kirtland's Warbler may be an eventuality somewhere in the vast Jack Pine forests as they have recently bred very close by. Barred Owls and Whip-poor-wills may greet campers at dawn. Other area specialties include Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Evening Grosbeak, and as many as 20 species of warblers.

Lake Huron and Bruce Peninsula

Cindy Cartwright

Since my first Baillie Birdathon, I have completed my big day in Bruce County, choosing a local organization to receive the portion of birdathon funds that I can designate, and encouraging other birders in the area to do the same. Now every year more than a dozen birders accomplish this same goal, each picking different routes throughout the county in their quest for high species counts. The best location that everyone visits, usually begin-

prefer to walk the berm listening for more quietly calling species. Traveling west, the road passes through a mixed age, mixed species woodland to Lake Huron where the lake can be scanned with a scope for many waterfowl species. Continuing east from the pond leads through old agricultural fields that are regenerating with hawthorns, cedar and other scrub, then up over the old lake ridge into open pastureland.

The habitat variation in such a short distance makes this location one of the best birding locations in the area. Least Bittern, Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warbler, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Blue-Gray Gnatcatcher, Cliff Swallow, and Field Sparrow are among the species targeted along this road. It would be reasonable to count 80+ species on a spring morning if you begin with the dawn chorus.



Barron Canyon / Peter Ferguson

Eastern Ontario

Seabrooke Leckie

Frontenac Provincial Park

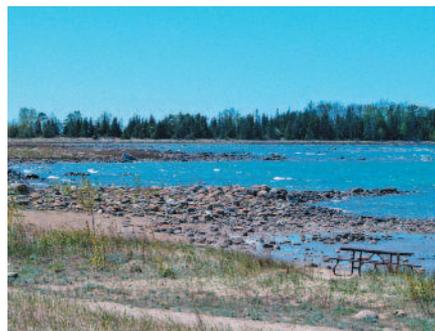
is a near-wilderness park that sits on the Frontenac Axis, where the rocky Shield habitat meets the southern deciduous forest. Both habitats and their representative species can be found in the park, offering a fabulous array of species to those who don't mind a little hiking.

To access the park, visitors should take Sydenham Road north from Kingston, and follow the signs for the park through the small town of Sydenham. The park is approximately twenty minutes north of town along Bedford Road. Turn east on Big Salmon Lake Road and follow this to the park entrance, where you will need to buy a day pass from the park office for your vehicle (walk-ins are free).

Birders can park at the office, or at one of a couple of parking lots farther along the road. There are some 150 kilometres of trails through the park, and backcountry campsites for overnight visitors. There is also a boat launch for canoes or small boats on Big Salmon Lake at the end of the road. Smaller craft can be portaged to the park's many other lakes.

ning with the dawn chorus, is the Bruce-Saugeen Townline, the road that forms the south boundary of **MacGregor Point Provincial Park**.

The Ducks Unlimited Pond is a large wetland area created by a man-made berm on the north side of the road. There is an observation tower on the west side of the pond but most



MacGregor Point Provincial Park
Cindy Cartwright

The park's western side is primarily mature deciduous forest. Cerulean Warblers occur here in one of the highest densities within Ontario. Stream corridors are home to Louisiana Waterthrush. Yellow-throated Vireos and Red-shouldered Hawks are also common. The southeastern section is rock barrens. While it is a longer hike to reach, this habitat supports small colonies of Prairie Warbler, as well as Eastern Towhee, Field Sparrow, and Common Nighthawk. Evergreens are more abundant in the northeastern portion of the Park, and White-throated Sparrow, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Winter Wren and Hermit Thrush occur here.

Two additional informal access points exist on the north side of the park for walk-ins (ask at the park office). Many of the birds found in the park can sometimes be encountered by driving the roads surrounding the park, east to Chaffey's Locks, as well.

Northern Ontario

Darlene Salter

Eagle Lake is located south of the Trans Canada Highway (Highway 17) between Dryden and Vermilion Bay. Though primarily known for the many fishing resorts that dot its shoreline, the lake and surrounding area can also be a great birding destination.

Since Eagle Lake has a 653 kilometre shoreline, with many rural access roads and several public boat launches, there are many possible combinations of water and land birding routes.

A boat excursion on **Eagle River** is a great way to start the morning. To access Eagle River and Eagle Lake go south on Hwy 594 from Hwy 17 (watch for Sharp-tailed Grouse and other grassland species) to the Machin public boat launch or pay a fee to use the facilities at one of the fishing lodges. Red-necked Grebes are common and a variety of boreal birds can be heard calling from the forested shore. At the mouth of Eagle River on Eagle Lake, Outlet Bay is a good place to see American White Pelicans and a Common Tern colony. Continuing west around Farabout Peninsula, birders will see Bald Eagle nests, Osprey, and Pied-billed Grebes. The varied habitat of the peninsula provides nesting for many boreal birds including Great Gray Owl, American Three-toed Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee and Canada Warbler.

In the afternoon, drive down Detour Point Road through the **Detour Point Peninsula**,



American White Pelicans on Eagle Lake / *Darlene Salter*

where opportunities to see and hear more boreal forest and wetland species abound. Weather permitting, portage a canoe 500 metres down a trail from Detour Point Road to Portage Bay. From there, Bottle Bay Marsh and Bottle Creek are a short paddle around the northeastern shoreline. The marsh provides nesting habitat for Black Terns, Virginia Rails, several species of ducks, Northern Harriers, Common Loons and possibly Short-eared Owls. More riparian species including Sedge Wren, Wilson's Warbler, Alder Flycatcher and Lincoln's Sparrow can be recorded in the fen that borders both shores of Bottle Creek.

Cameron Ranch Point Counts

On 29 May and 12 June, 2010, the Ontario Field Ornithologists, Toronto Ornithological Club and Couchiching Conservancy will be conducting the 6th Annual Point Counts of the Cameron and Windmill Ranches on the Carden Alvar.

Birders have a rare opportunity to visit unique, prime alvar grassland habitat usually closed to the public. These point counts offer an opportunity to see many provincially rare species; the alvar is home to a population of Loggerhead Shrikes, and last year we recorded a Henslow's Sparrow.

Birders of all skill levels are encouraged to participate. Point counts are conducted in parties of three or four, mixing experienced point counters with those who want to learn.

For more information about Cameron Ranch visit: <http://www.couchconservancy.ca/cameronranch.htm>. For details and to sign-up please contact Dan Bone at dan.bone@explornet.com or (705) 887-4691.



Henslow's Sparrow / *Jean Iron*