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Grand Tour of the Breeding Birds of the Midwest

14 DAY/ 13 NIGHT TOUR

3-16 June 2019

OVERVIEW

The Midwest of the United States, often known for its industry and agriculture, also abounds in breeding bird diversity in its natural areas. Starting in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Kentucky, this trip will traverse several different ecosystems, including three Great Lakes, as we move north finishing in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

The main focus of the trip will be to find all of the warblers that breed in the East, south of Canada (32 species), but we will try and find all the breeding birds and hopefully a few late migrants. With the focus on breeding birds, participants have a greater certainty of finding singing males in appropriate habitat compared to the uncertainties of migration.

DAILY SUMMARY

DAY 1	Arrive in Lexington, KY; Grassland/early successional birds
DAY 2	Red River Gorge
DAY 3	Red River Gorge (AM) & depart for northern Ohio
DAY 4	Oak Openings/Pointe Mouillee & depart for central Michigan
DAY 5	Shiawassee NWR and Chippewa Nature Center
DAY 6	Bay City State Park/Tobico Marsh/Nayanquing Point SWA
DAY 7	AuSable State Forest (Midland County)
DAY 8	Houghton Lake area
DAY 9	Kirtland's Warbler Restoration area/Hartwick Pines
DAY 10	Les Cheneaux area/Munuscong Potholes
DAY 11	Trout Lake area/Hulbert Bog
DAY 12	Paradise/Whitefish Point/Vermillion/Tahquamenon Falls

DAY 13	Seney NWR/Germfask area
DAY 14	Depart northern Michigan; Afternoon airport drop-off

DETAILED DAILY ITINERARY

DAY 1: Arrive in Lexington, KY; Grassland/early successional birds

Participants will arrive in Lexington, KY at Blue Grass Airport for late morning pick-up. After lunch, we will visit a local park (Veterans Park) with hopes of finding Mississippi Kite and our first warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, with the possibility of other 'southern' birds like Summer Tanager and Blue Grosbeak. We will visit other local parks (Raven Run Nature Sanctuary, Hisle Farm Park, Spindletop Research Farm) as time permits looking for Prairie Warbler and other early successional/field birds such as Northern Bobwhite, Blue Grosbeak, Northern Mockingbird, and Grasshopper Sparrow with the possibility of Dickcissel and Henslow's Sparrow. We will be sure to look for Black Vulture and Common Nighthawk as evening falls.

🏠 **Accommodation: Winchester, KY**

DAY 2: Red River Gorge

After an early breakfast (05:30), we will spend the day visiting the beautiful Red River Gorge. In this wooded habitat, we will have our best chance of seeing all of the 'southern' warblers including: Swainson's, Hooded, Prothonotary, Worm-eating, Cerulean, and Yellow-throated Warblers as well as Louisiana Waterthrush. Other breeding warblers include: Black-and-white, Black-throated Green, and Pine Warblers, American Redstart, and Northern Parula. Non-warbler forest birds we will seek include: Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Acadian Flycatcher, White-eyed and Blue-headed Vireo, Wood Thrush, Carolina Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, and Summer Tanager. If time permits at night, we will try to find Chuck-will's-widow and Eastern Whip-poor-will.

🏠 **Accommodation: Winchester, KY**

DAY 3: Red River Gorge (AM) & depart for northern Ohio

After another early breakfast (05:30), we will visit Red River Gorge to find any warbler species we may have missed. After lunch, we will depart for northern Ohio. If time permits before dinner, we will visit Toledo, OH birding hotspots.

🏠 **Accommodation: Toledo, OH**

DAY 4: Oak Openings/Pointe Mouillee & depart for central Michigan

Breakfast will be at 05:30. We will visit one of the more unique habitats on our trip, namely the oak openings of northwestern Ohio. This habitat is a relic of a once larger landscape where prairie mixed with scattered oak forest. This habitat was maintained by regular, low-intensity fires. Oak Openings Preserve Metropark is perhaps the best and most extensive example of this unique habitat. Within the park, we will have an opportunity to see Lark Sparrow, which is at the edge of its range, and Red-headed Woodpecker. This will be our last opportunity to reliably see some of the 'southern' species such as Carolina Wren, Summer Tanager, Blue Grosbeak, Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-breasted Chat and Hooded Warbler. After lunch, we will visit Pointe Mouillee SGA, perhaps the best location in Michigan for shorebirds. As this is a large managed wetland complex, American Coot, Common Gallinule, Pied-billed Grebe, Sandhill Crane and even American White Pelican and Yellow-headed Blackbird are likely. Any number of late migrating shorebirds and waterfowl could be present with recent June sightings of Red Knot, Whimbrel, Black-necked Stilt, Wilson's Phalarope, Least, Semipalmated, and White-rumped Sandpipers, Dunlin, Sanderling, Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers possible. Gulls and terns such as Ring-billed, Herring, Bonaparte's, and Caspian, Common, Forster's, respectively, will be common as well as the possibility of Little Gull. Waders can be excellent here including Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, and Black-crowned Night-Heron as well as the possibility of Snowy Egret and Tricolored Heron. King Rail has been recorded from this location within the last two years.

🏠 **Accommodation: Bay City, MI**

DAY 5: Shiawassee NWR and Chippewa Nature Center

Breakfast today will begin at 05:00. In the morning, we will initially walk and then drive through Shiawassee NWR. Similar to Pointe Mouillee, we again should encounter numerous aquatic species such as various dabbling waterfowl (American Black Duck, Wood Duck, Blue- and Green-winged Teal, Northern Pintail, and Northern Shoveler), Least and American Bitterns, Virginia Rail, Sora, and Common Gallinule. Swamp and Song Sparrows, Indigo Bunting, Yellow Warbler and Willow Flycatcher will be ubiquitous. In the forested portions of the refuge, we will look for the northmost breeding Prothonotary Warblers as well as Yellow- and Black-billed Cuckoos, Brown Creeper, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and the southernmost breeding Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers. After a late lunch, we will visit Chippewa Nature Center with hopes of finding breeding Henslow's and Clay-colored Sparrows and Sedge Wren in their prairie restorations. Blue-winged Warbler, Field Sparrow, and Orchard Oriole will be found along the forest edges. If time permits, we will visit Whiting Overlook Park where large cooling ponds from Dow Chemical attract late waterfowl and shorebirds.

🏠 **Accommodation: Bay City, MI**

DAY 6: Bay City State Park/Tobico Marsh/Nayanquing Point SWA

After breakfast at 05:00, we will visit nearby Bay City State Park along Lake Huron's Saginaw Bay. This shoreline park has open beach, wetlands, and dense wetland scrub supporting good numbers of waders (Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Green Heron, Black-crowned Night Heron and Cattle Egret). Common wetland breeders like Warbling Vireo, Gray Catbird, Common Yellowthroat, and Yellow Warblers will be widespread. Marsh Wrens will be readily viewable. Terns (Caspian, Common and Forster's) will be found on the beach and swallows (Tree, Barn, Northern Rough-winged, Bank, Cliff, and Purple Martin) will be plentiful. Nearby Tobico Marsh is an excellent example of dune/swale complex, a unique landform created by the long-term receding of Lake Huron. The forest around the marsh contains Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, and Veery. After lunch, we will go to the premiere wetland complex on the Saginaw Bay, Nayanquing Point SWA. This is the most reliable location in Michigan to see Yellow-headed Blackbird. This area is also excellent for late waterfowl, waders, rails, and wetland passerines.

🏠 **Accommodation: Bay City, MI**

DAY 7: AuSable State Forest (Midland County)

After breakfast at 05:00, we will drive to area between Midland and Mount Pleasant, MI visiting several locations that have breeding Golden-winged, Blue-winged, Mourning, Black-and-white, Pine, Canada, Chestnut-sided, and Nashville Warblers, American Redstart, and Northern Waterthrush. Other forest birds that we may encounter include Ruffed Grouse, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks, Alder, Least, and Great Crested Flycatchers, Blue-headed Vireo, Common Raven, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Veery, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Purple Finch, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. In the evening, we may attempt to see American Woodcock and call for owls.

🏠 **Accommodation: Bay City, MI**

DAY 8: Houghton Lake area

After an early breakfast, we will drive one hour north to the Houghton Lake, MI area visiting Houghton Lake Flats, a large sedge-dominated marsh known for Ospreys and Black Terns. Nearby is the Houghton Lake Sewage Treatment Plant, a large complex known for late diving ducks like Ring-necked Duck, Lesser and Greater Scaup, and Ruddy Duck. American Wigeon nest here as well. The grasslands have Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrow. At Reedsburg Dam we will be able to view nesting Common Loons and Trumpeter Swans along with more Black Terns. The Nellsville Boardwalk leads into a large marsh with Virginia Rail, Sora, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane, Wilson's Snipe, and Sedge Wren. This marsh is well-known as one of the few reliable locations for Yellow Rail, particularly in the Lower Peninsula. The bird can only be located at night by its tiking call, so depending on group willingness, we may linger at this location until nightfall after an early dinner.

🏠 Accommodation: Grayling, MI

DAY 9: Kirtland's Warbler Restoration area/Hartwick Pines

Breakfast will be at 05:00. We will endeavor today to explore the restored jack pine barrens around Grayling, MI. Sure to be the highlight of the day will be a number of Kirtland's Warblers along with Yellow-rumped, Nashville, and Palm Warblers. Other birds of the jack pine barrens that we will likely encounter are Upland Sandpiper, Hermit Thrush, Clay-colored, Vesper, and Lincoln's Sparrows, Dark-eyed Junco, Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, and Brewer's Blackbird. After lunch, we will visit Hartwick Pines SP, one of the last stands of virgin white pines in Michigan. The visitor center there is the best place in Michigan to observe Evening Grosbeaks at the feeders just a few feet from us. Other birds in and around park include Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Cape May, and Pine Warblers, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Winter Wren, White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager.

🏠 Accommodation: St. Ignace, MI

DAY 10: Les Cheneaux area/Munuscong Potholes

After an early breakfast, we will explore northern Lake Huron's shoreline with its dense cedar forests known for excellent breeding populations of Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Black-and-white, Nashville, Mourning, Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, Pine, Canada Warblers, American Redstart, and Northern Parula, Winter Wren, White-throated Sparrow, and Hermit Thrush. We will check the shoreline for Red-breasted and Common Mergansers as well as hunting Merlins. White cedars are the favorite habitat of Northern Saw-whet Owls. We may seek them out at late in the evening if there is interest. In the afternoon, we will drive through the Munuscong Potholes, which is a wet grassland area known to be the best location for LeConte's Sparrow and Sharp-tailed Grouse in Michigan. Other grassland birds like Savannah, Clay-colored, Swamp, and Song Sparrows, Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, and American Bittern will be present as well.

🏠 Accommodation: St. Ignace, MI

DAY 11: Trout Lake area/Hulbert Bog

After breakfast, we will explore the State forest lands near and north of Trout Lake, MI and finish in Hulbert Bog. The habitats in this area are known for their boreal birds. Today will be our best chance of finding Connecticut Warbler as well as other boreal-breeding birds like Northern Goshawk, Black-backed Woodpecker, Olive-sided Flycatcher, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Canada Jay (formerly Gray Jay), Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Swainson's Thrush as well as the warblers from the previous day with addition of Palm and Cape May.

🏠 Accommodation: Paradise, MI

DAY 12: Paradise/Whitefish Point/Vermillion/Tahquamenon Falls

After breakfast, we will travel to famous Whitefish Point, known for its oddities during spring and fall migration. We may very well catch a late migrating warbler or two (Blackpoll, Orange-crowned, Tennessee, or Wilson's) or even flyover finches like Pine Siskin. On the rock-strewn beaches of the point, we should be able to find Piping Plovers (an endangered subspecies nesting only along the Great Lakes) and possibly other late shorebirds.

From there, we will travel to the Vermillion area, known to be an excellent place for Spruce Grouse and Red Crossbill. All of the habitats we are visiting this day will allow opportunity to see similar birds to those seen in Trout Lake. We will, during the course of the day, visit Tahquamenon Fall SP to view the second largest (by volume) waterfall in the eastern United States.

🏠 Accommodation: Paradise, MI

DAY 13: Seney NWR/Germfask area

After our last early breakfast, we will drive to Seney NWR and the Germfask area. Along the way, we may see a moose as this area has the highest density in Upper Peninsula. Seney NWR contains a series of managed/diked pools with Trumpeter Swans and Common Loons. The wetlands here have Yellow Rail, but night tours are not a possibility unfortunately. Boreal breeding birds may be seen along the wildlife drive. This will be our last day to find boreal specialties.

🏠 Accommodation: Gaylord, MI

DAY 14: Depart northern Michigan; Afternoon airport drop-off

We will start the day a little later (07:00) overnighing in the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan. On this last morning, our general direction will be DTW airport for afternoon departures/overnight accommodations.

We will arrive around 14:00. On our way south, the group can determine the one or two stops we may want, be it for more Kirtland's Warblers near Grayling or any other missed birds.

Thank you for choosing Nature Travel Birding.