



A Kirtland's Warbler we were able to watch for a few minutes in Michigan!

Great Lakes

A Spectacle of Bird Migration

Tour Leader: Eric Ripma
May 11-18, 2021

May 11 – Lexington Grasslands and Natural Bridge State Resort Park

After arrival and pickup at the Cincinnati airport, our group headed south towards the Red River Gorge area of Kentucky where we would be spending the next day and a half. After stopping for lunch, we arrived at a grassland where we had good views of Dickcissels, Grasshopper Sparrows, and Bobolinks! Another stop nearby provided us with good looks at a pair of Loggerhead Shrikes feeding a fledgling! After arriving at our lodging for the night, we spent a short time birding in the park and were thrilled to have great looks at two Yellow-throated Warblers and a Sutton's Warbler (Yellow-throated Warbler X Northern Parula)! It was a great way to start the tour.

Hooded Warbler



Photo by Leora Balsam & Bill Hoffman

May 12 – Red River Gorge and Minor E Clark Fish Hatchery

We began early this morning but due to colder than average temperatures most birds were late to rise. We eventually ended up with brief views of Ovenbird (despite hearing many), good looks at Scarlet Tanagers, and a spectacular study of two Worm-eating Warblers as they caught many caterpillars. Our main target, the Swainson's Warbler, left us hoping for views after they taunted us with their loud whistled songs. After heading to some areas along the Red River the birding picked up and we were rewarded with great views of Blue-winged Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, and Hooded Warbler, among others. We spent the afternoon at Minor E Clark Fish Hatchery where species such as Semipalmated Plover, Least Sandpiper, Green Herons, many swallows, Orchard Oriole, and a heard only Summer Tanager were the highlights. It had been a great day but there were a few southern species we would need to have luck with before heading north to Lake Erie.

May 13 – Natural Bridge State Resort Park, Red River Gorge, and Lima, Ohio

We started off with a quick stop for Louisiana Waterthrush in Natural Bridge Resort Park. It didn't take long until we heard and then spotted one. It was zipping back and forth rather quickly but we eventually got good looks at this bird. We headed back over to bird close to the Red River. Our first stop resulted in great looks at a Swainson's Warbler as it sang and preened in an open spot! Our next stop along the Red River resulted in good looks at a Cerulean Warbler as it foraged out in the open. We also ended up getting good looks at Yellow-breasted Chat and fantastic scope views of a male Hooded Warbler. Now that we had seen all our southern targets, it was time to head north. After a stop for lunch, we continued driving north to Lima, Ohio. We stopped at a park to look for Henslow's Sparrow. We heard two individuals, but neither was willing to pop up and allow us a view. It was a great day of birding and we were excited to be birding Magee Marsh the next morning!

Cape May Warbler

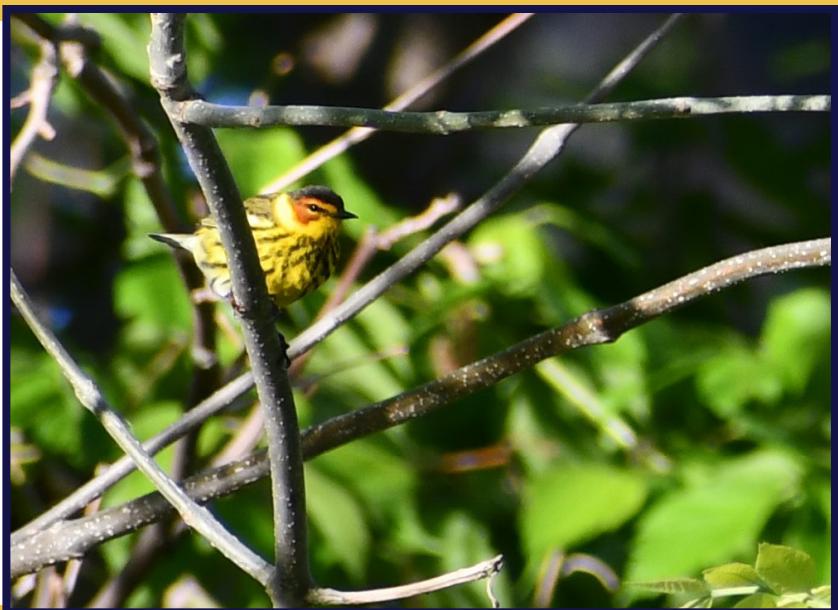


Photo by Leora Balsam & Bill Hoffman

May 14 – Magee Marsh, Ottawa NWR, and Maumee Bay State Park

We started this morning off at the famed, Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. Before long we had seen almost 20 species of warblers including great looks at Cape May and Blackburnian Warblers. We were also lucky enough to see our second hybrid warbler, the Brewster's (Blue-winged X Golden-winged). Over the course of the morning, we were also able to see species such as Veery and Swainson's Thrush, many Baltimore Orioles and Scarlet Tanagers. The rarest bird we ran across was a

May 14 – Continued

Dark-eyed Junco of the Pink-sided variety which is the first record (on eBird) for Magee. We spent the afternoon birding along the wildlife drive at Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge. We quickly added many species of waterbirds that we hadn't yet seen on the tour and specifically enjoyed watching some Dunlin, a Solitary Sandpiper, and a couple Lesser Yellowlegs. We also birded some of the wooded areas of the refuge which resulted in great views of a variety of warblers including Prothonotary, Black-throated Blue, and Chestnut-sided. However, the star of the show was a Scarlet Tanager that posed in the open for some great photo-ops. Our last stop of the day was at Maumee Bay State Park where an Eastern Screech-Owl provided great looks while sunning at the entrance of its cavity. A small flock of Purple Finches also put on a nice show and was a great way to end the day!

Scarlet Tanager



Photo by Leora Balsam

May 15 – Magee Marsh, Metzger Marsh, Howard Marsh, and Maumee Bay State Park

We started out the morning birding at Magee again and had a great morning! In addition to many of the species that were seen on the previous morning were both Yellow-billed and Black-billed Cuckoo, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Bay-breasted, Black-poll, and Wilson's Warblers. Our next stop was at the woodlot at Metzger Marsh. Quite a few birds were around, and we were happy to see a pair of Redheads, a Canada Warbler, Northern Waterthrushes, Ovenbird, Lincoln's Sparrow, and a flock of Ruddy Ducks. From here we headed over to Howard Marsh. After a short walk, we had a male

May 15 – Continued

Yellow-headed Blackbird in the scope! A few minutes later, a Black-necked Stilt flew right over our heads and a Peregrine Falcon screamed by over the marsh. It was shaping up to be a great afternoon of birding! After a short walk around the marsh, we were also able to see some more Bobolinks, a flock of Short-billed Dowitchers, American White Pelican, and great looks at a Marsh Wren. After a break at the hotel and a nice dinner at Maumee Bay State Park we headed out into the park to watch the American Woodcocks display. We weren't disappointed and were able to observe a few American Woodcocks including one doing a rarely seen wing display! It was well worth staying up later on this night for the show.

Orange-crowned Warbler



Photo by Leora Balsam

May 16 – Oak Openings Metropark

We spent the first half of this day at Oak Openings and the second half of the day making the drive to Tawas, Michigan where we would be spending the next two nights. As always, Oak Openings offered some great birding. Our first stop yielded us great scope views of Willow Flycatcher and thanks to a couple other birders, great views of an Orange-crowned Warbler. Our stop in the grassland area provided us with great scope views of Blue Grosbeak and quick looks at Lark Sparrows. Before it got too late, we headed over to the “tornado alley” area to see if we could find some migrants that were still eluding our group. It only took a minute before we spotted a Canada Warbler. While watching the Canada, a Mourning Warbler popped up too! It wasn't long before the whole group had outstanding views of both of these species. Over the next couple hours we were able to track down better views of more species that hadn't cooperated

May 16 – Continued

earlier in the tour. After lunch, we began our drive north but with a stop in southern Michigan to see a Whooping Crane. After spending about 15 minutes at the location and not having a glimpse at any big, white bird we were getting back in the car with no Whooper. Luckily, the crane came out of some vegetation, and one last scan paid off! We were all able to enjoy great scope views of this rare bird! The rest of the day was spent driving to Tawas City. Unfortunately, the whole town had lost power for most of the day and all the restaurants were closed or running out of food! Luckily, our group was understanding because we ended up at our last option, Burger King. I have to give a big thanks to the group for bearing with me on this night!

May 17 – Huron-Manistee National Forest and Hartwick Pines State Park

We spent this morning in one of the areas of the national forest where Kirtland's Warblers breed. As soon as we arrived we could hear a few singing but none were in view. After about 30 minutes one popped up and we got some good looks. With a little more patience, another popped up close to the road and put on a great show! With a little more patience, we got even better looks and photos! While waiting for the Kirtland's,

Kirtland's Warbler



Photo by Rebecca Van Dyke

May 17 – Continued

we enjoyed great views of Vesper Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Nashville Warbler, and a porcupine resting in a distant tree. In the late morning while birding a different area of the forest, we had our best looks at Ovenbird during the tour and our only looks at Pine Warbler. We also were lucky enough to watch a Broad-winged Hawk soaring overhead and get brief looks at another Black-billed Cuckoo. We also checked some grasslands in the area where we were happy to watch Bobolinks displaying among a few other species. The afternoon was spent at Hartwick Pines State Park. Unfortunately, the main target at the park, the Evening Grosbeaks, were not visiting the feeders and only one member of our group was lucky enough to see one. However, we did enjoy great views of Red-breasted Nuthatch, Pileated Woodpecker, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and a male Purple Finch!

Pileated Woodpecker



Photo by Leora Balsam

Magnolia Warbler



Photo by Rebecca Van Dyke

May 18 – Au Sable State Forest and Tawas Point State Park

Our last day of the tour started off in the Au Sable State Forest. Our main target here was Golden-winged Warbler. After hearing a “Golden-winged Warbler” in one area but not seeing it, we came back. Eventually the bird popped up and it was another Brewster’s Warbler (Golden-winged x Blue-winged Warbler) singing a Golden-winged song. We had a handful of other highlights too including Northern Harrier, singing Mourning Warblers, Cerulean Warbler, and many others! Only one of our group had seen a Golden-winged at this stop but I was hopeful that we would luck into another at Tawas Point. The birding at Tawas Point was fantastic; both Baltimore and Orchard Orioles in large numbers, Clay-colored Sparrows, American Pipit, Ruddy Turnstone, and many more made for a great late morning of birding. And eventually a female Golden-winged Warbler made a brief appearance. We wished this bird had made a clearer appearance, but it was great to see this bird, even if it was just brief views!

We ended up recording 190 species, including all the eastern warblers besides Connecticut. And almost all of these warblers were seen extremely well. Also, many other migrants and breeders filled out the bird list. This really is a special area to experience the migration in the eastern United States!