

ITINERARY
POINT PELEE MIGRATION SPECTACLE
May 11 -18, 2024



Neotropical migrants such as this stunning Golden-winged Warbler will be a main focus of our attention on this short tour to one of North America's best migration hotspots. We may see up to 30 species of warblers, and many other migrants.

Photograph by guide Cory Gregory.

We include here information for those interested in the 2024 Field Guides Point Pelee Migration Spectacle tour:

- a general introduction to the tour
- a description of the birding areas to be visited on the tour
- an abbreviated daily itinerary with some indication of the nature of each day's birding outings

These additional materials will be made available to those who register for the tour:

- an annotated list of the birds recorded on a previous year's Field Guides trip to the area, with comments by guide(s) on notable sightings (may be downloaded from our web site)
- a detailed information bulletin with important logistical information and answers to questions regarding accommodations, air arrangements, clothing, currency, customs and immigration, documents, health precautions, and personal items
- a Field Guides checklist for preparing and keeping track of the birds we see on the tour
- after the conclusion of the tour, a list of birds seen on the tour

Spring migration along the north shore of the Great Lakes can be truly fantastic—thousands of birds of dozens of species, tired after a long flight over the water, touch down on the first visible land they come to, and along the north shore of Lake Erie, that place is Point Pelee. Point Pelee National Park has long been famous as a premiere spring migration hotspot, and few places can rival the excitement of Pelee during a migration fallout. Multitudes of brilliantly colored warblers—Cape May, Canada, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, and many others—dart from tree to tree; thrashers, thrushes, and wrens hide in brush piles, while Scarlet Tanagers and Baltimore Orioles work the canopy overhead. The brilliance and contrast of all these different birds, so easily seen against the newly emerging greenery, is sure to lift even the most winter-weary soul. And while not every day is a fallout day, even a slow day at Pelee can be impressive. We'll have plenty of time to check all the best places within the park and other important sites that surround it. While weather conditions will dictate how many birds are around, we should be able to find more species each day.

Though Pelee has gotten the lion's share of the publicity, two other sites along the Lake Erie north shore—Rondeau and Long Point, are both migration hotspots in their own right. Both can rival Pelee for fallouts during spring migration, but they have less birder coverage and are therefore less well known. Rondeau will give us a chance to see the largest remaining stand of Carolinian forest in Canada, as well as the special birds that nest there. These include southern nesting species such as Prothonotary Warbler, White-eyed Vireo, and Acadian Flycatcher; Rondeau is one of the few remaining breeding sites for these species in Canada. Long Point, in addition to its considerable migrant potential, has the added bonus of hosting a broad range of nesting birds, many of which are scarce or absent at Pelee and Rondeau. These include such delights as Cerulean, Hooded, and Blue-winged warblers and Louisiana Waterthrush, plus twenty more species of nesting parulids. If the banding station is operating during our visit, we may also get the chance to watch a bird banding demonstration and see a few warblers up close and personal!



*We'll look for grassland birds such as the Bobolink when we visit the Carden Plain.
Photograph by guide Sam Wilson.*

Finally, to close out the trip, we'll head north to a fantastic mix of woodland, open grassland, and marsh species in an area called the Carden Plain. The intense pressure of agricultural practices on the land is loosened, and small lakes that dot the landscape begin to appear. Here we hope to find a good diversity of grassland birds such as Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark, Upland Sandpiper, Eastern Bluebird, Grasshopper Sparrow, and the endangered Eastern Loggerhead Shrike. The wetlands are home to Sora and Virginia Rail, American Bittern, Black Tern, Swamp Sparrow, and Sedge and Marsh wrens. Shrubby areas and a mix of coniferous and hardwood forests provide habitat for a large number of breeding warblers and other species, but we will try to track down birds such as Golden-winged Warbler and Clay-colored Sparrow specifically. Ospreys and Common Loons are common breeding birds on several smaller lakes that exist in the area.

We want to be sure you are on the right tour! Below is a description of the physical requirements of the tour. If you are concerned about the difficulty, please contact us about this and be sure to fully explain your concerns. We want to make sure you have a wonderful time with us, so if you are uncomfortable with the requirements, just let us know and we can help you find a better fitting tour! Field Guides will not charge you a change or cancellation fee if you opt out within 10 days of depositing.

Physical requirements of this tour

- **TRAILS & WALKING:** Considerable amounts of walking on flat ground (up to 4 or 5 miles per day), some of it on paved roads, some on gravel or dirt roads, some on trails that have no significant obstacles, all at a slow

("birder's") pace. We may walk a short distance on a sandy beach as well. Though the walking is generally quite easy on this trip, be aware that we are on our feet for much of each birding day.

- **POTENTIAL CHALLENGES:** We may stand for long periods to observe flocks of birds.
- **PACE:** Early mornings (5:30-6:00 a.m. departures); both morning and afternoon birding sessions, with occasional afternoon breaks, but usually a picnic lunch between morning and afternoon sessions.
- **WEATHER:** Spring weather is usually pleasant at Point Pelee. Expect temperatures in the 50s in the evening and early morning, with most days ranging from the low 60s to high 70s F, but wind chill off the lake can make it feel significantly cooler. Rain showers and windy conditions are possible (and sometimes result in fallouts of migrants).
- **VEHICLE SEATING:** So that each participant has equal opportunity during our travel, we employ a seat rotation system on all tours. Participants will need to be flexible enough to maneuver to the back of the vehicle on occasion. Those who experience motion sickness will need to bring adequate medication for the duration of the tour, as we are not able to reserve forward seats for medical conditions.
- **BATHROOM BREAKS:** Bathroom stops at indoor restrooms will be made regularly; comfort stops in nature are also possible, should the need arise.
- **OPTING OUT:** On days when we are returning to the same hotel, participants can easily opt to sit out a day or half-day.

If you are uncertain about whether this tour is a good match for your abilities, please don't hesitate to contact our office; if they cannot directly answer your queries, they will put you in touch with the guide.

About the Birding Areas



Point Pelee is one of the world's best-known migration hotspots, attracting birders from all over the world. On a good day this spit of land can be crawling with migrant warblers, thrushes, vireos, and flycatchers. The chance to see so many different birds alongside each other, all in their rich breeding colors, is what has made Pelee a birding legend. Daily totals typically exceed 100 species, and the possibility of finding some far-flung vagrant keeps everyone at alert. In addition to all the landbirds, we will be checking the tip of Pelee as well as nearby marshes and harbors for interesting waterbirds, shorebirds, gulls, and terns.

Rondeau Provincial Park is one of the largest and most beautiful examples of Carolinian forest left in Canada. The park features a series of excellent trails, and the lack of birder congestion is a welcome change from Pelee! We'll spend most of a morning and early afternoon birding various areas here. A feeding station at the park usually attracts a variety of birds, which might include several species of woodpeckers, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds.

Long Point is a fragile, complex sand spit that stretches 23 miles into Lake Erie. Most of the point is closed due to its delicate sand dune structure, but excellent birding sites can be found near the base of the point and in some of the large woodlots nearby. The Long Point area hosts more than 25 species of nesting warblers, including some of the less common species like Cerulean, Hooded, Prairie (rarely), Blue-winged, and Louisiana Waterthrush! The marshes and bays formed by Long Point are among the most important in North America for waterfowl. While the large waves of ducks will already have moved northward, we should still be able to see a few lingering species. Marsh birds, including perhaps Least Bittern, Sandhill Crane, and Black Tern are also a feature here.

Carden Plain is an extensive area of open grasslands used for low-intensity cattle ranching near the shores of Lake Simcoe to the north of Toronto. Due to thin soils and extensive wetlands, much of the area remains undeveloped and covered in shrublands or forests. This creates conditions for a high diversity of breeding birds over a relatively small area—more than 120 species have been known to breed here. Our birding will be mainly driving quiet country roads and walking sections to find our target birds.



Shorebird migration can be spectacular along the shores of Lake Erie, and we'll hope to get good views of flocks of Dunlin, seen here, and other northern breeders. Photograph by participant Don Taves.

Itinerary for Point Pelee Migration Spectacle

Day 1. Arrival in Toronto, Ontario. Please plan to meet your guide outside door “S” on the Ground Transportation level in the arrivals area of Terminal 1 at Pearson (Toronto) International Airport at 1:00 p.m.

If you arrive at either Terminal 2 or 3, you can catch the free airport shuttle bus, which will take you to Terminal 1. We will transfer to Leamington, at the base of Point Pelee, about a three-and-a-half hour's drive south of Toronto. Night in Leamington.

Days 2-4. Point Pelee. Pelee can be great fun. If weather and fate connect, we should have nothing to do but look at brightly colored migrants—tanagers, warblers, and orioles—all returning en masse from the south. Weather plays a huge role in determining where and how many birds might be about, so we will remain flexible so that we can see as much as we comfortably can.

Our daily pattern will be to meet early for breakfast (around 5:30 a.m.) and then head into the park, birding various sites throughout the morning. If a flight of birds has arrived overnight, we'll likely be birding the park for the remainder of the morning. Conversely, if the park is quiet, we can check several area shorebirding spots, bays, and harbors, any of which can be surprisingly productive. The Pelee area offers the potential for some of the most exciting migration birding anywhere in North America, and it has a great reputation for turning up rarities, an aspect we hope to fully enjoy! Rarities such as Kirtland's Warbler occur almost annually, and on a past tour, while species such as Mississippi Kite, Chuck-will's-widow, Bell's Vireo, Blue Grosbeak, and Painted Bunting are all among the many tantalizing, rare, possibilities. Nights in Leamington.

Day 5. Rondeau Provincial Park; travel to the Long Point Area. This morning we'll leave Pelee and head east along the Lake Erie shore to Rondeau Provincial Park, a lesser-known but very birdy peninsula. Rondeau is one of Canada's finest remaining examples of Carolinian forest and is the stronghold for the country's few remaining nesting Prothonotary

Warblers—one of our hoped-for species. We should see a number of other Carolinian specialties like Red-bellied Woodpecker, Tufted Titmouse, and hopefully White-eyed Vireo here. After lunch we'll continue east for about 2.5 hours until we arrive at our final major Lake Erie birding destination—the Long Point area. Night in Simcoe.

Day 6. Long Point Area. The Long Point area is named for the huge sand spit that juts out into the middle of Lake Erie. It is also one of the finest birding spots on the Great Lakes. Most of the spit is protected and out of bounds, but excellent birding opportunities exist near the base and in the surrounding area, which is blessed with several exceptional protected forest areas. If we haven't already seen them in migration elsewhere, we can search here for nesting Acadian Flycatcher, Cerulean, Hooded, and Blue-winged warblers, or Louisiana Waterthrush. Needless to say, in addition to seeing nesting birds, we could still encounter a major migration fallout as well. The Long Point Bird Observatory operates North America's oldest banding program, and visitors are invited to watch the banding process. We will make time on at least one of our two mornings here to observe some of the banding in progress. Night in Simcoe.

Day 7. Long Point Region; to Carden Alvar region. We'll have a second morning to enjoy the many birding sites around the Long Point area, targeting whatever species we have not yet caught up with. In the late morning, we'll start on our way north, heading to our final destination, the Carden Plain, to the east of Lake Simcoe, north of Toronto. We'll use whatever time remains this afternoon to begin exploring this beautiful area of open fields and associated shrubland and wetlands. Special birds here include Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper Sparrow, Golden-winged Warbler, Virginia Rail, Sora, and the endangered eastern Loggerhead Shrike. Other species of open habitats are common here compared to the highly developed agricultural areas of southern Ontario. Night in Orillia.

Day 8. Travel to Toronto and homeward. Our last morning will consist of more birding on the Carden Plain, followed by travel back to Toronto with the goal of arriving at the airport by 1:00 p.m. **Please make sure you don't book a flight out before 3:00 p.m.**

About Your Guide

Jay VanderGaast was introduced to birding by his father, and his obsession with birds was evident by age seven when he memorized the plates in Peterson's eastern field guide. He went on to earn a B.S. in biology at university and briefly contemplated a career in research, but two years on the mosquito-infested arctic tundra watching ptarmigan do little other than occasionally getting eaten by Gyrfalcons soon put an end to that plan! Instead, he strapped on a backpack and a pair of bins and began roaming the world in search of birds.

His travels eventually led him to Costa Rica, where he stumbled into a job as a birding guide at Rancho Naturalista Lodge. Amazed that he was actually getting paid to watch birds, he jealously guarded his position there for six years. His career with Field Guides coincided with the dawn of the new millennium (if you believe that began in 2000!), and since then he has guided more than 100 tours on several continents. He lives near Montreal.

"Jay VanderGaast was a delight to travel with...incredible at finding the birds and extremely helpful in getting us on the birds—which was much appreciated! ...he made the trip an exceptional experience which I will remember for the rest of my life." L.K., Costa Rica

Visit <https://fieldguides.com/our-staff/> for Jay's complete tour schedule; just click on his photo.

Financial Information

FEE: \$3675 from Toronto

DEPOSIT: \$375 per person

FINAL PAYMENT DUE: November 13, 2023

SINGLE SUPPLEMENT (Optional): \$775

LIMIT: 7

All participants will be required to confirm they will have completed a full COVID vaccination course at least two weeks prior to the tour (which includes a booster for those eligible to have one). Note too, that many travel destinations may still require proof of vaccination for entry to bypass testing delays or quarantine, and that entry

requirements for a destination can change at any time. Proof of a booster shot, too, may be a requirement for some travel destinations.

Other Things You Need to Know

TOUR MANAGER: The manager for this tour is Sharon Mackie. Sharon will be happy to assist you in preparing for the tour. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call her!

DOCUMENTS: US citizens will need a valid passport for travel to Canada. If you are not a US citizen, please check with the Canadian consulate nearest you for entry requirements. Information about consulates and entry requirements is generally available online or you can contact us and we will be happy to look this up for you. Passports should have an adequate number of blank pages for the entire journey. Some countries require a blank page for their stamp and as a precaution it is best to have one blank page per country you will visit or transit.

LUGGAGE: Please be aware that many airlines have recently modified their luggage policies and are charging additional fees for checked bags. Updates could easily occur before your departure, so you may wish to contact your airline to verify the policy. Additional charges for bags on any flights, whether these are covered by the tour fee or not, will be the client's responsibility.

TOUR INCLUSIONS/EXCLUSIONS: The **tour fee** is \$3675 for one person in double occupancy from Toronto. It includes all lodging from Day 1 through Day 7, all meals from dinner on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 8, all ground transportation, and the guide services of the tour leader(s). Tipping at group meals and for drivers, porters, and local guides is included in your tour fee and will be handled for the group by your Field Guides leader(s). However, if you would like to recognize your Field Guides leader(s) or any local guide(s) for exceptional service, it is entirely appropriate to tip. We emphasize that such tips are optional and not expected.

The above fee does not include your airfare to and from Toronto, airport taxes, any alcoholic beverages, any checked or carry-on baggage charges imposed by the airlines, optional tips to local drivers, phone calls, laundry, or other items of a personal nature.

The **single supplement** for the tour is \$775. If you do not have a roommate but wish to share, we will try to pair you with a roommate from the tour; but if none is available, you will be billed for the single supplement. Our tour fees are based on double occupancy; one-half the cost of a double room is priced into the tour fee. The single supplement is calculated by taking the actual cost of a single room and subtracting one-half the cost of a double room (plus any applicable taxes).

TOUR LIMITS: Our limits are firm and we don't exceed the limit by one to accommodate a couple when only one space remains open. However, on occasion, we will send along a guide in training on a tour. In these cases, one seat in the van or bus will be taken by the guide in training. Our guides will have a rotation system within the vehicle so that clients share the inconvenience equally. We hope this minor inconvenience will be more than offset by the advantages of having another guide along.

TOUR REGISTRATION: To register for this tour, please contact us at fieldguides.com/contact-us/. Our office will be in touch with you by email by the next business day (Mon-Fri) with instructions on how to complete our new electronic registration form and medical questionnaire. (We are no longer accepting the paper version.)

Please mail your **deposit of \$375** per person, or see <https://fieldguides.com/payment-options/> for our Payment Options. **Full payment** of the tour fee is due 180 days prior to departure, or **by November 13. We will bill you for the final payment at either 180 days or when the tour has reached sufficient subscription to operate, whichever date comes later.**

Since the cost of your trip insurance and airline tickets is generally non-refundable, please do not finalize these purchases until you have received final billing for the tour or have been advised that the tour is sufficiently subscribed to operate by your tour manager.

SMOKING: Almost all of our clients prefer a smoke-free environment. If you smoke, please be sensitive to the group and refrain from smoking at meals, in vehicles, and in proximity to the group on trails and elsewhere.

CANCELLATION POLICY: Refund of deposit and payment, less \$100 handling fee, will be made if cancellation is received up to 180 days before departure. If cancellation occurs between 179 and 90 days before the departure date, 50% of the tour fee is refundable. Thereafter, all deposits and payments are not refundable and non-transferable.

Our cancellation policy only applies to payments made to Field Guides for tour (and any services included in those fees). Airline tickets not included in the tour fee and purchased separately often carry penalties for cancellation or change, or are sometimes totally non-refundable. Additionally, if you take out trip insurance the cost of that insurance is not refundable, so it is best to purchase the policy just prior to making full payment for the tour or at the time you purchase airline tickets, depending upon the airline's restrictions.

The right is reserved to cancel any tour prior to departure. In most such cases, full refund will constitute full settlement to the passenger. Note this exception, however: If you have been advised pre-tour that there is a non-refundable portion of your tour fee no matter the reason for Field Guides cancellation of the tour, that portion will not be refunded. The right is reserved to substitute in case of emergency another guide for the original one.

TRIP CANCELLATION & MEDICAL EMERGENCY INSURANCE: We strongly recommend you consider purchasing trip cancellation (including medical emergency) insurance to cover your investment in case of injury or illness to you or your family prior to or during a trip. Because we must remit early (and substantial) tour deposits to our suppliers, you acknowledge and agree that we will not issue a refund when cancellation occurs outside of our cancellation policy as published in the itinerary (see CANCELLATION POLICY). In addition, the Department of State strongly urges Americans to consult with their medical insurance company prior to traveling abroad to confirm whether their policy applies overseas and if it will cover emergency expenses such as a medical evacuation. US medical insurance plans seldom cover health costs incurred outside the United States unless supplemental coverage is purchased. Furthermore, US Medicare and Medicaid programs do not provide payment for medical services outside the United States.

When making a decision regarding health insurance, Americans should consider that many foreign doctors and hospitals require payment in cash prior to providing service and that a medical evacuation to the United States may cost well in excess of \$50,000. Uninsured travelers who require medical care overseas often face extreme difficulties. When consulting with your insurer prior to your trip, please ascertain whether payment will be made to the overseas healthcare provider or whether you will be reimbursed later for expenses that you incur.

US citizens will receive information from us regarding optional tour cancellation/emergency medical insurance. Our agent, CSA, will insure for trip cancellation and interruption, medical coverage, travel delay, baggage loss and delay, and emergency medical transportation. If you purchase the insurance prior to, or within 24 hours of making final payment for the tour, and cover all non-refundable parts of the trip (including any non-refundable flights and in some cases, other arrangements), pre-existing conditions are covered. You may purchase your CSA policy on-line by visiting our website at <https://fieldguides.com/trip-cancellation-insurance/> and clicking the link to CSA. The CSA webpage also includes a contact number.

Currently we are unable to offer CSA insurance policies to residents of New York and Hawaii. We have had clients provide positive feedback after acquiring insurance thru InsureMyTrip (<https://www.insuremytrip.com/>) in the past, and would suggest that company as an alternative. When purchasing insurance with a company other than CSA, you will want to understand whether the timing of your purchase will affect coverage before paying your first deposit. Insurance purchase requirements can vary from company to company, and such requirements could limit your options if you do not look into this until making your final payment for your tour. Please let us know if you have any questions about this.

Please note, once the insurance is purchased it is non-refundable, so please check with your tour manager prior to making the purchase to assure the tour will operate as scheduled. Citizens of other countries are urged to consult their insurance broker.

RESPONSIBILITY: For and in consideration of the opportunity to participate in the tour, each tour participant and each parent or legal guardian of a tour participant who is under 18 agrees to release, indemnify, and hold harmless Field Guides Incorporated, its agents, servants, employees, shareholders, officers, directors, attorneys, and contractors as more fully set forth in the Release and Indemnity Agreement on the registration form. Field Guides Incorporated acts only as an agent for the passenger in regard to travel, whether by railroad, motorcar, motorcoach, boat, airplane, or other means, and assumes no liability for injury, damage, loss, accident, delay, or irregularity caused by defect in such vehicles or for any reason whatsoever, including the acts, defaults, or bankruptcies of any company or person engaged in conveying the passenger or in carrying out the arrangements of the tour. You acknowledge and agree that Field Guides Incorporated is not responsible for losses or additional expenses due to delay or changes in air or other services, sickness, weather, strike, war, quarantine, or other causes. The tour participant shall bear all such losses and expenses. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to substitute hotels of similar category for those indicated and to make any

changes in the itinerary where deemed necessary or caused by changes in air schedules. Field Guides Incorporated reserves the right to decline to accept or to retain any person as a member of any tour. Baggage is at owner's risk entirely.

Participants should be in good health and should consult a physician before undertaking a tour. If you have questions about the physical requirements of a tour, please contact our office for further information. Participants should prepare for the tour by reading the detailed itinerary, the information bulletin, and other pertinent matter provided by Field Guides. Each participant is responsible for bringing appropriate clothing and equipment as recommended in our bulletins.

THE RECEIPT OF YOUR TOUR DEPOSIT SHALL BE DEEMED TO BE CONSENT TO THE ABOVE CONDITIONS. EACH TOUR PARTICIPANT AND EACH PARENT OR LEGAL GUARDIAN OF A TOUR PARTICIPANT WHO IS UNDER 18 SHALL SIGN AND DELIVER THE RELEASE AND INDEMNITY AGREEMENT AT THE TIME OF REGISTRATION.

NCP 7/2020

JV 07/22

Peg 1/23; 10/23