



*Field Guides Tour Report*

**Pennsylvania's Warblers & More: from Cerulean Warbler to Henslow's Sparrow 2018**

May 22, 2018 to May 27, 2018  
Tom Johnson and Micah Riegner

*For our tour description, itinerary, past triplists, dates, fees, and more, please [VISIT OUR TOUR PAGE](#).*



*The Pine Creek Gorge is also known as the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania. Photo by guide Micah Riegner.*

I was fortunate enough to join Tom and all of you on this tour of the winding roads of backcountry Pennsylvania, as we patrolled meadows, gorges, brooks and bottomlands for the state's rich assortment of breeding warblers. We tallied 25 warbler species, most of which we had excellent views of, and we saw several other exciting birds, not to mention a couple Groundhogs along the way. The tour was punctuated by many highlights, from buzzing Cerulean Warblers along Stony Creek, to peenting Woodcocks in a cacophony of Whip-poor-wills, to dapper Henslow's Sparrows hiccuping from scattered shrubs. We lucked out with favorable weather throughout the trip; in our week of birding we didn't encounter a single drop of rain! Mornings were cool and clear, while afternoons were somewhat warm, even getting up into the mid-80s.

Sunrise on day one found us at Conoy Park, scoping Prothonotary and Yellow-throated Warblers singing from Sycamore treetops along the mighty Susquehanna River. This was our only opportunity to see these localized breeders that trickle into southern Pennsylvania in the spring. We then crossed to Stony Creek, north of Harrisburg, where Tom called out a gorgeous male Cerulean Warbler, fresh from the cloud forests of the northern Andes. We glimpsed a female, too, at Peter's Mountain, a treat few birders get to enjoy.

Our time at State College was quite productive, indeed. We birded Scotia Barrens, a patchwork of forests at different stages of succession, that is managed for game birds like grouse and turkey. Here, we were eye-to-eye with singing Golden-winged Warblers, and beneath a copulating pair of Yellow-billed Cuckoos! We also scoped the smaller, less common Black-billed Cuckoo, a bird I have always wanted to see.

The night birding at Scotia Barrens was exceptional. As the peach-colored sky darkened at dusk, multiple Eastern Whip-poor-wills erupted into song, and male American Woodcocks circled overhead in their attempts to impress the females. They certainly impressed us! On our way back to the hotel, we delighted in hearing an unexpected pair of Barred Owls singing "who cooks for you, who cooks for you all!" deep in the woods, unseen despite Tom's excellent vocal imitation. Henslow's Sparrows in the fields near Punxsutawney (the town where Groundhog Day originated), were another highlight of the tour. We watched one that was so close, our scopes could just barely focus on it! We also flushed a pair of Upland Sandpipers, perhaps the rarest breeding bird of PA.

The last few nights of the tour we birded the northern part of the state around Mansfield, where Hemlocks and introduced Norway Spruce provide habitat for a different collection of birds, including Blackburnian, and Black-throated Blue Warblers, both of which we had great looks at. We also enjoyed a singing Canada Warbler in Rhododendrons at Bear Meadows, and a Louisiana Waterthrush singing along a fast-flowing creek. One evening, we stopped at "The Muck," an extensive wetland, where Virginia Rails scuttled through cattails, and Bank Swallows swooped in to roost.

On our journey back to Harrisburg, we enjoyed a picnic breakfast at Colton Point State Park above Pine Creek Gorge, the "Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania," where Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers drummed on hollow trunks and a Hermit Thrush sang from the undergrowth. Later that morning, we veered off onto an obscure dirt road in the middle of a clear cut, and watched a brilliant male Mourning Warbler singing from stumps and tangled dead branches. After dining in Harrisburg the final evening, we stopped at Tom's Eastern Screech-owl spot (top secret location) and spot-lit a singing Wood Thrush and two red morph Screech-owls.

We squeezed in one final morning of birding at Fort Indiantown Gap before hustling off to the airport. Worm-eating and Prairie Warblers stood out as the morning's highlights and a singing Kentucky Warbler was icing on the cake. This striking warbler is in steep decline in PA due to in part to overgrazing by deer that remove dense vegetation for ground nesters. Kentuckys used to be relatively common in PA, now they are tough to come by; thus, we were extremely fortunate to have seen one.

Overall, the trip ran smoothly, although we hit a few pot-holes on that dirt road while looking for Henslow's Sparrows. Tom and I would like to thank you for joining us on this memorable journey through his home state; we had a great time and look forward to birding with you again!

Micah

---

#### KEYS FOR THIS LIST

One of the following keys may be shown in brackets for individual species as appropriate: \* = heard only, I = introduced, E = endemic, N = nesting, a = austral migrant, b = boreal migrant

---

### BIRDS

#### Anatidae (Ducks, Geese, and Waterfowl).

**CANADA GOOSE** (*Branta canadensis*) – Seen at several ponds and lakes throughout the tour.

**WOOD DUCK** (*Aix sponsa*) – We saw a family group on a pond at Colton Point State Park.

**MALLARD** (*Anas platyrhynchos*) – Several flyovers throughout the tour.

**HOODED MERGANSER** (*Lophodytes cucullatus*) – We saw a female with young at Lake Nessmuk.

#### Phalacrocoracidae (Cormorants and Shags).

**DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT** (*Phalacrocorax auritus*) – We passed a few on the Susquehanna River.

#### Ardeidae (Herons, Egrets, and Bitterns).

**GREAT BLUE HERON** (*Ardea herodias*) – We saw one at "The Muck" and a few others throughout the tour.

**GREAT EGRET** (*Ardea alba*) – We had a flyover at Conoy Park the first morning.

**GREEN HERON** (*Butorides virescens*) – We saw a bird way in the distance at Lake Nessmuk.

**YELLOW-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON** (*Nyctanassa violacea*) – We saw them nesting along Kelker Street in downtown Harrisburg!

#### Cathartidae (New World Vultures).

**BLACK VULTURE** (*Coragyps atratus*) – Relatively common in southern PA.

**TURKEY VULTURE** (*Cathartes aura*) – Common throughout the tour.

#### Pandionidae (Osprey).

**OSPREY** (*Pandion haliaetus*) – We saw one at Conoy park the first morning of the tour.

#### Accipitridae (Hawks, Eagles, and Kites).

**BALD EAGLE** (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*) – One flew by at the aptly named Bald Eagle State Park. We also saw one at the Pine Creek Gorge.

**RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** (*Buteo lineatus*) – Seen in flight at Bear Meadows.

**BROAD-WINGED HAWK** (*Buteo platypterus*) – Several lifting on thermals at Bear Meadows.

**RED-TAILED HAWK** (*Buteo jamaicensis*) – We scoped one out at Stony Creek and saw several from the road throughout the tour.

#### Rallidae (Rails, Gallinules, and Coots).

**VIRGINIA RAIL** (*Rallus limicola*) – We called out a few at "The Muck."

**SORA** (*Porzana carolina*) – Heard at "The Muck." [\*]

#### Charadriidae (Plovers and Lapwings).

**KILLDEER** (*Charadrius vociferus*) – Several in grassy areas throughout the tour.

#### Scolopacidae (Sandpipers and Allies).

**UPLAND SANDPIPER** (*Bartramia longicauda*) – Yes! We flushed a pair along Sandy Ridge Road. They have become increasingly rare throughout PA.

**SEMIPALMATED SANDPIPER** (*Calidris pusilla*) – One flew past us at "The Muck."

**AMERICAN WOODCOCK** (*Scolopax minor*) – Unbelievable! We heard them peenting and watched the flight display at Scotia Barrens.

**SPOTTED SANDPIPER** (*Actitis macularius*) – We flushed one at Colyer Lake.

#### Columbidae (Pigeons and Doves).

**ROCK PIGEON** (*Columba livia*) – Common in towns.

**MOURNING DOVE** (*Zenaida macroura*) – Several throughout the tour.

*Cuculidae (Cuckoos)*

**YELLOW-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus americanus*) – We watched a pair copulating at Scotia Barrens. We also saw two at Colton Point State Park.

**BLACK-BILLED CUCKOO** (*Coccyzus erythrophthalmus*) – Excellent! We had scope views of a couple individuals at Scotia Barrens.

*Strigidae (Owls)*

**EASTERN SCREECH-OWL** (*Megascops asio*) – We had great looks at a pair outside Harrisburg.

**BARRED OWL** (*Strix varia*) – We heard a pair at Scotia Barrens, but they just would not come in. [\*]

*Caprimulgidae (Nightjars and Allies)*

**EASTERN WHIP-POOR-WILL** (*Antrostomus vociferus*) – We heard dozens at Scotia Barrens. Tom called in a few that zipped right past us!

*Apodidae (Swifts)*

**CHIMNEY SWIFT** (*Chaetura pelagica*) – Common in the cities and towns.

*Trochilidae (Hummingbirds)*

**RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD** (*Archilochus colubris*) – We saw a male at Bear Meadows and a female collecting nesting material at Conoy Park.

*Picidae (Woodpeckers)*

**RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER** (*Melanerpes carolinus*) – Seen well at Bald Eagle State Park.

**YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER** (*Sphyrapicus varius*) – We watched one drumming at Colton Point State Park.

**DOWNY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides pubescens*) – Common throughout the tour.

**HAIRY WOODPECKER** (*Picoides villosus*) – We watched an adult attending a nest at Bald Eagle State Park.

**NORTHERN FLICKER (YELLOW-SHAFTED)** (*Colaptes auratus auratus*) – Common throughout the tour. We had good looks at Bald Eagle State Park.

*Falconidae (Falcons and Caracaras)*

**AMERICAN KESTREL** (*Falco sparverius*) – One circled by along Sandy Ridge Road.

**PEREGRINE FALCON** (*Falco peregrinus*) – The first bird of the tour! We watched the pair nesting on the EPA building in downtown Harrisburg.

*Tyrannidae (Tyrant Flycatchers)*

**EASTERN WOOD-PEWEE** (*Contopus virens*) – Common throughout the tour.

**ACADIAN FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax virens*) – We were eye-to-eye with one at Stoney Creek.

**ALDER FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax alnorum*) – Several were calling from dead trees at Scotia Barrens.

**WILLOW FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax traillii*) – We called one in at Lake Nessmuk.

**LEAST FLYCATCHER** (*Empidonax minimus*) – Seen at Scotia Barrens.

**EASTERN PHOEBE** (*Sayornis phoebe*) – Common throughout the tour.

**GREAT CRESTED FLYCATCHER** (*Myiarchus crinitus*) – We saw a pair from the parking lot at Conoy Park.

**EASTERN KINGBIRD** (*Tyrannus tyrannus*) – Seen well in the open field along the Juniata River.

*Vireonidae (Vireos, Shrike-Babblers, and Erpornis)*

**YELLOW-THROATED VIREO** (*Vireo flavifrons*) – One came in to investigate our pishing at Peer's Mountain.

**BLUE-HEADED VIREO** (*Vireo solitarius*) – Great views at Bear Meadows!

**WARBLING VIREO** (*Vireo gilvus*) – We saw one at the picnic spot along the Juniata River.

**RED-EYED VIREO** (*Vireo olivaceus*) – Probably the most abundant bird in PA. We saw them just about everywhere we went (except inside the hotels).

*Corvidae (Crows, Jays, and Magpies)*

**BLUE JAY** (*Cyanocitta cristata*) – Common throughout the tour.

**AMERICAN CROW** (*Corvus brachyrhynchos*) – Commonly seen from the road.

**FISH CROW** (*Corvus ossifragus*) – We saw a couple at our lunch spot along the Juniata River.

**COMMON RAVEN** (*Corvus corax*) – We saw them almost every day.

*Hirundinidae (Swallows)*

**NORTHERN ROUGH-WINGED SWALLOW** (*Stelgidopteryx serripennis*) – We saw one investigate the tail pipe of one of the vans (not a great cavity to nest in!) at Colyer Lake.

**TREE SWALLOW** (*Tachycineta bicolor*) – We had great looks at one at Scotia Barrens and saw them roosting at "The Muck."

**BANK SWALLOW** (*Riparia riparia*) – One flew over us at "The Muck" showing us its dark breast band.

**BARN SWALLOW** (*Hirundo rustica*) – Common over lakes and rivers.

**CLIFF SWALLOW** (*Petrochelidon pyrrhonota*) – A couple seen at "The Muck."

*Paridae (Tits, Chickadees, and Titmice)*

**CAROLINA CHICKADEE** (*Poecile carolinensis*) – Several seen at Conoy Park south of the hybrid zone around Harrisburg.

**BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE** (*Poecile atricapillus*) – Common throughout the northern part of PA. We had fine looks at Bear Meadows.

**TUFTED TITMOUSE** (*Baeolophus bicolor*) – Common throughout the tour.

*Sittidae (Nuthatches)*

**WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH** (*Sitta carolinensis*) – Common throughout the tour.

*Certhiidae (Treecreepers)*

**BROWN CREEPER** (*Certhia americana*) – Heard at Colton Point State Park. [\*]

Troglodytidae (Wrens).

**HOUSE WREN** (*Troglodytes aedon*) – Common at Scotia Barrens.

**MARSH WREN** (*Cistothorus palustris*) – Seen in the cattails at "The Muck."

**CAROLINA WREN** (*Thryothorus ludovicianus*) – We had good looks at one the first morning at Conoy Park.

Poliophtilidae (Gnatcatchers).

**BLUE-GRAY GNATCATCHER** (*Poliophtila caerulea*) – Very common throughout PA.

Regulidae (Kinglets).

**GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET** (*Regulus satrapa*) – We called in a small group at Colton Point State Park.

Turdidae (Thrushes and Allies).

**EASTERN BLUEBIRD** (*Sialia sialis*) – Seen at the lunch spot along the Juniata River.

**VEERY** (*Catharus fuscescens*) – We saw one singing from a snag at Bear Meadows. Very nice.

**SWAINSON'S THRUSH** (*Catharus ustulatus*) – Some of us had distant views of a bird at Stony Creek.

**HERMIT THRUSH** (*Catharus guttatus*) – Tom called one in and it landed in front of us with its bill wide open at Colton Point State Park.

**WOOD THRUSH** (*Hylocichla mustelina*) – We had a last-minute view of one singing in the spot-light at Tom's Screech-owl spot.

**AMERICAN ROBIN** (*Turdus migratorius*) – Common throughout the tour.

Mimidae (Mockingbirds and Thrashers).

**GRAY CATBIRD** (*Dumetella carolinensis*) – Common throughout the tour. We heard them giving the cat-like meow call at dusk at Scotia Barrens.

**BROWN THRASHER** (*Toxostoma rufum*) – We saw one in a lawn near Punxsutawney and one singing from a tall tree at Fort Indiantown Gap.

**NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (*Mimus polyglottos*) – Fairly common throughout the tour.

Sturnidae (Starlings).

**EUROPEAN STARLING** (*Sturnus vulgaris*) – Common in cities.

Bombycillidae (Waxwings).

**CEDAR WAXWING** (*Bombycilla cedrorum*) – Several flocks seen throughout the tour.

Parulidae (New World Warblers).

**OVENBIRD** (*Seiurus aurocapilla*) – What a loud little bird! We heard them throughout the tour and finally saw one at Colton Point State Park.

**WORM-EATING WARBLER** (*Helmitheros vermivorum*) – It was great to see this bird on our last morning of the tour.

**LOUISIANA WATERTHRUSH** (*Parkesia motacilla*) – We followed one down the creek at Bear Meadows.

**GOLDEN-WINGED WARBLER** (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) – One of the highlights of the trip! We were eye-to-eye with singing males at Scotia Barrens.

**BLUE-WINGED WARBLER** (*Vermivora cyanoptera*) – We had great looks at a male buzzing away at Colton Point State Park and Fort Indiantown Gap.

**BLACK-AND-WHITE WARBLER** (*Mniotilta varia*) – We saw one at Conoy Park and Fort Indiantown Gap.

**PROTHONOTARY WARBLER** (*Protonotaria citrea*) – Fabulous looks at a male singing in Sycamores at Conoy Park.

**MOURNING WARBLER** (*Geothlypis philadelphia*) – We tracked one down that was singing in a clear cut in Potter County.

**KENTUCKY WARBLER** (*Geothlypis formosa*) – We were lucky to see this bird our final morning; a scarce breeder in PA.

**COMMON YELLOWTHROAT** (*Geothlypis trichas*) – Common throughout the tour. We had good looks at one at Colyer Lake.

**HOODED WARBLER** (*Setophaga citrina*) – We had great looks at a male singing at Stony Creek. We also saw a pair at Bald Eagle State Park.

**AMERICAN REDSTART** (*Setophaga ruticilla*) – Common throughout the tour. We saw a female constructing a nest at Bald Eagle State Park and while she was gone, a Brown-headed Cowbird snuck in and dropped an egg in her nest!

**CERULEAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga cerulea*) – Wow, stunning bird! We saw a male at Stony Creek and a female at the Peter's Mountain Appalachian Trail crossing.

**NORTHERN PARULA** (*Setophaga americana*) – We saw a male singing in the Sycamores at Conoy Park.

**MAGNOLIA WARBLER** (*Setophaga magnolia*) – We had brief glimpses of a bird singing high in a Norway Spruce at Colton Point State Park.

**BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER** (*Setophaga fusca*) – Dang, what a bird! We watched a male singing right over us at Colton Point State Park and also saw one at Heiner Run State Park.

**YELLOW WARBLER** (*Setophaga petechia*) – Fairly common at Scotia Barrens.

**CHESTNUT-SIDED WARBLER** (*Setophaga pensylvanica*) – Common at Scotia Barrens. We saw a pair building a nest in Potter County.

**BLACKPOLL WARBLER** (*Setophaga striata*) – We bumped into a few migrants, one of which was seen from a Sheetz parking lot!

**BLACK-THROATED BLUE WARBLER** (*Setophaga caerulea cairnsi*) – A gorgeous warbler. We had great looks at males and females at Bear Meadows and Colton Point State Park.

**PINE WARBLER** (*Setophaga pinus*) – We saw one living up to its name (in a pine tree) at Scotia Barrens.

**YELLOW-THROATED WARBLER (ALBILORA)** (*Setophaga dominica albilora*) – We saw a male "Sycamore Warbler" at Conoy Park along the Susquehanna River. This population only breeds in Sycamores.

**PRAIRIE WARBLER** (*Setophaga discolor*) – Our last morning we saw a few of these in the regenerating clear cut at Fort Indiantown Gap.

**BLACK-THROATED GREEN WARBLER** (*Setophaga virens*) – We had good looks at this bird at Bear Meadows.

**CANADA WARBLER** (*Cardellina canadensis*) – Dang, what a sharp looking warbler! We saw one singing from a Rhododendron thicket at Bear Meadows.

Passerellidae (New World Buntings and Sparrows).

**GRASSHOPPER SPARROW** (*Ammodramus savannarum*) – A few were singing along Sandy Ridge Road.

**HENSLOW'S SPARROW** (*Ammodramus henslowii*) – One of the highlights of the trip. We first saw a distant male singing from a shrub along Sandy Ridge Road. Then, we came back after lunch and saw one singing right in front of us. Awesome scope views.

**CHIPPING SPARROW** (*Spizella passerina*) – Relatively common throughout the trip.

**FIELD SPARROW** (*Spizella pusilla*) – We saw one singing from a snag at Scotia Barrens and heard several more throughout the trip.

**DARK-EYED JUNCO (SLATE-COLORED)** (*Junco hyemalis carolinensis*) – We saw one singing near the creek at Bear Meadows.

**SONG SPARROW** (*Melospiza melodia*) – Very common throughout PA.

**SWAMP SPARROW** (*Melospiza georgiana*) – We saw a couple on the trip; one at Colyer lake, and another at "The Muck."

**EASTERN TOWHEE** (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*) – Common throughout most of the tour.

*Icteridae (Yellow-breasted Chat)*

**YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** (*Icteria virens*) – We saw one our last morning at Fort Indiantown Gap.

*Cardinalidae (Cardinals and Allies)*

**SCARLET TANAGER** (*Piranga olivacea*) – Fairly common. We had great looks at a male along Stony Creek.

**NORTHERN CARDINAL** (*Cardinalis cardinalis*) – Very common throughout the trip.

**ROSE-BREASTED GROSBEAK** (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*) – Seen at the clear cut in Potter County near where we saw the Mourning Warbler.

**INDIGO BUNTING** (*Passerina cyanea*) – Very common in PA. We enjoyed seeing them throughout the trip.

*Icteridae (Troupials and Allies)*

**BOBOLINK** (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*) – We saw a male chasing around a female at Sandy Ridge Road.

**EASTERN MEADOWLARK** (*Sturnella magna*) – Seen along Sandy Ridge Road. One of them sounded like a Bobolink.

**ORCHARD ORIOLE** (*Icterus spurius*) – We had nice looks at one near the Juniata River.

**BALTIMORE ORIOLE** (*Icterus galbula*) – Very common throughout southern PA. We saw several along the Juniata River.

**RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD** (*Agelaius phoeniceus*) – We saw several at "The Muck" and a few along Sandy Ridge Road.

**BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD** (*Molothrus ater*) – Common throughout the trip. We saw a female drop an egg into the nest of an unsuspecting American Redstart.

**COMMON GRACKLE** (*Quiscalus quiscula*) – Several seen around towns and open areas.

*Fringillidae (Finches, Euphonias, and Allies)*

**HOUSE FINCH** (*Haemorhous mexicanus*) – Common around towns.

**PURPLE FINCH** (*Haemorhous purpureus*) – We watched a small flock feeding above us at Colton Point State Park.

**AMERICAN GOLDFINCH** (*Spinus tristis*) – Common throughout the trip.

*Passeridae (Old World Sparrows)*

**HOUSE SPARROW** (*Passer domesticus*) – Common in cities and towns.

---

## MAMMALS

**EASTERN COTTONTAIL** (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) – Several were out on the road at Scotia Barrens.

**PLAIN EASTERN CHIPMUNK** (*Tamias striatus*) – Seen and heard most places we visited.

**WOODCHUCK** (*Marmota monax*) – The first vertebrate of the tour! We saw some as we pulled out of our hotel on our way to dinner the first evening.

**EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL** (*Sciurus carolinensis*) – Rather abundant throughout the trip.

**RED SQUIRREL** (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) – We saw one running on the ground at Colton Point State Park.

**BEAVER** (*Castor canadensis*) – We saw one in the distance at "The Muck."

**WHITE-TAILED DEER** (*Odocoileus virginianus*) – Deer have become incredibly common throughout the eastern US and are taking a toll on birds that nest on the ground in dense vegetation. We saw several along the road.

---

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

---

**Totals for the tour: 130 bird taxa and 7 mammal taxa**