

# Ohio and Michigan

11–21 May 2013

## Participants

John Boden

Bob Bailey

Jim Hamilton

Martyn Kenefick

Anne Lansdown

Christine Rose



**Leader** James P. Smith

## Scarlet Tanager

Whenever you plan a tour around warbler migration, especially in spring when birds have a constant urge to move on and breed, you have to get the timing exactly right and the weather conditions have to be favourable – we achieved both! Not only did we find 31 species of warbler, we also found seven species of woodpecker, five species of vireo and four species of thrush. Our accommodation in Ohio was excellent and that in Michigan comfortable. It is, however, certainly true that you don't visit north-west Ohio for the scenery. What we drove through was flat, open and rather featureless. Towards the end of the tour, the wildness of Upper Peninsula Michigan was scenically much more appealing. There is a myth that the crowds of birders on the Magee Marsh boardwalk impede enjoyable birding. This is simply not true. Whilst, especially on "the big weekend", birders could be counted in their hundreds if not thousands, the birds themselves appear totally fearless of this narrow channel of human presence. It is almost as if they understand that the boardwalk itself is human territory yet everything either side belongs to them – bizarre but true. Additionally, much of the crowd seemed to concentrate on the first 200 metres of boardwalk and we never felt them intrusive. Highlights were many. Put quite simply, the overall ambience of so many warblers and allies, so close and so confiding was beyond anyone's expectation. More specifically, we had the accolade and thrill of finding a female Kirtland's Warbler – a major rarity in Ohio and the first to be recorded in 2013. As for individual incidents, the expression of Jim's face when he caught up with his nemesis Prothonotary Warbler and Bob's triumphant punch in the air when Henslow's Sparrow was added to his life and ABA list will live long in the memory.

**Day 1** A cold, grey and overcast day with temperatures barely reaching 10°C, not the weather welcome I had been expecting. Everyone met up at Detroit airport shortly after 13.00 and within the hour we were on the road heading southeast into Ohio. Initially, roadside birding held little of interest: Canada Goose, House Sparrow, Common Starling and even Common Grackle do little for the birding appetite. However, before long we were seeing our first Bald Eagles (we were to see both adults and immatures every day in Ohio), Great Blue Herons, Red-tailed Hawks, American Robins and Red-winged Blackbirds – common birds here, but of real interest today nevertheless. By 16.00, we were checking into our motel in Port Clinton and by 16.45 we were out again on our way to the Crane Creek Wildlife Management Area. Late afternoon was as dull and dreary as the rest of the day but the dazzling array of plumage colour that greeted us really was "birding sunlight". Over the course of the next two hours or so, we walked probably no more than 300 metres along the main boardwalk at Magee Marsh – and warblers were everywhere. Not only were there lots of them, many were feeding on snags of willow at eye level, some almost within arm's length. In terms of abundance, there were probably at least 40 Yellow-rumped and 15 or so Magnolias. Add to this half a dozen or so each of Black-and-White, American Redstart, Bay-breasted, Black-

throated Blue and Black-throated Green with ones and twos of Tennessee, Northern Parula, Nashville, Cape May, Common Yellowthroat, Blackburnian, Yellow, Palm and Chestnut-sided – all in full breeding dress. Pride of place however must go to the male Mourning Warbler seen late on by most of the group. Staying with the brightly coloured theme, our only tanager was a superb adult male seriously red Scarlet Tanager and all four of our Baltimore Orioles were adult males. Of more subtle plumage tones, we found our first Blue-headed Vireo, probably half a dozen each of Warbling Vireo and Blue-grey Gnatcatcher, Downy Woodpecker, Grey Catbird, both Eastern Wood-pewee and Least Flycatcher plus Ruby-crowned Kinglet. All the while both White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows foraged in the leaf-litter, sometimes mere feet away from us. With the light seriously fading, we left, or at least tried to leave, the parking lot – then it was the American Woodcock show. There she sat, tight amongst dead grass and dried leaves no more than two metres away from us inside a (thankfully) roped off area. She was absolutely convinced that we couldn't see her – but she was wrong! So, less than three hours birding time into the tour, we had accumulated 17 warbler species and some cracking other species – it wasn't such a grey and gloomy day after all!

**Day 2** Our second day dawned clear, bright and absolutely freezing. Initial temperature was around 4°C – indeed it never warmed beyond 7°C all day due in the main to a biting northwest wind. Once again, we were to spend virtually all day at Magee Marsh. Our drive across the open freshwater marsh produced not only a pair of Northern Harriers, which attracted our attention more intently than the nearby American Coots, but also produced a pair of Trumpeter Swans. These birds are part of a widespread mid-western states re-introduction programme. However, current AOU regulations state that a stable population is, as yet, unproven in Ohio (although it is in neighbouring Michigan) and so our birds are not currently countable – I guess that's down to an individual's conscience. Where the marsh became lily-strewn ponds, hirundines hawked in significant numbers. Most were Barn and Tree Swallows but with a few Bank Swallows amongst them. Despite the cold, there were obviously sufficient tiny insects to feed the hordes of hungry warblers that were ever present once we had reached woodland. Again there were lots and lots of Yellow-rumpeds – certainly 50 and maybe many more. In an effort to do something a little different to the crowds, we decided to initially check out the East Beach area – a stretch of sand and stunted willows with taller trees behind, before re-working the marsh boardwalk. Here Yellow Warblers and (Western) Palm Warblers were easily as common as Yellow-rumpeds and there were a couple of bright yellow-breasted (Eastern) Palm Warblers mixed in. Daily totals for Black-and-White, Nashville, Magnolia, Bay-breasted, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green and Chestnut-sided Warblers and American Redstarts were well into double figures with half a dozen or so Common Yellowthroats, Cape May Warblers and Northern Parulas. Yesterday's Mourning Warbler again proved rather elusive but eventually showed well to most and we added to our warbler list a couple of Blackpolls, a particularly confiding Pine Warbler, at least four ludicrously tame Ovenbirds feeding on the forest floor together with excellent close views of both Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes. So in our first full day of birding at Magee we had found 22 species of warbler. Today was also the first "thrush day" of the season with most keeping pretty close to the wet leaf litter floor. We found three each of Swainson's Thrush and Veery together with a particularly photogenic Wood Thrush. There was an obvious increase in Least Flycatcher numbers with at least 10 birds flitting around frenetically. Added to this, some of the group saw our first Eastern Phoebe and all enjoyed close views of Eastern Wood-pewee sallying out to feed before returning to its original perch. Staying with the flycatcher theme, and during a much needed break for a caffeine fix (or was it get out of the cold?) mid-afternoon, a wrong turning produced a Willow Flycatcher feeding low in a roadside ditch. Back at the marsh, Grey Catbirds were foraging in the leaf litter at almost every turn of the boardwalk and a stunning male Rose-breasted Grosbeak fed high in a fruiting tree close to the entrance. Throughout the day, we probably saw in excess of 30 Warbling Vireos together with just one Red-eyed cousin all feeding at eye-level or below whilst several Brown Thrashers hopped with determination underneath the scrubby bushes behind the beach. Whilst we were on the coast almost all day, little effort was made to look out over Lake Erie. We did watch a pair of Caspian Terns patrolling the beach plus distant flying Gadwall and Red-breasted Mergansers but, apart from a few Great Blue Herons flying up and down and skeins of Double-crested Cormorant almost constantly in view, there was little else of note. Two species deserve special mention today. With our grateful thanks for some local knowledge to our friends at Sunrise Birding, we watched a day-time roosting Eastern Whip-poor-will – a bird James had not previously seen at a daytime roost – perched quite high in a tree but out on an open branch. Once again the other star was American Woodcock. Our female from yesterday was still sat on her nest but in the wetter area of the boardwalk, house points go to John for finding another strutting slowly through the mud and wet leaves in full view and certainly no more than five metres away from us. Yes it was cold all day, but what superb birding.

**Day 3** Like yesterday it was extremely cold first thing. There wasn't however, a cloud in the sky and the wind had dropped considerably. It warmed up during the day to reach a balmy 14–15°C – in fact the sun was quite warm at times. Having left our motel, we made an unscheduled stop on the outskirts of Port Clinton. Earlier in the day,

James had been checking out the local thickets close to the railway line and had heard a Connecticut Warbler singing, that arch-skulker wanted on so many birders lists. However, when we arrived an hour later, the vocalisation had clearly moved to the other side of the tracks and not viable to pursue. We did, however, have a Common Nighthawk flap over together with our first (of very few) House Finches and the first (of many) Blue Jays. As yesterday, warblers topped the agenda back at Magee Marsh – and the views today were absolutely outrageous. Bird of the morning by far was an extremely bright, curious, confiding, in fact downright nosy Prothonotary Warbler (warbler species number 23), which at one point looked as if it was trying to peck out the lens of Anne’s camera (or was it looking at its own reflection?) Earlier in the morning, a couple of us had found two separate Wilson’s Warblers bringing our current Magee warbler list up to 24. Whilst in the main, the clear night had allowed a number of birds to move on, we still found 16 other warbler species from the boardwalk, if in reduced numbers. By contrast, there were a few more thrushes around, with perhaps half a dozen each of Veery and Wood Thrush. Other new birds for the tour during the morning included a female Merlin and out on the estuary a distant Bonaparte’s Gull and a couple of Forster’s Terns. Back on the West Beach trail, a Red-bellied Woodpecker tried to check out a Tree Swallows nest much to the occupants concern and a Hairy Woodpecker did what woodpeckers should do to a tree trunk. Perhaps the most unexpected new species was a confiding Golden-crowned Kinglet feeding right over the boardwalk. We retreated to the warmth of our minibus for our lunchtime sandwiches before driving out to a new venue, the nearby Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge, a protected 9,500 acres of marshland, wooded wetland and scrubby bushes, and it was absolutely leaping with Yellow-rumped Warblers – we must have seen well over 100 birds. Over the course of the next three hours, we added a number of new species to the trip list inside the maple woods. Naturally pride of place goes to warbler species number 25 - OK it was a rather drab Orange-crowned Warbler best distinguished by its lack of distinctive plumage features. Of much more aesthetic value was an adult Great Horned Owl sat on its nest in an open cavity of a dead tree trunk. Added to this, we found our first Great-crested Flycatcher, Black-capped Chickadee and Tufted Titmouse whilst Anne and Bob managed to see a Blue Grosbeak which didn’t hang around. Out on the marsh, two Snowy Egrets flapped past us, rather unexpected this far north, a group of five Cedar Waxwings briefly alighted in a dead tree and a couple of Field Sparrows hopped along the path in the company of some larger White-throated cousins. By 18.00 it was time to find dinner, with a Peregrine soaring over the road to wish us good night.

**Day 4** There was a complete change in the weather today. Early morning skies were cloud covered, the wind was freshening from the south and there was a slight drizzle first thing. We knew we were in for a good day and as such, James decided to postpone our scheduled visit to Oak Openings and head straight for Crane Creek WMA. If ever warblers deserved first mention in a tour report, it was today. In all, between us, we saw 26 species of warbler during the day where we spent the entire time within the greater Magee area. We began, as on Sunday, walking the coastal sand and stunted willows and grasses along East Beach finding a male Wilson’s Warbler together with a visible increase in the numbers of American Redstart and Yellow Warbler. But it was on the way back that we hit the mother lode. All of a sudden, James shouted for us all to stop in our tracks. Some 20 metres ahead flitting quickly through the grasses and low vegetation was a female Kirtland’s Warbler (warbler species number 26). Incredibly, and rather worryingly, from the rear it gave a striking resemblance to a female Yellow-rumped Warbler – but when it turned its head and showed the under-parts colouration...! This was the first “mega” of the season for Magee. The bird remained for more than 24 hours and was seen by many hundreds of birders. The rest of the morning was spent walking the boardwalk (the crowds were all on East Beach!). Anne saw a Canada Warbler (warbler species number 27), I found a couple of Mourning Warblers and a male Hooded Warbler (warbler species number 28) and we all saw a confiding Louisiana Waterthrush. In general, most species numbers were down on yesterday, except for Common Yellowthroat and Black-throated Blue Warbler. After a lunch break, we returned to “the boards”, which allowed everyone to catch up with Canada Warbler and we spent another entertaining five minutes with a stunning Prothonotary Warbler at ranges so close it rendered as useless all but the closest focusing binoculars. Whilst all this warbler activity was going on, we did find a number of other quality birds. A female Northern Harrier flew in off of the lake, James and Anne saw our first Osprey and Sandhill Crane (we were to see two more cranes later in the afternoon), John managed to watch a Black-billed Cuckoo whilst being given a shoulder massage by an American lady birder (her husband was right beside her, so nothing to worry about Mrs B), most saw a daytime roosting Common Nighthawk and we found two Alder Flycatchers looking longer billed, less plump and longer winged with more orange in the lower mandible than the Least Flycatchers we had been watching over the last few days. Ruby-crowned Kinglets had increased significantly in numbers and amongst them was another Golden-crowned. Two absolutely awesome Philadelphia Vireos fed in short trees right over the boardwalk, one with complete lemon-yellow under-parts, the other showing yellow on throat and vent only. We added Hermit Thrush to our *Catharus* thrush list with one seen along the East Beach trail together with several Swainson’s and Veery. A group of five Cedar Waxwings fed voraciously on Crab Apple blossom and there was a real increase in the numbers of Baltimore Orioles – we probably found in excess of 30 during the day. Early

afternoon found us walking the track to the estuary at Crane Creek. There, amongst numbers of Dunlins and a couple of Least Sandpipers, I found a *Calidris* sandpiper with wing tips reaching way beyond the end of the tail. The bird was distant and both strong sunlight and heat haze were a problem. All of the discernible features pointed to Baird's Sandpiper, an extreme rarity at this site. However, despite James and me watching it for 90 minutes, it flew a few metres only once and didn't show its rump! By early evening it really was shirt-sleeves weather and a gentle drive back to our favourite dinner stop produced two Sandhill Cranes flying over our heads and away to roost – a fitting way to end a magnificent day.

**Day 4** As dawn broke this morning, heavy clouds filled the sky and lightning forked down to our south but it certainly wasn't cold, probably 18°C. It was immediately obvious that the weather would affect visible migration as flocks totalling about 100 Blue Jays flew over the motel car park. On reaching Magee Marsh, the first birds we saw in the parking lot were a male Scarlet Tanager and a Yellow-billed Cuckoo. We knew today was going to be different. We decided to walk the Crane Creek estuary trail, the entrance to which was heaving with American Redstarts, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Magnolia Warblers and a Swainson's Thrush. Looking in the other direction onto the lake, three female Hooded Mergansers drifted past. We caught the edge of a couple of short rain showers and birds were just hurtling overhead. Most notable were another 300 Blue Jays and 75 Cedar Waxwings. Watching the proceedings, with almost total disdain was a recently-fledged juvenile Great Horned Owl. James and I spent a frustrating hour or so scouring the estuary for sign of yesterday's sandpiper – but in vain. The really annoying thing was that this morning's light was so good; we would have had no problem in clinching the identification if it had showed. On reflection, however, careful examination of the images taken at the scene the previous day would confirm our suspicion that it was indeed a Baird's and not the more expected White-rumped Sandpiper. We did add American Wigeon, Solitary Sandpiper and Greater Yellowlegs to the tour list and saw several parties of up to 30 Pine Siskins fly over. Retracing their steps towards the parking lot, James found a singing Alder Flycatcher; Bob dug out a Wilson's Warbler and had brief view of an unidentified *Coccyzus* cuckoo and I found a female Hooded Warbler. Rather than join the crowds on the boardwalk, we birded the leaf litter strewn perimeter of the marsh finding three Hooded, a Canada and a Mourning Warbler. With the sun coming out and mid-morning warming up, both warbler and tanager numbers were very contrasting today. On the one hand, both American Redstarts and Yellow-rumped Warblers were everywhere; we probably saw 100 of each whilst Northern Parula, Magnolia and Black-throated Blue Warblers were up on previous totals. On the other hand, Nashville, Cape May and Bay-breasted Warblers were far fewer in number. Returning to the parking lot, we saw a crowd of 50 or so birders looking intently into some willows on the beach. The object of their attention was another Kirtland's Warbler, this time a male and much more sedentary and showy than yesterday's bird – two Kirtland's in two days before we'd even got to Michigan was unprecedented for this tour! Midday temperatures reached the around 29°C and we decided to venture further afield for the afternoon. Our planned departure was however, deferred due to an obliging Black-billed Cuckoo perched beside the boardwalk. By 15.00, we found ourselves at Metzger Marsh, a series of reed-fringed lagoons and scrub with a tiny one acre wood by the lake shore. The lagoons yielded a couple of Yellow-headed Blackbirds to two of the group, three Snowy Egrets and a swirling mass of Dunlins and dowitcher sp. but little else. By contrast the wood was leaping. We found a total of 22 species of warbler including four Black-throated Blues and a couple of Canadas. A lot of time, however, was spent chasing down a particularly mobile female Golden-winged Warbler (warbler species number 29 for the trip and number 27 for the day!). Add to the mix our second day-roosting Eastern Whip-poor-will, several Scarlet Tanagers and Ruby-crowned Kinglets together with both Willow Flycatcher and Eastern Wood-pewee and it was a particularly birdy end to our day. Time for another bowl of chilli at our favourite restaurant.

**Day 5** With clear blue skies, bright sunshine and a gentle northwest wind, we decided to drive west, beyond Toledo and spend the morning at Oak Openings Preserve. This is an extensive inland network of oak coppices interspersed by open short weedy fields. In effect it is a remnant of southern woodland in northwest Ohio with a species list to match. Perhaps the most obvious and indeed vocal species within the woodland was Red-headed Woodpecker, whilst out on the grassy fields we found a number of Eastern Bluebirds visiting nest boxes and both Chipping and Lark Sparrows favoured roadside verges. Additional new species for the tour included an adult Broad-winged Hawk, a Wild Turkey which nonchalantly strutted across the road causing the bus to brake sharply, a couple of White-breasted Nuthatches, a pair of Summer Tanagers, a male Indigo Bunting and a distant Eastern Towhee together with several Eastern Meadowlarks. Two species deserved much closer attention. A magnificent Blue-winged Warbler (warbler species number 30) was eventually coaxed in to feed low in a very close willow whilst a Grasshopper Sparrow sat in the middle of a weedy field, singing away with the view only marred by heat haze. If we add into the mix a beautiful adult male Ruby-throated Hummingbird perched and taking in some rays, a couple of Red-bellied Woodpeckers plus a Great-crested Flycatcher and fleeting glimpses of a typically skulking White-eyed Vireo, this really was an excellent and very different morning's birding. We took our lunch in the park's

picnic area, replete with scavenging Racoons, before loading up and heading back east for a final session on the boardwalk. The clear, sunny, almost hot conditions not only led to a clear out of birds but also a clear out of birders. However, our final four hours were best described as quality at the expense of quantity. We still managed to rack up 17 species of warbler including three Canadas, two Wilsons and a Mourning Warbler. We finally caught up with not one, but three Yellow-throated Vireos, yet another roosting Eastern Whip-poor-will and a ludicrously tame Sora feeding in the blackish water, just feet from the boardwalk. During our time birding northwest Ohio, we had endured and enjoyed vastly varying weather conditions and the photographers amongst us went through memory cards at a rapid rate. It had been a huge success and Michigan was still to come. We returned to Port Clinton mid-evening finishing off with a Common Nighthawk “hawking” over the motel.

**Day 6** The main focus of today was the journey to Grayling, our central Michigan base for the remainder of the tour. By contrast this leg had specific target breeding species objectives. We left a breezy but clear and sunny Port Clinton and a couple of hours later we arrived in an extensive area of unkempt weedy fields mixed with deciduous woodland not far from Ann Arbor – prime habitat for our target species for today. By standing patiently and quietly on a field-side track, we spent a magical thirty minutes in the company of three territorial singing Henslow’s Sparrows perched just short of the tops of small weedy snags. In the same area we watched a displaying adult male Bobolink, the only one of the tour, our first Savannah Sparrow and several Sandhill Cranes gliding to and fro in the distance. A few miles away we parked up and walked a narrow trail through the woods. Whilst initially quiet, save for the territorial songs of Ovenbirds, we found a pair of Acadian Flycatchers, which were probably near the northern limits of their range. Further on we came across both Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak – nice enough but our target still eluded us... until we had virtually returned to the vehicle. There in tall, blossoming ash trees, we not only found ourselves looking at our target singing male Cerulean Warbler (warbler species number 31) but almost side-by-side our second, singing Blue-winged Warbler. Time for lunch. The rest of the day was spent steadily driving north in ever cooling temperatures and intermittent drizzle. The countryside changed from open fields and deciduous woodland to conifers and wooded swamp. Spring was only just starting to show with trees just beginning to foliate before we reached our hotel in Grayling, our base for the final three nights of the tour.

**Day 7** A central Michigan dawn – overcast, drizzly and cold. The rain cleared by about 09.00 but it remained cloudy and cool until late afternoon, when the sun finally appeared and it really became very pleasant. OK we had seen two migrant Kirtland’s Warblers “up close and personal” in Ohio, but the opportunity to spend more quality time with one of the rarest warblers in the world was far too good an opportunity to miss. We started our Kirtland’s morning right in the motel by watching a short video presentation given by a representative of the US Fish and Wildlife Service who was also to be our guide into the restricted entry breeding habitat. This outlined the currently extremely healthy status and abundance of the world’s entire breeding population, which is restricted to managed areas of Jack Pines in and around central Michigan. It also highlighted the ongoing threats provided by parasitic Brown-headed Cowbirds and the methods used to minimise them. We then drove in convoy with a number of other visitors, parked up and walked a sandy track within the Huron National Forest where we saw four singing males and heard, probably about 10 others. Kirtland’s are extremely site specific: trees must be of a specific height and density, with small clearings between the clusters of Jack Pine. Within this habitat, we also found an Upland Sandpiper displaying from a bare tree top, a Great Northern Diver (this tour report is loon free) flying over calling, a pair of Brown Thrashers, several singing Nashville Warblers and the first Clay-coloured Sparrow of the tour. After an enchanting couple of hours, we drove east to Mio and spent much of the late morning and afternoon slowly driving the country roads that criss-cross stands of old deciduous woodland and farming fields owned and managed by the Amish communities with roadside Wild Turkeys almost becoming a regular sight. Here we not only found our only Pileated Woodpeckers and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers of the tour but also saw individual Hairy, Downy and Red-bellied Woodpeckers together with several Northern Flickers – a veritable woodpecker party. We parked up to view a remote garden bird feeder which enticed in up to nine Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, whilst the woodland surrounds provided single White-breasted Nuthatch, Great Crested Flycatcher and Pine Warbler. We then walked the quiet country roads through dwarf pines close to Mack Lake. Hermit Thrushes were both vocal and indeed inquisitive giving excellent photographic opportunities. Sadly the same could not be said for the two fly over White-winged Crossbills, identified exclusively by call. For our final birding of the day, we drove back west and then south to walk a boardwalk out into a large lake south of Grayling. This is an extensive area of reeds, sedges and freshwater swamp but with no visible open water. A Sandhill Crane sat tight on her nest watching us warily, several Swamp Sparrows flitted to and fro, a Sedge Wren ‘chattered’ and a Virginia Rail squawked at us from dense cover. Sadly, there was neither sight nor sound of our hoped for Yellow Rail. Nevertheless we had seen some excellent birds through the day, and more importantly saw almost all of them extremely well.

**Day 8** We decided to explore the vast wilderness that is Upper Peninsula Michigan today. We were under no illusion that whilst there were some superb species to be found, this was the boreal zone birding and the target species would be thinly spread. Furthermore, the nearest site was a good two hour drive from the hotel so we could not be in the field at prime birding time. We started off at dawn with a clear sky and an empty highway which allowed us to arrive at the edge of the Hiawatha National Forest shortly after 08.00. It was already shirt-sleeves weather. Our first stop was an abandoned airfield outside the village of Raco hoping to find Sharp-tailed Grouse. We didn't. However, an Upland Sandpiper strutting through the grass and a totally unexpected migrant flock of 15 American Pipits, some in full breeding dress was an unexpected bonus. The remainder of our birding was spent driving and walking the sometimes sandy, sometimes gravelly, farm roads that criss-cross this huge area – and the going was tough. The most fun was had when we stumbled upon a Porcupine beside the road and followed it waddle through the grasses before it chose a tree to climb. Back to birds, we added a most co-operative and vocal Olive-sided Flycatcher to the tour list and had good views of Northern Harrier, several Sandhill Cranes, Eastern Phoebe, Golden-crowned Kinglet and a number of Hermit Thrushes. Huge tracts of forest that we drove through looked absolutely ideal for Spruce Grouse but it was its cousin Ruffed Grouse that became bird of the day when we chanced upon a reddish morph bird which appeared to be picking off roadside insects and remained in view for about a minute before moving into the undergrowth and out of sight. The day had been long but scenic and enjoyable. A conflict between our two nearside wheels and a boggy roadside verge delayed proceedings for an hour or so, but with a clear highway south, we still arrived back in Grayling in good time for a refreshing shower. News that the hotel restaurant and bar were closed on Sunday didn't go down well, but the restaurant next door did us proud for the last group dinner of the tour.

**Day 9** Our final day. Early morning was clear and bright and a nicely warm 24°C, warming up to +30°C later in the day with a strengthening southerly wind. The bottom line was that we had to be at Detroit airport by early evening, a journey of some 200 miles or so, and we had all day to do it in. We just couldn't resist a final look at Kirtland's Warbler and decided to walk the roadside through suitable tracts of Jack Pine in the Huron National Forest. Kirtland's were calling almost continuously and it didn't take us long to find one bird on its song perch together with Nashville Warblers, and both Clay-coloured and Lincoln's Sparrows visible and vocal. We then decided to put some miles behind us and drove south and then east for a second bit of site exploration. The remainder of our birding time was spent at Tawas Point State Park on the shores of Lake Huron, and it was absolutely brilliant. This is a sandy peninsula jutting south into the lake with rolling dunes, stunted willows and pines – classic migrant habitat. Over the course of a couple of hours, between us we found a total of 16 warbler species including at least 25 American Redstarts and both Wilson's and Mourning Warbler, another Philadelphia Vireo together with at least 12 Red-eyed Vireos, half a dozen male Scarlet Tanagers, two male Orchard Orioles and at least 25 Eastern Kingbirds. There was visible overhead passage including small parties of Blue Jays, a tight bunch of 30 Cedar Waxwings, and a single Black Tern spotted by Anne and the only one of the tour. On the water we added both White-winged Scoter and Goosander to our tour list and finally found our only *Accipiter* species, three Sharp-shinned Hawks. After a final tasty but drawn out lunch, all that was left was the three hour drive back to Detroit airport where the group went its various ways to England, Massachusetts and Trinidad. Our sincere thanks and appreciation go to James not only for his excellent tour guiding skills but also his careful driving. It had been a superb nine days and a tremendous advert for tours in the years to come.

*Martyn Kenefick*

*Birdfinders*

[martynkenefick@hotmail.com](mailto:martynkenefick@hotmail.com)