

Birding in Grey-Bruce

Favourite Birding Hotspots

by Dave Fidler

General Description. Grey-Bruce has a great selection of diverse habitats such as forests of upland hardwoods, mixes of coniferous and deciduous bush, lowland forests and swamps, brushy overgrown fields and much good farmland. As well, there are many small inland lakes, an extensive Great Lakes shoreline and some cattail and small sedge marshes.

Time of Year. Late May and early June bring the last of the spring migrants that nest further north such as shorebirds, thrushes and warblers. At the same time, local nesting gets into full swing.

The Birds. The following are some of my favourite birding areas in Grey-Bruce. Don't forget to take along some insect repellent or a mosquito headnet for protection from biting insects. The earlier you get out in the morning, the more successful you will be at finding birds.

1. *The Glen*

Take Grey Road 1 north from Owen Sound, turn west (left) just south of Owen Sound Golf Course onto Grey Road 17 and continue for 6.5 km. The entrance to *The Glen* is clearly indicated by a sign and a yellow metal gate. Park here and walk into the area on a well-marked trail. *The Glen* is a 656 hectare property owned by Grey-Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA). This is a beautiful area for a walk through mixed hardwoods and some conifers leading to open fields, brushy overgrown fields and a flooded swamp. At the swamp, there is a control dam that was installed as a cooperative effort between GSCA and Ducks Unlimited. This structure assists in controlling water levels to enhance waterfowl reproduction. Changing the water levels in a swamp or marsh regenerates the vegetation and enriches the habitat for ducks and other wetland birds.

Species in *The Glen* include: Great Blue Heron, Green Heron, Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Hooded Merganser, Turkey Vulture, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-

tailed Hawk, Ruffed Grouse, Sora, Spotted Sandpiper, Black-billed Cuckoo, Great Horned Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood Peewee, Least Flycatcher, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, Tree Swallow, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, House Wren, Winter Wren, Eastern Bluebird, Veery, Wood Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Warbling Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Mourning Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle, Brown-headed Cowbird, Baltimore Oriole and American Goldfinch.

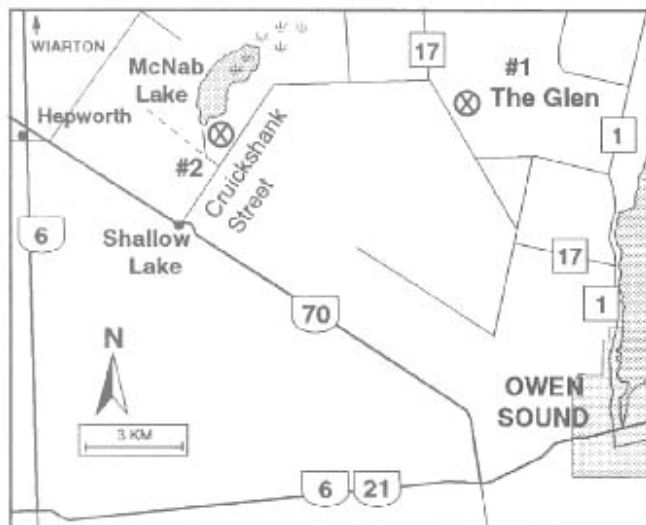
2. *McNab Lake*

Take Highway 70 to Shallow Lake, turn northeast on Cruickshank Street (the road to Francis Lake) for 1.9 km. *McNab Lake* is a 462 hectare property owned by Grey-Sauble Conservation Authority and is one of my favourites for migrants and nesting species. The road into this area, which I suggest you walk, proceeds for about 250 to 300 metres to a fork in the road. The right fork takes you to the lake where you may launch a canoe. Straight ahead from the fork is an area for forest and forest fringe birds. The habitats of *McNab Lake* are varied with some mature and second growth hardwoods, many conifer plantations, flooded treed swamps and white cedar bush. Near the easterly end of the lake is a wonderful high ridge of hardwoods with a flooded swamp on one side and a treed slope to the lake on the other side. The lake itself is relatively open at the westerly end and has extensive cattails and sedges in the easterly end. This trail leads you to the west end of the lake. Certainly the best way to explore *McNab Lake* is by canoe.

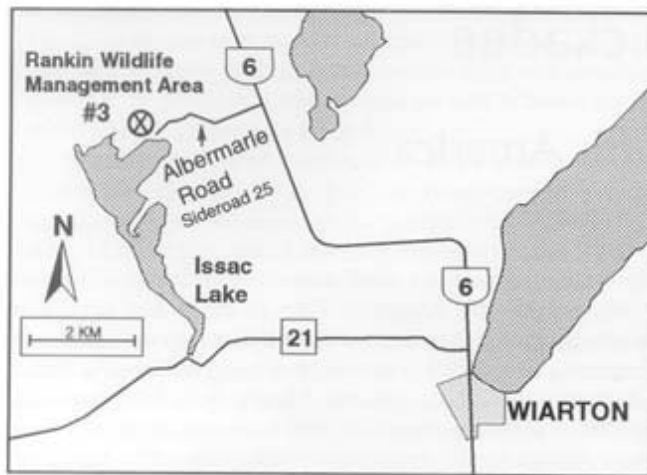
All the species listed for *The Glen* can be found at *McNab Lake*, with a number of significant additions: Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Least Bittern, Osprey, Broad-winged Hawk, Virginia Rail, Common Moorhen, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Black Tern, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Marsh Wren, Nashville Warbler and Northern Waterthrush. *McNab Lake* is one of the best places in Grey-Bruce to hear the loud rolling hollow rattle call of the Sandhill Crane, and if you are very lucky, you may see one!

3. *Runkin Wildlife Management Area (RWMA)*

Take Highway 6 north for 9.5 km from the traffic light in Wiaraton. Turn west on Albermarle Sideroad 25 for 1.2 km. This 165 hectare parcel of land is owned by the Ministry of Natural Resources. On the north side of the road is a sedge marsh with scattered willow and on the south side is a mix of sedge, cattail marsh and flooded swamp bordering Isaac Lake. As you continue along the road past the buildings you find a brushy sidehill leading to open fields and the boat launch for Isaac Lake. This



Map by Michael King



Map by Michael King

is part of an extensive wetland surrounded by open fields and consequently birds can be found that we have not encountered at the previous locations. Species that you will probably add to your list are American Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Northern Harrier, Common Snipe, Eastern Phoebe, Cliff Swallow, Barn Swallow, Sedge Wren, Savannah Sparrow, Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark.

4. Ferndale Flats



Map by Michael King

Birders are always keen to see Brewer's Blackbirds in Ontario. They breed in several locations on the Bruce, but are most easily found right beside Highway 6 north of Wiarton, about 1.4 to 2.8 km south of the Ferndale crossroad. In this area there are 15 to 20 pairs and they are easily spotted as they fly up beside the road to sit on fence wires or overhead hydro wires.

Brewer's are distinguished from Red-winged Blackbirds by their posture, which appears much more erect, and Brewer's give the appearance of having longer legs.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Andrew Jano of the Ministry of Natural Resources for providing map information.

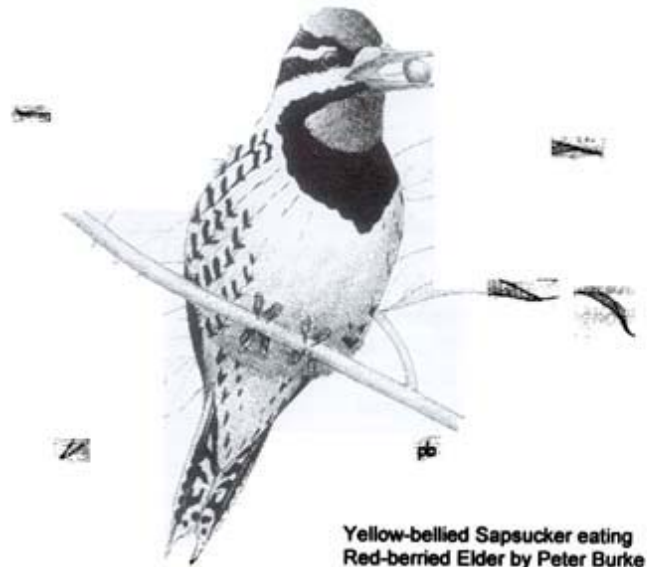
Taverner Cup

World Series Champion Bruce Di Labio and his team of Jim Harris, Chris Traynor and driver Dan Pierson won the first Taverner Cup with 180 species on 24 May 1997. Bruce says the key to winning is having the best route and a designated driver. Their route was Ottawa, Algonquin, Presqu'ile, Chaffey's Locks and back to Ottawa. Runner-up team with 176 species was Mike Runtz, Doug McRae, Peter Burke, Colin Jones and their designated driver. Teams from all over Ontario are expected to participate in next year's second Taverner Cup.

Elderberry Birds

by Ron Pittaway

When the fruit of the Red-berried Elder (*Sambucus racemosa* ssp. *pubens*) ripens in mid-July, there's no better place to observe shy woodland birds. For instance, on 14 July 1996, Jean Iron and I birded Mount Madawaska in the Ottawa Valley west of Renfrew. A good road goes to the top where there is a communication tower and interesting sideroads to explore. This quiet landscape with its interspersed of mixed forest, scrub and openings is superb for songbirds. Between the openings, clumps of Red-berried Elder in fruit were loaded with birds. In addition to Cedar Waxwings and American Robins, which we normally associate as fruit eaters, we saw Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Gray Catbird, Eastern Kingbird, Red-eyed Vireo, White-throated Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Veery, Hermit Thrush and even a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker all eating the juicy red berries. There seemed to be a sense of panic among birds as if they were saying "get them while they last".



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker eating Red-berried Elder by Peter Burke

Seeing kingbirds and tanagers eating berries seems surprising because we usually think of them as insect eaters, but in fact they are mainly fruit eaters during the winter while in the tropics.

Red-berried Elder is one of the few native shrubs with ripe fruit for birds in mid-summer. It is identified by its opposite, compound leaves (each leaf usually with five leaflets) and cone-shaped clusters of small red berries. Broken stems show a brown pith. It is locally common along roadsides and forest openings in southern Ontario, cottage country and Algonquin Park, becoming infrequent in northern Ontario.

In late August and September, also watch for Common Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*). Its fruit is prized by 43 species of birds according to the Peterson's guide to trees and shrubs. It is identified by its opposite, compound leaves (each leaf usually with seven leaflets). Broken stems show a white pith. The berries are purplish black in flat topped or slightly rounded clusters. It grows in open wet edges of creeks and meadows of southern Ontario north to Lake Nipissing.

If you find patches of elderberries this summer, stake them out, you'll see lots of birds.

