

Favourite Birding Hotspots

Minesing Swamp

Dave Milsom

Minesing Swamp is located just east of the town of Angus, west of Barrie, and south of Georgian Bay. It is concentrated on the Nottawasaga River and its valley, including the Mad River and many other tributaries. The swamp comprises 6,000 hectares of wetlands and is classed as a Provincially Significant Wetland, an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI), and has been designated as an internationally significant Ramsar site. The swamp plays a vital role in the control of flooding each spring. Swamps, marshes and fens are all found within its borders. Minesing Swamp contains major peat deposits.

Minesing Swamp resulted from the last Ice Age, subsequent flooding, erosion and the deposition of sediments. During the War of 1812, the swamp and Nottawasaga River formed an important supply route for the British to Fort Michilimackinac on Lake Huron.

Birding Season

One of the best times for birders to visit the swamp is early spring when the Nottawasaga River floods and the resulting vast wetlands harbour thousands of waterfowl.

Much of the great birding occurs in late spring and summer when mosquitoes are prevalent and a canoe is required to penetrate the interior of the swamp. A compass is necessary if traveling into the interior.

Late spring finds the receding waters suitable for migrating shorebirds, waterbirds and herons. Migrating warblers and other passerines can be found in the woodlands. Many species arrive in May to breed in the area. In fall, the swamp forests provide temporary food and shelter for migrants heading south.

The Birds

Minesing Swamp is noted for its waterbirds and for the birds of its adjacent Carolinian and boreal forest habitats. 221 species of birds have been recorded. 135 species breed within Minesing Swamp. There are 23 species of mammals, 30 species of fish, several amphibians and reptiles and over 400 species of plants, including many orchids. The Great Blue Heron colony in the heart of the swamp is the oldest heronry in Ontario and contained about 170 nests in 2002.

Birds expected in early spring include Great Blue Heron, Mallard, Wood Duck, Black Duck, Northern Shoveler, American Wigeon, Ring-necked Duck, Blue-winged and Green-winged Teals, hundreds of Northern



Northern Pintail by Brenda Carter

Pintail, Canada Geese, Tundra Swan, Pied-billed Grebe, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Wilson's Snipe, Killdeer, Rusty and Red-winged Blackbirds, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Winter Wren, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed Hawk, Bald Eagle and American Kestrel. In the spring of 2002, an OFO group discovered a pair of territorial Barred Owls.

Some of the more uncommon Carolinian species of Minesing, which are generally uncommon north of Lakes Erie and Ontario, include Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-winged, Golden-winged and Cerulean Warblers. Prothonotary Warbler formerly bred, as did the Loggerhead Shrike.

Northern birds nesting in Minesing include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Golden-crowned and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Black-billed and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Whip-poor-will, Sedge Wren, Pileated Woodpecker, Purple Finch, Eastern Screech-Owl, Short-eared and Great Horned Owl, and Yellow-rumped and Magnolia Warblers. A recent colonizer of the swamp, breeding in increasing numbers, is the Wild Turkey. Ruffed Grouse is the traditional breeding gallinaceous bird.

In winter, birds possibly found in Minesing Swamp are Great Gray, Snowy, Northern Hawk and Barred Owls, Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers, Pine and Evening Grosbeaks, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings and Pine Siskins.

Many mammals inhabit the swamp, including White-tailed Deer, Raccoon, Muskrat, Beaver, River Otter, Mink and Eastern Cottontail Rabbit.

Birding Tour

See map. Much of Minesing Swamp is inaccessible without a canoe. To access the swamp by car the following route is recommended. Trails are available at each stop.

From the main street in Angus, proceed east towards Barrie about 1 km on Simcoe County Road 90. Turn left heading north on Essa Township's McKinnon Road, which after 1 km becomes a dirt road. Check the fields to the west (left) for shorebirds and ducks. Go a further 0.7 km and look for an open body of water to the west (left) next to the road. Check this and all the area north of here to Sunnidale Concession 2, which is 3 km from County Road 90. All this area can be very productive even until June if water persists. This occurred in 1998 when two Glossy Ibises spent a week in the area.

Continue north on McKinnon Road as far as you can go, usually only 0.6 km, to the gated entrance to the Minesing Reserve. This section of road is often impassable in spring due to flooding. The house closest to the reserve, #9605, usually has productive bird feeders by the laneway.

Now retrace your route back to Sunnidale Concession 2. Turn right and drive slowly west 0.7 km until reaching the bridge over the Mad River. On both sides of the road along this stretch, birds should be numerous. The fields west of the bridge are good for birds when wet but are usually dry.

At the Mad River, turn around and drive back down McKinnon to County Road 90. Turn left (east) towards Barrie. After 4.4 km, just past an Olco gas station, turn left (north) onto Sunnidale Road. Stay on Sunnidale Road 1.1 km until reaching Baldwick Lane. Go north here until it ends after 2 km. All along here check woodlots, farms, barns and rough fields for Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Meadowlark and other blackbirds. At the dead end, proceed on foot along a well marked path into the swamp. Wear waterproof footwear. Breeding birds here include Brown Thrasher, Pine, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Black-throated Green and Magnolia Warblers, Red-eyed Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Pileated Woodpecker and Ruffed Grouse.

Returning south to the Sunnidale intersection, turn left (east) and continue 1.5 km until reaching Pine Grove Road in Grenfell. At this point turn left (north).

After passing through good Wild Turkey habitat and crossing the North Simcoe Rail Trail, at about 2.6 km you reach the Ganaraska Hiking Trail on the left side of the road. This is really just an extension of the rail trail, which is signposted on the opposite side of the road. A 100 metre walk along the Ganaraska Trail brings you to a magnificent overlook of the entire Minesing Swamp. Continuing further on this trail brings you into a forested area and to Fort Willow and an 1812 supply depot.

Continuing north on Pine Grove, you reach the Old



Map by Andrew Jano

Orchard sign 1 km from the Ganaraska Trail. Turn left here past Fort Willow until reaching George Johnston Road after 2.5 km. Ignore the Portage/Grenfell sign part way down this section. You have been traveling along Portage Trail up to the George Johnston Road, formerly #28. Now head north again by making a left turn. At 1.1 km stop at the North Simcoe Rail Trail again. Walk west for 1 or 2 km to find Golden-winged, Black-and-white, Blackburnian, Magnolia, Common Yellowthroat and Yellow-rumped Warblers in spring and summer, as well as amphibians, reptiles, butterflies and dragonflies. Then drive north a further 1.4 km to a parking lot on the west side for canoe access to the swamp. There is a trail leading west here that can be productive, as can scanning the adjacent fields for geese and shorebirds.

Continuing north on County Road 28 to the village of Minesing, turn left (west) on Ronald Road a further 2.9 km from the car park. Drive 2.8 km to a walking trail heading west at the corner of South Glengarry Landing Road and Ronald. Walk the trail west until reaching open water and meadows. Blue-gray Gnatcatchers breed here in the forested area. Waterbirds abound in springtime.

The above locations are the best access points for birders to the Minesing Swamp by car. March to July are the best months to visit. I hope to see you out birding at Minesing Swamp.