

# Favourite Birding Hotspot

## Mizzy Lake Trail in Algonquin Provincial Park

Ron Tozer

Algonquin Provincial Park is famous for its diversity of breeding warblers and boreal birds, which occur because of the park's higher elevation (typically 200 metres above the surrounding country) and mix of southern broad-leaved hardwood and northern coniferous forests. The Park is a vast tract of forests and lakes covering 7,725 square kilometres, situated between Georgian Bay and the Ottawa River, about 250 km north of Toronto. Algonquin is most easily visited by birders via the Highway 60 Corridor, and one of the very best places to see birds there is the Mizzy Lake Trail.

The Wolf Howl Pond to West Rose Lake section of this trail has long been known to park naturalists as the "Golden Mile" for boreal birds and mammals. It is one of the most accessible and regularly successful locations for birders seeking Algonquin's northern specialties: Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpecker, Gray Jay, Common Raven and Boreal Chickadee. The area is rich in breeding warblers and other "sought after" birds as well, especially during May and June.

The Mizzy Lake Trail is an 11 km loop which starts at the junction of the Arowhon Road and Highway 60, 15.4 km from the park's West Gate (see map). Brown signs with yellow letters mark each kilometre of the Highway 60 Corridor through Algonquin Park, from the West Gate (km 0) to the East Gate (km 56). The trail visits nine small lakes and ponds, and its theme is "Wildlife in Algonquin". No dogs are allowed on this trail because of their potential to disturb both wildlife and hikers. The Mizzy Lake Trail guide booklet (always available at the park gates, and at the trail entrance from April to October) suggests about six hours to do the trail, but birders can avoid this long walk and access the best section for northern species via the Arowhon Road and an old railway bed. This site guide will describe five good birding areas associated with Mizzy Lake Trail.

These sites can be productive at any time of the year, but birders are encouraged to purchase a copy of the Checklist and Seasonal Status of the Birds of Algonquin Provincial Park (\$1.50), which includes the relative abundance and a bar graph denoting dates of occurrence of each species found in Algonquin, to determine which birds are likely to be present at the time of your visit. This booklet and other publications are sold at the park gates, and can be ordered by mail (see below).

### Arowhon Road

Set your vehicle's trip odometer to zero at the junction of the Arowhon Road and Highway 60, since locations mentioned in this site guide will be described in distances from this point. The Mizzy Lake Trail parking lot features the only washroom facilities on this entire route, so you may wish to take advantage of this opportunity. As you drive north on this narrow, winding and often rough gravel road with blind curves and hills, be alert to oncoming traffic. From spring through fall, this road provides access to three children's camps, a large lodge, and several leaseholds, so it can be busy. Pull well off to the side to park,

and stop only in areas with a clear view in both directions.

The Arowhon Road passes through mixed forests of spruce, balsam fir, poplar and white birch, as well as sections of sugar maple, yellow birch, beech and eastern hemlock. Have the windows down as you drive along in spring and early summer, and listen for Blue-headed and Red-eyed Vireos, and warblers such as Northern Parula, American Redstart, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped and Canada. The hardwoods are home to Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Least Flycatcher, Brown Creeper, Scarlet Tanager, Ovenbird and Black-throated Blue Warbler, with Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers in the patches of hemlock.

At km 2.5, the road passes by March Hare Lake (on the right). Stop carefully there and scan the lake quickly for possible Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe (rare in Algonquin) and Hooded Merganser. The road crosses Sims Creek at km 3.8. Watch for American Black Duck and Common Merganser there. Look and listen for Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee and Common Raven. The Arowhon Road curves to the right at km 4.1 as it passes through Sims Pit, which was a source of sand for constructing the nearby Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway through the southern portion of Algonquin Park from 1894 to 1896. Watch for Gray Jay, Boreal Chickadee and red fox (often an active den with young) there.

Arowhon Road meets the old railway line at a point 4.8 km from Highway 60. Turn right and drive eastward on the railway bed (the rails were removed in 1959) for 0.6 km to a chain gate. Park there without blocking access through the locked gate; there is space for several vehicles. Walk past the gate and along the railway bed for about 20 minutes (1.5 km) to reach Wolf Howl Pond near Post #7 on the Mizzy Lake Trail. (Numbered posts along the trail are keyed to interpretive sections in the trail guide booklet.) In addition to looking for the numerous birds along the way, including all of the "northern specialties", watch for the tracks and scats of moose, deer, bear, fox, and wolves that regularly follow this travel corridor as well.

### Wolf Howl Pond

The railway bed passes through a long, narrow rock cut just before reaching Wolf Howl Pond, named in the early 1970s when the boggy meadow bordering the northwest end of the pond was used by a pack of wolves for several summers. The water level in this bog pond has been raised by beaver dams, creating a classic "doughnut bog" formation (a central pond surrounded by a floating bog mat ring, with open water again around the outside). Watch for Wood Duck, Ring-necked Duck and Hooded Merganser on the pond. Olive-sided Flycatcher, Alder Flycatcher, Boreal Chickadee, White-throated Sparrow and Lincoln's Sparrow nest here, and all are more likely to be heard before they are seen. Particularly in the case of Boreal Chickadee, you will need to know the wheezy, nasal *chick-che-day* call in order to locate these inconspicuous birds.

Gray Jays, each marked with a unique combination of

coloured plastic bands and a standard aluminum band, readily come to the hand to be fed in this area. The birds are part of Dan Strickland's life history study of this species which has gone on for over 30 years in Algonquin Park.

Spruce Grouse regularly come to the railway bed near Wolf Howl Pond in search of grit and to display. Look and listen for these often hard-to-find birds just before the long rock cut, and around the tamaracks beyond Post #6. In the fall, tamarack needles are eaten by these grouse as a "transition food" during the switch from a summer diet of ground vegetation and fruit to the conifer needles of winter, and the weight and length of their gastrointestinal tract increase in the process. Playing a tape of the female's "aggressive calls" in spring or fall will often elicit a vocal response from females and "flutter flight" displays from males, which enhances your chances of locating them. Tape playing should be limited to the minimum necessary to find the birds.

On sunny days from spring through fall, you should see lots of basking Painted Turtles at Wolf Howl Pond, most of which have numbers painted on their shells for ease in recognizing individuals. These turtles are part of a long-term study by Dr. Ron Brooks and his students at the University of Guelph. Otter, moose and beaver are also frequently seen at Wolf Howl Pond.

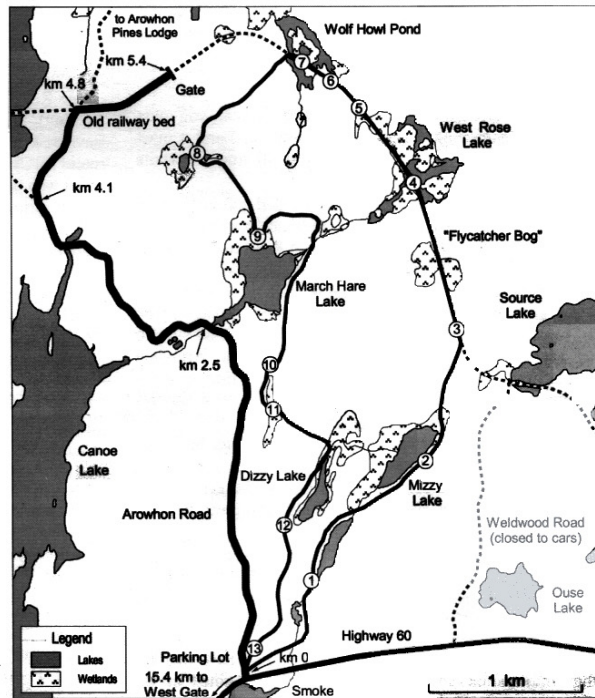
#### West Rose Lake

Another 15 minute (1 km) walk along the railway through mixed forest will bring you to West Rose Lake, an even larger boggy wetland. American Bittern, American Black Duck, Mallard (a scarce breeder in Algonquin), and Common Merganser are regular there. Listen for Common Yellowthroat, Swamp Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow in the sedge bog habitat. The latter species must have nested in sites like this before fields became common in southern Ontario. Black-backed Woodpecker and Tree Swallow nest regularly in the live and dead trees bordering the railway bed, the woodpeckers excavating their own cavities and the swallows utilizing them in later years. Yellow Warblers (an uncommon bird in Algonquin Park) may be heard from the brushy border of the lake. Rusty Blackbird (a formerly regular breeder in Algonquin that may be declining in the Park) is often present here in migration.

#### "Flycatcher Bog"

Continue eastward along the railway bed for another 10 minutes (0.5 km) to reach a section bordered by thick alders, black spruce, tamarack and white cedar, which I call "Flycatcher Bog". Watch for Spruce Grouse as you walk toward this area, as they are frequently seen between West Rose Lake and Flycatcher Bog. When you reach the bog, listen carefully for the distinctive *chelek* song or *per-wee* call of the Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, which is a regular breeder there (nesting on the ground in the sphagnum moss) although often difficult to see in the thick cover. Alder Flycatcher and Olive-sided Flycatcher are regular there as well, making the site one of my favourites for

Mizzy Lake Trail - at km 15.4 on Highway 60 in Algonquin Provincial Park



Map by Andrew Jano

Algonquin flycatchers. You may hear Winter Wren, Swainson's Thrush, Hermit Thrush, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, and Black-and-white Warbler, too.

Once you have enjoyed the birds of Flycatcher Bog, it is time to reverse direction and walk back to the locked gate and your parked vehicle. Don't worry if you have yet to observe all of Algonquin's northern birds; the return trip along the railway bed will give you another chance!

#### Weldwood Road and Ouse Lake

After driving back down the Arowhon Road to Highway 60, you may wish to turn left (east) and travel about 1.3 kilometres on the highway up the Smoke Lake hill to the unmarked Weldwood Road on your left, at km 16.7. This is an old logging road which is now closed and gated near its entrance. However, there is space to park a couple of vehicles in front of the gate, and you can walk along the old road through mature hardwood forest. This area has Pileated Woodpecker, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Scarlet Tanager.

A short portage trail off the Weldwood Road leads down to picturesque Ouse Lake, with its resident pair of Common Loons that usually nest on the island. Listen for Winter Wren, Common Yellowthroat and Song Sparrow singing from the

lake's tangled shoreline. The Weldwood Road area can be productive after dark for Northern Saw-whet Owl and Barred Owl, both of which may respond to your vocal imitations or taped calls.

#### Accessibility

When visiting Algonquin Park at any time of the year, you must have a permit (camping, daily, seasonal, or annual) and it must be displayed on your vehicle dashboard at all times. Permits may be purchased at the gates.

The Arowhon Road is normally open and passable from May to November. During winter, the entrance road for Taylor Statten Camps at km 3.3 along the Arowhon Road may mark the limit of plowed access, requiring the use of snowshoes or cross-country skis beyond that point. Do not block access if you park there in winter. In March and April, the Arowhon Road may be closed to public travel due to deterioration of the road surface during spring thaw. This winter (2000/2001), the Arowhon Road is being utilized for log hauling for the first time in many years; extreme caution is required if you intend to share this road with these huge trucks.

Visitors to Algonquin Park from late May through June may encounter swarms of mosquitoes and blackflies on some days, but repellants and light-coloured clothing can be effective in diminishing their impact. Avoid wearing blue and green apparel, which tends to attract blackflies.

Accommodation and food are available all year at various locations along both the eastern (Bancroft and Whitney) and western (Huntsville and Dwight) approaches to Algonquin Park, as is camping in the Park's Highway 60 Corridor.

#### Further Information

Further information about the park can be obtained at the official Algonquin Park web site <<http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca>>. Publications may be purchased at the park gates and bookstores, or ordered from The Friends of Algonquin Park, Box 248, Whitney, Ontario, K0J 2M0. Current birding information is available from park naturalists at the Algonquin Visitor Centre, located at km 43 on Highway 60 and open all year (weekends only during winter), or by phoning 613-637-2828 during business hours.

#### Acknowledgements

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## 2001 Breeding Bird Atlas

Mike Cadman

Nesting is already underway in a few select species (at least some Rock Doves and White-winged Crossbills at the time of writing), and squares are filling up. So, if you aren't already involved in the Atlas, it's time to contact your Regional Coordinator (RC) and start your preparations. RCs are listed on the atlas web page (<http://www.birdsontario.org>).

A series of atlasing workshops is planned for the coming months. The workshops will explain more about the project and provide training in collecting breeding evidence, song identification, doing point counts, entering and summarizing data on the web, and using GPS units. Hope you can make it to the workshop in your area.

For more information on the workshops (locations, directions, etc), check out the Atlas web page <http://www.birdsontario.org/atlas/atlasmain.html> or contact the Atlas office at 519-826-2092.

February 26, 7 pm, **Thunder Bay**, Lunan Hall, St. Paul's United Church, 349 Waverly St., Contact: Nick Escott, tel: 807-345-7122, e-mail: [escott@norlink.net](mailto:escott@norlink.net)

February 27, 7-9 pm, **Kenora**, Contact: Leo Heyens, tel: 807-345-7122, e-mail: [leo.heyens@mnr.gov.on.ca](mailto:leo.heyens@mnr.gov.on.ca)

March 6, 7:30-9:30 pm **Sault Ste. Marie**, Great Lakes Forestry Centre, Room A103, Contact: Chris Sanders, tel: 705-759-6216, e-mail: [csanders@NRCan.gc.ca](mailto:csanders@NRCan.gc.ca)

March 8, 7-9 pm, **Sudbury**, Contact: Charlie Whitelaw, tel: 705-969-4797, e-mail: [c.whitelaw@sympatico.ca](mailto:c.whitelaw@sympatico.ca)

March 9, 7-9 pm, **North Bay**, Contact: Dick Tafel, tel: 705-472-7907, e-mail: [rtafel@sympatico.ca](mailto:rtafel@sympatico.ca)

March 25, 10 am-3 pm, **Owen Sound**, Contact: Cindy Cartwright, tel: 519-389-2585, e-mail: [pom@bmts.com](mailto:pom@bmts.com)

April 7, 1-4 pm, **Hamilton**, Contact: Wolfgang Luft, tel: 905-681-2276, e-mail: [rprice@icom.ca](mailto:rprice@icom.ca)

April 8, 1-4 pm, **London**, Longwoods Conservation Area, Contact: Dave Martin, tel: 519-269-3262, E-mail: [dave.martin@odyssey.on.ca](mailto:dave.martin@odyssey.on.ca)

April 14, 1-4 pm, **Toronto**, Kortright Centre, Contact Nicole Kopysh, tel: 519-826-2092, e-mail: [Nicole.Kopysh@ec.gc.ca](mailto:Nicole.Kopysh@ec.gc.ca)

April 22, 1-4 pm, **Ottawa**, Fletcher Wildlife Garden, Prince of Wales Drive, Contact: Christine Hanrahan, tel: 613-798-1620, e-mail: [vanessa@magma.ca](mailto:vanessa@magma.ca)

April 28, **Midland**, Wye Marsh Wildlife Centre, Contact: Bob Bowles, tel: 705-325-3149, Email: [bowles@bconnex.net](mailto:bowles@bconnex.net)

April 29, 1-4 pm, **Presqu'île Provincial Park**, Contact: Margaret Bain, tel: 905-373-1202, e-mail: [mjcbain@sympatico.ca](mailto:mjcbain@sympatico.ca)

2001

### OFO Annual General Meeting Point Pelee National Park 29 and 30 September 2001

Mark your calendars now to enjoy this great weekend of fall birding. Experienced OFO birders will lead field trips and focus on bird identification. Join Gavin and Ian Platt, Paul Pratt, Pete Read, Ron Tozer and Alan Wormington to explore Point Pelee and nearby hotspots.

We will come together on Saturday evening at the Leamington Dock Restaurant for a banquet and special presentation on *Hawk Migration and Hawk Identification* by Allen Chartier. The program includes the OFO Distinguished Ornithologist Award and *Birds of the Gulf of Mexico* by Alan Wormington.