

# Favourite Birding Hotspots

## Ojibway Prairie

Paul Pratt

**General Description.** A visit to the Ojibway Prairie Complex in the southwestern corner of Windsor can add several species otherwise missed at Point Pelee. In addition, the tallgrass prairie and oak savanna communities provide an opportunity to view wildflowers, butterflies and other wildlife seldom encountered elsewhere in Ontario.

The Complex is made up of three municipal parks, a provincial nature reserve and private lands totalling over 350 hectares. Walking and bicycle trails wind through tallgrass prairie, savanna and oak woodland which support common nesting species such as Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Carolina Wren, Ring-necked Pheasant and Indigo Bunting. The area is also an excellent migrant trap for birds in both spring and fall. Some outstanding rarities of past years include Lewis's Woodpecker, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron and Dickcissel. 238 species have been recorded in the area.

### 1. Ojibway Nature Centre, Ojibway Park

From E.C. Row Expressway (Highway 2) take Matchette Road south one kilometre to the park. Most visitors visit here before exploring other regions of the Complex. Windsor's Department of Parks & Recreation operates the Ojibway Nature Centre which is open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. year-round (free admission). Information on recent bird sightings, checklists and trails are available from the naturalist staff. The Nature Centre feeders attract titmice, chickadees, nuthatches, cardinals, goldfinches and jays year round. A large picture window overlooking the feeder area provides easy viewing during inclement weather.

This 66 hectare park supports exceptional wet Pin Oak and dry Black Oak forests. The park attracts many migrants and species such as Eastern Screech-Owl, Tufted Titmouse, Red-bellied Woodpecker and Carolina Wren are common residents.

The Centre web site: <http://www.city.windsor.on.ca/ojibway/> includes a bird checklist, field trip and Christmas Bird Count reports, maps, birder's guide to Essex County, local rare bird alerts and a latest sightings page.

### 2. Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve

The provincial nature reserve is located on the east side of Matchette Road opposite Ojibway Park. The Nature Centre parking lots serves both properties. Over 105 hectares of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, scrub and woodland are accessible by several walking trails. While the wildflower show is best in late July or August, nesting birds are more easily found in spring. Cooper's Hawk, American Kestrel, Ring-necked Pheasant, American Woodcock, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Eastern Bluebird, Orchard Oriole, Indigo Bunting and occasionally Red-headed Woodpecker can be found in the reserve. Usually at least one pair of Yellow-breasted Chats can be found by searching thickets and bramble patches.

### 3. Black Oak Heritage Park

This municipal park is located one kilometre west of Ojibway Park off Broadway Street. A two kilometre trail begins at Broadway Park playground and winds through the northern half of the park. This undeveloped 52 hectare parkland supports one

of the finest Black Oak-Pignut Hickory savannas in Ontario. Woodland nesting species can be hard to find in Essex County but this park is a good spot for birds such as Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak. Adjacent to the park are several weedy agricultural fields, which are good for migrant sparrows, finches and warblers.

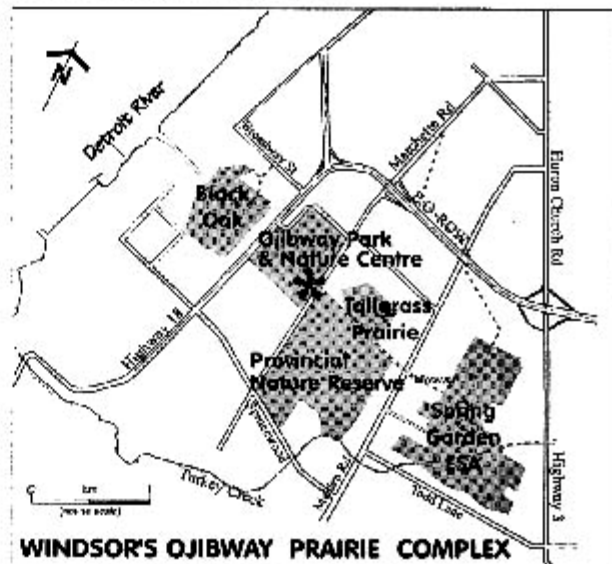
### 4. Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park

This 18 hectare municipal park is located on the north side of the nature reserve along the Titcombe road allowance. A series of picturesque ponds attract species such as Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Warbling Vireo and Baltimore Oriole. This is also a good spot for warblers in migration.

### 5. Spring Garden Road Prairie Environmentally Significant Area

150 hectares of undeveloped private and public land are located south of Spring Garden Road between Highway 3 (Huron Church Road) and Malden Road. The Windsor Bikeway winds through the area providing convenient access to patches of woodland, savanna and prairie glades. Here is the last holdout for Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake in extreme southwestern Ontario and one of the richest sites for butterflies anywhere in Canada. An old settling pond on the site typically has Great Egrets and other marsh birds. White-eyed Vireo and Blue-winged Warbler have nested here in recent years.

In spring and fall, these parks function as migrant traps for many birds, islands of habitat in an otherwise poor environment for food and shelter. In the early morning hours, warblers, thrushes and other migrants can often be seen flying into Ojibway from neighbouring residential areas. Grounding of migrants, especially during periods of bad weather can produce impressive concentrations of birds in these parks, up to twelve species of warblers in a single Choke Cherry!



Paul Pratt has been the naturalist for the City of Windsor for the past 20 years and an active birder for 30 years.