

Favourite Birding Hotspots

Canoe Lake Road and Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road Near Kingston

Bruce Di Labio and Paul Mackenzie

The Sites

This guide describes two popular birding roads in eastern Ontario, both of which are north of Kingston and south of Highway 7. About 20 km north of Kingston, flat farmland gives way to a myriad of small lakes, mixed forest and rocky ridges typical of the Precambrian or Canadian Shield. Bird diversity is high, and most Bird Atlas blocks record well over 100 breeding species. Frontenac Provincial Park is a good example of habitat associated with this area. Many of the breeding species can be located along either Canoe Lake Road or Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road, despite increasing cottage development on many of the lakes and "road improvements" which have reduced roadside canopy.

The routes can be visited as early as mid-May, but late May to mid-June is the peak time to locate singing birds. Both roads are easily accessible. We will describe the Bedford/Canoe Lake Road from south to north, and the Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road from east to west.

The Birds

This area is characterized by the meeting of northern forest and Carolinian forest species. Both Northern and Louisiana Waterthrushes can be found here. Three-toed Woodpeckers bred in 1984, while Red-bellied Woodpeckers are permanent residents along Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road. Some of the highest densities in Ontario of breeding Yellow-throated Vireos, Golden-winged Warblers and Cerulean Warblers are found here.

Noteworthy breeding species to seek along these roads include: Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Northern Goshawk, Red-shouldered Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk, Black-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Barred Owl, Whip-poor-will, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Pileated Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Common Raven, Carolina Wren (rare), Winter Wren, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Bluebird, Blue-winged Warbler (rare), Golden-winged Warbler, Black-throated Blue Warbler (scarce), Pine Warbler, Prairie Warbler (local), Cerulean Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Louisiana Waterthrush (rare), Mourning Warbler (scarce), Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Towhee and Indigo Bunting.

Many species are common along these roads in suitable habitat. No specific directions are needed for Least and Great Crested Flycatchers, Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Wood Thrush, Gray Catbird, Yellow Warbler, American Redstart, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, Indigo Bunting, Eastern Towhee, and Chipping, Field, Song, Swamp and White-throated Sparrows.

Bedford Road and Canoe Lake Road

Exit from Highway 401 (Exit 613) in Kingston at Sydenham Road (County Road 9) and proceed north to the T-junction at County Road 5 (16.3 km). Turn left (west) to Sydenham (1.7 km) then right at Wheatly Street which is signposted toward Kingston Ski Hills. Wheatly Street stops in 0.5 km at George Street, where a right turn leads over a small bridge to Bedford Road (County Road 19). Set the car odometer at 0.0 at this bridge. Keep right on Bedford Road which bears northeast through some fields (2.5 to 4.0 km) that have Eastern Meadowlark, Savannah and Vesper Sparrows and go past the tiny Kingston Ski Hill (4.3 km).

Here the geology and habitat suddenly change. It is worth a look and a listen at the bottom of the hill (4.8 km) where there is a pond on the right. The road continues through cottage country until Salmon Lake Road exits to the right to Frontenac Park (km 11.1) just past the obvious Frontenac Outfitters (Canoes and Kayaks). Continue straight on Bedford Road, stopping at a gate marked #6900 where the hemlock grove is home to Red-breasted Nuthatches, Brown Creepers and Winter Wrens.

Bedford Road next passes through the Helen Quilliam Sanctuary, a property of the Kingston Field Naturalists. The unmarked Greenwood Trail entry past the sanctuary sign on the left (km 13.2) is an area for Cerulean Warbler and Veery. Stop at the bridge at Otter Lake (km 13.9) or just beyond the bridge at an old gravel pit where one may park. There are American Bittern and Pied-billed Grebe in the marsh left of the bridge. Watch for Red-shouldered Hawks, Ospreys and Northern Goshawks. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Indigo Buntings frequent the gravel pit area. The wooded ridge on the left just past the gravel pit may have Yellow-billed Cuckoos and Yellow-throated Vireos.

Next, check a beaver pond on the left (km 15.0) where Hooded Merganser and Wood Duck may skulk among the stumps. Eastern Bluebird, Pileated Woodpecker and Belted Kingfisher may be seen here too.

County Road 19 turns left (km 16) to Desert Lake, but continue straight on the gravel road, Snug Harbour Road, which becomes Canoe Lake Road. Golden-winged Warblers are often heard just past this junction. There is a small bridge over Mitchell Creek (km 17.4) at Snug Harbour, and Eastern Bluebirds may be seen around the buildings.

As the road turns right at Snug Harbour, proceed to the Desert Lake Cemetery (17.8) where Pine Warblers nest. On the left, Eel Lake is visible from the road (km 19.7), Red-shouldered Hawks and Yellow-throated Vireos are often seen. The next 6.0 km are generally good, so proceed slowly and listen for bird activity. On the right, but not visible from the

road, are Birch Lake and then Kingsford Lake. At 22.2 km, watch for soaring raptors such as Turkey Vultures, Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks that may be seen from this overlook. Cerulean Warblers may be found in the tall deciduous woods 1.0 km before and 1.0 km after Eel Lake Rd. (formerly Wilson Rd.) branches left to the west (km 23.4). Continuing north, the road eventually becomes Canoe Lake Road. The only road to the right is Devil Lake Road (formerly Salem Road) at km 25.6 which passes the north entrance to Frontenac Park.

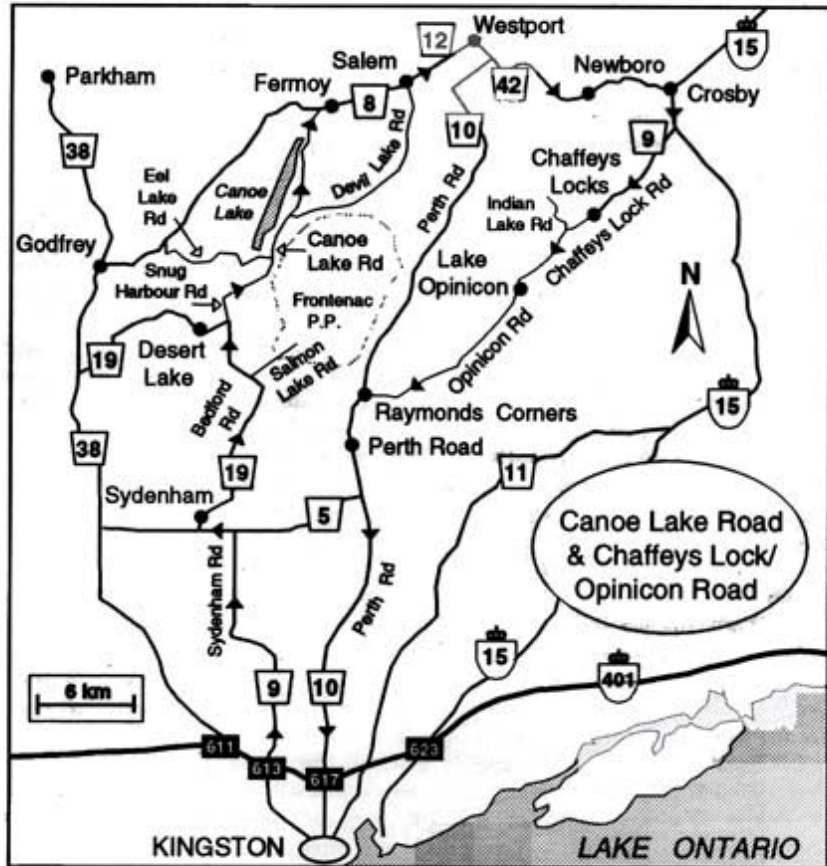
The Deerwood Farm Bed and Breakfast at #9741 is an imposing house on the left (km 26.5). Keep going past the gates of the Bing Retreat (km 28.5) to a lane on the left marked #10201 and park (km 28.8). The land and lane are private, but the small creek running through the hemlock stand has been a reliable site for Louisiana Waterthrush for some years. They may be on either side of the creek. Listen for Northern Waterthrush, Winter Wren, Black-and-white Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler and Black-throated Green Warbler.

Just past the large trailer park (km 30) the road borders Canoe Lake, and you can park against the rocky cliff face (km 30.2) and look over the lake. Prairie Warblers nest on the rocky cliffs on the far side of the lake. Familiarize yourself with their distinctive song, as seeing them from this location is remote. Yellow Warblers, Warbling Vireos and Northern Orioles may deafen you. At the top end of Canoe Lake (km 30.8) many other birds may be heard including Great Crested Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Yellow-throated Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler, Scarlet Tanager and Indigo Bunting. Common Loon, Wood Duck, Hooded Merganser, Osprey, Bald Eagle, Belted Kingfisher, Spotted Sandpiper and Northern Rough-winged Swallows may fly by. If you arrive before dawn, you will likely hear Whip-poor-wills and Barred Owls. Good birding continues until the power lines cross the road at km 31.3. The Canoe Lake Road ends at County Road 8 (km 32.5) onto which you may turn left to County Road 38 at Godfrey or right through Fermoy and Westport to Highway 15 at Crosby. To continue the tour, at Crosby take Highway 15 south 2.5 km to Chaffeys Lock Road.

Visitors from west of Kingston may wish to look for Loggerhead Shrikes along the side roads northwest of Newburgh before returning to Highway 401 at Napanee.

Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road

To optimize your success while visiting this area, it is important to be familiar with the vocalization of the key species. Tape recorders are discouraged due to possible disturbance to the ongoing bird studies by the Queen's University Biological Station. Traveling the roads and walking the trails can easily net between 60 and 80 species. Under optimum weather and migration conditions, 100 species is not out of the question.



Canoe Lake Road and Chaffeys Lock/Opinicon Road Map by Michael King

From Toronto, take Highway 401 eastbound to the Highway 15 exit (623). Travel north towards Ottawa for 48.5 km. and turn left onto Chaffeys Lock Road. From Ottawa, take Highway 417 to Highway 7 to Carleton Place, turn left onto Highway 15 and proceed passed Smiths Falls to Crosby, then south 2.5 km to Chaffeys Lock Road. Turn right and follow the road for 7.8 km through open fields until you reach the locks. Watch for Eastern Bluebird, Eastern Kingbird, Savannah Sparrow and Turkey Vulture. Set your odometer at 0.0 on the bridge over the Rideau Canal just the past Opinicon Lodge. At the locks, listen for Pine Warblers singing from the Eastern White Pines and check the Tree Swallows for Northern Rough-winged Swallows feeding over the canal. Continue west 0.9 km to Indian Lake Road. From this point westward, frequent stops along this route are advised as this is a lush area for many breeding species including Golden-winged Warbler, Indigo Bunting, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Cerulean Warbler and the occasional Louisiana Waterthrush. Just past this intersection and to the right is a small dump. Listen for singing Golden-winged Warblers and watch for Indigo Bunting and Eastern Kingbird perched on the hydro wires.

Continuing west along Chaffeys Lock Road, the entrance to the Queen's University Biological Station will be on your left at 1.5 km. Due to the rich and diverse nature of this unique area, many ornithological research studies are conducted from this campus. Watch for Eastern Bluebirds and Red-shouldered Hawks overhead. A singing male Acadian Flycatcher (1992)



and Carolina Wren (1991) have been found in the woods near here. At 1.8 km, check a large pond to the right for Hooded Mergansers and Wood Ducks, and Belted Kingfishers perched among trees bordering the shoreline. Listen for the distinctive *Blue Jay* call of breeding Red-shouldered Hawks and during migration for the Olive-sided Flycatcher's *quick-three-beers* song. Red-eyed and Warbling Vireo, American Redstart, Common Yellowthroat and Rose-breasted Grosbeak are just a few of the regular breeders in this area. Also listen for Golden-winged Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo.

Continue along this road making periodic stops. Due to the interbreeding of Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers, visual not audio identification is recommended as songs are not always reliable. Opposite Skycroft Campground at 5.7 km is a series of trails leading north to the old railroad bed. At the beginning of the trail, follow through the mature deciduous woods listening for the Wood Thrush, American Redstart and Eastern Wood-Pewee. Further down the trail at the bridge, listen for Louisiana Waterthrush which occasionally has been heard singing in this area. The canopy was heavily damaged during the ice storm of 1998, but Cerulean Warblers continue to occupy this area as their stronghold. Listen for Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-billed Cuckoo, Least Flycatcher, Pileated Woodpecker, Scarlet Tanager and Barred Owl. Exploring the trails will lead to more varied birdlife: Ruffed Grouse, Great Crested Flycatcher, Winter Wren and Northern Waterthrush. For the more ambitious, the main trail leads to the old railroad bed. Check the beaver pond opposite the track for breeding Red-headed Woodpecker. Walking west leads to a small colony of Prairie Warblers at about 4.0 km west of Skycroft Campground along the track. Young deciduous trees dispersed among the rock cut habitat characterize this area. Watch and listen for Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee and Indigo Bunting.

Back at Chaffey's Lock Road at Skycroft, continue to Lake Opinicon (6.0 km.). Watch for Common Loon on the lake and the occasional Osprey flying overhead. Listen for Pine and Yellow-rumped Warblers in the pine trees and Blackburnian Warblers in the pine/hemlock groves.

At 8.1 km, the Queen's Pangman Conservation Centre Trail appears on the right. Listen for the many Cerulean Warblers and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers. It is worthwhile to walk the trail and watch for Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-throated Vireo, Golden-winged Warbler and hybrid Golden-winged x Blue-winged Warblers. Over the next 4.0 km the area will be dotted with numerous Tree Swallow boxes among the fields. At 12.4 km listen for Eastern Phoebe at the bridge. The next 8.0 km go through cottage country to end at Perth Road (County Road 10). Along this route, watch and listen for Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee and Field Sparrow. To return to Highway 401, turn left and follow County Road 10 south for 25.0 km. Birders heading to Ottawa, either retrace the route to Highway 15 or turn right on County Road 10 and follow it to Perth.

Bruce Di Labio is a well-known birder from Eastern Ontario. He works as a nature consultant and tour guide for Turaco Nature Inc.

Paul Mackenzie began birding in London, Ontario in 1952, where Bill Girling and others inspired his interest in the McIlwraith Field Naturalists. Paul is currently president of the Kingston Field Naturalists.

Whip-poor-will Sees Red

Jean Iron

On 3 May 1999 at 5:00 a.m., I heard a Whip-poor-will singing outside my house near Highway 401 and Don Valley Parkway in Toronto. In the dim light I saw a dark shadow flit across the lawn and down into the ravine. At 9:30 a.m., I went looking for it. As I walked, the Whip-poor-will flushed up from a downed log and onto the horizontal branch of an Eastern Hemlock. A safe distance away, I set up my scope and observed the resting bird without disturbing it. This peaceful scene ended abruptly at 1:45 p.m. when a Red Squirrel scampered onto the same branch and came nose-to-beak with the Whip-poor-will. I expected the Whip-poor-will to fly off but it did not budge. Instead, it puffed itself up, making itself look big and scary. The Whip-poor-will, with its feathers all fluffed out, held its own against the squirrel which charged at it five times, stopping just short of touching it. I wondered who would win this exciting confrontation! Eventually, the Red Squirrel backed off and ran down the trunk of the tree. Having successfully repelled the intruder, the Whip-poor-will settled back to its resting pose and closed its eyes.

When threatened, birds and other animals are known to puff themselves up in order to look bigger, stronger and more fearsome. But I had not heard of this behaviour in Whip-poor-wills. A check of Bent's (1940) *Life Histories of North American Birds* found no reference to Whip-poor-wills puffing themselves up as a means of defence. Bent mentions the use of vocalizations to intimidate enemies, but I did not hear anything. I asked Alex Mills, an expert on Whip-poor-wills, if he had encountered this behaviour. He did not have any similar experience to compare to this episode, but wondered why it was worthwhile for the Whip-poor-will to stand its ground.

In summary, I think "puffing up" in response to an intruder is probably a well developed defensive behaviour in Whip-poor-wills that we do not see often because they are very secretive birds. Its function may be to stop squirrels and other small nest predators from getting at the eggs or young, which are very vulnerable on the ground where they could be stumbled upon.

Acknowledgements: I would like to thank Alex Mills and Ron Pittaway for help with this note.

Maps and OFO Site Guides

We recommend that birders carry an up-to-date Ontario road map in their car. Road names and signs changed in January 1998. Many of us still use the old names! *OFO News* uses the latest edition of the *MapArt Ontario Road Atlas* to check road names and help compile the maps in our site guides. This road atlas comes in a convenient ringed book format that can be purchased in bookstores, gas stations, office supply stores and through the CAA. Concession roads, side roads and small roads that birders use a lot are generally well marked. *Jean Iron*