

Peter's Woods in Northumberland County

Favourite Birding Hotspots

by Clive Goodwin

Presqu'île Park is the birding destination of choice in Northumberland County for much of the year, but there are other places that can be productive, particularly during the breeding season. One of the best is Peter's Woods, a superb old woodlot some 25 km north of Cobourg. Its significance has been recognized for many years, and it was acquired by Willow Beach Field Naturalists in the 1970s. It is named for A.B. (Peter) Schultz, a leading club member who was instrumental in the acquisition. It was subsequently turned over to the Ministry of Natural Resources as a Provincial Nature Reserve.

The route to Peter's Woods can be rewarding as well, and yield some species I have not encountered in the woods themselves, so this account will describe both the woods and a possible circle route to them.

Take Highway 401 Exit 474, the eastern exit for Cobourg, set your odometer at zero, and drive north on Highway 45. All the distances are from this point. You first pass through the hamlet of Baltimore, and then (between 7 and 11 km) the road follows the heavily wooded course of Baltimore Creek.

The sideroads on either side of the highway here can be productive, especially Bull Road at 9.3 km. It's not necessary to drive far, and indeed most of the roads are deadends. Walking them for a short distance is often more interesting. You can expect a good mix of warblers, including Black-throated Green, Nashville, Black-and-white, Canada, Ovenbird, Northern Waterthrush and Common Yellowthroat, together with Winter Wren, White-throated Sparrow and Purple Finch, Alder Flycatcher in the alder thickets and Swamp Sparrow in the marshy sections. All three accipiters occur and probably breed, as does Broad-winged Hawk, while Red-tailed can be found in more open areas.

On leaving the low-lying wooded areas along the highway, some of the sideroads open up, with sandy old fields that attract Brown Thrashers, Field and Vesper Sparrows, and Bank Swallows in some of the old sand banks. Pioneer Road, on the west side at 8.8 km, passes one such area.

Continuing northeast, note the Centreton Road on the east at 11.5 km as you will return to this point, and soon afterwards (at about 12 km) the highway enters Northumberland County Forest, a huge area of conifer plantations. At 14 km on

the west side is Beagle Club Road, which gives access to the network of ski trails through the forest. The tall pines along the highway should readily yield Pine Warbler, and a more careful search can produce Red-breasted Nuthatch, Hermit Thrush and Solitary Vireo. However, the exceptionally lush growth of poison ivy which dominates as the ground cover (often to the exclusion of anything else), can inhibit exploration if you are susceptible to it. Poison ivy could well be adopted as the official plant of the county, as it grows in remarkable abundance.

Both the Baltimore Creek area and Northumberland County Forest can be good areas for winter finches in season, when the ivy is no longer a problem.

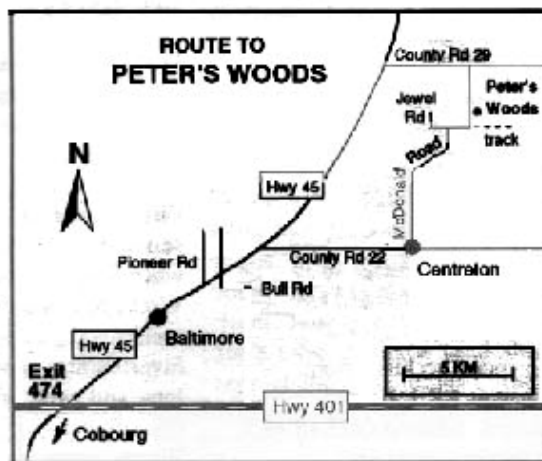
At 18.9 km, turn right on Northumberland County Road 29, signed to Warkworth, and then right again on the second sideroad (22 km, McDonald Road). A small marshy area on both sides of the road immediately after the turn can be worth checking for Green Heron and other wetland species. Then continue south; from the 23

km point on, watch for Eastern Bluebirds along the fence lines on the left, until finally the road goes down into a wooded area, and at 24.1 km, there is a driveway on the left. You have arrived at Peter's Woods.

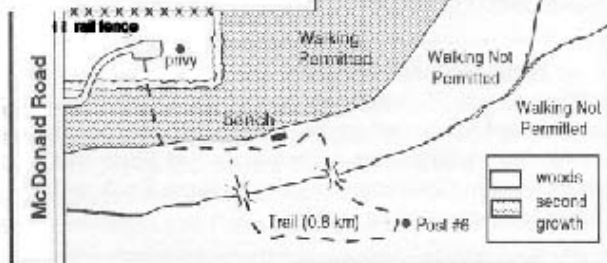
Although the area is currently signed as a Provincial Nature Preserve, the Ministry has stated that it will no longer manage the

area and the parking lot and trails are not actively maintained. New access details are still being worked out, but it is likely that arrangements with the Willow Beach Club will allow the parking lot to remain open, although it would always be possible to walk in from the road (0.2 km) if the drive was closed. Users should be aware that the trail is not a typical manicured Provincial park one; there is some scrambling over deadfalls, parts of the path are boggy (we often wear rubber boots) and the access points to the small bridges that cross the stream are rather steep and can be very slippery.

In addition to the parking lot, there is a small privy and the walking trail through the woods. Walking is also permitted in the areas of old fields and early succession to the northeast, but in the main woodlot please keep to the marked trail. This first runs through an area of young pines and second growth



Map by Michael King



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(watch and listen for Golden-winged, Blue-winged and Mourning Warblers), and then enters the main woods, looping round to follow both sides of an intermittent stream that runs through the area. At the eastern end is a boggy area with coniferous growth (be alert for possible American Woodcock feeding around post 6). The rest of the woods are mainly deciduous, with a very rich ground flora and some fine old trees including a few magnificent white pines (listen for Pine Warbler).

You should encounter a good mix of typical woodland birds including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy and Pileated Woodpeckers, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Brown Creeper, Veery, Wood Thrush, Red-eyed Vireo (a positive chorus of its song), Black-throated Green and Black-and-white Warblers, Ovenbird, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Purple Finch. You can hope to hear Ruffed Grouse.

In May 1995, the woods played host for a time to both a Kentucky Warbler and a Louisiana Waterthrush, both frequented the area of the stream west of the first bridge, and a Black-throated Blue Warbler was on territory towards the far end of the trail. More southern species that are more regular in occurrence are Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Yellow-throated Vireo, the latter on the return leg of the loop near the large bench, although I expect the vireo moves around from year to year. The bench, incidentally, looks strange, but is an excellent vantage point for viewing the very high canopy.

The old fields to the north and east have their own birds of interest. A pair of Eastern Phoebes nests on the privy,

bluebirds may nest in boxes along the fence line and Brown Thrashers and Eastern Towhees can be found in the thickets, with Grasshopper Sparrows in the field itself. As noted above, both Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers nest. At least they did in 1994-1995 (I did not check in 1996), but the Blue-winged were not recorded in the area on the *Atlas* (1987), so this is part of the species' continuing expansion in Ontario. It remains to be seen whether Golden-winged continue to hold their own here, or whether they will eventually disappear because of hybridization with Blue-winged Warblers.

South of the drive into the woods, the main road jogs west, and an old cart track continues east from it, following the southern boundary of the reserve. A walk along here will yield a rather different mix of species, as well as many of those already seen in the woods. Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers occur here too, and you can expect Least Flycatcher, Chestnut-sided and Mourning Warblers and Indigo Buntings.

Leaving the area, follow McDonald Road as it jogs once more through the eastern part of Northumberland County forest. If you failed to find Grasshopper Sparrow earlier you can turn right on Jewell Road just past the point where McDonald jogs south, and drive a short distance west to the corner where the road turns north. The fields here have both Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrows. Otherwise, continue south on McDonald. After some 3 km, the forest ends and the rest of the route runs through a typical mix of woods and farmland (watch for bluebirds), finally arriving at Centreton (5 km from the woods), where a right turn on County Road 22 leads back to Highway 45 again. Obviously a more direct route is to use Highway 48 and Centreton Road both ways, but the above provides a little more variety, and is only marginally longer.

Literature Cited

Cadman, M. D., P. F.J. Eagles and F. M. Helleiner. 1987. *Atlas of the Breeding Birds of Ontario*. University of Waterloo Press.

California Gull Subspecies by Ron Pittaway

At least two California Gulls were reported at Niagara in November 1996. Surprisingly, two of the birds were distinctly different in appearance and may represent two subspecies (races).

The California Gull is currently regarded as monotypic (no subspecies). However, in the *AUK* 104: 421-428, 1987, J.R. Jehl describes two well-marked races, with no indication of clinal variation between the two races. The southern nominate race *Larus californicus californicus* breeds in the Great Basin of the United States. The northern race *L.c. albertaensis*, named after the province, breeds mainly in the Prairie Provinces. The breeding ranges of the two races were separated (allopatric) until recently, but are now joined in Montana. The nominate race is smaller, smaller billed and darker mantled, a full shade or two darker than a Herring Gull. Compared with it, *albertaensis* is

distinguished by its greater size (and mass in the hand), larger bill and paler mantle approaching or matching the paleness of a Herring Gull. A typical *californicus* is illustrated on page 151 of the *National Geographic Society* (1987) field guide. A typical *albertaensis* is illustrated on Plate 36 in W. Earl Godfrey's *The Birds of Canada* (1986).

Bruce Di Labio (pers. comm.) tells me that a California Gull seen at the Nepean Dump near Ottawa on 13-15 October 1988 by B. Di Labio, S. Gawn, R.P. Holland and L. Neily was a smaller and much darker mantled bird than the breeding birds he had seen in Saskatchewan while working for the Canadian Museum of Nature in 1985. Bruce now thinks the Nepean bird was probably of the *californicus* race.

Interestingly, none of the field guides describes the considerable geographical variation in the California Gull.

1997 Niagara Peninsula

Hawkwatch Open House

Good Friday 28 March

10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Rain date: Saturday 29 March

Beamer Memorial Conservation Area

Ridge Road, Grimsby

Migrating hawks, a rehabilitated raptor release, hawk ID workshops, nature displays and the OFO display.

Free Hawk ID Workshops

Saturdays and Sundays from March 22 to April 27 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Friends of Kawartha Region

Conservation Authority will be publishing an Annual Bird Report for Victoria County. Please send your 1996 Victoria County bird sightings for inclusion in the report to: David Gascoigne, Friends of Kawartha Conservation Authority, RR 1, Lindsay ON K9V 4R1