

# A Birding Site Guide to Petroglyphs Provincial Park, Peterborough County

by  
A. Geoffrey Carpentier

This picturesque Provincial Park, classified as an Historical Park, is located approximately 56 km northeast of the city of Peterborough. It has gained acclaim and its name from the Indian rock carvings found there, dating back to the prehistoric life of the Algonkian Indians. These petroglyphs represent one of the largest single concentrations of their type in North America.

The outstanding feature of the Park, as far as naturalists are concerned, is the almost unlimited wildlife viewing opportunities of the area. It is a particularly interesting area in winter.

Bird life is varied and of interest. Breeding warblers include Yellow-rumped, Pine, Magnolia, Black-throated Green, and Black-throated Blue Warblers, Northern Parula and Northern Waterthrush. Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Purple Finches, Hooded and Common Mergansers, Broad-winged Hawks, some puddle ducks, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and White-throated

Sparrows also breed. In addition, evidence (e.g., consecutive sightings in suitable habitat, nest building, fledged young or aggressive behaviour) suggests that Sedge Wrens, Bald Eagles, Golden Eagles, both crossbills, Northern Ravens, Gray Jays and Black-backed Woodpeckers may also breed in the area.

Winter birding can be excellent. This is perhaps the best time of year to search for "northern specialties" and unusual species. Since the Park is situated on the southern edge of the Shield, it is perhaps one of the most southerly areas in the Province where one can expect to find northern birds on a regular basis. Both crossbills, Common Redpolls, both three-toed woodpeckers, Northern Ravens, Gray Jays, Pine Siskins, both eagles and an occasional Barred Owl may be expected.

For the last several years, eagles have been an outstanding reality for perseverant birders. Up to seven Balds and three Golden have regularly spent the winter in and near the Park. The large deer

A. Geoffrey Carpentier, 42 Wallis Drive, Peterborough, Ont. K9J 6B7.

herds easily support this population. A surprising number of summer sightings, particularly of Bald Eagles, suggest local breeding.

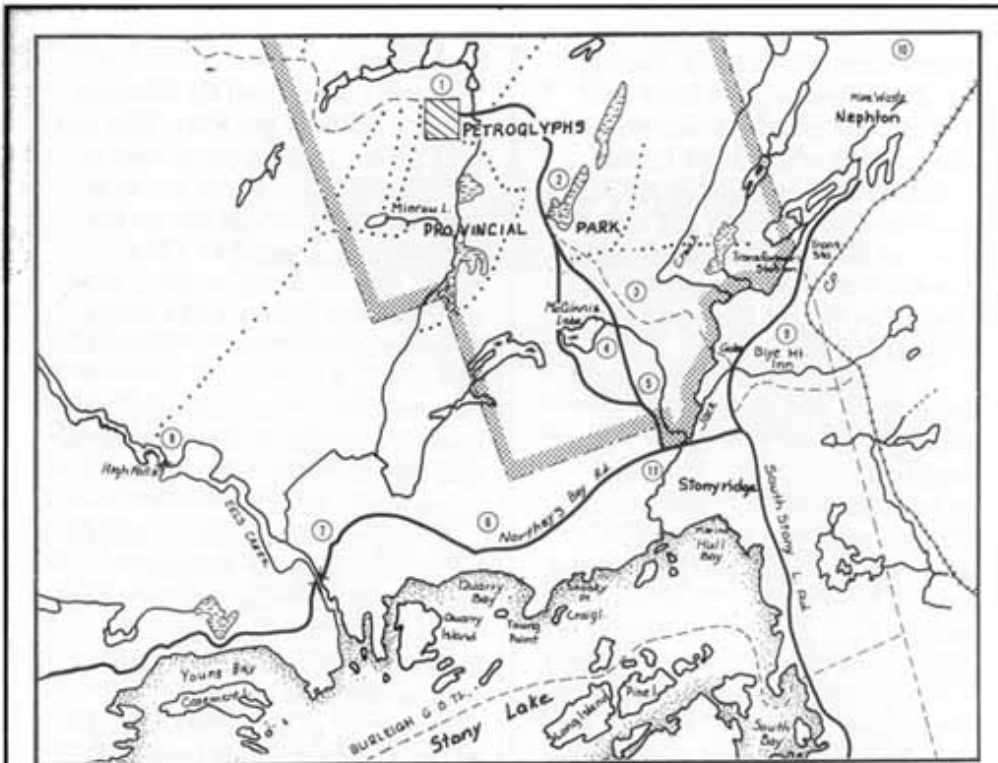
The only realistic way to explore Petroglyphs, in winter, is on foot. Snowfall in the area tends to be substantial. It is recommended that if the birder intends to go to the Park and leave the snowmobile trails, he/she bring cross-country skis or snowshoes.

The eagles, when soaring, are easily spotted as they fly over the roadway or breaks in the trees. The only real exception to this is along the trail running from the gate along the west side of McGinnis Lake, where the canopy is very dense and overhangs the road. When on a kill, eagles are very skittish and flush readily and at a great distance. It is, therefore, important that you make as little noise as possible. The easiest way to locate the eagles, I have found, is to watch the ravens. When searching for food, the ravens emit their typical "croark" call and soar low over the trees. Bald Eagles regularly *follow* these ravens. Once the ravens have passed by, wait five to ten minutes, and you may very well be rewarded with an eagle. When on a kill, ravens produce a "chortle" that is most unlike a raven's expected call, and is, in fact, almost musical. Bald and Golden Eagles, if in the area, will not be far away. Bald Eagles often sit in the midst of the ravens, on the kill or in adjacent trees. Beware, though, the ravens post 'sentries' that are very observant. At the

slightest hint of danger, all of the birds disappear, perhaps for several hours. If you are lucky enough to find a fresh deer kill, conceal yourself (including from above) at least 100 meters from it and wait. You will probably see one or more eagles this way. Although Golden Eagles seem less willing to land on kills than Balds, they often fly over them. So keep checking the sky!

It can sometimes be difficult to identify eagles in flight, particularly if they are immatures. I recommend that you review the recent article on eagle identification (*American Birds*, Volume 37, No. 5, Sept.-Oct. 1983) in advance.

The accompanying map indicates, by numbered locations, the 'best' areas to explore. However, you will find your own favourite areas or 'hotspots' as you bird the area. Access to the Park is gained through the main gate (11). Travel northeast along the main road following the east fork towards McGinnis Lake. Watch for Gray Jays (5) and eagles (4). A roadway will intersect from the east, about 0.75 km north of the lake. This is the old roadway leading east to the former entrance. It is shown on the map as a dotted line leading to the Blue Mountain Inn. Leaving the Park using this route is hindered by Jack Creek, which stays open all year and, has no crossing bridge. Along this road watch for crossbills in the red pines (3) and Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers throughout. Near the east end of this road you will notice a relatively high



lookout that has been good for eagle watching in the past.

Back on the main road leading to the Petroglyphs site (1) you will come to an area where the center of the road has square wooden posts dividing it in two (2). The marshy lake on the north is one of the two most regular places to see eagles of either species. Gray Jays and eagles, particularly Bald, may be seen at the fenced in area (1) surrounding the Petroglyphs site, the other: regular eagle spot.

Many trails crisscross the Park, and are shown as fine dotted lines. These generally lead to very interesting areas, including High Falls (8). The trail to these falls is poorly marked, and caution is advised when travelling to them along this route. Remember that

you are in truly wild bush. It is easy to get lost when you leave any of the trails, or when you lose the trail.

Egress from the Park may be gained in several ways: over entrance, the way you entered following the east shore of McGinnis Lake (recommended), or via High Falls and Eel's Creek out to Northey's Bay Road. This creek appears to be solidly frozen, but the ice is often of poor quality, so use the east shore if this is your chosen route. Conversely, High Falls may be visited by going up the creek from Northey's Bay Road. I'm sure you will find this spot, in particular, spectacular in winter and worth the effort. Other places of interest include Eel's Creek at Northey's Bay Road (7)

where deer abound and Black-backed Woodpeckers have been regular, the marshy areas west of the gate (6) where Bald Eagles sometimes sit in adjacent trees, and the high lookout (10) near the town of Nephton. Access to this road is restricted and permission should be sought from Security staff at the mine office.

To reach the Park, travel north from Hwy. 401 on Hwy. 115/35 and then follow 115 to the intersection of Hwy. 7. At this point, follow Hwy. 7 east towards Ottawa until you intersect Hwy. 134 (about 8 km), and travel north on 134 to Hwy. 28. Continue north again, through the village of Woodview (approximately 35 km). Once through this hamlet, take the first paved road east (Northey's Bay Road) for about 11 km to the Park entrance. The road and Park entrance are well-marked. Another enjoyable and scenic route may be used for the return trip. As you exit the Park, through the same entrance you used on the way in, turn east (left) and go a short distance to a stop sign. Turn south (right) and follow this paved road (South Stoney Lake Rd.) as it twists and turns, heading for Peterborough. You will emerge on Hwy. 28 just north of Lakefield and Hwy. 134. Turn south (left) on Hwy. 28 and you are on your

way home.

Stores are few and far between in the vicinity of the Park. Hot and cold snacks may be purchased at the Blue Mountain Inn, which is open all year and marked on the accompanying map (9). Other stores may be found south of here on the South Stoney Lake Road. Accommodation can be difficult to find north of the city of Peterborough. The Park charges a modest entrance fee in the summer and early fall, but not at other times of the year.

Although Petroglyphs seems to be the best area for wildlife viewing, explore the neighbouring lands, if you have time, as the habitat is continuous. You might want to obtain a copy of *Our Heritage of Birds: Peterborough in the Kawarthas* by Doug Sadler. This 192 page book describes all good birding areas in Peterborough County, and gives the dates and status of species found therein. It is available from the author for \$7.50. (see Book Review this issue)

Visitors are requested to supply local birders with information about their sightings in the Petroglyph area, particularly regarding eagles, crossbills, and Black-backed and Three-toed Woodpeckers.

Good Birding!!

Corrections: In the Table of Contents in the December 1984 issue of Ontario birds, we inadvertently indicated Gerry Bennet's review of *A Bird-Finding Guide to Canada*. That review appears in the current issue (page 39). On page 103, credit for the photo of the Prairie Warbler should have gone to Ron Ridout instead of George Peck.