

## *OFO Bird Finding Guide #5*

### **A Birder's Guide to the Rondeau Provincial Park Area**

by  
P. Allen Woodliffe

#### **Introduction**

The deep, southwestern part of Ontario has some exciting possibilities for birding. In spite of, or perhaps even because of the extensively developed landscape, the few natural areas of any size, such as Rondeau Provincial Park, provide significant attractions for migrating, breeding or visiting birds.

There is a great diversity of habitats, including sandy beaches, rich southern hardwood forests, oak savannah, woodland sloughs, a sizeable marsh and a large, productive inland bay, all of which contribute to bird diversity. Many species just barely make it into southern Ontario. Those that do are almost sure to be found at Rondeau. Also, because of Rondeau's location on the southern Great Lakes and proximity to the midwest, species more common farther west are found here regularly. And of course, most birds migrating north find Rondeau an ideal resting and feeding stopover for their travels. As a result, 333 species of birds have been recorded in the Rondeau checklist area. One hundred and thirty-four of these have been confirmed as breeding, with an additional twenty or more species having at least some breeding evidence. Indeed, during the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas of 1981-1985, the atlas square that included most of

Rondeau contained the highest number of birds with breeding evidence in the whole province!

This site guide will, through maps and written descriptions, give visitors plenty of information with which to plan a trip to Rondeau, whether just for a day or, better yet, for a week. Visitors must bear in mind that the time of year as well as weather conditions of the day, will of course play a major role in determining what birds will be found.

#### **General Information**

##### **1) Weather**

The weather is changeable, and it is said that more weather forecasters lose their jobs in this part of the world than areas with a more continental climate.

By mid-March, the ice of Rondeau Bay and nearby Lake Erie has disappeared. Warmer days usually occur in April, along with the first big waves of migrating passerines. May is occasionally cool and wet, ideal for holding down migrants, but it can just as often be hot, with temperatures in the upper 20s to low 30s Celsius. June through mid-September often continues this warm weather trend, and the humidity increases as well. Occasionally this hot, sultry weather will spawn some very turbulent

thunderstorms. Late September and October are cooler, with usually the greatest number of clear, sunny skies of the year. November until mid-December is fraught with grey, wet, sometimes stormy conditions. The silver lining of this type of weather is that this is when most of the rare waterbirds show up.

The first blasts of winter can occur by early December, but it can just as easily dissipate and be well above freezing throughout the rest of the month. Southern Ontario, being in close proximity to large bodies of water, means high humidity and that, combined with the winter winds, makes the temperature feel much colder than the thermometer reads. Precipitation is just as often of the liquid kind as the frozen stuff, and snow seldom lasts for more than a couple of weeks, although one must be prepared for cold stretches as well.

## 2) Insects

Insects are a definite part of the fauna of the Rondeau area, and it is fortunate that they are! Many bird species, from swallows to flycatchers, nighthawks to kestrels, screech-owls to woodpeckers, cuckoos to gnatcatchers and vireos to warblers rely quite heavily on these insects for food.

Most of the insect species present will not be noticeable to the majority of birders. However, a few may be problematic, depending on the time of the day or season. There are at least eight species of mosquitoes known for Rondeau, and different species hatch at different times of the season, starting after the first hot and humid periods by late May. They are the greatest nuisance in early morning or at dusk. Deer flies and

horse flies feed along wooded trails as well as open grassy areas during the hot, sultry weather. Stable flies, which are similar in appearance to the common house fly, are most noticeable along the beach areas in mid to late summer. They like ankles especially, are difficult to swat, and have a nasty bite! They do not often draw blood, probably because one is quick to strike out at them before they have a chance.

One critter that haunts long grassy areas and can be an annoyance is not an insect but an arachnid. Chiggers are the larval stages of mites, and are so small that they are difficult to see with the naked eye. You are most likely to encounter them during the hotter weather from June through August. Evidence of them usually appears several hours after walking through these grassy areas. At first you may notice a slight reddening of the skin at an area where there is a slight restriction of clothing, such as ankles, knees, waistband, etc. This reddened area eventually results in a very itchy rash. The critter by this time has secreted an enzyme to dissolve a bit of your skin's outer layers and has situated itself just below the surface where it feeds on the brew. The itch can last for several days, and a lotion with an anti-histamine is usually quite effective. People have differing sensitivities to chiggers, and although they can be quite bothersome to some, other people are not affected at all. One precaution if you know you are in chigger country is to tuck your pantleg into your socks, and spray a bit of insect repellent on your socks. In addition, when leaving an area potentially having chiggers, give your legs a brisk rubdown, which will

often crush their fragile little bodies before they have a chance to burrow in. Taking a shower as soon as possible after getting out of the field will also help reduce the likelihood of experiencing their aggravating habits.

Wood ticks are present in small numbers, and would most likely be encountered in spring. Lyme disease has not been detected within the park.

### 3) Where To Stay

#### Camping:

- Rondeau Provincial Park  
(519-674-1750)
- The Summer Place Marina and  
Campground (519-674-2326)
- Rondeau Shores Trailer Park  
(519-674-3330)

#### Bed & Breakfast:

- Morrison Manor  
(519-674-3431)
- Ridgeland B&B  
(519-674-2461)

#### Motels (Blenheim):

- The Queen's Motel  
(519-676-5477)
- The Silver Motel  
(519-676-5156)

Both the towns of Blenheim and Ridgeland have stores and services one might normally require, including restaurants. A grocery store and seasonally operated dining facility are just outside the Park entrance.

### 4) How To Get To Rondeau Provincial Park

(see Regional Overview map)

Rondeau Provincial Park is located in the extreme southwestern part of Ontario, approximately 115 km east of the Ambassador Bridge between Windsor and Detroit, and

approximately 275 km southwest of Toronto. Regardless of the direction, travel along Highway 401 is the normal access, leaving it at Exit 101. Take County Road 15 south, crossing Highway 3, and continuing south on Highway 51 to the Park entrance.

### 5) Private Property

Much of the property in the Rondeau area is privately owned. Landowners, especially in the residential area immediately north of Rondeau Provincial Park, have heavily posted their property and have made efforts to enforce it. Please respect these property rights and leave landowners with a good image of birders. Most birding opportunities described in this guide will cover public or at least unposted land, or can be done from public roads.

### 6) Maps

Topographic maps at 1:50,000 may be useful on your visit to Rondeau. The following sheets cover the Rondeau Provincial Park area:

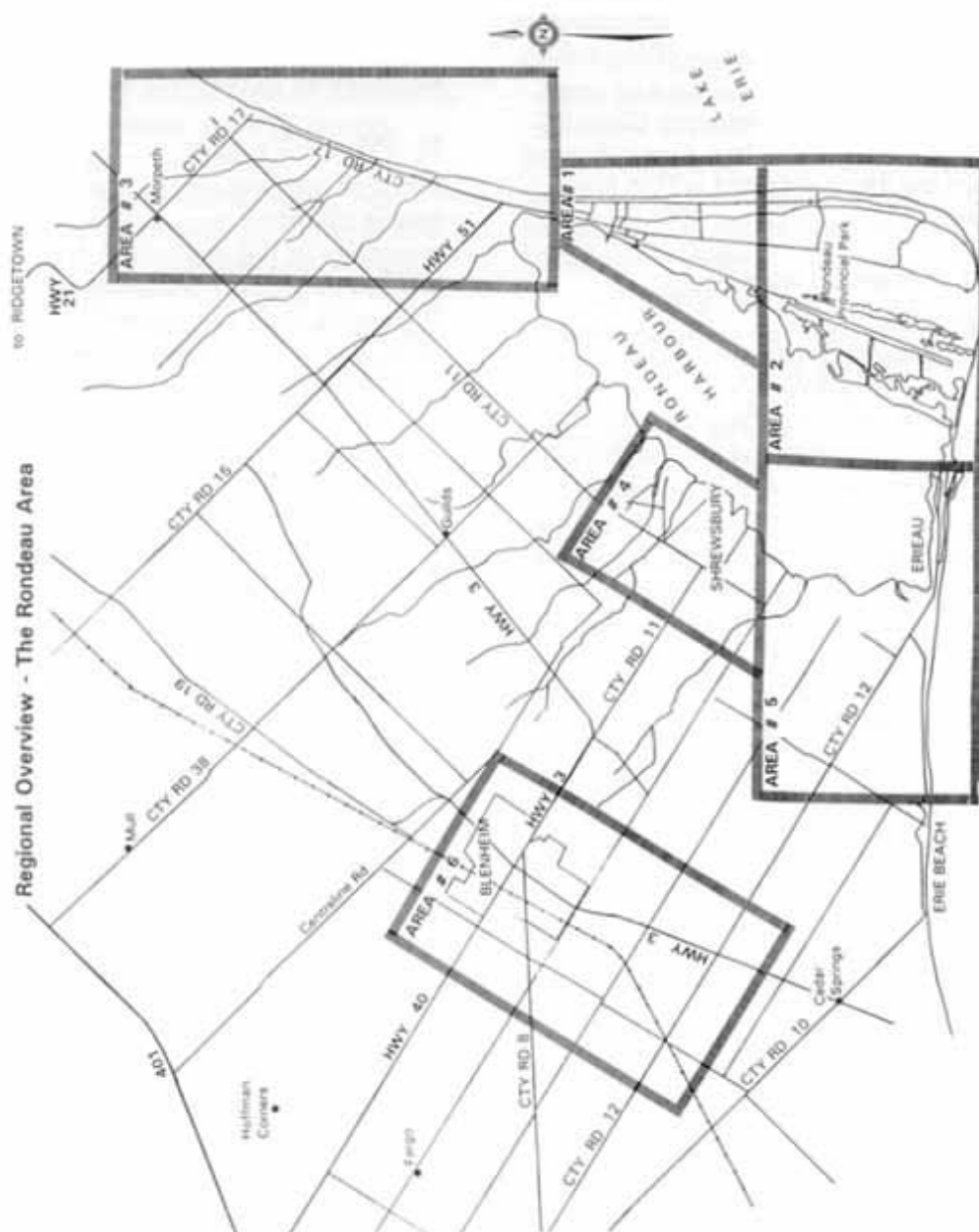
- Ridgetown 40-I/5
- Chatham 40-J/8

Most larger urban centres will have one or more outlets for these maps (e.g. bookstores) and may be available from them or from:

- CANADA MAP OFFICE
- 615 Booth Street
- Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0E9

**Sketch Map:**

**Regional Overview - The Rondeau Area**



## Breeding Bird Specialties of the Rondeau Provincial Park Area

**Common** - a virtual guarantee to be found if searched for in suitable habitat at appropriate time of year;

**Uncommon** - should be found if searched for in suitable habitat at appropriate time of year;

**Rare** - may be found if searched for in suitable habitat at appropriate time of year;

**Very Rare** - a bonus, but don't count on finding it.

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**Least Bittern** - uncommon summer resident, Rondeau Provincial Park marshes.

**Northern Shoveler** - uncommon migrant and summer resident, Blenheim sewage lagoons.

**Ruddy Duck** - common migrant and uncommon summer resident, Blenheim sewage lagoons.

**Bald Eagle** - uncommon permanent resident, seen from almost anywhere in Rondeau, but especially from the Marsh Trail.

**King Rail** - rare summer resident, marshes of Rondeau and occasionally the wet, grassy fields and marshes near Shrewsbury.

**Wilson's Phalarope** - rare migrant, and very rare summer resident, but does not nest every year. Blenheim sewage lagoon.

**Forster's Tern** - common migrant and summer resident, Rondeau Bay and marshes.

**Black Tern** - uncommon migrant and summer resident, Rondeau marshes.

**Red-headed Woodpecker** - uncommon migrant and summer

resident, open woods and sloughs of Rondeau.

**Red-bellied Woodpecker** - uncommon permanent resident, mature woods of Rondeau.

**Pileated Woodpecker** - rare permanent resident, mature woods of Rondeau.

**Acadian Flycatcher** - rare migrant, seen most frequently in late May to early June. Very rare summer resident. Occurs in beech/maple forests of Rondeau, but has not been recorded breeding every year.

**Carolina Wren** - uncommon permanent resident, but populations may vary depending on severity of previous winter weather conditions. Occurs near forest edges and cottage area.

**White-eyed Vireo** - rare migrant and very rare summer resident. Occurs at shrubby forest edges of Rondeau.

**Yellow-throated Vireo** - uncommon migrant and summer resident, open oak forests of Rondeau.

**Cerulean Warbler** - uncommon migrant and summer resident, open pine/oak forests of Rondeau, especially along Harrison Trail.

**Prothonotary Warbler** - common summer resident, larger sloughs of Rondeau.

**Yellow-breasted Chat** - rare spring migrant, and very rare summer resident, shrubby tangles at forest edges, Rondeau.

## BIRDING AREAS

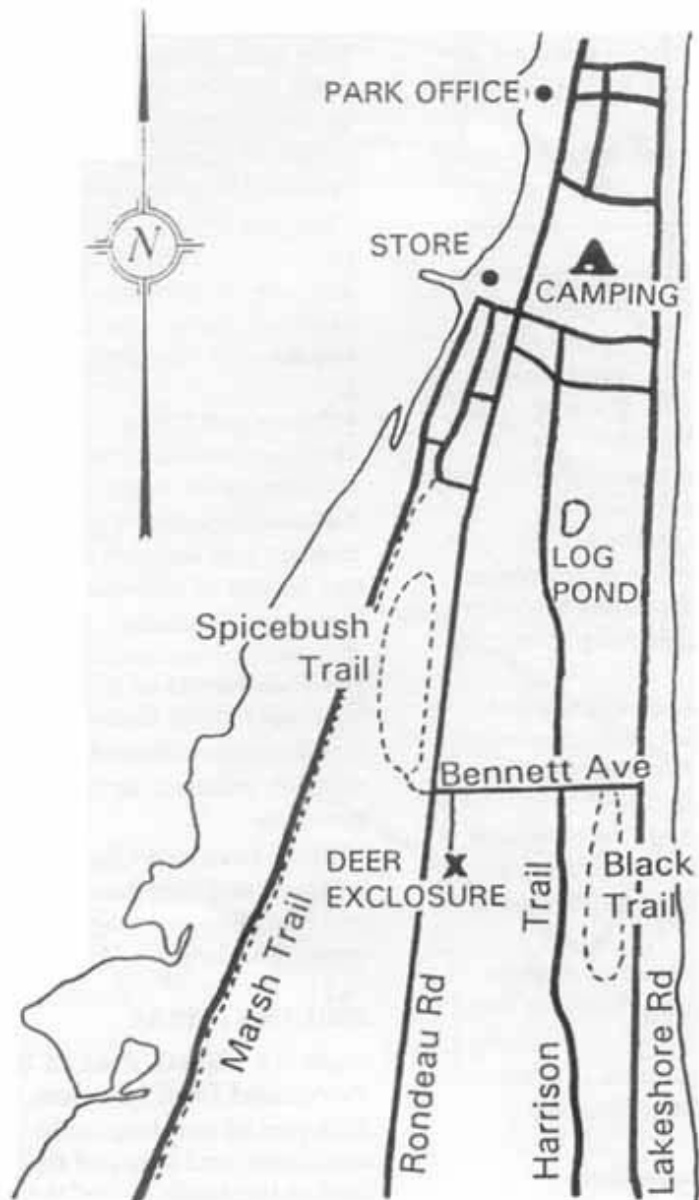
### Area #1 - North Part of Rondeau Provincial Park (see Area #1 map)

This part of Rondeau is the narrowest, and many of the birds that land at the south end of the park will make their way through the north



**Sketch Map:  
NORTH PART OF RONDEAU PROVINCIAL PARK**

**Area # 1**



end. The public boat ramp and dock can be excellent vantage points for viewing numerous ducks on Rondeau Bay in spring. About 1.6 km south of the campground, along Rondeau Road, is the Spicebush Trail. It is a 1.5 km trail loop set in a lush beech/maple forest, with the west side being more swamp-like. Typical hardwood forest species, such as Red-eyed Vireo, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, American Redstart, Hairy Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch occur in this area. Red-bellied Woodpecker is frequently seen along this trail, and Acadian Flycatcher is occasionally present. The wetter, west side of the trail is more open, with Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Black-capped Chickadee, Great Crested Flycatcher and Eastern Kingbird often observed. Green Heron and Brown Creeper are occasionally seen. After dark, the trail's parking lot is one of the most convenient and reliable locations from which to get Eastern Screech-Owl to respond.

The forest and edges immediately southwest of the maintenance compound (immediately east of the main picnic area) can be very productive for passerines in spring, especially late in the day. Birds that arrived at the south end of the park and have worked their way northward through the forest are often observed during the last couple of hours before sunset in a sort of feeding frenzy, as they stock up for the next leg of their migration. The oaks and maples that are flowering attract insects, which in turn may attract hundreds of birds of several dozen species, especially warblers.

The Black Oak Trail loop is

situated near the east end of Bennett Avenue. It is best birded in the spring, as migrating warblers are attracted to the opening flowers of the numerous oaks along the trail.

Also along Bennett Avenue is one of the two deer exclosures in the Park, the other being just south of Gardiner Avenue. Each exclosure was erected in 1978, and is easily accessed via a short trail from the road. The exclosures are worth visiting for two reasons. Firstly, they provide a vivid example of what can happen to a rich, southern hardwood forest when a population of White-tailed Deer is allowed to remain at abnormally high levels for many years. Secondly, the vegetation inside the exclosures is more normal compared with the dearth of a ground and shrub layer outside. These exclosures therefore act as a bit of an island, and bird species requiring a dense lower level vegetation, such as Ovenbird and Wood Thrush, are more apt to be found here. Interestingly enough, later season migrant Hooded Warblers and Kentucky Warblers have occasionally been found in the vicinity of these exclosures, as well.

Along Harrison Trail, about 0.6 km south of the campground, is an old barn beside a clearing in the forest. Immediately south of the barn is an area referred to as the Log Pond. In spring, especially when the cottonwoods and willows adjacent to the pond are in flower, this area can attract a surprising number of early migrant passerines.

About 0.4 km south of the park store, and just west of the main picnic ground, is the entrance to the Marsh Trail. This trail provides the best access to the 1000 hectare

marsh, and is excellent for hiking or biking. I would recommend the latter form of transportation if you are interested in going the full distance (7 km each way).

This trail deserves careful attention, as many of the park's rarities have been observed here. Sage Thrasher, Yellow-crowned Night-Heron, Tricolored Heron, American Avocet, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Dickcissel, Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Peregrine Falcon, Little Gull and Common Black-headed Gull are some of the rarities that have appeared here. In addition, there are a number of regular goodies that can be found along the trail, such as Bald Eagle, Least Bittern, American Bittern, Common Moorhen, Forster's Tern and Black Tern.

The first kilometre or so of the trail has shrubby, wooded vegetation dominating the east side, with open water, mud flats (depending on seasonal fluctuations of the water levels) and dense cattail marsh occurring on the west side. Common bird species are Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, Eastern Kingbird, Northern Oriole, Warbling Vireo, Swamp and Song Sparrows, Great Crested Flycatcher and Mallard, with occasional Red-headed Woodpecker, Brown Thrasher, Green Heron and Great Blue Heron, as well. Eventually, the trail gets beyond the wooded sections to where there is extensive marsh on both sides. Willow Flycatchers occupy the scattered shrubs, and the stands of cattails provide a breeding haven for both bittern species, Sora, Virginia Rail, and occasionally King Rail, coot, moorhen, Black and Forster's Terns and of course numerous Red-winged

Blackbirds and Marsh Wrens. The park's resident Bald Eagles are more frequently observed perched in a tree or flying over the marsh. Over the last couple of kilometres of the trail, the marsh widens and becomes more open. The trail ends within about 200 metres of the south beach, giving one a look at numerous gulls, terns and other waterbirds.

The water levels in the marsh are quite shallow, and as the summer progresses, numerous mudflats appear. These provide ideal conditions for wild rice beds to establish, and there are often dozens of hectares of wild rice scattered throughout. By late summer, the rice seed matures and begins to fall, corresponding with the migration of Soras. On occasion, literally hundreds of Soras can be heard peeping in the rice beds, in response to the splash of a tossed stone.

The waterfowl migration begins with the first breakup of ice, usually by late February. Ducks, geese and swans can be seen from the marsh trail, sometimes numbering in the tens of thousands, both spring and fall. By early April, only those that breed, and a few lingerers are present, and in early summer relatively few are seen. By late July, many of the resident and local Mallards, Blue-winged Teal and Wood Ducks gather together in post-breeding flocks. Water levels often drop by late summer, providing good shorebird habitat scattered throughout the marsh right up until freeze-up.

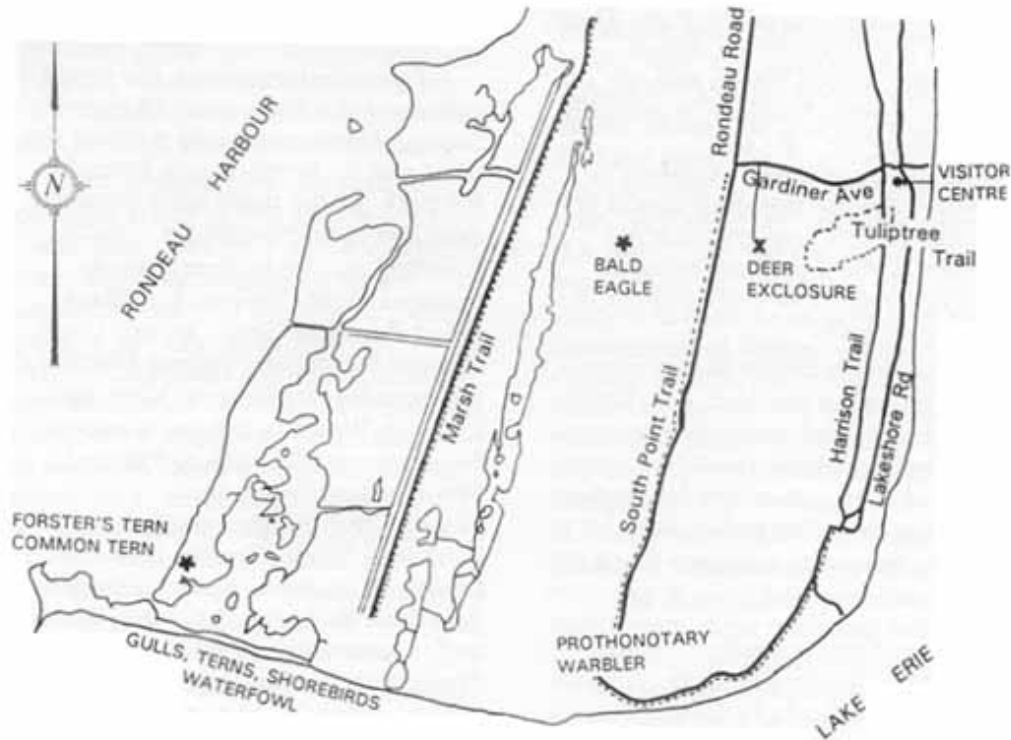
#### **Area #2 - South Part of Rondeau Provincial Park** (see Area #2 map)

The south part of Rondeau, jutting out into Lake Erie, is the most



**Sketch Map:  
South Part of Rondeau Provincial Park**

**Area # 2**



extensive and contains the greatest diversity of habitats. It is here, especially along the South Point Trail, that most local birders concentrate their time. Indeed, whether you have three hours to spend in the Park, or three days, your time would be well spent covering part or all of this trail. Most of Rondeau's rarities have appeared along this trail, or the parts of the park accessed by this trail. Eared Grebe, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, Little Blue Heron, Harlequin Duck, Glossy Ibis, Piping Plover, Laughing Gull, Black Skimmer, Bewick's Wren, Summer Tanager, Swainson's Warbler, Townsend's Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, Yellow-

throated Warbler, Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Harris's Sparrow are just a few of the rarities that have turned up in this portion of Rondeau.

The South Point Trail actually has two access points, one at the corner of Rondeau Road and Gardiner Avenue, the other at the south end of Lakeshore Road. The latter access is recommended. Near the beginning, there is a fair bit of low vegetation, usually good for Rufous-sided Towhee, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher and Yellow Warbler. The dogwood is particularly good for attracting warblers and thrushes during the autumn migration. As the vegetation begins to open up farther

down the trail, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Eastern Wood-Pewee and occasionally Red-headed Woodpecker are found. The trail crosses a couple of wide sloughs at the very south end of the Park. These sloughs are excellent for Belted Kingfisher, Green Heron and one of the bird species Rondeau is probably best known for - the rare Prothonotary Warbler. Rondeau is undoubtedly the breeding capital of Canada for this brightly coloured denizen of the woodland sloughs, with upwards of 40 pairs present in an average year.

You have a choice at this most southern part of the trail. One option is to retrace your route to the starting point, but hopefully you will have time and energy to either follow the Lake Erie shoreline and go west towards Eriean, or continue along the paved portion of the trail. If you follow the shoreline west, after about 500 m, you will reach the marsh. From this point and for the next 2.5 km or so the narrow sand barrier that separates the lake from the marsh and bay seldom gets more than 40 m wide. At the extreme west end of the sandspit is a channel that separates Rondeau Provincial Park from Eriean. This walk provides excellent opportunities for viewing a variety of waterfowl, gulls, terns, cormorants, herons and shorebirds. The endangered Piping Plover used to nest here but in recent times only single birds are seen on rare occasions. Least and American Bitterns are seen or heard in the south end marshes, and Black-crowned Night-Heron, Sora and Virginia Rail are occasionally seen skulking at the edge of the cattails. On one of the islands at the very

southwest part of the marsh, Forster's and Common Terns nest. Ring-billed and Herring Gulls are two of the most recently discovered nesting species for Rondeau, and they nest either on the south beach or one of the islands along the marsh edge.

If you continue along the paved portion of the trail, you will travel through open woods and some of the most mature beech/maple forest in the park. In the more open areas are excellent opportunities for viewing breeding species such as Yellow-throated Vireo, Yellow- and Black-billed Cuckoos, Gray Catbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler and possibly White-eyed Vireo and Carolina Wren. In the more mature forest are species such as Pileated Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, White-breasted Nuthatch, Wood Thrush, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Scarlet Tanager, American Redstart, Cerulean Warbler and, occasionally, Acadian Flycatcher. During migration literally dozens of species of passerines can be observed.

This trail continues north until, after about 3.0 km, it joins with Gardiner Avenue. You can then travel east along the road as far as the Visitor Centre and then return to your starting point by heading south along either Harrison Trail or Lakeshore Road. You may want to check the lakefront for waterbirds or stop in at the Visitor Centre to see what birds of interest have been reported. The open area around the Centre usually has Warbling Vireo, Eastern Kingbird, Eastern Bluebird, Red-headed Woodpecker and Northern Oriole. Cooper's Hawk and Cerulean Warbler nest regularly along Harrison Trail, and

Chuck-will's-widow, when present, has most frequently been heard after dark between Harrison and Lakeshore south of the Visitor Centre.

The entire loop described in the past few paragraphs is approximately 8 km, if one is walking more or less in a straight line, and not counting a side trip out along the south beach.

One other part of the park to consider while in this area is the Tulip Tree Trail. It is a one kilometre trail, handicap accessible, which begins and ends at the Visitor Centre parking lot. American Redstart, White-eyed Vireo and Pine Warbler can sometimes be found near the trail entrance. It winds through a section of pine/oak forest and beech/maple forest with, as its name suggests, some impressive tulip trees along it as well. There are a number of boardwalks crossing several sloughs, providing access to prime Prothonotary Warbler and Wood Duck habitat. The park's first nesting record of Hooded Merganser and Winter Wren were noted along the biggest slough. It is an excellent trail to see migrating passerines, but nothing that one would not expect to see along the South Point Trail.

### **Area #3 - North of Rondeau Provincial Park (see Area #3 map)**

The unincorporated village of Rondeau Park immediately north of the Provincial Park boundary has retained a fair percentage of original vegetation. The streets crisscrossing the area provide excellent access, and can provide quite good birding opportunities. There are parking areas and accesses to the lake at the east end of most streets. However, please keep in mind that property off

the streets is private, so ensure you stick to the streets.

Along Highway 51, 1.1 km north of the park entrance, there is privately owned marsh/swamp visible on either side of the road. Water levels vary, but there often is suitable habitat for a number of herons, egrets, waterfowl and shorebirds. Parking along the roadway at this precise point is quite restricted, so park only along the roadway south of the marsh and walk along the narrow road allowance to get the best views. Also, at the northeast corner of the intersection of Highway 51 and County Road 17, is a well known flowering tree. Every year, usually during the first week of May, it is in full flower, and attracts numerous hummingbirds, warblers and orioles. In fact, it is probably the most reliable location to find Orchard Oriole at that time of year.

If you continue north from Rondeau along County Road 17, the road follows the Lake Erie shoreline. In the first 3.5 km, there are three small creeks flowing into the lake, each one having a small wetland associated with it near the mouth. Although species such as Belted Kingfisher, Great Blue Heron, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Mallard, Wood Duck, Marsh Wren and occasionally shorebirds are the most likely bird species to be found here, rarities such as Snowy Egret and Yellow-crowned Night-Heron have turned up in recent years. At 3.8 km, the road begins to turn inland, as it climbs some of the cliffs that are typical of the north Lake Erie shoreline. These cliffs provide an excellent vantage point to survey the lake for loons, grebes, scoters, diving

Sketch Map:  
NORTH OF RONDEAU PROVINCIAL PARK

Area # 3





ducks and gulls, especially in the spring and fall.

Just as the road turns northwest towards Morpeth is an excellent opportunity to view migrating hawks in the autumn. Most hawks, especially *buteos*, prefer not to cross large bodies of water and so on their southward migration in the autumn, tend to follow the north shoreline until they can cross over, most often near the mouth of the Detroit River south of Amherstburg. On days when there is a moderate or brisk wind blowing from the northeast, north or northwest, these migrating hawks often "pile up" along the shoreline and follow it southwest. Literally thousands of hawks pass by at anywhere from treetop level to out of sight. From late August to early October, a number of Blue Jays and monarch butterflies can also be observed migrating under these same weather conditions. Park along the road allowance or along a quiet sideroad within 200 metres or so of the shoreline for the best results.

#### **Area #4 - Shrewsbury**

(see Area #4 map)

On the north side of Rondeau Bay is the village of Shrewsbury. The village itself doesn't offer a lot for the visiting birder, but the scrubby areas throughout the village and the streets leading to the bay and marsh edges can be profitable. Large numbers of waterfowl, especially, can be observed from this access from late February through early April and, to a lesser extent, from late autumn until freeze-up.

To get to Shrewsbury from Rondeau, follow Highway 51 north of the park for 3.8 km, to the hamlet of New Scotland. Turn left (west) on

County Road 11. The fields along this road are often used by swans, geese and ducks in March. Freshly ploughed fields in May attract Black-bellied Plover and occasionally American Golden-Plover and Ruddy Turnstone. After 7.4 km you will be at Shrewsbury. A number of streets lead southeast towards Rondeau Bay and adjacent marshes. Some of the best ones are Kent, Brock and Albert Streets.

#### **Area #5 - Erieau**

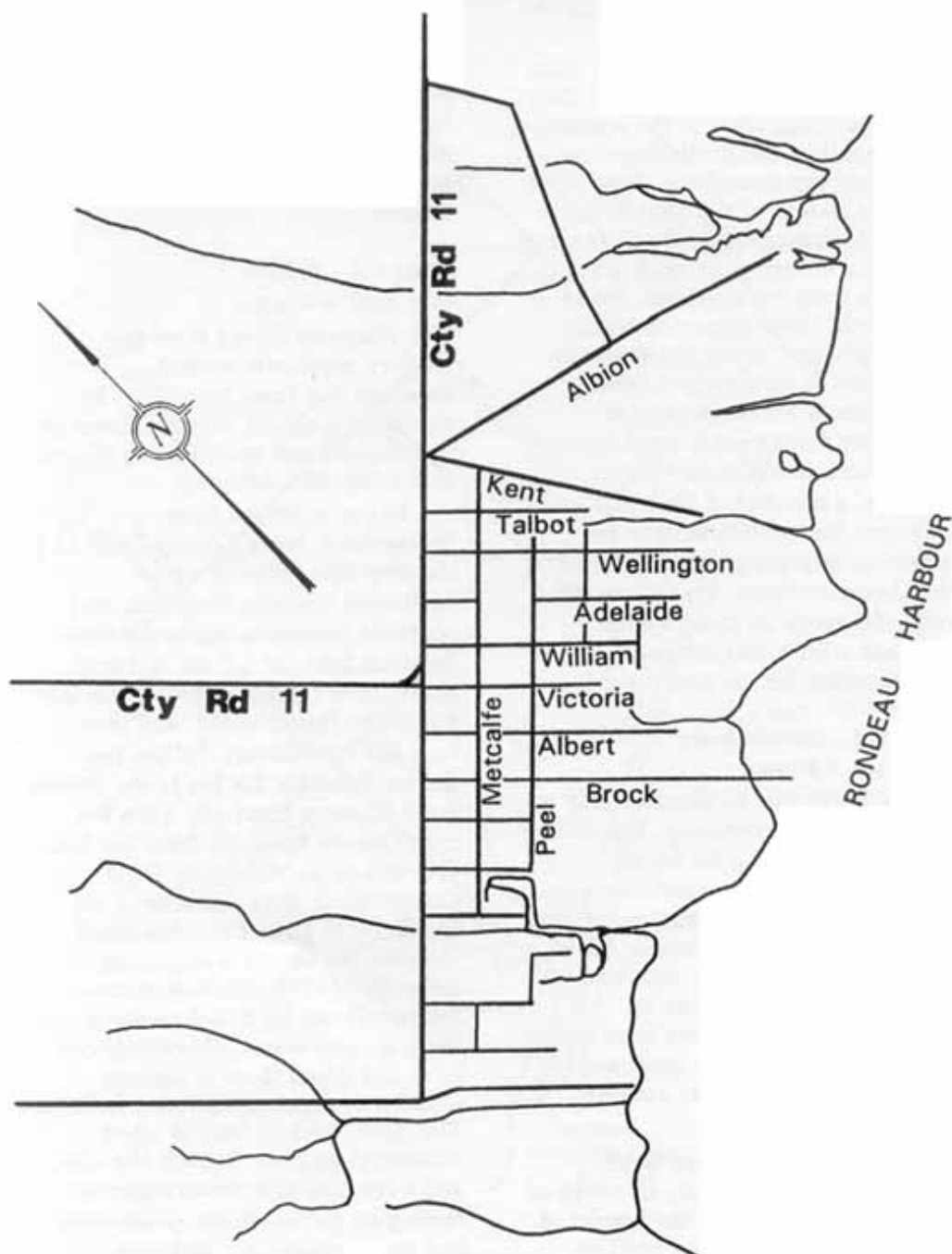
(see Area #5 map)

The village of Erieau is on the western peninsula separating Rondeau Bay from Lake Erie. Its economy is almost entirely based on commercial and sport fishing as well as boating and cottaging.

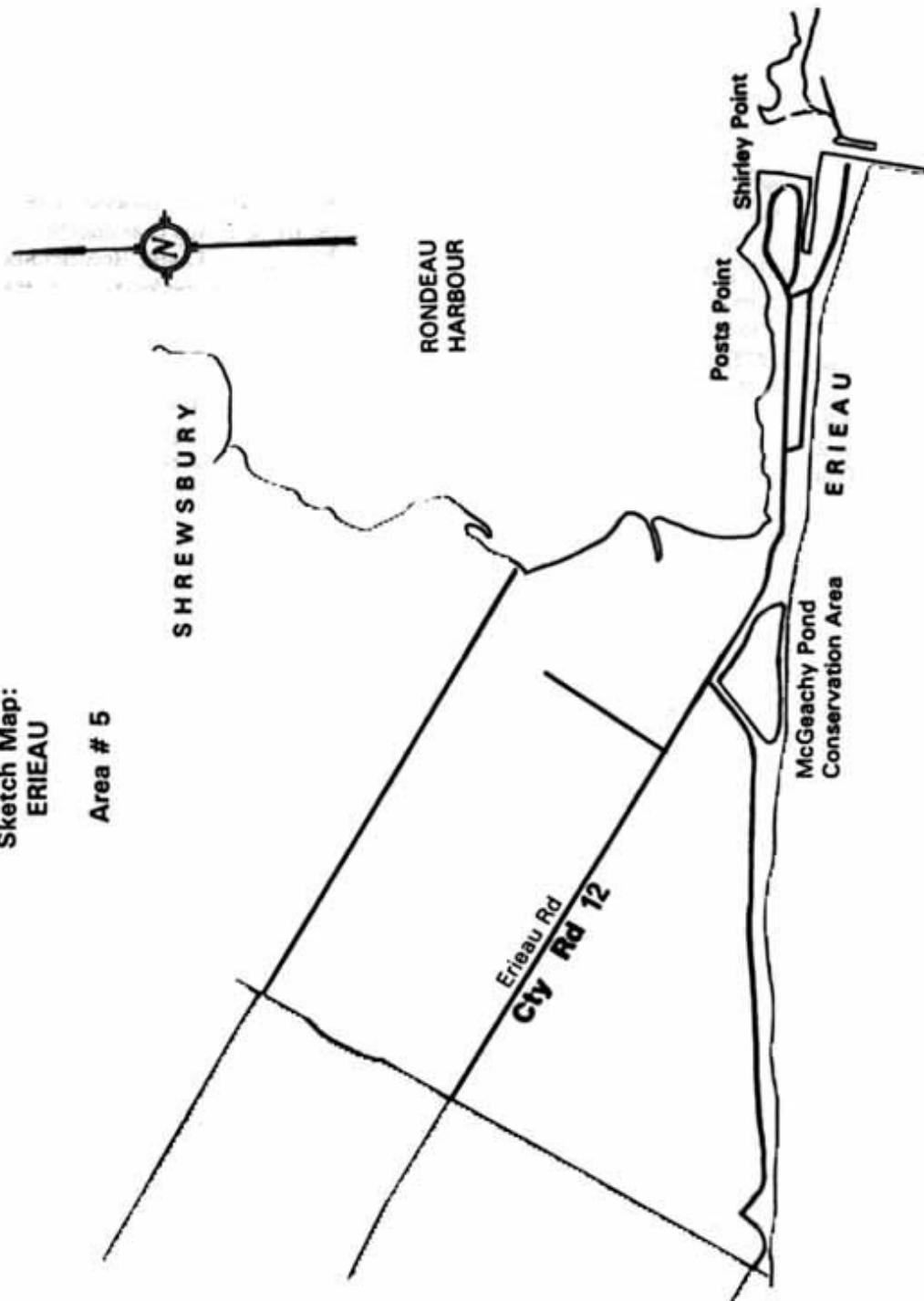
To get to Erieau from Shrewsbury, leave County Road 11 at the stop sign where it turns northwest towards Blenheim, and continue southwest along the New Scotland Line for 1.3 km to Fargo Road. Turn right (northwest) for 2.0 km to the Bisnett Road, and then turn left (southwest). Follow the Bisnett Road for 2.8 km to the Erieau Road (County Road 12). Turn left onto County Road 12. After 2.8 km, you will be at McGeachy Pond Conservation Area. Because of its proximity to Lake Erie, this small wetland can attract a surprising diversity of birds. At least some waterfowl can be found anytime there is open water. Shorebirds can be found when there is suitable mudflat or exposed shoreline habitat. The third week in May is when Whimbrel migrate through the area, and a few are sometimes observed resting on the mudflats. Gulls often loaf on the shoreline, and coot,

**Sketch Map:  
SHREWSBURY**

Area # 4



Sketch Map:  
ERIEAU  
Area # 5



moorhen and rails can occasionally be seen skulking amidst the cattails. Even the black muck fields in the vicinity of McGeachy Pond should be checked for shorebirds and gulls and, when water is present, waterfowl. Rarities that have been recorded here include Snowy Egret, King Rail, American Avocet, Marbled Godwit, Glossy Ibis, Laughing Gull, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Eurasian Wigeon, American White Pelican and even Burrowing Owl!

From McGeachy Pond, continue along County Road 12 for another 3.4 km into Eriau, following the One Way road along the lakeside cottages to a T-intersection. Turn right and continue to the Government Pier alongside the Eriau channel. Parking at the pier is usually no problem, but occasionally it can be a bit busy. It is a popular short-term destination for people wanting to watch the commercial fishing tugs and numerous power and sail boats coming and going through the main channel, or to fish from the pier. Fortunately, it is also a great spot from which to observe birds. Hundreds and sometimes thousands of gulls and terns can be easily observed resting on the pier, the rocks or the water. Numerous waterfowl may also be present, especially in spring and late fall. Major movements of Bonaparte's Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants and diving ducks can be seen over the lake from the relative comfort of one's car. Shorebirds occasionally use the pier, especially if the wind is such (e.g. NW-NE) that the algae are exposed. Snowy Owls have been observed from here, sometimes sitting on a gravel pile or harbour post, or sometimes observed in the

Rondeau marsh to the east or on the Park's south beach.

The spring and fall are the two best times to visit this location, especially when a storm is raging or immediately after a storm. Waterbirds seeking shelter from the heavy seas of Lake Erie may take refuge in the harbour. Indeed, it is usually at these times that species such as Harlequin Duck, Red-necked Grebe, Common Eider or King Eider have turned up. On one occasion, even a Black Skimmer put in an appearance for about five days! Red Phalarope occurs irregularly in the fall, and Purple Sandpiper can be found on the pier or rocks almost annually anytime from late October until at least mid-December. However, a note of caution is in order: the lake can be very rough, causing water to wash over the pier. In addition the pier can be slippery when wet. **THEREFORE, DO NOT ATTEMPT TO WALK OUT ON THE PIER DURING THESE TIMES.** More than one unsuspecting person has been swept to their death from this pier.

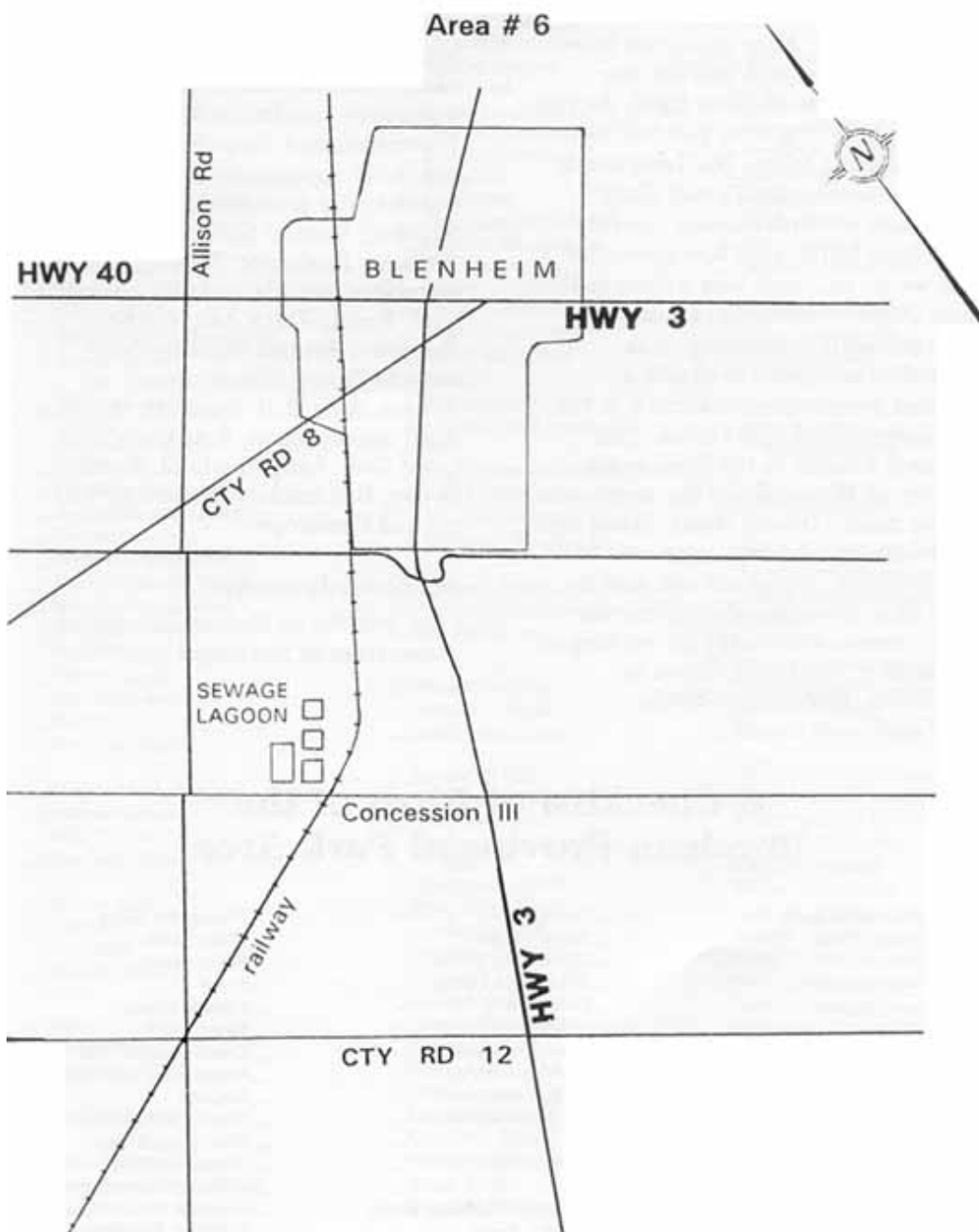
#### **Area #6 - Blenheim Sewage Lagoon** (see Area #6 map)

A birding trip to the Rondeau area wouldn't be complete without a visit to the Blenheim Sewage Lagoons. Perhaps they don't sound like the best place to have your lunch, but lots of birds would disagree! The nutrient-rich waters, mudflats and edges provide a rich, tasty banquet for dozens of species of birds, whether they are just passing through or remaining to nest.

To reach the lagoons from Eriau, head north along County Road 12.



**Sketch Map:  
BLENHEIM SEWAGE LAGOON**



After 7.1 km north of McGeachy Pond, you will come to Highway 3. Turn right (east) on Highway 3 for 1.4 km until you come to the intersection of Concession 3. Turn left (north) on Concession 3 and travel 1.1 km. After you cross the railroad tracks, you will see the sewage lagoons on your right. As you approach the lagoons, you will notice signs ranging from "No Trespassing" to "Trespassing By Permit Only". Although no birders have run into problems in the past few years that I am aware of, there was a time in the mid 1980s when birders were charged with trespassing. It is therefore advisable to obtain a written permit from the clerk at the Blenheim Municipal Office. This office is located in the downtown section of Blenheim on the north side of the main (Talbot) street, about half way between the two main sets of traffic lights. If you are not able to stop in at the office during normal office hours, you might try writing in advance to the Clerk, Town of Blenheim, Blenheim, Ontario, N0P 1A0.

Once you have obtained permission to access the lagoons, take your time to check all four of the lagoon cells. Water levels and the amount of vegetation in each cell will likely vary, therefore influencing what birds are present. Virtually all of the herons, rails, shorebirds and waterfowl species on the Rondeau Provincial Park bird checklist have put in an appearance at the lagoons, but the only shorebirds to nest are Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper and Wilson's Phalarope. Nesting waterfowl are Mallard, Blue-winged Teal, Ruddy Duck and Northern Shoveler. Rarities recorded here include Piping Plover, American Avocet, King Rail, Eurasian Wigeon, Ruff, Snowy Egret, Franklin's Gull, Little Gull, Laughing Gull, Eared Grebe, Red-necked Grebe and Red-necked Phalarope.

#### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Sharon Korpan for preparation of the maps.

## A Checklist of Birds of the Rondeau Provincial Park Area

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-throated Loon        | <input type="checkbox"/> Great Egret                | <input type="checkbox"/> Trumpeter Swan      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Common Loon              | <input type="checkbox"/> Snowy Egret                | <input type="checkbox"/> Mute Swan           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pied-billed Grebe        | <input type="checkbox"/> Little Blue Heron          | <input type="checkbox"/> Snow Goose          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horned Grebe             | <input type="checkbox"/> Tricolored Heron           | <input type="checkbox"/> Brant               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Red-necked Grebe         | <input type="checkbox"/> Cattle Egret               | <input type="checkbox"/> Canada Goose        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Eared Grebe              | <input type="checkbox"/> Green Heron                | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Duck           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Gannet          | <input type="checkbox"/> Black-crowned Night-Heron  | <input type="checkbox"/> Green-winged Teal   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American White Pelican   | <input type="checkbox"/> Yellow-crowned Night-Heron | <input type="checkbox"/> American Black Duck |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Double-crested Cormorant | <input type="checkbox"/> Glossy Ibis                | <input type="checkbox"/> Mallard             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Bittern         | <input type="checkbox"/> Fulvous Whistling-Duck     | <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Pintail    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Least Bittern            | <input type="checkbox"/> Tundra Swan                | <input type="checkbox"/> Blue-winged Teal    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Great Blue Heron         |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Cinnamon Teal       |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Northern Shoveler   |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Gadwall             |
|   |   | <input type="checkbox"/> Eurasian Wigeon     |

- American Wigeon
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Ring-necked Duck
- Tufted Duck
- Greater Scaup
- Lesser Scaup
- Common Eider
- King Eider
- Harlequin Duck
- Oldsquaw
- Black Scoter
- Surf Scoter
- White-winged Scoter
- Common Goldeneye
- Barrow's Goldeneye
- Bufflehead
- Hooded Merganser
- Common Merganser
- Red-breasted Merganser
- Ruddy Duck
- Turkey Vulture
- Osprey
- Mississippi Kite
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Harrier
- Sharp-shinned Hawk
- Cooper's Hawk
- Northern Goshawk
- Red-shouldered Hawk
- Broad-winged Hawk
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Rough-legged Hawk
- Golden Eagle
- American Kestrel
- Merlin
- Peregrine Falcon
- Ring-necked Pheasant
- Ruffed Grouse
- Wild Turkey
- Northern Bobwhite
- Yellow Rail
- Black Rail
- King Rail
- Virginia Rail
- Sora
- Common Moorhen
- American Coot
- Sandhill Crane
- Black-bellied Plover
- American Golden-Plover
- Semipalmated Plover
- Piping Plover
- Killdeer
- American Avocet
- Greater Yellowlegs
- Lesser Yellowlegs
- Solitary Sandpiper
- Willet
- Spotted Sandpiper
- Upland Sandpiper
- Eskimo Curlew
- Whimbrel
- Hudsonian Godwit
- Marbled Godwit
- Ruddy Turnstone
- Red Knot
- Sanderling
- Semipalmated Sandpiper
- Western Sandpiper
- Least Sandpiper
- White-rumped Sandpiper
- Baird's Sandpiper
- Pectoral Sandpiper
- Purple Sandpiper
- Dunlin
- Stilt Sandpiper
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper
- Ruff
- Short-billed Dowitcher
- Long-billed Dowitcher
- Common Snipe
- American Woodcock
- Wilson's Phalarope
- Red-necked Phalarope
- Red Phalarope
- Pomarine Jaeger
- Parasitic Jaeger
- Long-tailed Jaeger
- Laughing Gull
- Franklin's Gull
- Little Gull
- Common Black-headed Gull
- Bonaparte's Gull
- Ring-billed Gull
- California Gull
- Herring Gull
- Thayer's Gull
- Iceland Gull
- Lesser Black-backed Gull
- Glaucous Gull
- Great Black-backed Gull
- Black-legged Kittiwake
- Caspian Tern
- Common Tern
- Forster's Tern
- Black Tern
- Black Skimmer
- Thick-billed Murre
- Rock Dove
- Band-tailed Pigeon
- Mourning Dove
- Passenger Pigeon
- Black-billed Cuckoo
- Yellow-billed Cuckoo
- Barn Owl
- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Great Horned Owl
- Snowy Owl
- Northern Hawk Owl
- Burrowing Owl
- Barred Owl
- Long-eared Owl
- Short-eared Owl
- Northern Saw-whet Owl
- Common Nighthawk
- Chuck-will's-widow
- Whip-poor-will
- Chimney Swift
- Ruby-throated Hummingbird
- Belted Kingfisher
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
- Downy Woodpecker
- Hairy Woodpecker
- Three-toed Woodpecker
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Northern Flicker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Olive-sided Flycatcher
- Eastern Wood-Pewee
- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher
- Acadian Flycatcher
- Alder Flycatcher
- Willow Flycatcher
- Least Flycatcher
- Eastern Phoebe
- Great Crested Flycatcher
- Western Kingbird
- Eastern Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Horned Lark
- Purple Martin
- Tree Swallow
- Northern Rough-winged Swallow
- Bank Swallow
- Cliff Swallow
- Barn Swallow

- Blue Jay
- Black-billed Magpie
- American Crow
- Common Raven
  
- Black-capped Chickadee
- Boreal Chickadee
- Tufted Titmouse
  
- Red-breasted Nuthatch
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Brown Creeper
  
- Carolina Wren
- Bewick's Wren
- House Wren
- Winter Wren
- Sedge Wren
- Marsh Wren
  
- Golden-crowned Kinglet
- Ruby-crowned Kinglet
- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher
  
- Eastern Bluebird
- Townsend's Solitaire
- Veery
- Gray-cheeked Thrush
- Swainson's Thrush
- Hermit Thrush
- Wood Thrush
- Eurasian Blackbird
- American Robin
- Varied Thrush
  
- Gray Catbird
- Northern Mockingbird
- Sage Thrasher
- Brown Thrasher
  
- American Pipit
- Cedar Waxwing
  
- Northern Shrike
- Loggerhead Shrike
  
- European Starling
  
- White-eyed Vireo
- Bell's Vireo
- Solitary Vireo
- Yellow-throated Vireo
  
- Warbling Vireo
- Philadelphia Vireo
- Red-eyed Vireo
  
- Blue-winged Warbler
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Tennessee Warbler
- Orange-crowned Warbler
- Nashville Warbler
- Northern Parula
- Yellow Warbler
- Chestnut-sided Warbler
- Magnolia Warbler
- Cape May Warbler
- Black-throated Blue Warbler
- Yellow-rumped Warbler
- Townsend's Warbler
- Black-throated Green Warbler
- Blackburnian Warbler
- Yellow-throated Warbler
- Pine Warbler
- Kirtland's Warbler
- Prairie Warbler
- Palm Warbler
- Bay-breasted Warbler
- Blackpoll Warbler
- Cerulean Warbler
- Black-and-white Warbler
- American Redstart
- Prothonotary Warbler
- Worm-eating Warbler
- Swainson's Warbler
- Ovenbird
- Northern Waterthrush
- Louisiana Waterthrush
- Kentucky Warbler
- Connecticut Warbler
- Mourning Warbler
- Common Yellowthroat
- Hooded Warbler
- Wilson's Warbler
- Canada Warbler
- Yellow-breasted Chat
  
- Summer Tanager
- Scarlet Tanager
  
- Northern Cardinal
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak
- Blue Grosbeak
  
- Indigo Bunting
- Dickcissel
- Rufous-sided Towhee
- American Tree Sparrow
- Chipping Sparrow
- Clay-colored Sparrow
- Field Sparrow
- Vesper Sparrow
- Lark Sparrow
- Lark Bunting
- Savannah Sparrow
- Grasshopper Sparrow
- Henslow's Sparrow
- Le Conte's Sparrow
- Sharp-tailed Sparrow
- Fox Sparrow
- Song Sparrow
- Lincoln's Sparrow
- Swamp Sparrow
- White-throated Sparrow
- White-crowned Sparrow
- Harris's Sparrow
  
- Dark-eyed Junco
- Lapland Longspur
- Snow Bunting
  
- Bobolink
- Red-winged Blackbird
- Eastern Meadowlark
- Western Meadowlark
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Rusty Blackbird
- Brewer's Blackbird
- Common Grackle
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Orchard Oriole
- Northern Oriole
  
- Pine Grosbeak
- Purple Finch
- House Finch
- Red Crossbill
- White-winged Crossbill
- Common Redpoll
- Hoary Redpoll
- Pine Siskin
- American Goldfinch
- Evening Grosbeak
  
- House Sparrow

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