

Tropical Birding Tours

Ohio & Michigan: CUSTOM Warbler Photo Tour



Prairie Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

Tour Guide: Ben Knoot

The photos in this report were photographed by guide Ben Knoot unless otherwise stated.

Tour Introduction

This was a custom tour that organized and run with a group of friends. The group was a combination of bird photographers, one videographer, and one birder. Luckily everyone agreed to the plan so, the trip was divided into three sections. The first, the Hocking Hills section was primarily for the photographers and videographers. Then, we hit the shores of Lake Erie to find a few target birds for the birder (as well some good photo opportunities for the photographers). Lastly, we took the long drive into Michigan for both the photographers and the birder...what a great trip combination!

The Hocking Hills were a fantastic start to the trip. Here, over a dozen warblers breed in these stunning forests surrounded by small ponds, swamps and brooks and rolling hills. Here we spent three full days photographing a variety of great warblers like Kentucky, Hooded, Black-and-white and Prairie among other great species. Our birder opted to skip this part of the tour

After we picked up the birder for the "Shores of Lake Erie" portion of the trip, we spent the majority of the time at the four most popular locations; Magee Marsh, Ottawa NWR, Maumee Bay State Park and Metzger Marsh. Several great warbler species were photographed here but the main chase targets were difficult. Thankfully, on the last day, we managed to make it 3/3 with a quick sighting and "auditory check" of Connecticut Warbler. The others found were Mourning Warbler and Least Flycatcher. Now to head up to Michigan for the last section of the tour.

Once in Michigan, our mission was simple. Find the last two targets for the birder and get some more killer shots of breeding warblers for the photographers. I am happy to say that with the addition of Kirtland's Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler, the birder was satisfied and knowing that we got tremendous photos of both, the photographers were super pleased as well. We also managed to stay relatively out of the path of an approaching tornado that spun up just 30miles north of our location.

All in all, this was a very fun and the first trip of its kind for me. There were a lot of moving parts but overall, I was extremely satisfied with our results, the photographers and videographer got some amazing imagery and videos and the birder got all of his targets including a few butterflies he wasn't expecting. Overall, we had the possibility of seeing 33 warbler species. We saw 32, just missing Northern Waterthrush and of those 32, we had good photographic opportunities at 23, one heck of a ratio if you ask me. Great trip with some great friends!

This trip report is broken down into three sections rather than day-by-day due to the fact that many of our days, especially in the first and third sections were repeats so that we could maximize our photography chances. Enjoy!



Itinerary

May 12th.....Arrival/Hocking Hills
May 13th.....Hocking Hills
May 14th.....Hocking Hills
May 15th.....Hocking Hills to Shores of Lake Erie
May 16th.....Shores of Lake Erie
May 17th.....Shores of Lake Erie
May 18th.....Shores of Lake Erie to Michigan
May 19th.....Michigan
May 20th.....Departures

Tour Summary by General Location

Hocking Hills

This was my first time in this beautiful area. Full of stunning trees, beautiful streams, swamps and breathtaking scenery. I did truly fall in love with this part of Ohio and the birds, WOW...this area was packed full of breeding warblers. Everything from Yellow-throated Warbler to Worm-eating Warbler breeds in this part of the state which means the photographic opportunities are abundant and ripe for the taking. Throughout the three days we had here, we photographed 17 warbler species; **Kentucky Warbler, Northern Parula, Cerulean Warbler, Hooded Warbler, American Redstart, Blue-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler, Black-throated Green Warbler, Black-and-white Warbler, Prairie Warbler, Yellow-throated Warbler, Worm-eating Warbler, Yellow Warbler, Ovenbird, Yellow Warbler, Blackpoll Warbler, and Hooded Warbler.** We also managed many “non-warbler” birds like; **Eastern Towhee, Scarlet Tanager, White-eyed Vireo, Yellow-throated Vireo, Red-eyed Vireo, Indigo Bunting, Brown Thrasher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Wood Thrush.** After our time here we ventured north to the shores of Lake Erie.



Hooded Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knot



Prairie Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Worm-eating Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Pine Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Black-throated Green Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



American Redstart - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Ovenbird - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Yellow-throated Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Black-and-white Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Blue-winged Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Cerulean Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Kentucky Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Northern Parula - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Yellow-throated Vireo - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



White-eyed Vireo - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Indigo Bunting - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Scarlet Tanager - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot

Shores of Lake Erie

Here on the shores of one of the great lakes, we spent three great days exploring four wonderful locations; [Magee Marsh](#), [Metzger Marsh](#), [Ottawa NWR](#) and [Maumee Bay](#). The photography here is difficult for a multitude of reasons. For one, there are many more people here so ducking under and around them can prove difficult for photographic success. Another is that most of the warblers do not breed here, making find them on breeding territories literally impossible which also means they are not singing on exposed perches. Regardless, we were able to add; **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, **Bay-breasted Warbler**, **Canada Warbler**, **Magnolia Warbler**, **Blackburnian Warbler**, **Mourning Warbler**, **Connecticut Warbler**, **Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler**, **Black-throated Blue Warbler** and **Prothonotary Warbler**. We added several more non-warbler birds like; **Philadelphia Vireo**, **Warbling Vireo**, **Gray Catbird**, **Red-winged Blackbird**, **Eastern Kingbird**, **Trumpeter Swan**, **Eastern Bluebird**, **Tree Swallow**, **Black-tailed Gnatcatcher** and **Eastern Screech Owl**.



Blackpoll Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Trumpeter Swan - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Black-throated Blue Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Warbling Vireo - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Eastern Screech Owl - Photo by Guide: Ben Knot

Central Michigan

The last section of our trip took place in central Michigan, specifically around the [Houghton Lake](#) area. Here we searched Jack Pine forests, and forested lake regions for more warbler photography opportunities and to find the last two warblers for our birder friend. Luckily, one of them was quite easy, the famous **Kirtland's Warbler**. The other, the **Golden-winged Warbler** required a bit more effort but we did managed to spend several wonderful minutes photographing both of these warblers. We were able to photograph a lovely **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, **American Redstart** and **Common Yellowthroat** very well. **Nashville Warbler** was a bit trickier but we managed some decent photos and we photographed several good “non-warblers” like; **Rose-breasted Grosbeak**, **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker**, **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, **Pileated Woodpecker**, **Blue Jay** and a **Common Grackle**. The tour concluded here and the guests flew out of Grand Rapids the next day.



Kirtland's Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoop



Golden-winged Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Nashville Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Chestnut-sided Warbler - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Common Yellowthroat - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Rose-breasted Grosbeak - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Pileated Woodpecker - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot



Blue Jay - Photo by Guide: Ben Knoot