

ONTARIO TRIP REPORT - February 14-16, 2009

By Adrian Binns

Day 1: Drive to Ottawa

11 of us from the DVOC got up well before dawn and headed north. Our first bit of excitement came at the border when of all people Tony was pulled aside for questioning. Just a slight problem of being refused entry on a previous occasion he had not told us about! All turned out well and we were soon tracking down a Northern Hawk Owl (*below*) at the Ottawa airport.



Once Marty had spotted it in the distance we had excellent views before watching it fly away. In the center of Ottawa the Rideau River was frozen with the exception of few open places. One of those held a couple of male goldeneyes, actually one Barrows and one Common, making for a wonderful study comparison (*below*).



Common (l) and Barrows (r) Goldeneye





Along the park path a male Pileated Woodpecker (*left*) was extremely cooperative banging away low on a tree trunk before flying right at us only to veer away as it was about to hit us!



The area just west of Ottawa produced a second Hawk Owl and flocks of hundreds upon hundreds of Bohemian Waxwings (*above right*). We could see them in the distance and followed in the direction they were headed before meeting up with them feeding on viburnum berries besides the road. At the Hilda Road feeders there was considerable activity with Hairy Woodpeckers taking a back seat to Pine Siskins and redpolls. Amongst a handful of Common, there were at least 2 frosty ones, one of which was certainly a Hoary (*below*).



The remainder of the afternoon was spent trying to locate one of the 'many' Great Gray Owls that were being seen. We had a tough time. Maybe it had to do with the gorgeous weather, a bright cloudless sunny day keeping them in the woods longer than usual? All we needed was one and eventually did get to see one at sunset on the edge of a deciduous woodlot (*below*) as it hunted for voles. Several times it did fly a short distance to another perch but alas always a little further away from us.



Day 2: Amherst Island; Orillia vicinity

A quick stop after breakfast at the Kingston Hot ponds produced a few expected duck species and American Coot as well as Hooded Merganser. Our first Northern Shrike was also found here. It was another brilliant morning and the sun was well up by the time we were on the ferry to Amherst. The lake was frozen with the exception of the broken ice along our course and one open section of water. Common Mergansers and a few Red-breasted Mergansers were amongst many gulls, one of which was an Iceland.



Once on the island a Snowy Owl (*left*) put on a very nice show flying between telephone poles actively hunting which kept us all enthralled.

There was little snow on the roads following recent warm temperatures and rains which made the drive into Owl Woods easier. Walking in, the feeders were rather quiet with the exception of an American Tree Sparrow, the obligatory Black-capped Chickadees and Downy Woodpeckers.

A short distance beyond we found a Boreal Owl which was a great relief considering that not everyone had been finding it. Once through the deciduous section we fanned out to look for Saw-whets before heading into the older Jack Pine plantation. We located the Barred Owl which has been decimating the Long-eared and Short-eared Owls.

Once through the dense plantation Marty called us over for a small owl sitting in the open in a shorter stand of Jack Pines. This was a perfect scenario, allowing us to go through the identification of both Saw-whet and Boreal. Once everyone had described what they were seeing we all knew it was a Boreal, and Marty is to be thanked for not only finding it but giving us the opportunity for such a perfect lesson. Now we had to find a Saw-whet to compare them. Our next bird was indeed a Saw-whet, then another, followed by a third Boreal! We left the woods very content that all our target owls had been seen exceptionally well.



Boreal Owl (left) and Northern Saw-whet Owl (right) for comparison

On the way to the ferry we stopped for a distance dark morph Rough-legged Hawk, possibly the same one that we saw go over the van on our way to the ferry earlier this morning. A second Snowy Owl was by the firehouse and on the ferry crossing a third one was sitting on the ice.

It was a long journey west to the Orillia area, punctuated with the obligatory stop at Tim Horton's for lunch. Once in the Orillia area we visited known recent Great Gray Owl sites but came up short.

In spite of dipping on the 'big' owl our enthusiasm was not dampened as we got to see the best mammal of the trip, a wolf of some mixture, watch us watching it in the middle of a snow covered field. I don't believe that there are any pure wolves or even pure coyotes in this part of Ontario, so even though it was likely a hybrid of some type, I'd like to think it was still a wolf!



Crossing the Narrows in Orillia a group of 14 Trumpeter Swans were north of the bridge loafing on the ice. Our only Snow Buntings were seen amongst the open pastures east of town when a flock of about 60 birds flushed as we drove past. Any Great Grays that may have been in the area never materialized, so we headed north to Bracebridge just after sunset. There was enough light once we reached our destination but no Great Gray. As a fine consolation Denis found a Barred Owl roosting low besides someone's garage.

Day 3: Algonquin Provincial Park

A picture perfect day greeted us, the sky being a deep orange along the horizon, as we purchased our lunch sandwiches from "Timmies". It was straight into Algonquin Park. The west gate had a dozen Pine Grosbeaks, Hairy Woodpecker and White-breasted Nuthatch. Our usual one spot stop along the highway produced a pair of Black-backed Woodpeckers (*right*) that were quite happy drumming to each other.

With two species in particular being of great interest to the group we decided to concentration on Opeongo Road. We got our Gray Jays at the gate along with Red-breasted Nuthatch. Being such a nice day and with almost no snow on the road we were easily able to walk for as far as we wanted. For three hours we worked stretches of spruce, hemlock, cedar and pines for the grouse. Even saw many grouse tracks and followed them as best as we could. Clyde caught sight of a grouse flushing but we could never locate it.





The Boreal Chickadees on the other hand were far more cooperative. As is their habit they were seen at the very top of a spruce tree working their way deep inside and when they did show themselves it was for long enough that we all got excellent views. Three Common Redpolls were feeding alongside the road and kept flying just ahead of

us. Pairs of White-winged Crossbills flew over with some showing well including a couple feeding on snow. Phil found a pair of Red Crossbills that sat around long enough for those that were not grouse hunting in the woods to see. The frozen lakes and evergreen vistas along this stretch of road were really beautiful.

One final check along the Spruce Bog Trail failed to turn up the grouse, though we did get to see a pair of Ruffed Grouse besides the road just before the bog. The feeders at the park visitor's center held an Evening Grosbeak, many Pine Grosbeaks, Blue Jays, Hairy and Downy Woodpecker as well as siskins and redpolls. By 2pm we were back on the road for the long journey home, this time without any incident at the border!



Standing left to right: *Vincent, Chris, Clyde, Tony, Ralph, Bonnie, Phil*
Kneeling left to right: *Marty, Denis, Todd*

SPECIES LIST

(the 1st number is the maximum seen in one day; the 2nd number is the number of days it was seen)

Birds (58 species):

Trumpeter Swan 14/1
Canada Goose 12/2
American Black Duck 4/1
Mallard c/2
Common Goldeneye 10/2
Barrows Goldeneye 1/1
Hooded Merganser 4/1
Common Merganser 60/2
Red-breasted Merganser 4/1
American Coot 15/1
Bald Eagle 3/1
Red-tailed Hawk 40/3
Rough-legged Hawk 2/1
American Kestrel 1/1
Ring-necked Pheasant 1/1
Ruffed Grouse 3/2
Wild Turkey 48/2
Herring Gull 40/2
Iceland Gull 1/1
Great Black-backed Gull 6/2

Rock Pigeon 50/3
Mourning Dove 6/3
Snowy Owl 3/1
Northern Hawk Owl 2/1
Barred Owl 1/1
Great Gray Owl 1/1
Boreal Owl 3/1
Northern Saw-whet Owl 2/1
Downy Woodpecker 4/3
Hairy Woodpecker 5/2
Bl. -backed Woodpecker 2/1
North. Flicker 1/1 (*NY only*)
Pileated Woodpecker 1/1
Northern Shrike 2/2
Gray Jay 8/1
Blue Jay c/3
American Crow c/2
Common Raven 20/3
Bl. -capped Chickadee 18/3
Boreal Chickadee 3/1

Red-breasted Nuthatch 4/1
White-breasted Nuthatch 2/3
Brown Creeper 1/1
American Robin 3/2
Bohemian Waxwing 1000/1
Cedar Waxwing 12/1
European Starling 30/3
American Tree Sparrow 4/2
Snow Bunting 60/2
Pine Grosbeak 20/3
House Finch 2/1
Red Crossbill 4/1
White-winged Crossbill 10/1
Common Redpoll 100+/3
Hoary Redpoll 1/1
Pine Siskin 10/2
American Goldfinch 2/2
House Sparrow 10/1

Mammals:

Red Squirrel 4/2
Gray Squirrel 2/1
Black Squirrel 6/1
White-tailed Deer 50/3
Meadow Vole 8/1
Muskrat 1/1 (*right*)
Wolf 1/1



*Trip Report and photographs © Adrian Binns
except Wolf © Marty Dellwo
Feb 2009*

www.wildsidenaturetours.com