

Midwest Warbling

Editorial Notes:

All of the photos in this writeup are “live.” Clicking on them will open a new tab or window with a version of the photo on Google Photos, which is larger format, and often has more information. Also, all the photos can be seen in the [album 2023 Midwest Warbler Tour](#), which you can see by clicking on that link.

Background

We have heard about MaGee Marsh in Ohio for years from enthusiastic birders, but never got around to going there. Located on the south shore of Lake Erie, the marsh is an important stopover for migrating birds, especially colorful warblers in spring plumage. They stay and feed extensively before heading out over the water.

This trip combined a chance to see eastern warblers that we knew from the Texas coast instead to the western ones we have grown accustomed to. And, there was a special added attraction. After MaGee Marsh, we drove into Michigan, mainly to see the Kirtland’s Warbler. This species has a very restricted breeding range. It prefers Jack Pines for nesting, but only those a few years old. A program established a few years ago insures that there are always some trees the correct height. Everyone in the tour group hoped to see this bird, the only actual lifer for us.

We added Eurasian Tree Sparrow, a common sparrow we’ve seen in Europe and Asia, to our North American list. Some were released in the St. Louis area and have spread north.

In Michigan, we also visited Tawas Point State Park, a narrow spit of land on the edge of Lake Huron, another spot for migrants to rest and feed.

This was a tour heavy in *eye candy*.

Ohio



Common Merganser

On the way to the lakeshore, we stopped at Cuyahoga Valley National Park, along Station Rd and Towpath Trail. There we had what was, at least for us, an unusual sighting a Male Common Merganser at the top of a large broken off tree trunk. Almost all of our previous sightings have been birds swimming.

However, the main event was to come.

The boardwalk at MaGee Marsh is everything we had been told:

- It was extensive, reaching into many different habitats.
- It provided sights of many spectacular species, not only birds.
- It was full of people.

Our tour schedule called for us to arrive the week following the annual birding affair that draws huge crowds. Even so, there were quite a few people there.



Prothonotary Warbler on Boardwalk

A pair of Prothonotary Warblers had built a nest in a hole in the boardwalk. Fortunately, the area had been cordoned off, so the birds visited the nest frequently while we watched. Here's a photo of one.

Warblers are hard to photograph. They flit around in and out of the leaves. The next photo is a real quiz bird. Click on it for more info.

A Downy Woodpecker cooperated just enough for a photo. The small black dots on the outer tail feather is a semi-mythical field mark that can be seen in the photo.



Immature American Redstart



Downy Woodpecker

It wasn't all warblers. We saw our share of little brown birds, such as this Savannah Sparrow.

Another LBJ (Little Brown Job) was the House Wren, often hard to see well.



Savannah Sparrow



House Wren

Michigan

From MaGee Marsh, we moved on to Tawas State Park, a spit of land in Michigan reaching out into Lake Huron.



Rose-breasted Grosbeak

There was plenty of eye candy there as well, such as this nice male Rose-breasted Grosbeak, another eastern migrant we haven't seen in a while. The same applies to the Baltimore Oriole, Scarlet Tanager, and Gray Catbird

Some more interesting birds seen in Michigan are these. The Female Red-winged Blackbird was much more colorful, being in breeding plumage, than we are used to seeing. The Common Grackle seems to be glaring at Jim as he takes the photo..



Baltimore Oriole



Scarlet Tanager



Gray Catbird



Female Red-winged Blackbird



Common Grackle

Our guides, Michael O'Brien and his charming wife, Louise Zemaitis, were both wonderful. A nice trip.