

Toronto and southern Ontario, June 1-4th 2008

Toronto city area and the Carden Alvar (Kirkfield)

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I visited Toronto a couple of days in the beginning of June 2008 to attend a conference and had some extra days to do some birding around the city on my own. Toronto is located in southern Ontario on the shores of the Lake Ontario. From the impressive 553m Canadian National Tower you could on a clear day see the Niagara falls and the US state of New York on the opposite southern side of the lake.

I also managed to get in touch with a local birder, Knud Rasmussen (as it happens through his own website www.birdingpal.com), who was kind enough to take me on a day trip a bit north to the beautiful Carden Alvar area and a few other places on the way. Passerine migration was essentially over, so rather few warblers and flycatchers were recorded compared to what is possible only a week or two earlier in the season.



Toronto City Centre seen from the Tommy Thomson Park in Lake Ontario

The following places were visited. All are easily accessible and overview maps and additional information can be found on the internet:

- **Tommy Thomson Park (aka Leslie Street Spit).** Visited on June 1st between 15:45-18:15. This man-made peninsula stretching 5 kilometres out in the Lake Ontario has only been around for half a century and is now a significant breeding place for e.g. gulls, terns, herons and cormorants. Taxi from centre to go there. Walked from the entrance as far as the big cormorant colony. Very windy, fairly warm, partially cloudy. The walk back to the hotel in the city took well more than one hour, so to have arranged with someone to pick me up would have been better as there were no “stray” taxis around.
- **High Park.** Located in central Toronto. A large rather densely wooded recreation area with a lake at one end. Can attract a fair number of warblers and other migrating passerines. Visited on June 3rd between 13:00-15:00. Wet and drizzling at arrival, fairly warm and even a bit of sun at the end. Moderate winds.
- **Toronto Island Park.** Visited on June 4th. Situated just off shore the city centre, and originally a chain of smaller islands providing shelter for the Toronto harbour, this is now popular recreation area with the city airport located at the west end. At the time of my visit there was overcast, a bit windy and rather cool but no rain (previous evening was very cool and rainy). Took the 6.35-ferry to Ward’s harbor, then walked west 5km to Hanlon’s Harbour for the 9.45-ferry back.
- **Carden Alvar (Kirkfield).** Situated some 125km north east of Toronto, this is one of Ontario’s finest birding areas. Visited on June 2nd between 07:30-12:00. Started just north of Kirkfield on the “Wylie Rd” going north through the “Sedge Wren Marsh”, then turning east on “Alvar Rd” through some deciduous forest to the west side of Lake Dalrymple. Then south back along Lake Dalrymple, eventually coming back to the starting point near Kirkfield. Warm and sunny, but rather windy. One is strictly obliged to stay on the roads, so this is stereotypical American birdwatching when you certainly never need to get very far away from your vehicle. “No trespassing”-signs were as abundant as the tree swallows. Since the protection of the whole area to a large degree depend on the good will of the many land owners, unnecessary conflicts are unwanted also by the local birders.
- **Lake Dalrymple.** A short stop in the afternoon on the way back from Carden Alvar, around lunch time, at a bridge between a narrow passage over the lake.
- **Nonquon Sewage Lagoons (Durham).** Visited June 2nd between 14:00-15:00. Situated south of Kirkfield on the way back to Toronto from Carden Alvar. A permit is necessary to enter and this can be purchased at the Durham Region Transfer Site located at 1623 Reach Rd. Check the business hours before planning to go here.

Species notes

TT = Tommy Thomson Park, HP = High Park, TI = Toronto Island Park, CA = Carden Alvar, LD = Lake Dalrymple and NSL = Nonquon Sewage Lagoons.

Common Loon, *Gavia immer*. 1 adult summer plumage, LD.

Double-crested Cormorant, *Phalacrocorax auritus*. Several thousand birds breeding in TT. Seen everywhere along the Toronto/Lake Ontario coast line.

Great Blue Heron, *Ardea herodias*, 4-5 seen flying around in the Carden Alvar area.

Great Egret, *Egretta alba*, 1 TT in the cormorant colony, 1 in the lake at HP.

Black-crowned Night Heron, *Nycticorax nycticorax*. A 2nd cy bird flying by one evening in Toronto, 8-10 adults day roosting at the lake in HP.

Trumpeter Swan, *Cygnus buccinators*. A 2nd cy bird NSL. Presumably a non-breeding bird that had remained in the south.

Mute Swan, *Cygnus olor*. 2 along western coast line, central Toronto, 5-7 in the ponds in TT, 1 in HP.

Canada Goose, *Branta canadensis*. Common on lawns everywhere including in Toronto. Also breeding in NSL.

Mallard, *Anas platyrhynchos*, common most places in small numbers.

Gadwall, *Anas strepera*. Almost as common as Mallard, seen at most places visited.

Wigeon, *Anas americana*. 2 males NSL.

Shoveler, *Anas clypeata*, 2 males NSL.

Bufflehead, *Bucephala albeola*. 1 male in the bigger ponds, TT.

Lesser Scaup, *Aythya affinis*. 1 male in the bigger ponds, TT.

Canvasback, *Aythya valisineria*. 3 males TT, 1 male and a pair TI.

Wood Duck, *Aix sponsa*. A single male in the lake HP.

Turkey Vulture, *Cathartes aura*. Between 20-30 seen in the Kirkfield area.

Red-tailed Buzzard, *Buteo jamaicensis*. 2-3 observed in Kirkfield area, 1 hunting and soaring over HP.

Northern Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*. Several sightings of at least 3 birds, all female plumage, CA.

Osprey, *Pandion haliaetus*. 1 on a nest LD, A pair on a nest NSL.

Ruffed Grouse, *Bonasa umbellus*. 1 in a wooded area slowly crossed the Alvar Rd, CA.

Semipalmated Plover, *Charadrius semipalmatus*. 15-20 NSL.

Killdeer, *Charadrius vociferus*. Common and conspicuous at most open places visited. Not noted in CA.

Spotted Sandpiper, *Actitis macularia*. Common TT, also noted NSL and TI.

Upland Sandpiper, *Bartramia longicauda*. At least 3 pairs displaying and holding territory at the CA.

Dunlin, *Calidris alpina*. 40-50 NSL.

White-rumped Sandpiper, *C. fuscicollis*. At least 5 birds NSL.

Semi-palmated Sandpiper, *C. semipalmata*. 100+ birds NSL.

Least Sandpiper, *C. minutilla*. 30+ birds NSL.

Wilson's Snipe, *Gallinago wilsonii*. Up to 5 displaying birds and a few more seen, CA.

Red-necked Phalarope, *Phalaropus lobatus*, 1 female NSL.

Herring Gull, *Larus (argentatus) smithsonianus* Surprisingly low numbers. 2-3 immature birds Toronto and one immature bird TI.

Ring-billed Gull, *Larus delawarensis*. Abundant everywhere except CA.

Bonaparte's Gull, *Larus philadelphia*. A single 2nd cy bird NSL.

Common Tern, *Sterna hirundo*. Breeding in hundreds on artificial platforms in TT and off TI.

Caspian Tern, *Sterna caspia*. One adult NSL.

(American) Black Tern, *Chlidonias niger surinamensis*. 90-100 adult birds over the ponds in NSL. Possibly a bit darker, but by no means strikingly different from its European counterparts.

Feral Dove. Common in Toronto.

Mourning Dove, *Zenaida macroura*. Quite few numbers observed, primarily in central Toronto.

Common Nighthawk, *Chordeiles minor*. 1+4 flying by and calling during short stop at LD.

Chimney Swift, *Chaetura pelagica*. 10-15 TT and 5-10 HP.

Downy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopus pubescens*. 1 briefly in HP.

Hairy Woodpecker, *Dendrocopus villosus*. One bird seen in HP foraging on a fallen trunk, allowing for close examination of outer tail feathers.

Northern Flicker, *Colaptes auratus*. Noted in small numbers, TT, TI, HP and CA.

Belted Kingfisher, *Megaceryle alcyon*. One by the lake HP.

Least Flycatcher, *Empidonax minimus*. 2-3 calling birds identified. Several probables.

Empidonax sp. 10-15 left unidentified were most often probably either Willow (*E. traillii*) or Alder (*E. alnorum*) Flycatchers.

Eastern Kingbird, *Tyrannus tyrannus*. Up to 10 birds appearing to be on migration in TT, a few CA and 5-6 (including an active nest) at TI. Very conspicuous.

Eastern Wood-Pewee, *Contopus virens*. Maybe overlooked, but at least one singing bird seen well HP.

Great Crested-flycatcher, *Myiarchus crinitus*. 4-5 birds TI.

Loggerhead Shrike, *Lanius ludovicianus*. A single bird at the classical location along Wylie Rd, Carden Alvar.

Warbling Vireo, *Vireo gilvus*. Commonly noted at most places, often singing, including at the Carden Alvar.

Blue Jay, *Cyanocitta cristata*. Up to 10 birds noted in the Kirkfield area.

American Crow, *Corvus brachyrhynchos*. Surprisingly only noted in the Kirkfield area. Here it was fairly common though.

Tree Swallow, *Tachycineta bicolor*. Very common and noted everywhere. Nesting in boxes at TT, HP and CA.

Barn Swallow, *Hirundo rustica erythrogaster*. Common, noted at most places visited.

Bank Swallow, *Riparia riparia*. More than 50 noted in TT, a few NSL.

Northern Rough-winged Swallow, *Stelgidopteryx serripennis*. 25+ TT, also noted in small numbers in Kirkfield area and on TI.

House Wren, *Troglodytes aedon*. A few noted Kirkfield area.

Sedge Wren, *Cistothorus platensis*. At least 4 singing birds, of which two performing in the open, at the "Sedge Wren Marsh", CA.

Eastern Bluebird, *Sialia sialis*. Surprisingly only one pair observed at the southern end of Wylie Rd, Carden Alvar.

American Robin, *Turdus migratorius*. Abundant everywhere except central Toronto and CA where noted in small numbers.

Swainson's Thrush, *Catharus ustulatus*. Only one bird seen, in a garden at TI.

Gray Catbird, *Dumetella carolinensis*. One seen singing out in the open in a tree TT and 1-2 singing TI.

Brown Thrasher, *Toxostoma rufum*. Common, possibly up to 15 birds seen, at CA. Not noted elsewhere.

Black-capped Chickadee, *Parus (Poecile) carolinensis*. A pair TT and 1-2 birds NSL.

Cedar Waxwing, *Bombycilla cedrorum*. A few noted in HP, common on TI.

Starling, *Sturnus vulgaris*. (Introduced) Abundant everywhere including central Toronto and CA.

Yellow Warbler, *Dendroica petechia*. Present at most places visited, the only common warbler.

Blackpoll Warbler, *Dendroica striata*. 1 female seen well TT was the only record.

Mourning Warbler, *Oporornis philadelphia*. A single male low in dense bushes on TT.

Ovenbird, *Seiurus aurocapillus*. One bird flushed early morning near the CN Tower, Toronto.

Savannah Sparrow, *Passerculus sandwichensis*. 1-2 TT, 3-4 Kirkfield area. Also noted NSL.

Song Sparrow, *Melospiza melodia*. Common everywhere, also CA.

White-crowned Sparrow, *Zonotrichia leucophrys*. A single adult bird TT.

Field Sparrow, *Spizella pusilla*. Several singing and one seen well CA.

Grasshopper Sparrow. Several seen singing CA.

Chipping Sparrow, *Ammodramus savannarum*. Fairly common CA, 3-4 heard singing and seen HP and TI.

Vesper Sparrow, *Pooecetes gramineus*. A pair seen well and later brief views of another bird, CA.

Eastern Towhee, *Pipilo erythrophthalmus*. One seen CA.

Eastern Meadowlark, *Sturnella magna*. Common CA. Singing from low but prominent places, small bushes, rocks etc.

Bobolink, *Dolichonyx oryzivorus* Common southern stretch of Wylie Rd, CA.

Red-winged Blackbird, *Agelaius phoeniceus*. Very common, especially TT and HP.

Common Grackle, *Quiscalus quiscula*. Abundant, also in central Toronto.

Brown-headed Cowbird, *Molothrus eaneus*. Common TT and TI. Also fairly common in the Kirkfield area.

Baltimore Oriole, *Icterus galbula*. 2-3 TT, 5-6 TI and several Kirkfield area. Mostly males.

Orchard Oriole, *Icterus spurius*. One 2cy male seen well in a low tree in HP was surprisingly the only sighting.

Northern Cardinal, *Cardinalis cardinalis*. 2-3 HP and 4-5 TI. All males.

House Rosefinch, *Carpodactus mexicanus*. A male holding territory near the CN Tower in central Toronto seen and heard singing almost every day.

Purple Finch, *Carpodactus purpureus*. A pair and possibly 2-3 more birds CA.

American Goldfinch, *Carduelis tristis*. Common in small numbers in open areas at most places visited.

House Sparrow, *Passer domesticus*. (Introduced) Common everywhere near settlements.