



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Kirtland's Warbler



Though not generally considered a bucket list birding destination, Appalachia and the Upper Midwest have much to offer visiting birders. In fact, there is likely no more exciting venue for one to spend time during spring migration. During the first half of May, migratory songbirds reach peak numbers in this part of the country, are singing vigorously and are decked out in their resplendent breeding plumage. In the mountains of West Virginia many southerly warbler species like Swainson's, Cerulean, Prothonotary, Worm-eating and Kentucky have already commenced breeding by early May and farther north, species like Kirtland's are starting to set up territories. In addition to the songbirds available on this tour (up to 35 species of warblers), shorebirds will also be moving through and there are some prime areas in northwestern Ohio that will excite even the most ardent shorebird aficionados. In southern Ohio we will visit a site with breeding Upland Sandpipers and many Henslow's Sparrows; two species infrequently encountered by many birders and at the tour's conclusion we will spend a day in the deciduous forests of northern Michigan where, in addition to seeing the critically endangered Kirtland's Warbler, we can also look for species like Evening Grosbeak, Red Crossbill, Pine Siskin and Purple Finch, adding a bit of boreal flair to what will already be an impressive bird tally. Other interesting and seldom seen birds we have excellent chances to see will include Barn Owl, Black Tern, Eastern Whip-poor-will, Least and American bitterns, Black-billed Cuckoo, Sedge Wren, Yellow-headed Blackbird and Dickcissel. Beginning in Charleston WV, we will spend time in the mountains and along the Ohio River in this lightly birded state, before moving north through Ohio and concluding the tour in Michigan. We will visit two of the the country's premier spring migration sites: Magee Marsh in Ohio and Tawas Point in Michigan and well as several excellent grassland and wetland sites during the tour.



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

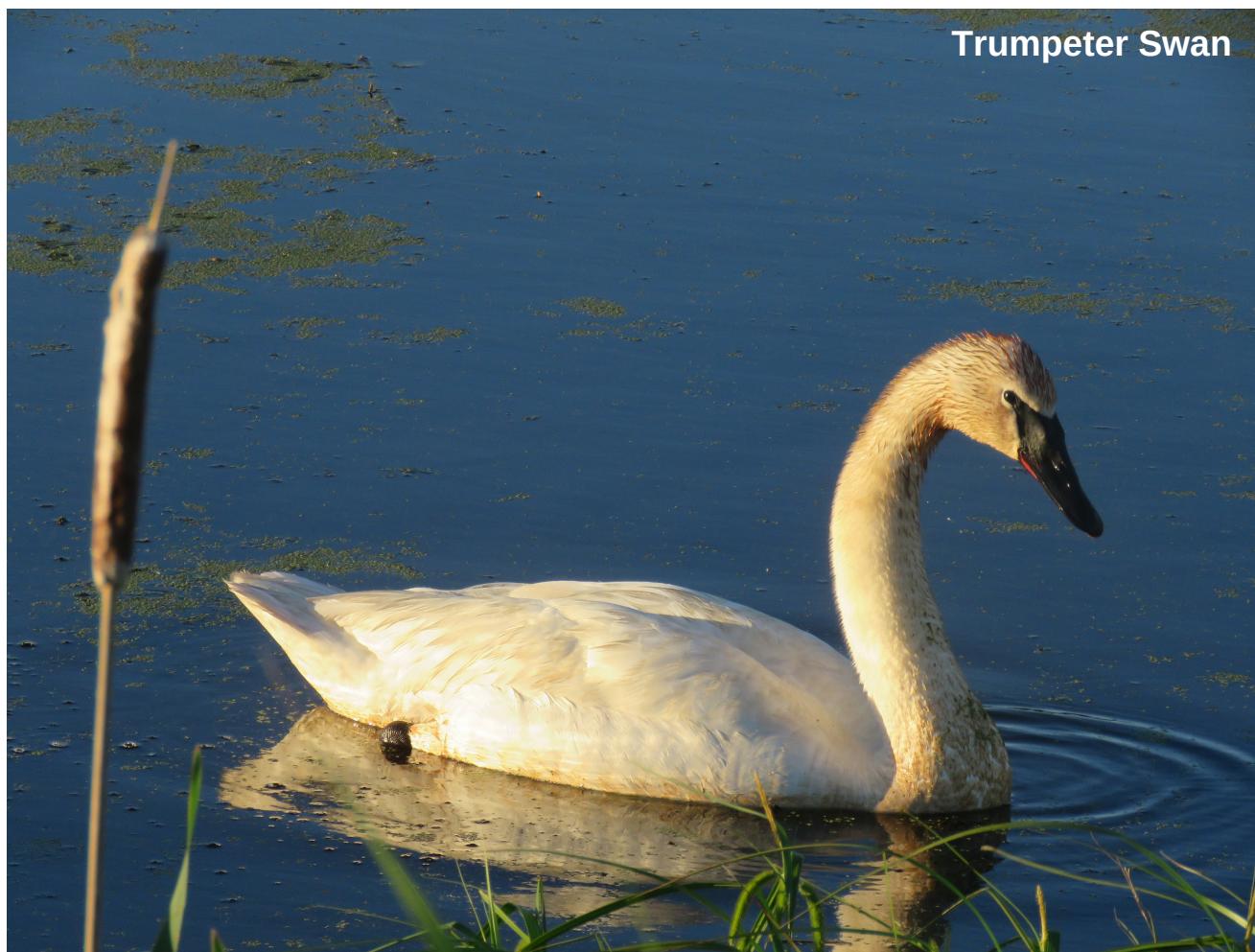
May 5-16, 2021

To maximize safety for everyone we will not travel together in a large van. Instead this will be a self-driving tour and the number of participants will be limited to seven. We will also not have group meals in restaurants, but instead will stay in hotels with microwaves and refrigerators so that participants can eat in their rooms. By following these safety protocols we can reduce close contact and thus minimize risk of contracting Covid-19. **If significant changes occur in the Covid-19 situation prior to May 2021, the tour format will change and we will use a group van and include meals. If this happens an alternative price has been included to account for these additional tour expenses.**

Daily Itinerary

May 5, Day 1: Arrival and meeting in Charleston WV

The tour begins today with arrivals at our hotel near the airport in Charleston, West Virginia. Everyone should plan to arrive by 3:00 PM at which time there will be a brief orientation session. If time allows we will make a late afternoon visit that is within an easy drive of our hotel. Charleston's proximity to hardwood forests and wetlands along the Kanawha River will provide us with many options. Night in Charleston.





West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Daily Itinerary

May 6, Day 2: Hurricane Ridge & New River Gorge

We begin this morning driving south about an hour and a half to Hurricane Ridge, one of West Virginia's only reliable sites to find the rapidly declining Golden-winged Warbler. Several pairs breed in the scrubby habitat along the ridge and we should be able to get good views here. Other nice birds that will be possible include Black-billed Cuckoo, Common Raven and Scarlet Tanager. The remainder of the day will be spent birding in the forests near the New River Gorge where the primary target will be the elusive Swainson's Warbler. Fortunately they are fairly common in low lying rhododendron thickets near the gorge and we will have plenty of time to coax one into view. Throughout the day, we will focus primarily on the more southerly species of warblers that will become scarce as we move north. Examples of these include Louisiana Waterthrush, Worm-eating, Hooded, Yellow-throated and Cerulean. The forests between Beckley and Charleston are home to a healthy breeding population of Cerulean Warblers and are one of the best areas in the country to see this dwindling songbird. Night in Charleston.

May 7, Day 3: McClintic WMA & Greenbottom WMA

McClintic Wildlife Management Area, located about an hour north of Charleston is one of West Virginia's premier birding destinations. Boasting a delightful mix of hardwood forests and low lying wetland areas, one can easily spend an entire morning exploring its riches, especially in early May when breeding birds are in full song and seemingly everywhere. In addition to having more chances for southern warblers like Hooded, Yellow-throated and Prothonotary, McClintic also has small populations of Kentucky and Mourning warblers and finding these two will be high on our list of priorities. McClintic also has some nice wetland areas where we may find some lingering waterfowl and possibly Common Gallinule. From there we will bird our way back to Charleston traveling south along the Ohio River where, at periodic stops, we can check the river and its adjacent wetlands for shorebirds, waterfowl and other migrants. We will conclude the day at Greenbottom WMA where the cattail marshes host breeding Least Bittern and Willow Flycatcher as well as migrant Sora and Virginia Rail, and breeding Warbling Vireos drone monotonously from the scrubby willows. Night in Charleston.

May 8, Day 4: Kanawha State Forest & Belleville Wetlands

We will spend a few hours this morning at the Kanawha State Forest outside of Charleston in a final attempt to see any southern warblers we might have missed. The forests here are home to quite a few breeding Cerulean Warblers and if we have not already had good views, we should be able to get them here. This is also a good place for the sometimes secretive Wood Thrush which often feeds in the open near the park office. By mid-morning we will leave Charleston and begin heading north, stopping near the tiny hamlet of Scott Depot where a pair of Mississippi Kites has bred for several years. Continuing north, we will



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Daily Itinerary

stop at a small wetland along the Ohio River near the town of Belleville where a pair of Barn Owls is fairly reliable. As we move north we will check a variety of wetland sites along the Ohio River including the locks near Belleville. Many birds follow the river's course as they journey northward and in early May almost anything is possible on the route we will follow. Night in Parkersburg WV.

May 9, Day 5: Harrison County OH and Wooster area

We will plan for an early departure in order to arrive by sunrise at a large grassland area in southern Ohio where several pairs of Upland Sandpipers breed. When conditions are right this is a fabulous place to see this declining grassland species which often perches on wooden fenceposts along the roadside. Henslow's Sparrows are surprisingly common here as well and during a morning visit one can easily record 10-15 of this normally difficult sparrow. Other nice birds here include Grasshopper Sparrow, Dickcissel (irregular), Northern Harrier and Black-billed Cuckoo. From there we will continue north to the Amish country around the small college town of Wooster. If we have not yet had good looks at Cerulean Warbler we can try again at a forest reserve south of town. After checking in to our hotel in Wooster and taking a short rest, we will drive to Killibuck Marsh where we will spend the rest of the day. This extensive wetland is a great place to see Sandhill Cranes, migrant shorebirds, Common Gallinule and sometimes Least Bittern and King Rail. Night in Wooster.

May 10, Day 6: Wooster to Magee Marsh

About an hour west of Wooster, the Mohican State Forest is a great place to find breeding warblers with a more northerly affinity and we will plan on spending a couple of hours exploring its trails before continuing north. Possibilities here will include Magnolia, Blackburnian and Black-throated Green warblers as well as Winter Wren and Red-breasted Nuthatch. We then drive north to the shores of Lake Erie where we will visit the Pickerel Wildlife Management Area where the various impoundments can be rich with shorebirds in May. We will plan for a late afternoon arrival at Magee Marsh on the shore of Lake Erie where we will have time for a couple of hours of birding before sunset. Night in Oregon.

May 11-12, Days 7-8: Magee Marsh & Environs

Crane Creek and Magee Marsh are two of the best places to observe spring bird migration in the eastern United States. The boardwalk trail through the wooded copse at Magee Marsh is famous for its concentration of colorful warblers....not to mention the hordes of birders that form their own flocks in search of them. This is a place where it is possible to see some of our scarcest and most secretive birds. Magee Marsh is probably the most reliable place in the U.S. to see a Connecticut Warbler and we will hope for blessings from the birding gods during our visit as even here one stands a less than 50% chance of seeing one on any given day. Mourning Warblers, also difficult under most circumstances, are regular here and it is not



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Daily Itinerary



Chestnut-sided Warbler

unusual to see an American Woodcock shuffling slowly through the leaf litter beneath the boardwalk. In addition to the spectacle at Magee Marsh, there are several other excellent birding venues within 45 minutes of our hotel and we will spend time at many of them before continuing into Michigan. Howard Marsh Metropark is a vast wetland complex with Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Common Gallinule, Least and American bitterns, several pairs of breeding Black-necked Stilts and possibilities for migrant shorebirds and waterfowl. At Maumee State Park the beach area often has a nice variety of gulls, terns and shorebirds and Ottawa NWR attracts many shorebirds if water levels are appropriate. A bit farther west, we can visit Oak Openings Metropark, the only place in Ohio to find nesting Lark Sparrows. Nights in Oregon.

May 13, Day 9: To Tawas Point

The final leg of our journey will take us to Tawas Point, Michigan on the shores of Lake Huron, another excellent site during spring migration. Tawas Point often has similar concentrations of migrants found at Magee Marsh, but with far fewer birders making it a more relaxing and enjoyable experience. As we drive north to Tawas City, we will stop at the Nayantquing Point SWA where an observation platform provides panoramic views of a freshwater marsh with nesting Yellow-headed Blackbirds, Marsh Wrens, lingering waterfowl and migrant shorebirds.



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Daily Itinerary

Upon arrival in Tawas City, we will head directly to Tawas Point State Park, a narrow peninsula extending into Lake Huron. The combination of the park's geography and scattered low and scrubby vegetation concentrates migrants and makes them rather easy to see. Many rare birds have been recorded at Tawas Point over the years including tropical vagrants like Fork-tailed Flycatcher and White-collared Swift. The possibility of something ultra rare coupled with the large numbers of regularly occurring migrants makes this a really exciting place to spend time in mid-May. Night in Tawas City.

May 14-15, Days 10-11:

We will have two days to explore the fields and forests around Tawas City. There are many excellent sites within 90 minutes of our hotel and we will try to visit as many as possible in the time we have. First on the agenda will be a visit to a jack pine stand about 30 minutes from our hotel where we can see breeding Kirtland's Warblers, which should be beginning to set up shop on breeding territories. The loud, incessant songs of the males make them easy to locate and with patience one can usually see them quite well. Nearby fields and pastures hold good numbers of breeding Bobolinks as well as a few Clay-colored and Vesper sparrows and occasionally it is possible to encounter Brewer's Blackbirds at the far eastern edge of their nesting range. We will spend one full day traveling north to the forests around Mio where northern species like Blue-headed Vireo, Purple Finch, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, Ruffed Grouse and Hermit Thrush will be possible, and we will also plan to return to Tawas Point once or twice as the birds there turn over frequently. Night in Tawas City.

May 16, Day 12: Tour Concludes

The tour concludes this morning with some final birding at Tawas Point before participants begin their trips home. ****Note that if the Covid-19 situation improves and it is possible to use a van and fly during the tour, the tour will end this morning at Detroit Metropolitan Airport where participants can fly home.**





West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Tour Information

The tour will be limited to seven participants.

Tour Cost

The cost of the tour is calculated per person from Charleston. The self-driving option without meals included will be **\$2995** per person and includes 11 nights lodging in single rooms, all park entrance fees and guide fees.

If it becomes possible to travel together in a large van and eat group meals in restaurants, the cost will be **\$3495** per person which will include all lodging, entrance fees, guide fees, ground transportation from Charleston and all meals beginning with dinner on May 5 and ending with breakfast on May 16.

Due to Covid-19 concerns, all accommodations will be in single rooms and there will be no single supplement surcharge.

Registration & Deposit

In order to reserve a space on the tour, a completed and signed registration form is required along with a deposit of \$500. Registration forms are available on the website at www.otusasiotours.com

Payments should be mailed to:

Otus asio Tours

900 Hillsborough Road
Chapel Hill NC, 27516

Cancellation Policy & Final Payments

Final payments will be due February 5, 2021 and final invoices will be sent in January. Given the unusual circumstances that we find ourselves in, there will be no cancellation penalties for this tour after deposits and final payments are made. All cancellations will be issued full refunds less any unrecoverable expenses that have been incurred by Otus asio Tours. Any such expenses on this tour should be minimal.

Transportation

If the Covid-19 health crisis persists into May we will not be using a van for transport during this tour. Participants will be responsible for arranging their own transportation via private vehicle during the tour. At some sites we may choose to car pool while birding depending upon the comfort level of the participants. If the current situation changes and using a van becomes practical and possible, we will travel throughout the tour in a 12 or 15-passenger van.



West Virginia, Ohio & Michigan: A Spring Migration Journey

May 5-16, 2021

Tour Information (cont)

Weather

Mid-May weather in the Midwest can be extremely variable with possible temperatures ranging from the mid-30s to the high 80s F. Precipitation is always a possibility at this season and if it is unusually cold it might even be in the form of snow, though would be light and ephemeral if it were to occur. It can also be quite windy at times along the shores of the Great Lakes. Being prepared for a variety of conditions will be important during this tour.

Covid Policies

Masks will be required throughout the tour and we will try as best as we can to maintain social distancing while birding. If participants are comfortable we may do some car pooling when possible, but this will be determined during the tour and will always be at the discretion of the group. If car pooling is used, masks will be required in the vehicle and we will drive with the windows down. Hand sanitizer will be available at all times, but participants should also plan to bring their own supply.

Physical Requirements

The tour is moderately strenuous, with long days, early departures, and a lot of hiking and time spent on your feet. On most mornings we will depart before sunrise. When possible we will take afternoon breaks, but this won't be possible the majority of the time. Driving distances in Ohio and Michigan are moderately long. We will try to conclude our birding by late afternoon on most days, but we may be out longer at times. This will depend largely upon the wishes and desires of the group. There may be a few optional evening excursions if there is interest in owls and nightjars. The terrain will be mostly level although in West Virginia there may be some moderate climbing involved. On days we are not traveling it will be possible to skip some outings and rest at the hotel if someone is so inclined. Generally speaking, this is not a terribly demanding tour physically, but the long days and time spent on your feet will be somewhat taxing.

Information

For further information, contact Jan Hansen at 919-259-9423 or otusasiotours@gmail.com.