

Ontario, Canada

October 2022

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This was a short trip to southern Ontario, consisting of a few days outdoors in the Algonquin Highlands (in the Haliburton area) and a few days in Toronto.

Day 1 – Downtown Toronto

Just before landing at Toronto's City Airport (also known as Billy Bishop Airport), I had great views of Lake Ontario, the Scarborough Bluffs and the city skyline. While on the ferry for the short crossing to the mainland, I spotted tens of **Ring-billed Gulls** and hundreds of **Double-Crested Cormorants**. A few **Mallards** were resting on the water and a few **Herring Gulls** were present too. In Little Norway Park, on the harbourfront, I spotted two **Northern Cardinals** and a few **American Robins**. From the quay, I saw a resting **Merlin** on the airport grounds, across the Western Channel. **European Starlings**, **Rock Doves** and **House Sparrows** were ubiquitous in town. Walking around College Street near the University of Toronto, I spotted a probable **Common Grackle** (the sighting was too short to confirm species id.), a few **American Robins** and many **Grey Squirrels** (most of these were actually black).

Day 2 – Toronto Islands

I walked to the Toronto Islands ferry terminal at the harbour front and took the 0915 AM ferry to Ward's Island, the easternmost island of the Toronto Islands chain. From the ferry, I spotted **Canada Goose**, **Mallards**, **Ring-billed Gulls**, **Double-Crested Cormorants** and **Blue Jays** (high overhead). Upon arrival at Ward's Island docks, a **Great White Egret** was present. I walked around the islands, which were very quiet on this grey autumn morning. The eastern end of Ward's Island was a good spot to watch birds, most of the area consists of sandy paths through scattered trees and scrubs, and is surrounded by Lake Ontario. A **Cooper's Hawk** flew right over my head, while small flocks of **Black-capped Chickadees** were foraging at eye level. Two **Red-winged Blackbirds** were fluttering around, and a few **Blue Jays** were calling. **Downy Woodpeckers** and **American Goldfinch** were also present. Walking westwards along Cibola Avenue, I spotted two **Trumpeter Swans** (one of them wore a yellow wing tag (Y55), pointing at one of the reintroduction projects in the region, see: www.trumpeterswansociety.org and <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/tagged-trumpeter-swans-of-ontario>) at 'Sunfish Cut' (between Algonquin Island and Snake Island), along with 20 –feral- **Mute Swans**. **Mallards** and a few **American Black Ducks** were foraging in the shallow water on Lake Ontario's fringes. Two **Eastern Phoebe**s and lots of **Grey Squirrels** were around. Walking along the boardwalk along the lakeshore, I enjoyed the scenic views of Lake Ontario. Next to the ubiquitous **Ring-billed Gulls** and **Double-crested Cormorants**, I spotted three small groups of **Surf Scoters** on the lake – my first in Ontario! Walking on towards Centre Island Pier I spotted a wary **American Mink** along the lake shore. From the windy pier I could see all the way to the skyline of Niagara Falls. In the parkland and scrubs just east of the pier, lots of **Golden-crowned Kinglets** were present (this could have been a 'fall' of migrating kinglets) as well as a few **Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warblers**, a couple of **Downy Woodpeckers** and a lone **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. At least two hawks (probably **Sharp-shinned Hawks**) flew over. While walking the 2.5 km back to Ward's Island's ferry dock I had great views of two **Northern Parulas** in the scrub along the lake and at least four **American Robins** were foraging on Algonquin Island. Looking at the impressive Toronto skyline from the ferry dock I spotted two noisy **Dark-eyed Juncos** in a tree. See my ebird checklist here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S121725282>. Back in town, I saw two **White-throated Sparrows** the Harbourfront Centre. By the end of the day, I headed to MacCowan metro station, at the very eastern end of the TTC metro network, where I caught a TOK bus headed for Haliburton (I booked the bus online: <https://tokcoachlines.com/schedule-services/>), and slept at the Silver Maple Motel.



Trumpeter Swan (Cygnus buccinator) (wing tag Y55), Toronto Islands, Ontario



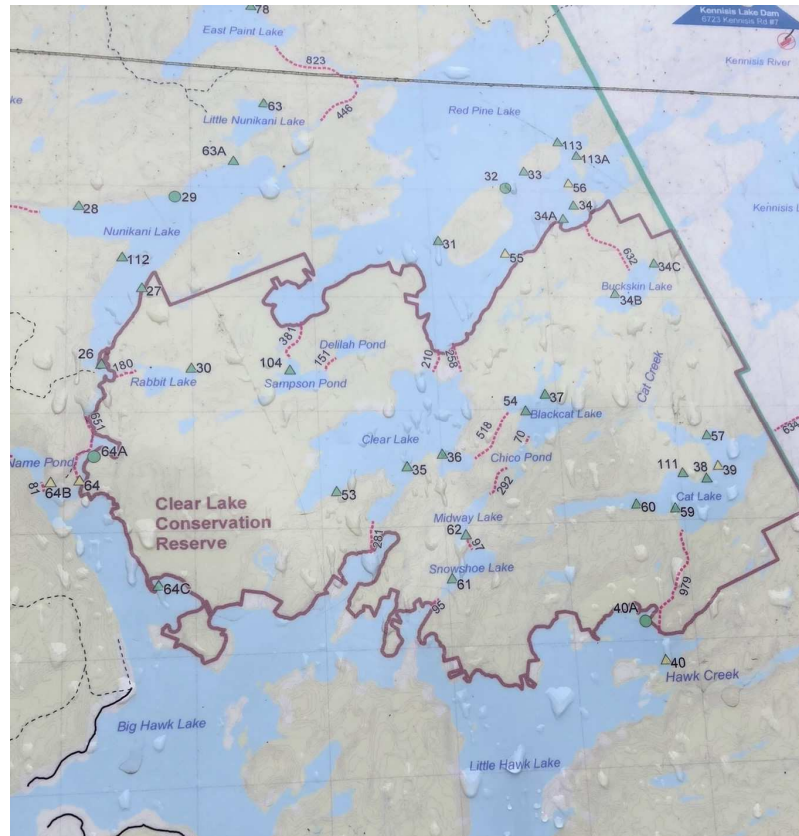
Ring-billed Gull (Larus delawarensis), Centre Island Pier, Toronto Islands, Ontario

Day 3 – Algonquin Highlands: Haliburton, Little Hawk Lake & Cat Lake

I woke up early, and had a look at the Head Lake area just in front of the Silver Maple motel, and then went on to buy groceries for my three-day trip to a cabin in the Algonquin Highlands. Along the shores of Head Lake, an **American Robin** and a **Hairy Woodpecker** were foraging, while two **American Crows** were calling loudly. Autumnal woodland surrounded the lake, and the light was beautiful in between the early-morning showers. A lone **Common Loon** was resting on the lake and three **Lesser Scaups**, a few **Mallards** and some **Ring-billed Gulls** were also present. Entering town, an American Woodcock flew over, a surprising sight and a lifer for me! A cab (booked in advance through Hyland Taxi <https://www.yellowpages.ca/bus/Ontario/Haliburton/Hyland-Taxi/801312.html>) drove me to the Oakview Lodge at Little Hawk Lake, where I had booked a water taxi with Greg & Anna. Greg brought me to the cabin (bunkee) I had rented through AirBnB, and left me there for the next three days. The cabin was an amazing place, and an ideal hub for a few days of autumn kayaking and birding on the lakes of the Algonquin Highlands. From the water taxi, I spotted a few **Common Mergansers** and a lone **Glaucous Gull** on the rocks.

For the next three days, I kayaked and portaged around the area, and watched birds and other wildlife. The area is particularly scenic, and is a natural extension of Algonquin Provincial Park (situated up north). While some lakes (like Little & Big Hawk Lake, and Red Pine Lake) have cottages and may be quite busy

in summer (there was no one mid-October), the lakes and forests of the Clear Lake Conservation Area are wild, and hold no cottages nor allow for motorized boats. Information on the –kayak- trails can be found online: <https://www.algonquinhighlands.ca/visitors/water-trails.php>. The Haliburton Highlands Water Trails (HHWT) is a municipally managed backcountry canoe routes system that consists of approximately 28,000+ hectares of provincial and municipal public lands comprised of countless lakes, rivers, trails and continuous forest. I had (pictures of) a good map, provided by my host Erica yet I could not find a detailed map freely accessible online. The map below contains all Algonquin Highland locations mentioned in this report.



Map of part of the Algonquin Highlands, indicating the boundaries of the Clear Lake Conservation Reserve, and the kayak/canoe portages (dotted lines, in meters), as well as camp sites.

For this first day of kayak-birding, I first went for a 2 hours-trip to Snowshoe Lake and Midway Lake, portaging through Indian Pass from Little Hawk Lake to Big Hawk Lake. A **Common Raven** seemingly followed me around from lake to lake, occasionally calling in the otherwise absolute silence of the area. **Common Mergansers** were foraging on Little Hawk Lake and Midway Lake, while I had great views of a loud **Belted Kingfisher** at Indian Pass. The forest held **Yellow-crowned Kinglets** and **Black-capped Chickadees**, as well as a few **Downy / Hairy Woodpeckers**. After a short pit stop at the cabin, I headed to Cat Lake. The northeastern corner of Little Hawk Lake hosts a shallow, sandy marshy area, where a group of **American Black Ducks** was foraging. **Red Crossbills** and **Black-capped Chickadees** were present in the surrounding forest. I then had to portage for almost 1 km, through a beautiful stretch of moist forest, to reach Cat Lake. Despite heavy rain and hail showers, Cat Lake was a beautiful place. Cat Lake's northwestern arm held an active **Beaver** dam, two **Lesser Scaups**, and noisy yet invisible kinglets, chickadees and woodpeckers. Getting back on Little Hawk Lake in the pouring rain, a lone **Common Loon** was floating not that far from my kayak, and a **Raven** was calling loudly from a high perch. I reached the cabin at dusk.



View from the cabin at Little Hawk Lake (northwestern section), Algonquin Highlands, Ontario



Kayaking on Cat Lake, Algonquin Highlands, Ontario

Day 4 – Algonquin Highlands: Kayak & ‘cool duck’ day in the Red Pine Lake & Clear Lake Conservation Reserve

I went for a full day of kayak-birding, leaving the cabin around 0830 AM. After leaving Little Hawk Lake through the short Indian Pass portage to Big Hawk Lake, I headed to Clear Lake (which required another 280 meter portage). Big Hawk Lake yielded a **Sharp-shinned Hawk** and **Common Mergansers** while Clear Lake held a **Belted Kingfisher**. After Clear Lake, I headed to Red Pine Lake, where I headed to the northwestern corner of the lake to hike to East Paint Lake, where I saw a **Downy Woodpecker** and many **Golden-crowned Kinglets**. The marshy fringes of northwestern Red Pine Lake yielded the only **Wood Duck** (a male) of the trip, while a hike to isolated Buckskin Lake, east of Red Pine Lake, allowed me to get great views of a male **Hooded Merganser** and a few **American Robins** and **Downy Woodpeckers** in the woods. After having a lunch on a beautiful, lonely rocky island (point 55), I spotted three **Surf Scoters** from the kayak and heard **Pileated Woodpecker** call. Back on Clear Lake, I took a different road

'home', portaging to magnificent Blackcat Lake (where the sun peered through the clouds after a few rainy hours), and then on to Chico Pond, Midway Lake, Snowshoe Lake and back to the cabin. Chico Pond was fringed by multiple active **Beaver** dams and dens. On Midway Lake, I had great views of a **River Otter**, walking around and on a **Beaver** den, and then grooming and resting at close range. Two **Buffleheads** and a **Grey Jay** were also present there. Three female and one male **Hooded Merganser** swam on Snowshoe Lake, while four **Common Mergansers** were resting at Big Hawk Lake.



Midway Lake, Algonquin Highlands, Ontario

Day 5 – Algonquin Highlands: early winter kayaking in the Little Hawk Lake area

I woke up to discover a landscape blanketed by October snow. I went kayaking to Snowshoe Lake and Midway Lake (taking the now familiar Indian Pass where I met the resident **Belted Kingfisher**), and hiked up to Chico Pond. I saw fresh **River Otter** tracks in the snow on the shores of Midway Lake, and a **Wood Thrush** near Chico Pond. A couple of **Common Ravens** flew around the area. In late afternoon, the water taxi picked me up at the cabin and I headed to the Oakview Lodge and then by cab back to Haliburton. Arriving in the leafy neighbourhood around Pine Avenue and Mulholland Drive, I spotted - many confident **White-tailed Deer** as well as **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Downy Woodpecker**, **Blue Jays**, **Black-capped Chickadees** and a large group of **Dark-eyed Juncos** feeding along the side of the road. **Red Squirrels** were present in the gardens.

Day 6 – Haliburton & Toronto

A short early morning walk along Head Lake in Haliburton, yielded **Mourning Dove** as well as the other usual park species, and a **Common Muskrat** swimming close to shore in the lake. I spotted no less than 11 **White-tailed Deer** (5 in the Pine Avenue area, and 6 along the southwestern shore of Head Lake). I then took the TOK bus back to Toronto. From the bus, I spotted a group of **Wild Turkeys** in the Kawartha Lakes area, 2 **Turkey Vultures** in greater Toronto, and a **Great Blue Heron** and flocks of **Rusty Blackbirds** in the rural areas.

Day 7 & 8 – Toronto

I spent these days at the University of Toronto St. George campus. Lots of **Grey Squirrels** and a few **American Robins** were the only wildlife sightings, along with a couple of soaring **Red-tailed Hawks** above Spadina Avenue. Riding the UP Express train back to Pearson Airport, I spotted two more **Turkey Vultures** and an **American Kestrel** before heading back home.

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Species Lists

Birds (55 species)

American Black Duck
American Crow
American Goldfinch
American Kestrel
American Robin
American Woodcock
Belted Kingfisher
Black-capped Chickadee
Blue Jay
Bufflehead
Canada Goose
Common Grackle
Common Loon
Common Merganser
Common Raven
Cooper's Hawk
Dark-eyed Junco
Double-crested Cormorant
Downy Woodpecker
Eastern Phoebe
European Starling
Glaucous Gull
Gray Jay
Great Blue Heron
Great White Egret
Hairy Woodpecker
Herring Gull
Hooded Merganser
House Sparrow
Lesser Scaup
Mallard
Merlin
Mourning Dove
Mute Swan
Northern Cardinal
Northern Parula
Pileated Woodpecker
Red-breasted Nuthatch

Red Crossbill
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-winged Blackbird
Ring-billed Gull
Rock Dove
Rusty Blackbird
Sharp-shinned Hawk
Surf Scoter
Trumpeter Swan
Turkey Vulture
White-breasted Nuthatch
White-throated Sparrow
Wild Turkey
Wood Duck
Wood Thrush
Golden-crowned Kinglet
Yellow-rumped (Myrtle) Warbler

Mammals (6 species)

American Mink
Common Muskrat
Grey Squirrel
Red Squirrel
River Otter
White-tailed Deer