

Eastern Alberta

6-7 to 6-14-2017

Audubon Society of Portland
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Intro

Portland Audubon's first trip to Alberta took us to the southeastern prairies and then the north woods including the aspen parkland the boreal forest biomes. The weather took a turn for the worst after the had 1.5 warm days in the prairies, only to experience 3 days of high winds and rain. The final day was gorgeous and therefore also very birdy. It was a fun trip where we essentially got almost all of our primary targets including Baird's and Le Conte's Sparrow, Mourning, Connecticut, Canada, Blackburnian and Bay-breasted Warbler, but also both longspur species. It was great fun, eh?

General info

- Township Roads (Tws Rd or TR for short) run east-west and Range Roads (RR) run north-south.
- St. Paul, Bonnyville and Cold Lake ended up being much larger towns than folks expected. Lodging, food and gas were all easy to find. Lac La Biche is a little bit smaller, but still has everything you need.
- Some foods like cheese and chocolate are very expensive. Alcohol is too. Gas was about 1.23 to 1.38/liter.
- The itinerary did not include the mountains as we can see western birds where we live here in Portland. One can make the point that the extreme southeast corner of the state

can be skipped. All the prairie species can be seen easily near Brooks. Dinosaur PP is a gem and should definitely be visited.

- Mosquitos were generally bearable (maybe also because of the rain and winds), but bring good bug spray with deet. The south side of Elk Island was the buggiest place, but it was not extreme. Horse flies were around, but ticks were not an issue.



Highlights and lowlights

- Highlights:
 - Nice looks at Connecticut, Mourning, Canada, Bay-breasted and Blackburnian Warblers even though we had terrible weather for most of our time up north
 - Baird's Sparrow, Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspur in the prairies
 - A super-close Le Conte's Sparrow in the driving rain on the west side of Cold Lake.

- Wood and Prairie Bison at Elk Island and a Beaver in Lac La Biche.
- Lowlights:
 - Misses included Cape May Warbler and Upland Sandpiper
 - A singing Nelson's Sparrow did not pop out for us at Elk Island
 - We tried twice unsuccessfully for Three-toed Woodpecker at Sir Winston Churchill PP
 - Sprague's Pipit was heard-only and only by a few

June 7: Transfer to Calgary and drive to Brooks

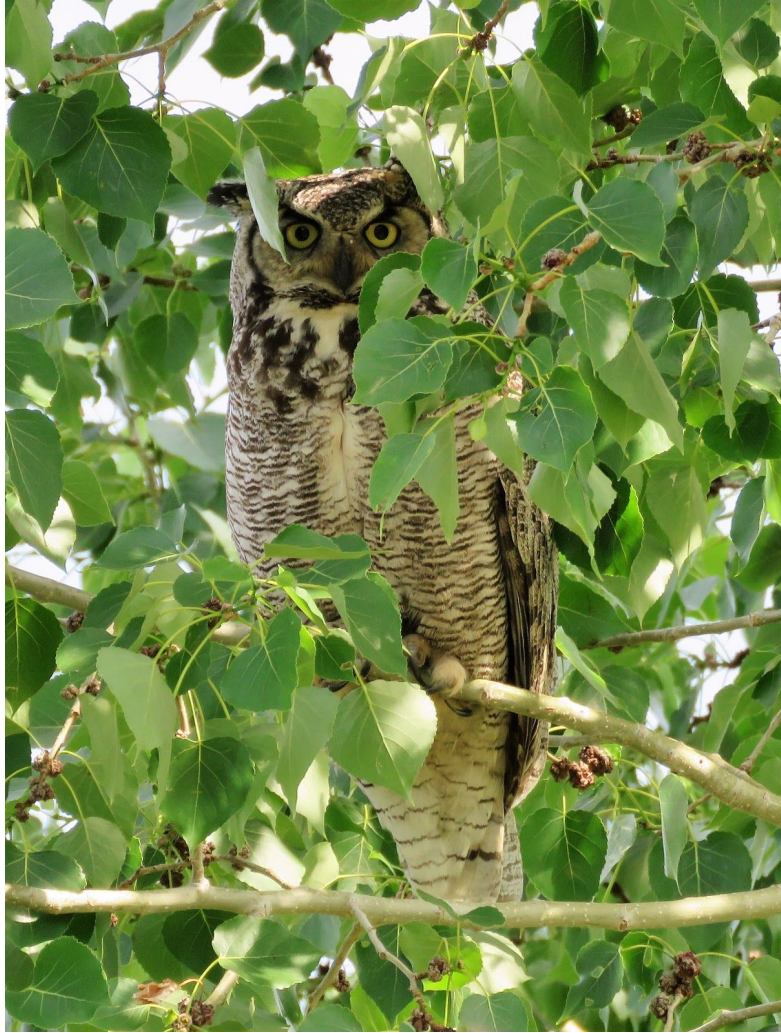
After picking up the group mid afternoon at YYC, we drove the 2 hours to Brooks, checked into the Days Inn, got lunch for the next day and then enjoyed a tasty dinner at Montana's across the road.

June 8: Around Brooks

We started our adventure bright and early at Range Road 104 where it didn't take long to get fabulous scope looks of Baird's Sparrow. It took us a while to locate, but Susan finally did. Wow! Sprague's Pipit was heard overhead, but not seen. Range Road 105 across the TC1 yielded a lot of nice species including Chestnut-collared and McCown's Longspurs, Brewer's, Grasshopper and Vesper Sparrow, Ferruginous Hawk and Horned Grebe. We missed the Upland Sandpiper seen earlier.

After lunch in Tilley we headed out to Range Road 132 south of Brooks. It was hot and bird activity was slow. On the way out we found Long-billed Curlew and 30+ Marbled Godwits (including a chick briefly on the road). Loggerhead Shrike was new for us as well.

Working our way over to Rolling Hills Reservoir, we saw a lot of waterfowl, Wilson's Phalarope, and Willet. At Rolling Hills Reservoir, Red-necked Grebe, Bank Swallow and Common Tern were in the marina and Gray Catbird, a rare Oregon Dark-eyed Junco, several Baltimore Orioles, Warbling Vireo and Yellow Warbler were in the campground. An upset Great Horned Owl mom was near a nest with a baby in it. It was difficult to leave the area, but we made back to Brooks by 5:20pm to get some rest.



June 9: Dinosaur PP, Prairie Oasis Park

This was a long day as we visited Dinosaur in the morning and then drove all the way to Bonnyville. We ran into a pretty violent storm cell later in the drive that spawned a tornado near St. Paul and caused damage in Bonnyville. Topsy turvy weather!



Our morning at Dinosaur was fabulous! The park is amazing, with scenery, birds and fossils alike. We quickly picked up all our targets in and around the campground including Lark Sparrow, Rock Wren, Gray Catbird and Brown Thrasher. Common Nighthawks were roosting in the cottonwoods at the campground. We also finally glimpsed

Least Flycatcher and Warbling Vireo. The museum was awesome too!



Then we were on our way north stopping at windy Prairie Oasis Park. A Black-crowned Night-heron, Common Tern and Hooded Merganser all were good birds, but we lacked the diversity found a week ago. The upside was that there were no bugs. Baltimore Oriole, Chipping Sparrow and Warbling Vireo were near our lunch location at the sheltered campsite.

A quick check for Upland Sandpiper south of the Sheerness power plant was unsuccessful.

We did not stop any more for the day, in particular, we weren't able to scope Upper Therien Lake in St. Paul as we were running out of time. The drive yielded Bufflehead, Redhead, Black Tern and Red-tailed Hawk.

June 10: Cold Lake PP



With a good weather forecast in hand, we arrived at Cold Lake PP early morning full of hope for a dry outing. This hope was soon squashed when it started to rain. It did not stop until after lunch. We tirelessly worked the woods and came up with Magnolia, Blackburnian (a long awaited lifer for Gary!) and Chestnut-sided Warbler. We heard a few more, so it wasn't all that shabby at all.

After a nice "drying-up type" lunch at Humpty's in Cold Lake we headed back out to the park and finally saw a Black-and-white Warbler, an Ovenbird, heard a Winter Wren and briefly saw a Canada Warbler zipping by. Hall's Lagoon held several Canvasbacks and we admired a Red-necked Grebe on the nest in the scope. An Alder Flycatcher finally offered great looks.

At the marsh just east of downtown we added Swamp Sparrow and a well-seen Sedge Wren. Marsh Wren and Sora were calling, but the Le Conte's Sparrows were silent.

Dinner was celebrated at Mike's Restaurant in Bonnyville.

June 11: Cold Lake area, Primrose Lake Rd, Cold Lake PP

Nasty weather today, but we made the best of it! Forgoing the marsh on the east side of Cold Lake early morning due to the heavy winds, we opted to go for Connecticut Warbler along Primrose Lake Rd. We found the stakeout bird after a while, but only got brief looks as it was playing hide and seek with us. It was a fun expedition though! A Mourning Warbler was singing across the road, but the never were able to lay eyes on it.

After that we drove down English Bay Rd, briefly stopping at the Recreational Site where we found a singing Blackburnian Warbler.



A little closer towards Cold Lake we stopped at a large black spruce bog. A Tennessee Warbler was singing and perched up in the rain and gale-force winds when suddenly a Le Conte's Sparrow started singing right in front of us. The bird came amazingly close and everybody got great looks at this cutie! An Eastern Nashville Warbler was heard and seen nearby, a Palm Warbler only heard. A pond just a little closer to town yielded our first Bonaparte's Gull, a nice breeding-plumaged bird.

After another lunch at Humpty's, we headed back out to Cold Lake PP where we walked a new trail. A Canada Warbler and a Boreal Chickadee were seen well there. Magnolia Warbler and American Redstart were also in the mix. Blue-headed Vireo was only heard. A close-by Common Loon was admired by all. The fighter planes above eventually made us run for cover. We'd had another pretty good day!

June 12: Sir Winston Churchill PP

The forecast again showed 25 mph winds and rain, but the rain ended up not being that bad.

We cruised around town for Horned Grebe (not Eared!), Purple Martin and Clay-colored Sparrow which we all found.

Then we quickly stopped by Alexander Hamilton Park, but the wind was howling, so we didn't stay long. A rare Caspian Tern flew over.



Finally to the gate of Sir Winston Churchill PP. We soon found out that the loop road was closed due to wind damage. Traipsing around the entrance area yielded a nice Bay-breasted Warbler, Tennessee Warbler, Boreal Chickadee and others. Getting all 12 of us on the Bay-breasted was certainly a thrill! A walk from the visitor center yielded a heard-only Mourning and a Magnolia Warbler. An Eastern Phoebe was at the campground headquarters.

After lunch we decided to go back to the park for a few more hours. The loop road had reopened (yippee!), so we immediately drove over to the Mourning Warbler spot.

We heard 3 singers and quickly got on one. Great bird! Another stop a little later was good for Ovenbird, One last check for Three-toed Woodpecker was again unsuccessful, but we found Blackburnian Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo and Boreal Chickadee. Susan saw a pair of Merlins at the roundabout while the rest of us were walking the trails, but we couldn't refind when we got back.

Another fun day!

June 13: Alexander Hamilton Park, Long Lake PP, Elk Island NP

After 3.5 days of winds and rain, we hit our first nice day! We started at 5am at Alexander Hamilton Park, but could not refind the Philadelphia Vireo. The park was very active and there were lots of birds. Highlights included a few singing Le Conte's Sparrows, Clay-colored Sparrows chasing each other and a calling Sedge Wren. And there was a Beaver on the edge and later in the pond!!

En route to Long Lake PP we found a Richardson's (aka Prairie) Merlin. At Long Lake proper, a loud song lead us to the area of the Connecticut Warbler which posed eye-level for all of us!!! The loud singer finally revealed itself to be a Northern Waterthrush! A Rose-breasted Grosbeak posed for us on top of a fir. Black-throated Green Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, Blackburnian Warbler and 3 heard only Canadas were added as well. The lake shore held Common and Forster's Tern and Spotted Sandpiper.



After a short drive we had lunch at Elk Island National Park and then birded there for just over 3 hours. It is a great place! We heard or saw 45 species, many of them we saw before, but it remained birdy all through the afternoon. For a longer stop we drove down the road to the administration area and then went on a hike out to a boat dock. A singing Nelson's Sparrow did not reveal itself, bummer! 5 species of grebes, heard-only Mourning Warbler, a pumping American Bittern, a singing Baltimore Oriole all were great fun. The highlight however were the 2 bison subspecies: We got good looks at Plains (on the north side of Hwy 16) and Woodland (on the south side of Hwy 16). One Plains Bison claimed the road for several minutes. That was fun!



After than we concluded the trip with a final dinner at the hotel in Red Deer.

June 14: Transfer back home

After breakfast early morning, we only had time to drive back to the Calgary airport. Our flight back to Portland left at 10:55am. Even though we had challenging weather for several days we ended up having a great trip!

Species list (158 seen or heard):

Canada Goose
Gadwall
American Wigeon
Mallard
Blue-winged Teal
Northern Shoveler
Northern Pintail
Green-winged Teal
Canvasback
Redhead
Ring-necked Duck
Lesser Scaup
White-winged Scoter (3 seen well at Lac La Biche)
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Hooded Merganser (1 at Prairie Oasis Park)
Common Merganser (1 at Sir Winston Churchill PP)
Red-breasted Merganser (2 at Sir Winston Churchill PP)
Ruddy Duck
Ring-necked Pheasant
Pied-billed Grebe
Red-necked Grebe
Eared Grebe
Horned Grebe
Western Grebe
Rock Pigeon
Eurasian Collared-Dove
Mourning Dove
Common Nighthawk (a few at Dinosaur PP)
Sora
American Coot
Black-necked Stilt
American Avocet
Killdeer
Long-billed Curlew
Marbled Godwit (an amazing ~30 south of Tilley, one pair with a chick)
Wilson's Snipe
Wilson's Phalarope
Spotted Sandpiper
Willet
Bonaparte's Gull
Franklin's Gull
Ring-billed Gull

California Gull
Herring Gull (Lac La Biche)
Black Tern
Common Tern
Forster's Tern
Caspian Tern (1 at Alexander Hamilton Park in Lac La Biche)
Common Loon
Double-crested Cormorant
American White Pelican
Great Blue Heron
American Bittern (1 heard at Elk Island)
Black-crowned Night-Heron (1 at Prairie Oasis Park)
Turkey Vulture (a total of 5 at different locations)
Osprey
Northern Harrier
Bald Eagle
Swainson's Hawk
Red-tailed Hawk
Ferruginous Hawk (1 along RR105 northwest of Suffield)
Great Horned Owl (1 at Rolling Hills Reservoir CC)
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
Downy Woodpecker
Hairy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Pileated Woodpecker
American Kestrel
Merlin (1 Richardson's en route southwest of Lac La Biche)
Western Wood-Pewee
Alder Flycatcher
Least Flycatcher
Eastern Phoebe (Cold Lake PP, Sir Winston Churchill PP, Long Lake PP)
Say's Phoebe (south of Brooks, Dinosaur PP)
Western Kingbird
Eastern Kingbird
Loggerhead Shrike
Blue-headed Vireo (Sir Winston Churchill PP & Long Lake PP)
Warbling Vireo
Red-eyed Vireo
Blue Jay (heard at Long Lake PP, Sir Winston Churchill PP, Red Deer)
Black-billed Magpie
American Crow
Common Raven
Horned Lark

Purple Martin
Tree Swallow
Violet-green Swallow (Dinosaur PP)
Bank Swallow
Barn Swallow
Cliff Swallow
Black-capped Chickadee
Boreal Chickadee (Cold Lake PP, Sir Winston Churchill PP)
Red-breasted Nuthatch
Rock Wren (several at Dinosaur PP)
House Wren
Winter Wren (heard only at Cold Lake PP, Sir Winston Churchill PP)
Sedge Wren (2 just outside Cold Lake PP entrance, heard at Alexander Hamilton Park)
Marsh Wren
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Swainson's Thrush
Hermit Thrush (Long Lake PP, Elk Island NP)
American Robin
Gray Catbird
Brown Thrasher (Dinosaur PP)
European Starling
Sprague's Pipit (heard only along RR104 near Baird's Sparrow spot)
Cedar Waxwing
House Sparrow
House Finch
Red Crossbill (8 flyovers at Cold Lake PP)
Pine Siskin
American Goldfinch
Chestnut-collared Longspur (RR105 northwest of Suffield, also RR132 south of Tilley)
McCown's Longspur (RR105 northwest of Suffield)
Ovenbird
Northern Waterthrush (1 well-seen bird at Long Lake PP)
Black-and-white Warbler
Tennessee Warbler
Nashville Warbler (eastern spp; seen by only a few along Primrose Lake Rd)
Connecticut Warbler (1 along Primrose Rd 0.8km after official Marie Lake turnoff, 1 just outside Long Lake PP)
Mourning Warbler (several at Sir Winston Churchill PP; heard at Elk Island)
Common Yellowthroat
American Redstart
Magnolia Warbler
Bay-breasted Warbler (1 at Sir Winston Churchill PP)
Blackburnian Warbler (Sir Winston Churchill PP and Long Lake PP; several at Cold Lake PP)

Yellow Warbler
Chestnut-sided Warbler (1 posing at Cold Lake PP)
Palm Warbler (1 heard-only along Primrose Lake Rd)
Yellow-rumped Warbler (Myrtle spp)
Black-throated Green Warbler (1 seen at Cold Lake PP)
Canada Warbler (several heard at Long Lake PP, 1 seen at Cold Lake PP)
Spotted Towhee
Chipping Sparrow
Clay-colored Sparrow
Brewer's Sparrow (1 off RR105 northwest of Suffolk)
Lark Sparrow (Dinosaur PP)
Vesper Sparrow
Savannah Sparrow
Grasshopper Sparrow (1 heard off RR104, 1 seen of RR105 northwest of Suffolk)
Baird's Sparrow (1 off RR104 northwest of Suffolk)
Le Conte's Sparrow (1 seen well along Primrose Lake Rd; 4 heard-only at Alexander Hamilton Park in Lac La Biche)
Nelson's Sparrow (heard-only at Elk Island NP)
Song Sparrow
Lincoln's Sparrow
Swamp Sparrow (near Cold Lake PP)
White-throated Sparrow
Dark-eyed Junco (1 Oregon at Rolling Hills Reservoir CC)
Rose-breasted Grosbeak (1 at Long Lake PP, 1 at Elk Island NP)
Red-winged Blackbird
Western Meadowlark
Yellow-headed Blackbird
Brewer's Blackbird
Common Grackle
Brown-headed Cowbird
Baltimore Oriole (Dinosaur PP, Rolling Hills CG, Prairie Oasis Park, Elk Island NP)





Other wildlife:

Pronghorn
Mule deer
White-tailed Deer
Coyote
Red Squirrel
Richardson's Ground-squirrel
Red Fox
Beaver
Muskrat
Prairie and Woodland Bison
Boreal Chorus Frog

Ochre Ringlet
Canadian Swallowtail
Weidemeyer's Admiral



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