

# Presqu'île Provincial Park

## Ontario, Canada

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### Location

Approximately 2 miles (4 km) south of the community of Brighton, Northumberland County, Ontario, lies a southern projection into Lake Ontario on its north shore. On this land spit, across Lake Ontario opposite Rochester, New York, is Presqu'île Provincial Park. This Park is about 60 miles (100 km) southwest of Kingston and about 85 miles (135 km) east of Toronto.

### Description

On this boot-shaped peninsula, within the Park's 2200 acres, there is a rich mixture of habitats including marshes, the protected waters of Presqu'île Bay, sand dunes and wide sandy beaches, old fields, and a wide variety of forests. This includes an extensive spruce forest with strong northern affinities, with white cedar and tall stands of pine. This diversity of habitats meets the nesting requirements of 130 different bird species so that the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas has ranked Presqu'île's square as one of the highest and most productive in Ontario Province. Despite limited coverage, more than 300 bird species have been recorded here and that number seems to increase by about four per year.

### Access

The Park can be reached from east or west via Highway 401. From Highway 401, exit south onto Highway 30. Proceed south for approximately 5 miles (8 km) on Highway 30. There are road signs all along the way indicating the way to the Park.

### Accommodations

There are restaurants, motels, and all the essential services along Highway 401 and in the community of Brighton. There is also a camping area within the Park with almost 400 sites. The ones located in the High Bluff Loop are best situated for birding.

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***The park is best known for its shorebirds, concentrations of migrant landbirds and as an important staging area for waterfowl, particularly ducks.***

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### Birding

Presqu'île is best known for shorebirds and the 39 species recorded to date include such mega-rarities as Ontario's first American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), and Canada's first Mongolian Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*). Other, less exotic strays include American Avocet (*Recurvirostra americana*), Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*), and Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*). During spring, shorebirds are found all along the mile-long beach, but in fall they are mostly at the south end near Owen Point, where the beach has been left in an undisturbed state.

Northbound shorebirds are most common during late May and early June. The numbers of birds are normally small, but adverse weather can force occasional groundings—the largest of which involved an estimated 20,000 birds.

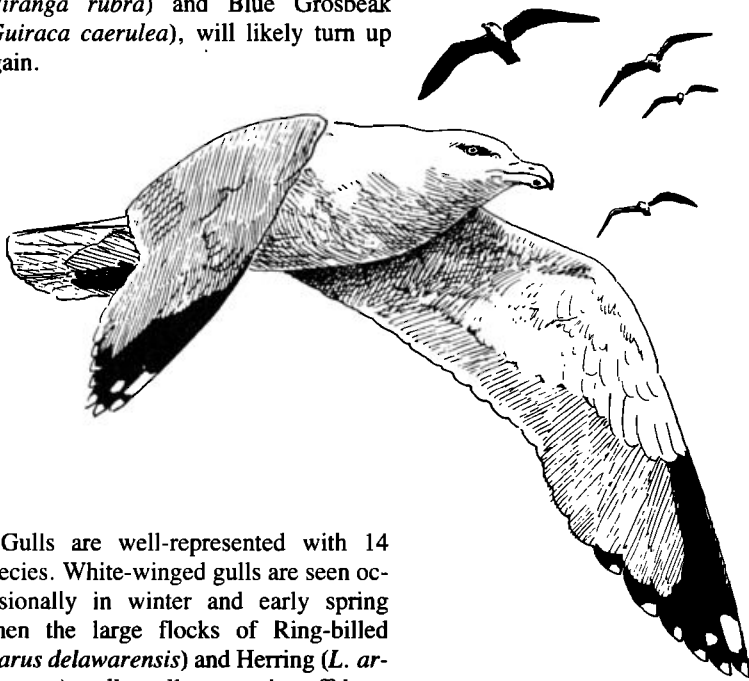
Presqu'île is one of the most reliable places in southern Ontario to see Whimbrel (*Numenius phaeopus*) and Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), occasionally in large numbers.

From early July to late November, large numbers of waders pass through and can be watched and photographed from very close range. Typically, several hundred arrive with a weather front and numbers gradually fall off until another front moves through and 'recharges' the flock. These cycles tend to be about 10 days apart on average. Less common species that are seen in most years include Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*), which formerly bred in the area, Willet (*Cantotrophorus semipalmatus*), Hudsonian Godwit (*Limosa haemastica*), Western (*Calidris mauri*), Purple (*Calidris maritima*), and Buff-breasted (*Tryngites subruficollis*) sandpipers, and Long-billed Dowitcher (*Limnodromus scolopaceus*).

Presqu'île Peninsula concentrates migrant landbirds, especially at Presqu'île point, Calf Pasture Point, and the camping area adjacent to Owen Point. On days of heavy fallout, the scene includes grosbeaks, tanagers, and orioles in great abundance. Landbird fallouts occur under various conditions, but are most often associated with light rain or fog.

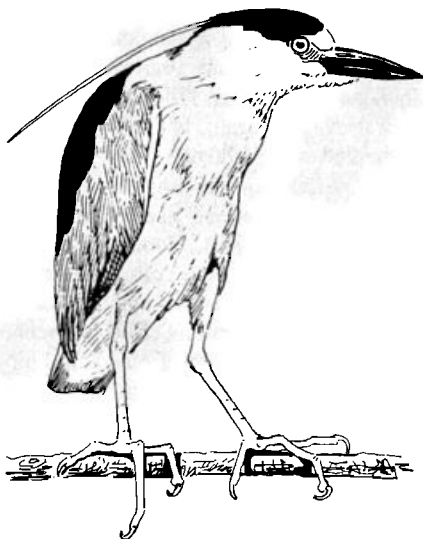
Recent fieldwork has shown that typically southern species like White-eyed Vireo (*Vireo griseus*), Hooded Warbler (*Wilsonia citrina*), and Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*) are of annual occurrence. Most of the birding effort has been directed toward waterbirds, and finding vagrant landbirds is more difficult, but results are finally coming to light. Among the most unusual finds are Band-tailed Pigeon (*Columba fasciata*), Townsend's Solitaire (*Myadestes townsendi*), and Lark Bunting (*Calamospiza melano-*

corys). Others, like Summer Tanager (*Piranga rubra*) and Blue Grosbeak (*Guiraca caerulea*), will likely turn up again.



Gulls are well-represented with 14 species. White-winged gulls are seen occasionally in winter and early spring when the large flocks of Ring-billed (*Larus delawarensis*) and Herring (*L. argentatus*) gulls collect on the offshore ice. Little Gull (*L. minutus*) is a regular migrant, most easily seen in late April/early May when large flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls (*L. philadelphia*) gather on the beach. These flocks should be carefully checked as Laughing (*L. atricilla*), Franklin's (*L. pipixcan*) and Common Black-headed (*L. ridibundus*) gulls have all been seen before. An Ivory Gull (*Pagophila eburnea*), on the 1967 Christmas Bird Count was an excellent find.

Gull and High Bluff Island, just offshore from Owen Point, supports a huge bird colony. Recent estimates put the expanding Ring-billed Gull population at 60,000 pairs with a smaller number of



Double-crested Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Black-crowned Night-Herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Herring and Great Black-backed (*L. marinus*) gulls, and Caspian (*Sterna caspia*) and Common (*S. hirundo*) terns. To protect the colony, visits to the island during the breeding season are not permitted.

Presqu'ile is an important staging area for waterfowl, especially ducks. The spring flight peaks in late March when up to 50,000 birds, consisting mostly of diving ducks, have been seen. About 25 species of waterfowl stop over in spring, including a few Tundra (*Cygnus columbianus*) and Mute (*C. olor*) swans. Presqu'ile lies on the western edge of the narrow spring migration corridor of Brant (*Branta bernicla*), and they can be common for several days in late May.

The November gales that whisk ducks out of Canada's north can bring thousands of Common Goldeneye (*Bucephala clangula*), Bufflehead (*B. albeola*) and Oldsquaw (*Clangula hyemalis*). All three scoter species are usually present as well. Small numbers of King Eider (*Somateria spectabilis*) are seen regularly and there are several records of Harlequin Duck (*Histrionicus histrionicus*) and Barrow's Goldeneye (*B. islandica*).

Winter birding is rather subdued by comparison, with about 50 species present in most years. Severe cold spells force out or kill most lingering migrants by early January and can also cause a

temporary exodus of the ducks and gulls that remain in Presqu'ile Bay. A few Snowy Owls (*Nyctea scandiaca*) and some of the 'winter' finches are present most years.

Increasing birding effort at Presqu'ile has shown that it is a first rate area that offers a wide variety of birdlife to study, including the opportunity to view numerous vagrants, particularly shorebirds. Over 100 species are usually present from late April until early October. Be sure to check the Bird Sightings Board located at the Camp Office during migration and at the Visitor Center in summer, to see what birds have been reported and to add your own sightings. We would be happy to receive a copy of anyone's notes for our files.

For more information about birding at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, please contact me at Presqu'ile Provincial Park, R.R. #4, Brighton, Ontario, K0K 1H0, telephone: (613) 475-2204.

#### Seasonal Rating

Spring (April-June)★★★★

Summer (July-August)★★★★

Fall (September-November)★★★★

Winter (December-March)★★

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