

Algonquin Provincial Park

Ontario, Canada

Clive E. Goodwin

(Reprinted from *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario* by Clive E. Goodwin, by permission of the University of Toronto Press © University of Toronto Press, 1982.)

HUNTSVILLE—On Highway 11 driving north from town and shortly after the Highway 60 junction is *Arrowhead Provincial Park*, with an interesting nature trail along the river.

Huntsville is best known, however, as the nearest large community to the *Algonquin Provincial Park* Highway 60 corridor.

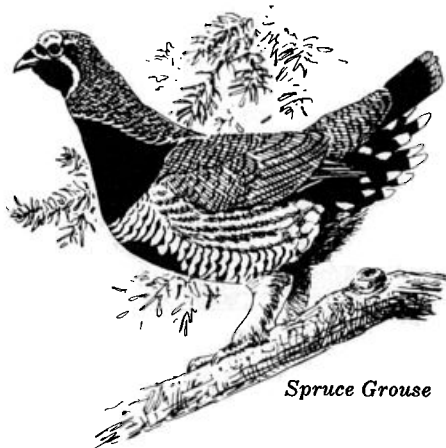
Algonquin (entry fee) is both the oldest provincial park and, with an area of over 7600 square kilometres, one of the biggest. Highway 60 between Dwight and Whitney crosses the southwest corner of the park, and is the main public road through it. The interior is accessible by canoe, and there are over 1600 km of canoe routes. Specific routes will not be identified here because to my knowledge none offers significantly different birding to that available elsewhere in the region; however, the canoe routes and hiking trails are undoubtedly the best way to see the park.

Algonquin occupies an area of rolling highlands, and the forest—and other flora and fauna—presents a mix of southern and northern species. Although this kind of mix is typical of the region generally, Algonquin has a particularly rich mixture, and much of the variety is accessible in the relatively short distance along Highway 60. There is a good museum with a skilled and knowledgeable interpretive staff which can be of great help to the visitor in giving directions regarding specific species. There are several fine nature trails as well as a couple of major hiking trails, all accessible along the highway.

mammals and birds. In spring and early

Algonquin Park is noted for its wildlife-viewing opportunities, for both summer, Black Bears, Moose, Beaver, and White-tailed Deer are frequently seen at close range. The park has become famous as a place to hear Timber Wolves in late summer and early autumn.

Birders are primarily drawn to Algonquin for its northern specialties, and warblers on their breeding grounds. Boreal forest species such as Olive-sided Flycatcher, Gray Jay, Common Raven, and Boreal Chickadee occur commonly along Highway 60 in the park. In addition, careful searching in favoured locations can yield Spruce Grouse, Black-backed and Three-toed woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Rusty Blackbird, and Lincoln's Sparrow. Remember, however, that Algonquin's continuous forest cover can make these birds very difficult to find.



Spruce Grouse

Common Loons nest on most of the larger lakes, but ducks are scarce. The commonly observed raptor along Highway 60 is the Broad-winged Hawk (frequently perched along the utility lines). Ospreys are occasionally noted over



lakes near the road, and one should listen at night for Barred and Northern Saw-whet owls, both of which are common.

Outside the breeding season, the park is worth a visit in late autumn through early spring to see winter finches and resident species. Both eagles occur rarely during this period as well, feeding on wolf-killed deer.

There is good birding along the 43 km of Highway 60 between the Huntsville turn-off (Muskoka Road 3) and the park gate. The fields in this stretch represent a habitat not available to any extent in the park itself, and can yield field species including (occasionally) Grasshopper Sparrow. Some sideroads can be most interesting, particularly the network accessible along Canal Road (Muskoka Road 23) on the south, 4 km from Muskoka Road 3; and Limberlost Road on the north 5.9 km farther on (Muskoka Road 8, to Sinclair Township). These are narrow, winding roads, often gravelled, going through good warbler country. Drive slowly, parking and walking along the roads from time to time.

In Algonquin itself much birding can also be done from the highway, but it is busy and if you plan to do this get out at dawn ahead of the traffic. Stop regularly,

(The illustrations accompanying the text are by T.M. Shortt and do not appear in *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario*.)

selecting variations in the habitat along the road, and drive with the windows open. Most of your 'watching' will be done by ear! In addition to the marked nature trails, there are many sideroads, some disused, and old trails along the road that can be explored on foot. It is emphasized again that naturalists at the museum can provide detailed information on particular species at the time of your visit. Be sure to stop in.

Some specific locations of interest follow, but no attempt has been made to be exhaustive. The distances given are from the West Gate: the distances along the highway within the park are marked in this manner also.

- 0 km The West Gate
- 3 km The Oxtongue River Picnic Grounds and start of the Western Uplands Hiking Trail. The heavy spruce to the east used to be good for Spruce Grouse; it is years since I have found the birds there, but it may be worth checking. Gray Jay and Boreal Chickadee are frequent.
- 7.2 km The Whiskey Rapids Nature Trail. This is an excellent nature trail, and in my experience one of the more productive spots for Boreal Chickadees.
- 16.7 km The Hardwood Hill Picnic Grounds. Black-throated Blue Warbler and other deciduous woodland species occur here.
- 20.1 km The Park Museum and Interpretive Centre
- 22.3 km An abandoned railroad bed here offers a good walk in either direction.
- 30.6 km The road to the airfield. A very productive spot for field-birds and rarities (an island of open country); also waterbirds on Lake of Two Rivers.
- 35.6 km The Trailer Dump Station. Golden-winged Warblers have occurred in the shrubbery here.
- 42.5 km The Spruce Boardwalk Trail. Olive-sided Flycatchers are regular, and there is a good chance of spotting Spruce Grouse in the bog.
- 45.2 km The Beaver Pond Trail. A varied and productive nature trail through wetlands and coniferous habitats.

- 46.3 km The Opeongo Lake Road. At the south end of Opeongo Lake are some of the best marshy areas accessible from the highway.
- 53.0 km There is a gravel pit here on the north side, and a small bog adjacent to it. Spruce Grouse are possible.
- 55.8 km The East Gate

To bird the eastern side of the park the following directions are from the communities of Cobden and Pembroke.

Cobden — At Cobden Highway 17 parallels the west shoreline of Muskrat Lake, and some 7½ km north of town the road crosses the Snake River and the wetlands associated with it. The latter also parallel the road to the west. A west-bound sideroad about ½ km south of the river bridge leads to this area: turn left at the T-intersection.

Pembroke — Some 25 km northwest of Cobden is Pembroke. There is access to the *Sand Lake Gate of Algonquin Provincial Park* from a point 3.2 km farther northwest of this town on Highway 17. Follow a road (paved for a few kilometres and then gravelled) west for 32 km to the Sand Lake Gate (permits available there) on the eastern boundary of Algonquin Park. Proceed into the park on Sand Lake Road through young forests of birch and poplar, and extensive pine stands (both red and white) — which are dramatically different from Algonquin's west-side hardwoods. Common birds of the pine forest include Olive-sided Flycatcher, Pine Warbler, and Dark-eyed Junco.



About 10.5 km in from the Sand Lake Gate is the Barron Canyon Trail. This

trail (about 1½ km long) leads to and along the edge of the spectacular Barron River Canyon (with 100-metre vertical granite walls), before looping back to the parking lot. Common birds in the gorge include Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Hermit Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, and Dark-eyed Junco (all of which should be heard from the top). Close to the water's edge (far below), Barn Swallows and Eastern Phoebes build their nests on the vertical rock walls — a contrast to their usual sites on man-made structures.

Another 8.5 km along Sand Lake Road brings you to the turn-off (left) to Achray on Grand Lake. Here there is a campground on the lake, with a good beach.

Upon returning to Sand Lake Road, there is a choice of returning to Pembroke (turn right), or taking a left turn and driving some 35 km farther on to Lake Traverse. An extensive area near Lake Traverse was clear-cut to salvage the jack pine forest killed by budworm in the past, a section which may produce American Kestrels, Eastern Bluebirds, Rufous-sided Towhees, and Field Sparrows. Watch along the road and in adjacent ponds for Wood Turtles and Blanding's Turtles, both of which are 'specialties' of Algonquin Park's 'east side.' Typical birds along the road in summer (varying with the particular year) include Evening Grosbeak, Purple Finch, Pine Siskin, and Red Crossbill. Stops along the way may yield Solitary and Warbling Vireos and the usual variety of Algonquin warbler species.

The Algonquin Park Museum has produced a series of priced publications on the park's flora and fauna. Birders would be particularly interested in the booklet on birds (price: \$1.00), which includes an annotated list with arrival and departure dates. In addition, illustrated trail guide booklets (each with a different natural or human history theme) are available for each of nine trails along Highway 60.

General information and a publication price list are available from: Ministry of Natural Resources, Box 219, Whitney, Ontario, KOJ 2M0. Current bird-finding information can always be obtained at the Park Museum (km 20), or by phone ([705] 633-5592).

There are several campgrounds in Algonquin and three commercial lodges that take guests. Outside the park there are motels at Oxtongue Lake, Huntsville, and Whitney.