



Warbler Grand Tour
May 4 – 15, 2026
Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan

GENERAL INFORMATION

GUIDE/DRIVER

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WEATHER

- In northern Kentucky, low of 55 and high of 76 with 8 rainy days in the month.
- In southern Ohio, low of 52 and high of 76 with 10 rainy days in the month.
- In northern Ohio, low of 52 and high of 72 with 7 rainy days in the month.
- In east central Michigan, low of 43 and high of 63 with 8 rainy days in the month.

CLOTHING

Layers are the key to comfort on this trip. With rain always a possibility, a raincoat should be available in your day pack. Most hotels will have laundry machines available. It might be a good idea to include two pairs of shoes including a pair of light hikers for trail walking and keeping your feet dry if it rains. Some of our destinations might have some flying insects so a repellent might make you more comfortable. Sun protection is also a good idea.

TRAVEL

Try to bring a suitcase and a daypack. This will give everyone enough room to be comfortable on the trip. We will be traveling in a large SUV with the luggage stacked in the back during the day. Your small bag should have your birding gear, snacks, and layers for easy access. I will have my spotting scope for the groups use. However, we will have room for a few scopes if you decide to bring yours. I will have my Swarovski 80mm scope for the group. Be prepared to sit in all seats of the SUV. We will have a rotation, so everyone has equal time in all seats including the front and rear. This is a non-smoking vehicle and hotels. Most hikes will be under two miles in length with under 400 feet of elevation gain/loss. Plan to fly into Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) on or before May 6, 2025, by noon. Your flight home should be from Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW) on May 17, 2025. You will need to check out of the hotel by 11:00am that day so plan your flight accordingly.

FOOD

All of your meals are covered from dinner on day one to breakfast on day twelve. This includes your standard meal and any non-alcoholic beverage. You will be responsible for room service, alcohol,

appetizers, and/or desserts. We are traveling and staying in some remote locations with a limited variety of foods available. Effort will be made to keep everyone happy and well fed. Feel free to bring snacks, so you feel good all day when meals might not be exactly on schedule.

BIRD CHECKLISTS

I will be creating eBird checklists at all significant birding spots as well as an eBird Trip Report that covers the whole trip. These checklists will include all species seen but will not include all bird numbers during the trip. (ex. Birds seen along the way while driving will not be on a checklist unless it is a new bird for the trip) For those of you using paper checklists, we can go over them each night if needed. Feel free to attach photos, audio, or videos taken throughout our trip to the eBird checklists.

WHAT IS NOT INCLUDED

Optional tips to the She Flew Birding Tour guide, any luggage porters used, and transportation to the starting point and departure travel after the tour has completed are not included. In addition, alcoholic beverages, travel insurance, excursions not included in the tour itinerary, extras in hotels such as laundry service, minibar, room service, telephone calls, and personal items, medical fees, other items or services not specifically mentioned as being included are not included.

WHAT TO BRING

- Binoculars
- Spotting scope (optional)
- Camera (optional)
- Sun hat
- Raincoat
- Light hikers
- Shin-high water boots for one birding spot (optional)
- Toiletries
- Medications
- Field cloths for 12 days
- A warm layer for cooler mornings
- Snacks (can purchase on trip)
- Insect repellent (optional)
- Electronic charging cables
- Day pack/backpack
- Water bottle
- A smile

ITINERARY

May 4 (Day 1) Arrival and local birding, Ohio/Kentucky

Fly into the Cincinnati/Northern Kentucky International Airport (CVG) by noon. I'll get there by 11:00ish and stay until everyone has arrived. In the airport, we'll meet at the area called "Meeting Point." It is located on the lower level of the terminal before you go up the escalator to baggage claim and is on the left. I'll have my cell phone for texting or calling. 970-232-4539.



As we head southeast to our hotel, we will stretch our legs at the birdy Armleder Park near Cincinnati (Ohio). This 313-acre park has open fields, a nice forest patch of deciduous trees and is located near the Little Miami Scenic River. This 2-mile trail is paved



and should take about two hours to bird watch. We will spend two nights on the east side of Lexington, making driving distances less. Comfort Inn & Suites, 2400 Buena Vista Rd, Lexington, KY, 40505, (859) 317-2339, 2 days (pictured Yellow-throated Vireo, Field Sparrow)

May 5 (Day 2) Red River Gorge, Kentucky

First thing this morning we head to a rich grassland area west of Winchester along a quiet road for some hard-to-find species. Our targets here are Henslow's Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Bobolinks. Other grassland species could be seen as well including Orchard Oriole, Willow Flycatcher, Eastern Meadowlark, Savannah, and Field Sparrows just to name a few. Then we head east for the rest of the birding day to the beautiful Red River Gorge area inside the Daniel Boone National Forest. The Red River Gorge is a unique scenic natural area that boasts spectacular rock features including sandstone arches, towering cliffs, the wild and the scenic Red River including the Clifty Wilderness. Here we will be in the northern most part of the range for the southern breeders. The target birds here include Louisiana Waterthrush, Swainson's, Yellow-throated, and Black-throated Green Warblers. While in Kentucky, we will also focus on Hooded, Kentucky, Prothonotary, and Pine Warblers. The birding spots include Nada Tunnel and Sky Bridge Roads in the morning, then we make our way down to Natural Bridge State Resort Park for lunch and afternoon birding. Light hikers might be a good idea today as we will walk on several short dirt trails totaling about 3 miles. (Pictured - Worm-eating Warbler, Henslow's Sparrow, & our morning sparrow field)



May 6 (Day 3) Red River Gorge to Shawnee National Forest





Rock Bridge Trail, in the Red River Gorge, is a beautiful 1.4-mile loop with towering hemlock trees and dense rhododendron understory. It is in this understory we will look



and listen for our targets Louisiana Waterthrush and Swainson’s Warbler. This is our last foray into this lovely gorge area. Heading 1:30 hours north, our second stop of the day is Minor Clark Fish Hatchery near Morehead, Kentucky. With shorebirds, ducks, and swallows, this stop will pad our Kentucky state list and give us a completely new habitat to explore. The college town of Morehead will provide a lunch spot as we continue the drive toward Portsmouth and the bridge across the Ohio River. Most of our food stops will be ‘local restaurants’ while avoiding chain restaurants. I always like to support the little guy! Pond Lick Road area in the Shawnee National Forest is the afternoon’s destination. Dinner is at Portsmouth’s most popular restaurant, the *Scioto Ribber*. For the next two nights we stay at the Quality Inn & Suites, 5100 Old Scioto Trail, Portsmouth, OH, 855-849-1513. 2 days (Pictured - Cerulean Warbler, Kentucky Warbler, Red River Gorge map & Nada Tunnel)

May 7 (Day 4) Shawnee National Forest and State Park

The Shawnee area is a convergence of six natural ecological regions. It features strikingly



convergence of six natural ecological beautiful oak-hickory trees, flourishing wetlands, lush canyons, razorback ridges, and unique geological features. Sitting atop the Appalachian plateau and just north of the Ohio River, Shawnee State Park is the largest state park in Ohio. 13 species of warbler’s nest here including these targets: Cerulean, Yellow-throated, Worm-eating, Kentucky, Prairie and Pine Warblers, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Ovenbird. Other birds we hope to see are Yellow-breasted Chat, both Black and Yellow-billed Cuckoos, Pileated Woodpecker, Least Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Eastern Towhee, and Indigo Bunting. Spending all day in this ecosystem, several short hikes will be needed in this amazing mixed forest. I can’t



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wait to hear the morning chorus! We finish our full day with an optional evening outing targeting Eastern Whip-poor-will and Chuck-will's-widow. We might even luck into an American Woodcock and Barred Owl. Rest for the second night at the Quality Inn & Suites in Portsmouth, Ohio. (Pictured Black-throated Green & Swainson's Warblers)

May 8 (Day 5) The Heartland of Ohio to Lake Erie



Our options this morning include spending a few more hours filling the holes on our checklist targets in southern Ohio or start to head north through the heartland of Ohio right away. This extended 4:40 drive is broken up by a stop or two along the way. Bathroom breaks are a must! Battelle Darby



Metro Park has restored wetlands near the Big Darby Creek, a national scenic river. This wet trail, water shin-high boots required, has Virginia Rail, Sora, American Bittern, Common Yellowthroat, and last time even had a Trumpeter Swan pair. Some clients choose to wear flip flops through the water. We only go about 200 yards down and back. We finish the drive north toward the fabulous Magee Marsh Boardwalk where we should get in a few hours of birding and start seeing the warbler extravaganza. Dinner in Oregon, Ohio where we stay for four nights. Comfort Inn East, 2930 Navarre Ave, Oregon, OH 43616, 419-691-8911. (Pictured – Blackburnian Warbler, American Bittern, & Trumpeter Swan)

May 9-11 (Day 6-8) Warblers and Northwest Ohio Hotspots

After our hotel breakfast, we drive to nearby Magee Marsh and bird the boardwalk, beach, marshes, and hawk tower for the morning warblers. This trip coincides with 'The Biggest Week



in American Birding.' Why come to northwest Ohio in May? "... it is quite simply the best place to witness spring migration of songbirds anywhere in North America. The southern edge of Lake Erie acts as a barrier that the birds are reluctant to cross during

migration. The birds tend to "pile up" in the woodlots surrounded by marshland on the lake's southern edge to rest and refuel before crossing the Lake.

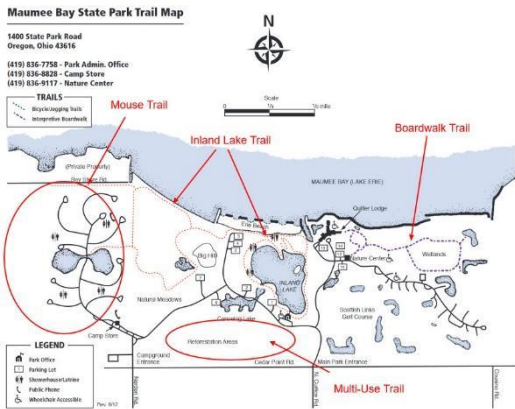


The timing of their arrival is early enough in spring that the trees have not leafed out, there are no bugs, and the birds are incredibly low and accessible. No such thing as "warbler neck" around here! We get HUGE numbers of birds, much like fallout, only better! Fallouts occur when a weather event pushes birds down, and what birders find are the weary survivors. Here in NW Ohio, we get the same huge numbers of birds as you'd see in a fallout, but the birds are active and vibrant, and by the time they get to this latitude, the males are actively singing!" After an amazing morning, we'll spend the afternoon at one of the local birding hotspots.



- Ottawa National Wildlife Refuge – has several special designations including Globally Important Bird Area and Regionally Significant Site in the Western Hemisphere. Much of Ottawa Refuge and the surrounding lands were once part of the Great Black Swamp. The refuge manages about 6,500 acres of wetland, grassland, and wooded habitat.
- Oak Openings – The natural habitats in the park range from oak savanna to wetlands to vegetated dunes. This 5,000-acre preserve is one of the only places to try for Lark Sparrow.
- Irwin Prairie State Nature Preserve – The core of this preserve is a treeless, wet sedge meadow dominated by several species of sedges, rushes, and grasses. It is the finest remaining sedge meadow in the state.
- Howard Marsh Metropark – This new park has become a shorebird magnet along the lake edge.
- Pearson Metropark – About three miles of trails crisscross this 624-acre park. They provide remarkable access to the best birding anywhere. The thick woods and location close to Lake Erie make Pearson a favorite stopover for a wide variety of migrating birds.
- Black Swamp Bird Observatory is the host of *The Biggest Week in American Birding*. They will have a great optics tent and center to try out and are available for purchase.
- Metzger Marsh Wildlife Area – Located between Ottawa WR and Lake Erie, this 558-acre marsh is managed to provide optimum vegetation for wetland wildlife. The small woodlot is the last stop for migrants and often holds good birds.
- Maumee Bay State Park – Home of *The Biggest Week*, has scenic meadows, wet woods, a boardwalk, and lush marshes just teeming with wildlife. We will stop in here to bird,

see the vendors, and take an American Woodcock evening stroll. (Pictured – Black-throated Blue Warbler, Magee Marsh Boardwalk entrance, and Magnolia Warbler)



May 12 (Day 9) Magee to Tawas Pointe SP, Michigan

An early departure is needed as we head northwest around Lake Erie’s shores. Breakfast in Ann Arbor, Michigan will give us a great start to the day and allow us more birding time. Au Sable State Forest is home to some different breeding birds including Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Sedge Wren, Veery, Wood Thrush, Swamp Sparrow, Golden-winged, and Blue-winged Warblers. Any migrant can be found in this habitat as well. This forest is part of the Grayling Outwash Plain, an important ecosystem in this region. Spending a few hours walking along a quiet road, will give us a jump on our Michigan bird list. Tawas Pointe State Park is the destination for midafternoon until dinner. Sticking out into Lake Huron, birds concentrate along this peninsula in migration. It is famous in Michigan as the best migrant trap along Lake Huron. Less crowded than Magee Marsh, we should enjoy this underutilized birding gem and enjoy taking pictures of fresh plumaged gems. This park boasts 260 different migrating species in spring migration. I can’t wait to spend time here! Two nights at Bay Inn, 1020 W Lake St, Tawas City MI 989-363-0082 for two nights. (Pictured – Golden-winged Warbler & Rose-breasted Grosbeak)



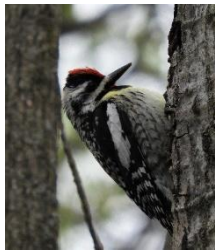
May 13 (Day 10) Kirtland’s Warbler and Tawas Point SP

Kirtland’s Warbler is our target this morning. These birds only use young Jack Pine trees that are close together and five to fifteen feet tall. A true habitat specialist and one of the rarest songbirds in North America. The contrasting blue gray above and bright yellow below will seem like eye candy. Other birds in this habitat include Ruffed Grouse, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Field and Vesper Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Nashville Warbler, and Pine Warblers. After lunch back in town, the rest of the afternoon is back to

Tawas Point. This evening we head to Tuttle Marsh Wildlife Area. Our targets here include Trumpeter Swan, American Bittern, Sandhill Crane, Alder, and Willow Flycatchers, Marsh Wren, Veery, Bobolink, and Swamp Sparrow. (Pictured – Kirtland’s Warbler, Jack Pine habitat, & Nashville Warbler)



May 14 (Day 11) Tawas Point SP – Detroit



After breakfast, we’ll either take another pass at Kirtland’s Warbler or spend a few hours to see what dropped in at Tawas Pointe SP. After lunch we start heading back south towards Detroit. Breaking up our drive will be several stops to try for any missing species. Nayanquing Point SWA and or Shiawassee NWR are obvious choices. Any waterbird is possible at these two spots. Our final dinner is at a nice Italian Restaurant near the hotel to celebrate fun memories and birds. Comfort Inn Metro Airport, 31800 Wick Rd, Romulus, MI, 313-567-8888. (Pictured – Yellow-bellied Sapsucker)

May 15 (Day 12) Departure from the Warbler Grand Tour

Detroit Metropolitan Airport (DTW) - Flights home via hotel shuttle. Keep in mind that the hotel checkout is 11:00 am when planning your flight itinerary home.