

## Best Places to Bird in Ontario

By Kenneth Burrell and Michael Burrell. 2019. Greystone Books. 278 pages, 24.95 CAD, Paper.

A book on where to find birds is a truly valuable tool. It has been a long time since Clive Goodwin's indispensable *A Bird-Finding Guide to Ontario* (University of Toronto Press, 1982 and revised 1995) and much has changed since then. So periodically someone needs to write a new version to incorporate the changes in the land and the concepts in biology.



The Burrell brothers have now produced *Best Places to Bird in Ontario* to bring us current information. They have chosen 30 of their favourite places to highlight the best Ontario has to offer. Each place is described by a general introduction that familiarises the reader with the local environment. There are instructions on how to get there, whether by road, rail, or aeroplane. (These tend to be a little Toronto-centric.)

There is a well described birding strategy. The authors propose a starting point, a route, and the key places to check for special species. These plans are carefully thought through and appear to be logical (or perhaps I think the same way as the Burrells). I have followed a similar route to that suggested through Point Pelee and

the surrounding area many times, seeing many of the species mentioned at the location highlights.

Each area is accompanied by a location map. Like most recent publications these are clear and easy to read and follow. The Burrells have added locations that are particularly relevant to birdwatchers. Only birders will understand the significance of Pelee's "Serengeti" tree or Rose Lane on Canoe Lake Road or the sewage lagoons at Moosonee. This makes these the most useful birding maps I have seen.

Writers of this type of book must reflect a good level of enthusiasm. They need to paint a rosy picture of each site; after all they are their favourites. Is the zeal in this book warranted? It depends on the site. I have been going to Presqu'île Provincial Park (PIPP) for years. In the spring it has a flood of waterfowl and the fall is shorebird season. Even on a bad day you should get a good count of these birds, and a good day can be wonderful. For a place like Algonquin Provincial Park (APP) it is very different. Recently I reviewed the last 10 day trips my regular birding group took to APP. We go every year to look for 10 boreal species. We have a 24% success rate seeing those species and average of 2.2 species of the 10 per trip. As one of those species is always Canada Jay these results are not impressive. The difference is PIPP is filled with visible migrants, whereas APP has a group of elusive forest dwellers. The APP birds are always there and seen every week by somebody, but usually on different days of the week.

Pelee is a different case. The authors think this is the best birding spot in Ontario and I strongly agree. There are more different species seen and even a few hours in spring will get you an impressive list. My own view is a bit prejudiced because I first went to Pelee in the 1960s. Then the park was visited by two dozen birders a day (we all knew each other) and there were higher numbers of individual birds than today. In spring, trees near the point would be loaded with birds and the fall would bring streams of migrants. I used to band raptors (and sleep) at the base of the tip near the hot dog stand. Yes, sadly, it was different, but the Burrells are still correct in their praise. I am planning a spring trip to the USA, so I pulled a guide to New England. The Burrell's book is significantly superior to this, admittedly older, book.

This guide will be of great value to new birders and visitors alike. More experienced people will likely know most of the chosen places. But if they have not been to the more distant spots, like Rainy River or Moosonee, then it is still worth the purchase. I will not be abandoning Goodwin's guide entirely as it covers many more areas than the 30 selected for this guide. Should I be going to one of the favoured 30, however, I will use the new book with enthusiasm.

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