BIRDING TOUR USA: OHIO – EASTERN WARBLERS AND SPRING MIGRATION SPECTACULAR

08–15 MAY 2027
09–16 MAY 2028
09–16 MAY 2029



*The stunning **Magnolia Warbler** is always a favorite warbler.*

Overview

On this Ohio birding tour, we have a realistic chance of finding nearly every eastern wood warbler, plus so many other migrants and residents. These New World warblers are arguably America's most iconic and beautiful birds and one of the big reasons for world birders to visit the USA. This is the ideal tour to see them, often at eye-level, feeding to fuel their migration or on established breeding grounds. The birds are in bright, freshly molted spring plumage and are looking their snazzy best at this time of year.

Ohio is a surprisingly underrated birding state, full of diverse habitats and migrant traps. The northern and southern portions of Ohio are quite different, each providing unique birding opportunities and species to enjoy. The southern portion hosts some incredible prairies as well as vast, beautiful old-growth forests in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. It is also the northernmost extent of several breeding birds, which use these amazing habitats in the spring and summer to the fullest. These include **Prairie Warbler**, **Worm-eating Warbler**, **Kentucky Warbler**, **Blue Grosbeak**, and **Yellow-breasted Chat**, to name just a few.

Northern Ohio is bordered by the great Lake Erie, creating expansive freshwater marshes. The birding in this area has been made famous by the Biggest Week in American Birding Festival hosted by our friends at the Black Swamp Bird Observatory. The lake is like a freshwater ocean, creating a similar obstacle for migrating birds, as they migrate along its shores before making the risky water crossing at its narrowest point. Luckily, the shorelines are full of fantastic nature preserves, parks and refuges, with great birding trails, including the world-famous Magee Marsh Wildlife Area. As birds migrate north and encounter the huge body of water, they put down into the trees along the shore to rest and feed before attempting to cross the unknown. This creates a massive build-up of birds with one mission: to fuel up before crossing the lake. Many of them take the shortest water crossing to Point Pelee, where they arrive tired and hungry; you can enjoy these incoming migrants on our custom tours here.

This tour highlights and targets 30+ species of wood warblers in the eastern United States by showcasing a wide array of habitats in Ohio and the true spectacle of spring migration in this fantastic birding state. We will begin in Cincinnati, Ohio, with a visit to some of its pristine local Metroparks before heading off to Shawnee State Park. The forests here are typically teeming with birds and we will target the southern specialties on the trip. After this we make the trip north for a few days of migration at Magee Marsh and surrounding parks with possible stops in Chillicothe and Columbus along the way. After some time with the jaw-dropping warbler views from the Toledo area we will head to the airport in Detroit, Michigan to wrap up our successful bird-packed adventure. When it's all said and done, you should expect to have seen 180+ species, although we'll most likely be pushing close to 200 eastern US birds!

It's not all about warblers and other passerine migrants though. The north of Ohio also has some fantastic shorebird habitat, which supports tremendous numbers of birds on their journey to their breeding grounds in Canada. These beautiful birds are normally molting into their dapper breeding plumages and include **Stilt Sandpiper**, **Short-billed Dowitcher**, **Wilson's Phalarope**, and upwards of 15 others.



*The brilliant **Golden-winged Warbler**, a true highlight of the trip.*



***Dunlin** will be in their striking breeding plumage this time of year.*

Detailed Itinerary (8 days/7 nights)

Day 1. Arrival in Cincinnati

After arrival at the Cincinnati airport (airport code CVG), you will be transferred to a nearby hotel for the evening. Depending on flight times and arrivals, we may have some time for a little birding before heading off for our first dinner of the trip. We will get to know each other a bit better and discuss the exciting birding ahead of us.

Overnight: Cincinnati

Day 2. Red River Gorge and transfer to Shawnee

On our first full day of the trip, we will head out early and make the two-hour drive to Red River Gorge in Kentucky. We will get our first taste of eastern warblers as we hope to catch some of the migrants from the previous night and target a few of the southern-breeding species. Our top target in Kentucky will be the tricky **Swainson's Warbler** as this species does not make it north into Ohio. Other breeders include **Worm-eating**, **Hooded**, and **Black-and-white Warblers**. Of course, other migrants like **Scarlet Tanager**, **Baltimore Oriole**, and **Warbling Vireo** should also be around. After a nice morning of birding, we will make our way back to Ohio and the Appalachian foothills of Shawnee State Forest. After lunch we will begin our birding of this region with some grasslands and prairie habitats for **Field Sparrow**, **Prairie Warbler**, **Eastern Towhee**, and **Blue Grosbeak**. We will then make it to the lodge where we will spend some time birding around the grounds. Typically, there are accommodating **Cerulean Warblers** nearby, plus **Brown Thrasher** and **Wood Thrush** in the woods.

Overnight: Shawnee State Park Lodge (or similar)



*The **Blue-headed Vireo** serves as a reminder that this trip isn't only about warblers.*

Day 3. Shawnee State Park

We will be up and out of the door before dawn to visit this 60,000-plus acres of old-growth forest. As we navigate our way up the curvy roads before dawn, we should see plenty of eye shine of **Eastern Whip-poor-will** in the road. The morning chorus here can be absolutely deafening with loads of migrating birds echoing through the slopes and ravines. We will start on higher grounds, as migrants typically land at the tops of canyons for a rest. As with most migration it can be hit or miss depending on the winds, but we should be able to score a bright **Blackburnian Warbler** glowing in the morning sun and see loads of **Black-and-white Warblers** scooting up trunks. After things slow down on the mountain tops, we will move back down into the ravines alongside creeks and streams. Here we will see loads of **Yellow-throated Warblers** and **Northern Parulas**. Next, we will move into areas with precipitous drops to find a true southern special, **Worm-eating Warbler**. These mid-to-high elevations also provide us with excellent opportunities to see the jaw-dropping blue of **Cerulean Warbler** up close and personal. This huge forest is filled with the skulking **Ovenbird** and **Hooded Warbler** as their songs echo throughout the entire area. In the evening we will head out to a small creek in Adams County to listen for **Barred Owl** and **Eastern Screech Owl**. This is also the only place in the entire state of Ohio where **Chuck-will's-widow** breeds. Then we'll head back to the lodge for a good night's sleep after an action-packed day.

Overnight: Shawnee State Park Lodge (or similar)



*Shawnee hosts one of the world's best breeding areas for **Cerulean Warbler**.*

Day 4. Morning at Shawnee and transfer north

We will spend one more morning up at the top of the mountains, listening to the dawn chorus and searching for new migrants. Anything can show up in these trees, including over 20 different

species of warbler, so hopefully we will be able to dig up something new that we didn't get the previous day, such as **Tennessee Warbler** or **Scarlet Tanager**. We may also need to spend a little time cleaning up on southern specialty species. After a nice, relaxing morning of enjoying the new migrants, we will begin our long journey north towards Lake Erie. Depending on time and reports, we may make brief stops along the way in Chillicothe or Columbus before eventually getting to Oregon, Ohio, our base of operations for the next several days.

Overnight: Oregon



***Canada Warbler** is typically a second or third wave migrant.*

Days 5-7. Magee Marsh and Northwest Ohio

Over the next three days we will experience the true greatness and fascination of spring migration in Ohio as we visit Magee Marsh and the numerous other parks along the Lake Erie shoreline! Spending most mornings at the Magee Marsh boardwalk, we will be treated to eye-level looks at a great diversity of warblers and migrants as they drip from the trees like rain droplets. This will also give us a chance to see how drastically things can change from one day to the next with different waves of birds moving through. One day may be dominated by **Chestnut-sided** and **Black-throated Blue Warblers** and the next by **Bay-breasted** and **Cape May Warblers**, with little to none left of the previous day. Expect to experience things like **Magnolia Warbler** bouncing in trees right above your head and **Northern Waterthrush** foraging on the marshy leaf litter under the boardwalk. Like in previous days, we will take special interest in targeting any warbler or other migrant we still need for the trip, especially some of the later migrants like **Wilson's Warbler** and **Canada Warbler**.

There is great diversity of habitats here which provide for all species of birds from warblers to shorebirds. We usually see breeding-plumage **Dunlin** and **American Golden Plover** in great

numbers at the brand-new and fantastic Howard Marsh. This is a site specially managed with birds in mind, as the water levels are controlled to aid shorebirds on migration. We will also explore some unique areas to the west in Toledo like the pine and oak savanna at Oak Openings Preserve. It is here we will find one of Ohio's breeding populations of the colorful **Lark Sparrow** as well as plenty of singing **Blue-winged Warblers** and noisy **Red-headed Woodpeckers** foraging in stands of dead trees.

Overnight: Oregon



*The camouflaged **Eastern Screech-Owl** is often seen on the Magee boardwalk.*

Day 8. Departure

Our final morning together may allow for a quick visit to Pearson Metropark or the boardwalk at Maumee Bay State Park to see any new migrants that came in. After this we will make the approximately 45-minute drive to Detroit International airport for drop-off and conclusion of the trip.

Overnight: Not included

Please note that the itinerary cannot be guaranteed as it is only a rough guide and can be changed (usually slightly) due to factors such as availability of accommodation, updated information on the state of accommodation, roads, or birding sites, the discretion of the guides and other factors. In addition, we sometimes must use a different guide from the one advertised due to tour scheduling or other factors.

Tour Details

Duration:	8 days
Group size:	4–8
Dates:	08–15 May 2027 09–16 May 2028 09–16 May 2029
Start:	Cincinnati, Ohio
End:	Detroit, Michigan
Prices:	US$ 3,759 per person sharing (2027) US$ 3,790 per person sharing (2028) US$ 3,890 per person sharing (2029)
Single supplements:	US$ 808 (2027) US$ 810 (2028) US$ 820 (2029)

Price includes:

Meals
Accommodation
Transport
Guiding fees

Price excludes:

Flights
Personal insurance
Alcoholic beverages
Gratuities (please see our tipping guidelines blog)
Laundry service
Personal expenses such as gifts