

# Point Pelee National Park of Canada

## Climate

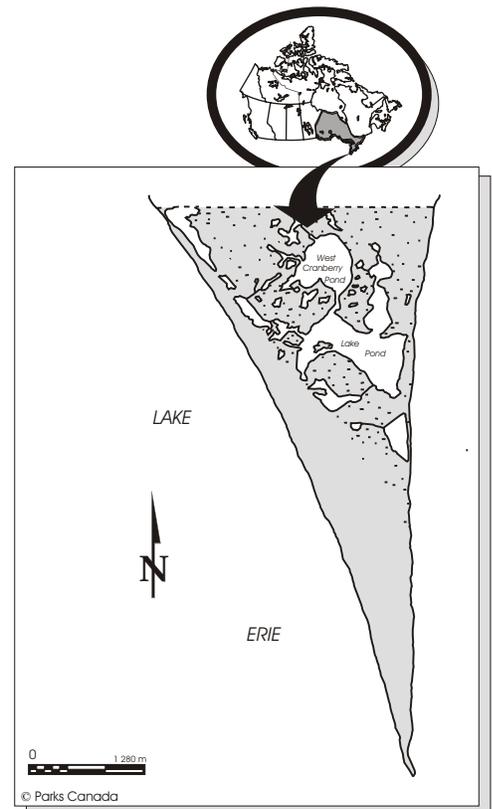
Being the most southern location in mainland Canada, just south of the 42°N latitude, means that Point Pelee enjoys one of the warmest climates in the country. Average temperatures are - 4°C (January) and + 21°C (July). Lake Erie, which surrounds Point Pelee, moderates park temperatures. In autumn, the lake waters cool slowly and insulate Point Pelee from the lower temperatures found further inland. In spring, the opposite holds true as the slowly warming lake keeps Pelee cooler than the surrounding mainland. This means that temperatures are slightly cooler in the spring and warmer in the fall as compared to the nearby city of Windsor. Lake Erie also increases humidity in the region, although the area does not receive a large amount of precipitation (average 81 cm) annually. In fact, Point Pelee receives the lowest amount of precipitation in the province of Ontario and drought conditions are apt to occur three years out of every five. A regular procession of high and low pressure systems crossing the Lower Great Lakes region produces ever-changing weather patterns in the area.

## Geology

The base of Point Pelee was carved out by the ice sheet of the Wisconsin glaciation about 15 000 years ago. Point Pelee, as we know it today, was gradually formed by lake currents and wind from 10 000 to 3 500 years ago. Its base is limestone bedrock with overlying layers of glacial till, silty clays and wind-blown sand. Post-glacial lakes were responsible for much of the layered sediment. Historical sand deposition and lake level changes have created a ridge and trough network near the Visitor Centre area which is presently home to Point Pelee's swamp forest. The beaches are constantly undergoing erosion and deposition to the point where shoreline shifting is common. Erosion remains a constant concern as the Tip has been shortened by over 4 km since the first surveys were conducted in the 1700's. Highly organic peat soils, up to three metres thick, can be found adjacent to Point Pelee's considerable marsh habitat.

## Location

Point Pelee National Park is located at the southern end of the Pelee peninsula, in the western basin of Lake Erie about 55 km southeast of Windsor, Ontario. This relatively small park was established in 1918, and protects about 15 km<sup>2</sup> of beach, forest, savannah, and cattail marsh. Point Pelee lies within the western portion of the St. Lawrence Lowlands Landform Region. It has the distinction of being the most southernly point of mainland Canada. The nearest town, Leamington, is about 10 km north of the park. In the year 2000, Middle Island, located 29 km south of the Point Pelee became part of the national park. This 18.5 hectare forested island is also limestone based. It is located just 1 kilometre north of the Ohio border in the United States. Point Pelee is located in the Mixedwood Plains Ecozone.



## **Vegetation**

Point Pelee is a rich blend of marsh, beach, cedar savannah and forest. About two thirds of the park is marsh, which is home to cattails, lilies, and other species including the rare swamp rose-mallow. The forest is largely deciduous and includes hackberry, black walnut, honey locust, blue ash, sycamore and sassafras. Pelee's exposed beaches are home to various grasses, fragrant sumac, clammy weed and other heat tolerant plants. The cedar savannah is largely dominated by grasses and red cedar trees with a scattering of common milkweed, fringed puccoon and Canada goldenrod. There are over 70 species of rare vascular plants in the park, including the largest stand of hop trees and the endangered prickly-pear cactus. Over 300 homes, businesses, cottages and farms have been removed from the park. This has left the park with many open areas which are slowly regenerating to a more natural state. Staff monitor many of the park's significant plant populations and an effort has been made to control the spread of introduced species which threaten the survival of native species.

## **Wildlife**

Many bird species are attracted to Point Pelee in both the spring and fall. As northbound spring migrants fly over Lake Erie, Point Pelee is often the first visible landmark to them on the north shore. Exhausted from migrating, they often land at Pelee and spend the day feeding and resting until night returns and their migration resumes. In the fall, the opposite occurs as southbound birds follow the shorelines of the Great Lakes and often end up in Point Pelee. Often times, these birds will remain in the park for a brief period until they decide to cross Lake Erie and continue on their migration. Recognized as one of the best bird watching locations in North America, visitors flock to Pelee in large numbers during these annual spring and fall migrations. To date, over 370 bird species have been recorded in the park. Over 100 species breed in the park. The area also sees a significant fall migration of Monarch butterflies, dragonflies and even bats! There are 17 species of reptiles and amphibians of which 4 are classified as rare, threatened, or endangered.

## **Wildlife** (Cont'd.)

Point Pelee also protects habitat for the rare eastern mole and many other mammals such as mink, white-tailed deer and coyotes. The southern flying squirrel was also reintroduced to the park by Resource Conservation staff after a 40 year absence. Their population appears to be quite healthy today.



## **Activities**

Point Pelee National Park is open all year. Bird watching is easily the most popular spring activity. The Festival of Birds runs annually during the month of May and offers bird watchers special birding trails, guided hikes and birdwatching seminars. The fall bird and butterfly migrations also attract numerous visitors to the park. In the summer, there are opportunities for picnicking and swimming as well as hiking on over 12 km of nature trails. These same trails also accommodate cross-country skiing when weather permits. Part of this trail system is also designated as a bicycle trail. It runs from the marsh boardwalk to the Visitor Centre, which is located some 7 km from the park entrance. A transit service was initiated in the early 1970's which shuttles visitors from the Visitor Centre to the Tip area during the spring, summer and fall. Though there are no public campsites, the Henry Community Youth Camp is available by advanced registration to schools and community organizations. Visitors can also enjoy the park's 22 km of sand beach, canoe the Pelee marsh, and participate in a variety of interpretive programs.

For more information, contact:  
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