

## Ontario

### A Greentours Itinerary

#### Days 1 & 2

##### Beverley Swamp

A nice short journey to start our tour as it's just an hour west of the airport to Cambridge. We'll probably have time in the afternoon for our first spot of natural history, and on Day 2 we'll spend the morning exploring the diverse mix of swamps, broadleaf forests and old fields that make the Beverley Swamp area so important as a refuge for very many species now rare in the rest of Ontario. Our main aim will be the fabulous and well-named Showy Lady's Slippers though Fen Orchids and the Bluebead Lily are common here too. In the afternoon we'll drive north to the Bruce Peninsula and to Tobermory.

#### Days 3 - 5

##### The Bruce Peninsula

A glance at the map will show that there must be something unusual afoot here as the narrow Bruce Peninsula (known as The Bruce) thrusts northwards into the waters of Lake Huron separating the lake from the wide expanse of Georgian Bay. The Bruce is in fact a continuation of the Niagara Escarpment. The hard dolomitic limestone capping rock makes for an unusual landscape where water meets land. Sharp cliffs are the norm and, in the islands off the tip of the peninsula, these have been weathered into arches, grottos, and the striking stacks of Flowerpot Island.

Above the cliffs lie flat dry plains called alvars. The bedrock is right on the surface and it takes some unusual plants to cope with the harsh conditions, yet nearby are boreal forests of balsam fir, cedar and birch, and in hollows botanically-rich calcareous fens. This wonderful mosaic of habitats is protected as a National Park and is a rich hunting ground for botanists. The Bruce is famous for its orchids. Forty-four of the Province's sixty-one species occur here, and many of the choicest species will be blooming now.

The stars are the Slipper Orchids. It is not so much the variety, though we'll see five species, but the abundance of some of them. In fact it seems impossible to go for a walk in the Tobermory area without encountering Lady's Slippers. The Small Yellow Lady's Slipper is everywhere, even a few metres from the hotel! These *Cypripediums* are closely related to the European Lady's Slipper and indeed may be nothing more than the variety 'parviflorum'. Another 'taxa' from this group is the Large Yellow-flowered Lady's Slipper, 'pubescens' which puts on unbeatable displays in light maple woods covering deeply grooved limestone rocks. This Lady's Slipper does have impressively large flowers and it makes a stunning sight amid the shiny green fronds of Northern Maidenhair Fern. As Ovenbirds and Magnolia Warblers sing loudly from amongst the pale green foliage we'll find Hermit and Swainson's Thrushes as well as Solitary Vireo and the shy Mourning Warbler. Thicker

forests hold various woodpeckers including the magnificent Pileated. Several pairs of Sandhill Cranes make the northern tip of The Bruce their home and will now be caring for their freshly hatched young. Evenings and early mornings are good times to see White-tailed Deer grazing fields where we'll also encounter Upland Sandpipers, gorgeous Eastern Bluebirds and the charismatic Bobolink. The human population of the Bruce is very small. Just a few thousand people, over half of them in Tobermory itself, so perhaps it should not be surprising that Black Bears are found in the area. An isolated population, and a distinctive one, as most of the bears are unusually small. Though shy, we stand a good chance of a sighting with early morning and evening trips along the peninsula's quiet roads.

Delicate pink *Primula mistissinica* emerges from calcareous mires with yellow and orange-red Indian Paintbrushes, as Wilson's Snipe give their winnowing display overhead. Pitcher Plants, butterworts and sundews thrive in these sedge-dominated beds. Blooming in cracks in the limestone pavement is pretty blue and white Dwarf Lake Iris, a regional endemic, and even rarer, and only found here, are the golden discs of the Lakeside Daisy. At Singing Sands we'll find another Cypripedium, the deep pink and white Ram's-head Lady's Slipper, flowering with Tall White Bog Orchid. American Blue-eyed Grass and beds of False Solomon's Seal occupy woodland edges whilst under shade we can find the elegant and very local Hooker's Orchid. Violets are everywhere with nearly a dozen species likely to be seen in flower on this tour, some of the finest on the Bruce where we'll encounter Sweet White Violet, Tall White Violet, Hook-spurred and Long-spurred Violets.

A boat will take us out to the islands in Fathom Five National Marine Park where a walk through the sublime landscapes of Flowerpot Island will see us enjoying many new plants. Many of the apparently youthful (at least in terms of size) Eastern White Cedars that cling to the 'flowerpots' as the coastal stacks are known, are in fact hundreds of years old, some even thousands! Amongst the mossy forests we hope to find the last blooms of the Calypso Orchid while the almost equally stunning Striped Coralroot will now be in full flower - these just two of the island's twenty orchid species. Early Coralroots offer their tiny flowers in the shade with various 'Rein Orchids', difficult-to-spot Lesser Twayblade and Rattlesnake Plantains, though these *Goodyera* species will probably still be in bud. Low limestone cliffs in sheltered glades host delicate ferns such as the Slender cliff-brake and lovely Bulblet Bladder-fern whilst the forest floor on north facing slopes still have abundant flowering *Trillium grandiflorum* ranging from pure white to a strong pink and the last flowers of the yellow Trout Lily *Erythronium americanum*.

Days 6 - 8

Killarney Provincial Park

A ferry takes us from Tobermory, across Georgian Bay, to Manitoulin Island, the largest freshwater island in the world. We'll land at South Baymouth, opposite 'Wiky' a First Nation unceded reservation, and therefore officially not part of

Canada! Manitoulin has a road bridge back to the mainland and we'll continue to Killarney National Park, and our hotel, opposite George Island.

Considered one of Ontario's crown jewels, Killarney's majestic, mountainous wilderness of sapphire lakes and Jack Pine ridges so captivated the famous 'Group of Seven' artists that they persuaded the Ontario government to make it a park. Once higher than the Rocky Mountains, La Cloche's white quartzite cliffs gleam like snowy peaks from afar. The rocks here are incredibly ancient, the red-pink granites have been around for a billion and a half years, the quartzite considerably longer. There's only one road into the park and that ends at our hotel! Otherwise there's just miles of wilderness stretching into the distance. This is a very little visited park, and most that do come are summer canoeists, so at this season it'll be very quiet, just us and the birds, animals and flowers! So quiet in fact that Black Bears are rather common and we can expect to see them daily, especially on optional early morning or evening walks, but also in the daytime too. Fisher and Mink are as likely here as anywhere in the province.

There is a strong northern feel to the woodlands. Maybe it's the stunted Jack Pines or the abundance of hard bare rock, but in any case it is very different from southern Ontario's rich farmlands. An entrancing sight awaits us in the mossy interior. Here we'll find the wonderful Moccasin Flower or Pink Lady's Slipper whose vinous pouches are scattered over the forest floor like large purple eggs! Two little orchids, Spotted and Early Coralroots, grow with it and the delicate Goldthread too. In the water will be Yellow Pond Lily and the Fragrant White Waterlily. Naked Mitrewort, Foamflower, Rose Twisted-stalk, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Starflower and the elegant Blue Marsh Violet, are other flowers we'll expect to see. Common Loons call mournfully from the many lakes and we'll hear the soft thudding sound of Ruffed Grouse displaying.

Days 9 - 12

Algonquin Provincial Park

A five hour drive takes us down the coast of the Thirty Thousand Islands to the wonderful wilderness that is Algonquin Provincial Park, a vast acreage of forest and lake on the high Canadian Shield country that rises to the east of Georgian Bay. Though hardly mountainous, the landscape is still awesome with forested hills bisected by beautiful clear lakes of all shapes and sizes. In many ways the Algonquin's landscape has come to symbolise the idyllic 'northern woods' as the genius of first Tom Thomson and then the 'Group of Seven' brought us closer to this realm through their art. The Algonquin has been host to the appreciative visitor for over a century but there is still only one asphalt road through the park's almost eight thousand square kilometres, and building development was soon stopped after a few early hotels and outfitters moved in. Only the excellent visitor's centre is of recent vintage. Bartlett Lodge opened almost a century ago and so was allowed to stay, and is now a byword for excellent cuisine and comfort in the wilderness.

Off the main road are only a couple of driveable tracks, a number of well-marked trails, and lots of canoe portages. We'll concentrate on the first two! The Lookout Trail takes us through mixed maple and White Pine where we'll find the graceful zig-zag stems of Twisted-stalk and abundant Indian Cucumber-root. Flamboyant Blackburnian Warblers and immaculate Black-throated Blue Warblers advertise their territories and we'll see both diminutive 'crests', Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Eastern Chipmunks and vociferous Red Squirrels are common. A high bluff provides a classic panorama of lakes and forests and no doubt we'll see the odd Broad-winged Hawk or Red-tailed Hawk whilst we are up there. Many ferns grown on the ledges below and the pretty pink and yellow *Corydalis sempervirens* decorates lichen-encrusted rocks.

Moose are common in the park and though we'll likely see them along the main highway it's so much better to find one standing phlegmatically chewing away on sedges garnered from Beaver Ponds. Beaver dams and lodges are hardly out of sight. An early morning walk along a particular trail offers us a very good chance of Beaver (though we often see them at the lodge too!) as well as a chance of Otter sightings. These ponds are an integral part of Algonquin's ecosystems and we'll see many creatures that rely on the Beaver's industry. They are the favoured domain of Midland Painted Turtles, Common Garter Snakes and a wide variety of damselflies and dragonflies such as the impressive Green Darner and uncommon Uhler's Suntime. Gray Jays are almost comically approachable, Evening Grosbeaks look marvellous in their golden finery and Belted Kingfishers startle us with their loud yelpings. We'll seek some of the park's shyer denizens on early morning or night walks. Woodland Jumping Mice leap like mini high-speed kangaroos through the forest out back of the lodge and we'll hope to see Deer Mice, Raccoons and Northern Flying Squirrels on night walks, or if we are lucky, in the lodge grounds.

Other trails take us through marvellous 'northern' boglands where Black Spruce and Tamarack emerge from valley mires, these populated by a range of Ericaceous plants such-as Leatherleaf, pink Bog Laurel (both Ontario species), *Andromeda glaucophylla* and white-flowered Trailing Arbutus. Spruce Grouse potter across the trail and in the dwarfed trees are boreal species such as Black-backed Woodpecker and Boreal Chickadee. By the Oxtongue River are mixed forests where little Twinflower decorates pale green sphagnum hummocks that cover the forest floor. *Cypripedium acaule* adds its maroon slippers and we'll look for other orchids such as *Listera cordata* and the rare punicea form of Spotted Coralroot. By lake edge are stands of pretty *Iris versicolor*. One of the undoubted highlights will be the gorgeous Rose Pogonia, an orchid with showy pink blooms, often flowering with another orchid, lovely Grass Pink. Both these orchids are 'sphagnum lovers' growing right by the water's edge. Please note that we hope the timing of this tour will allow us to catch the end of Calypso's blooming period at the same time as the start of the flowering period for Grass Pink and Rose Pogonia but the variations in seasons means it is most likely that you'll either see the Calypso in flower or both Pogonia and Grass Pink, not all three.

Days 13 & 14  
Purdon Fen

The finale to our tour takes us eastwards to Purdon Fen, less than an hour from Ottawa. Though quite a small reserve, Purdon packs some amazing botany in its small acreage, and a true floral spectacle awaits us here. There can be few blooms in the plant world as glamorous as the Showy Lady's Slipper. At Purdon they count around sixteen thousand of these magnificent pink and white blooms each year and though we'll be near the beginning of their flowering period we can still expect to see at least a thousand already out. Amongst them are Pink Shinleaf *Pyrola asarifolia* and the lovely Swamp Loosestrife with its globular yellow heads. There are more orchids too with Round-leaved Orchid as well as the green spires of Tall Northern Bog Orchid. During Day 14 we'll make the short journey to Ottawa and start our journey home.

Day 15  
Arrive UK

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