



The Auspice

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

Fall 2015

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PIBO inspires next generation of ornithologists



Eric Orosz at the Young Ornithologists' workshop at Long Point Bird Observatory summer 2015

Interview with Eric Orosz

Eric has been helping out at the PIBO field station for more than six years. We chatted with him recently about his birding adventure at the Long Point Bird Observatory's Young Ornithologists' Workshop (YOW).

Q. When, and for how long, did you attend the workshop?

I attended the YOW for nine days from August 1st to 9th.

Q. How many participants did you study with and where were they from?

Including myself, there were five of us. Two were from Burlington, and the others from B.C., the Yukon, and Ontario.

Q. Did you enjoy the workshop?

Yes. It was a good opportunity for me to learn from many great ornithologists and work with other like-minded individuals.

Q. What was your most interesting experience?

Going to the tip of Long Point peninsula [on Lake Erie]. It's an incredibly unique location which not only has cool birds to observe, but lots of other different animals and plants. It was a great time to see how birds interact when there is so little human interference, and the ways that they behave naturally.

Q. What was the most valuable thing you learned?

I learned that not everything is about the birds alone. Birds are part of an elaborate ecosystem which they rely on, and are necessary part of for all different plants and animals to survive. It showed me just how important it is to take care of our Earth, as well as giving me a great oversight of nature at its finest.

Q. What was your most interesting bird encounter?

It was handling a Northern Flicker. They are quite the powerful bird and gave me a great perspective on how amazing birds are. Handling this bird allowed me to see not only their strength and will, but also the beauty of all birds, no matter how big or small.

Q. When did you become interested in birds?

When I first came to Pelee Island and met the staff and volunteers at the Pelee Island Bird Observatory. They have taught me a lot and I can't thank them enough for the experiences they have provided.



2015 Fall Migration Summary

By Graeme Gibson, the younger

August

On August 1st PIBO launched its thirteenth season of fall migration monitoring studies at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve. Although typically quiet at the start of the month, some species were on the move including shorebirds and swallows, flycatchers, some orioles and swifts, and ones-and-twos of a few warbler species. A small influx of songbirds on August 7th included the season's first least flycatchers, American redstarts, and black-and-white warblers. August 12th was active as well – ones-and-twos of four warbler species were tallied, along with 8 blue-gray gnatcatchers, both cuckoo species, and a nice variety of others – 35 species in all.

Activity picked up considerably in the second half of the month. Thirty-two new arrivals were noted over sixteen days, including seventeen warbler species. The jump in diversity and abundance was evident in the netting area. A hatch-year prothonotary and a blue-winged warbler were two of six warbler species banded in small numbers on the 22nd, and a Connecticut warbler was observed on the 24th. August 26th saw 'firsts' for osprey, ruddy turnstone, and mourning warbler, followed by a busy morning the next day when 55 species were tallied. Fifty-six species were recorded on August 31st – redstarts, magnolias, and black-and-white warblers were active, along with a nice variety of others.

September

It was a busy two weeks at Fish Point from September 1st – 15th. *Catharus* thrushes were the mainstay, with 229 individuals banded over fifteen days (19 veerys, 177 swainson's, and 33 gray-cheeked), or 45% of all the birds captured from the 1st – 15th. Warblers were observed and banded in good numbers as well – 22 species were documented. It was hot and humid on September 1st but still fairly active, with 55 species encountered including fall 'firsts' for greater yellowlegs, scarlet tanager, and rose-breasted grosbeak. A couple of other 'firsts' livened things up on the 7th, with a peregrine falcon noted at the Tip, and a group of 8 American white pelicans observed offshore.

Twelve days of southerly winds in the second half of September made for a quiet time apart from a very busy morning on the last day of the month. Otherwise, PIBO staff experienced one of the quietest stretches at the station for some time. Conditions improved somewhat on the 20th when 57 species were tallied (compared to eighteen the day before) and 48 birds of seventeen species were banded. Five fall 'firsts' were noted that day along with seventeen warbler species. East winds settled in on the 23rd, activity tapered off, and it remained still for the rest of the week. The only notable sighting was an impressive group of cormorants on the 29th – a conservative estimate of 12,000 birds. The floodgates opened on September 30th, however, when 61 species were recorded and 78 birds of twenty-two species were captured. Large numbers of late-fall migrants were encountered including white-throated sparrow (152) and yellow-rumped warbler (81), along with a nice assortment of others. Twelve warbler species were tallied that day along with all of Ontario's common thrushes – eastern bluebird, American robin, wood thrush, veery, swainson's, gray-cheeked, and hermit.

October

The first two weeks of October was a study in contrasts. Some of the largest numbers of songbirds ever recorded at Fish Point moved through the area from the 1st – 8th, followed by a dramatic drop-off during the second week. The banding log tells the story: from the 1st – 8th, 690 birds were captured in 293 net-hours (an average catch-rate of 2.36 birds/net-hour), compared to 132 birds banded in 270 net-hours from the 9th – 15th (0.49 birds/net-hour). The 1st of October set the pace for the remainder of the week when 53 species were recorded and 116 birds of twenty-two species were captured. Kinglets and thrushes dominated, but a nice variety of others migrants were observed including 251 blue jays, 60 white-throated sparrows, 6 blue-headed vireos, and ten warbler species. October 4th turned out to be the most active morning at the nets this fall when 158 birds were captured in thirty-six net-hours (4.40 birds/net-hour). More than half of the banded birds were kinglets, but lots of others were caught in smaller numbers as well. The 5th was a near repeat, with 55 species recorded and 141 birds captured.



Banding highlights on the day included 5 blue-headed vireos, 18 brown creepers, 4 thrush species, and 72 kinglets. Migration activity finally tapered off and it was relatively quiet on the 6th.

A steady decline in bird activity in the netting area in the last two weeks of October was accompanied by a big increase of diurnal migration overhead. Tens-of-thousands of songbirds streamed south over the point during the day – often at high altitude – heading towards Middle and Kelley’s islands. In all, more than twenty thousand blackbirds – mostly red-wings and grackles – were noted over sixteen days, as well as large numbers of robins, larks, pipits, goldfinches, siskins, and others. A stunning immature golden eagle at Fox Pond on the 22nd was a first for 2015. October 25th was quiet apart from a somewhat late common yellowthroat and scarlet tanager. The wind started to build from the east on the 27th and reached gale conditions by the 28th. Just 18 species were recorded at Fish Point that day.

November

Activity during the final weeks of coverage was fairly typical for November. Diurnal migration continued, especially blackbirds, with more than 25,000 tallied from the 2nd - 5th, along with large numbers of pipits, larks, and waxwings. An active day on the 2nd produced 52 species including 89 horned grebes, 1225 red-breasted mergansers, 96 crows, and a station-high 185 horned larks. Eight sparrow species were detected on the 90-minute walk on the 4th – a season-high – including 155 juncos. Two coots and ones-and-twos of four raptor species were observed on the 10th, after which a powerful southwest gale developed and extended over the next two days. Wind gusts at South Bass Island, just southwest of Pelee, reached 51 knots (94 kph) on November 12th. The wind abated somewhat on the 13th but there wasn’t much improvement on the bird front, with just sixteen species recorded. Of interest, however, was the appearance of 3 Franklin’s gulls at the tip – part of a large influx of this uncommon species in Ontario as a result of the southerly gales. Scaup numbers increased to 700 on November 14th along with a nice variety of eight other waterfowl species, including a mixed flock of 3 black, 3 surf, and 6 unidentified scoters. A cloudless, calm, morning on the 15th made for an enjoyable walk down to the tip and back – kinglets, bluebirds, robins, and goldfinches

were out in good numbers – and brought to a close, after 107 mornings of consecutive coverage, the 2015 migration monitoring season.

In all, 162 species and forms were documented this autumn at Fish Point during PIBO’s standardized daily six-hour count period, including 26 warbler species. The fall banding program concluded on November 5th with 2070 birds captured of sixty-six species (23 warbler species) in 2745 net-hours (0.75 birds/net-hour). A big thanks to Pat Woodford, Ricky Dunn, and Eric and Abbey Orosz, for their help with the fieldwork!

Owling Nights



Northern Saw-whet owl by Sumiko Onishi

Education Initiatives

This fall, the distance learning component of our education program successfully linked up with Cardinal Carter High school in Leamington via Google chat. Unfortunately, no birds were caught that morning, but the students had plenty of good questions on migration, habitat and bird conservation for Graeme and Sachi. We also started a project with a grade 11 English class at the Henan Experimental High School in Zhengzhou, People’s Republic of China. Although time zones make it difficult to set up a live banding demo, the teacher, Miss Rusu, created a unit called, “Take Flight” that incorporates the writings of Margaret Atwood. The students will watch PIBO’s videos and ask questions about some of the research they see and read about. Our General Manager will respond to the student’s emails about PIBO’s research and Canadian culture. The goal is for the students to create a personal and creative response to the word “flight” and for the students to make cross-cultural connections.



New!

PIBO has a new General Manager. Suzanne Friemann, who lives in Windsor, joined us in August. From her satellite home office she handles the administrative, education and fundraising side of PIBO. She has a background in teaching and experience with environmental non-profits.



PIBO team

Please Join Us On



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In Memoriam



Alison Gordon, a fine and generous woman, died unexpectedly last February. She was not only a friend of PIBO and of Spring Song, but she loved the Island, especially the old Quarry's silent, solitary space.

Her initial career included the CBC, where she played various roles, including those of producer at As It Happens and news anchor in Halifax. But when the Toronto Star hired her to cover the Toronto Blue Jays in 1979, she became one of the first female sport reporters in North America, and perhaps the first female allowed into a Major League Baseball locker room. As a fellow sports writer said, "As a baseball writer, Alison demonstrated an effortless style, an

appreciation for the human side of the game, as well as a biting wit."

About that same time, she earned a National Magazine Award and a National Newspaper Award. She then turned her hand to writing a series of mystery novels featuring Kate Henry, a sports reporter who solved sports-related murders.

Alison was also passionately committed to Freedom of Expression, and a strong supporter of such organizations as PEN Canada and the Writers' Union.

Apart from all this, Alison was a marvelous friend, with a contagious sense of humour and a gift for laughter you'd never want to forget.

Graeme Gibson the Elder



Ovenbird by Sumiko Onishi

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