

**2015 Year-end Report
Pelee Island Bird Observatory**



**Graeme Gibson, the younger
& Sumiko Onishi
Pelee Island Bird Observatory
2015**

PIBO 2015

Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO)

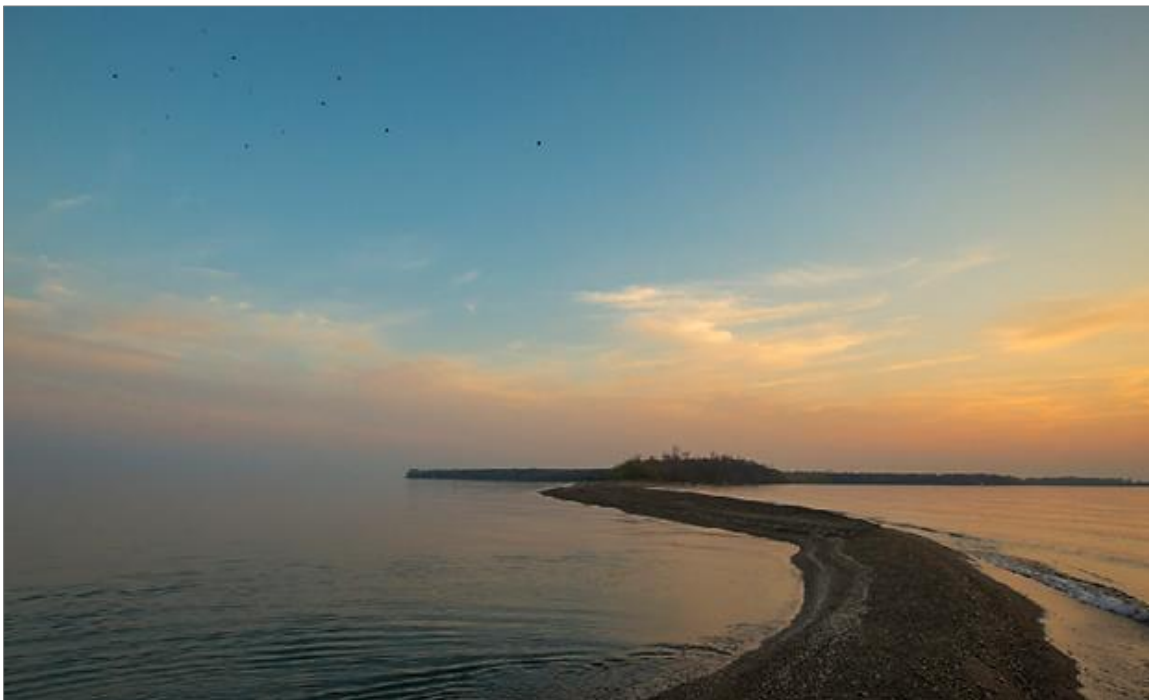
Address: 585 South Shore Road, Pelee Island, Ontario, Canada N0R 1M0
Phone: 519-724-2829
Email: info@pibo.ca
Website: www.pibo.ca

The Pelee Island Bird Observatory was established in 2003 and incorporated as a non-profit charitable organization in 2006. PIBO's mandate includes a commitment to long-term avian migration monitoring research on Pelee Island; long-term studies of Pelee's breeding bird communities, including national and provincial Species at Risk; serving as an educational centre for the public, school groups and the local community; and promoting the importance of Pelee Island's unique natural heritage.

PIBO Board – Graeme Gibson, the Elder (Chair), Elizabeth Agnew, Margaret Atwood, Matthew Mann Gibson, Wayne Grady.

Advisory Board – Ian Davidson, Penny Kavanaugh, Philip Slayton, Dr. Bridget Stutchbury.

Cover photo: Purple Martin (Sumiko Onishi)



Tip of Fish Point (Paul Jones)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It was a productive and enjoyable twelve months of research, education, and outreach at the Pelee Island Bird Observatory in 2015 and much was accomplished in all areas of our mandate. The organization was active on many fronts and everyone – the Board of Directors, one full time staff, three seasonal staff, and a core group of volunteers – kept busy throughout the year advancing the cause of wild birds and their native habitats.

PIBO completed a number of research studies in 2015 including standardized documentation of migrant birds at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve; breeding bird surveys on properties under the stewardship of Ontario Parks, the Essex Region Conservation Authority, and Nature Conservancy of Canada; saw-whet owl population sampling; species at risk transects; monarch butterfly migration counts, and a variety of other projects. Eight participants conducted 197 mornings of fieldwork from April to November, the majority of which involved daily migration monitoring and ‘constant-effort’ bird banding. During the spring and fall, 194 species were documented during PIBO’s official surveys at Fish Point and 2493 birds of seventy-six species were banded. 2015 saw the completion of thirteen years of migration monitoring at Fish Point as part of PIBO’s commitment to the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network. A cool, wet spring, and unseasonably mild temperatures in October and November, both played a role in this year’s movements of birds.

In addition to the migration program, two staff conducted comprehensive breeding bird studies this summer at a ten-hectare alvar woodland site on Pelee under the stewardship of the Nature Conservancy of Canada. One hundred-and-forty-six breeding territories and thirty species were mapped during the surveys, ranging from wild turkeys and hummingbirds to cuckoos and tanagers. The fieldwork – part of PIBO’s long-term Breeding Birds of Pelee Island project – required thirty-five hours of observation over eleven mornings. Additional summer activities involved monitoring up to ten species at risk known to nest on the island, including the endangered prothonotary warbler and yellow-breasted chat, along with a number of other projects.

PIBO’s education and outreach programs hosted thousands of visitors in 2015 through a combination of in-class school presentations, online video-conferences, distance education, live bird-banding demonstrations, public ‘owling’ nights, bi-monthly migration updates, and the PIBO website and Auspice newsletter. The observatory’s conservation message reached a wider audience this year thanks to PIBO’s ever-growing popularity on Facebook, with more than 700 fans connecting up from thirty-three countries. Three hundred students attended PIBO presentations at mainland schools this spring, hundreds of visitors stopped by the bird banding lab at Fish Point, and lots of friends and new acquaintances took part in PIBO’s island picnic and owl nights, along with many other events and activities throughout the year.

Other exciting news in 2015 was another hugely successful fundraiser for PIBO in Windsor – Margaret Atwood Presents – with guest writer and speaker Lawrence Hill reading from his best-selling “The Book of Negroes”. This annual event benefits PIBO in numerous ways thanks to the generosity of everyone who organizes and supports it. Another highlight was the hiring in August of a full-time General Manager. Suzanne Friemann brings a wealth of organizational experience and a passion for nature, childhood education, and knowledge-sharing, to the bird observatory, all of which will benefit PIBO immensely. On a sad note, three dear PIBO supporters passed away this year – Jim Woodford, David Hussell, and Alison Gordon – all of whom will be missed. On a happy note, Pat and Erica (Jim and David’s life-long partners, respectively) both volunteered at the field-station again this autumn, as they have done for many years.

Each spring and fall Pelee Island provides essential resources to millions of migratory birds at a critical time in their life-cycles. The island – like other green spaces in Southern Ontario – affords rest, fuel, and a degree of safety before the resumption of their often trans-continental journeys. This is true of wild places everywhere – large forest tracts, an undisturbed marsh, a hedgerow in the garden – offering temporary refuge that migrants need if they are to reach their seasonal destinations. In this respect, Pelee’s designation as a ‘globally’ Important Bird Area (IBA) is well-deserved, and due almost entirely to the island’s critical role as a stopover site for migratory birds. What’s more, the island is home during the summer months to species with limited breeding ranges in Canada, including many species at risk. On both counts, PIBO is well positioned to take up the cause of birds with a wide range of research and education programs designed to draw attention to the rapid diminishment of birds everywhere. Whether providing data on the population status of migrant songbirds, educating the public about the importance of stopover sites, studying the breeding ecology of Pelee’s nesting species, counting monarch butterflies, and many other pursuits – the work in 2015 successfully built on the observatory’s long-term commitment to study and preserve avian diversity and abundance both locally and internationally.

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Mourning Warbler, by Sumiko Onishi

INTRODUCTION

This year's report is presented in three sections: 1) Research 2) Education/Outreach, and 3) Additional News. Section One summarizes the results of the 2015 research season including details about PIBO's spring and fall migration monitoring program, our summer breeding birds surveys, monarch butterfly counts, and a range of other projects. Results are presented in tables throughout the section including: species recorded on Pelee Island in 2015; birds banded this year at Fish Point; northern saw-whet owl capture totals; species identified in 2015 as confirmed, probable, or possible breeders; and Species at Risk sightings, among others. The section also contains an edited version of the spring and fall weekly migration updates posted this year on PIBO's website.

Section Two includes an update of PIBO's education and community outreach programs in 2015 and describes a number of activities carried out this year on the island and further afield. Details include information about our in-class presentations at local mainland schools, our online video conferences, the number of visitors at Fish Point for bird banding demonstrations, PIBO's public owling nights, our spring island picnic, and a variety of other events.

Section Three highlights a number of other developments at PIBO in 2015 and presents some details about plans in 2016.

SECTION 1 – RESEARCH

Songbird migration monitoring

Long-term migration monitoring research is an effective method for tracking changes in bird populations through the counting and capture of migrants. The data collected at migration stations are used to detect population trends of small landbirds that migrate to and from their breeding and wintering grounds each year, particularly species that nest in North America's vast Boreal Forest Region. The area is often referred to as "Canada's songbird nursery". Many birds summer in remote northern regions and winter in equally isolated areas, which makes it difficult to survey these species using more conventional monitoring methods. The Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN) – a partnership of Environment Canada, Bird Studies Canada, and small independent organizations (mostly non-profits) – oversees migration studies in Canada. The network is comprised of more than twenty-five permanent sites established across the country that, like PIBO, generate daily migration counts for a wide range of species. Monitoring stations are committed to collecting standardized data that contribute to our collective understanding of the changes taking place in populations of migratory birds, as well as to document migration at the station itself, and many other avian, and some non-avian, studies.

PIBO's 13th year of spring and fall migration coverage at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve (Ontario Parks – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources) ran from April 2nd – June 9th and August 1st – November 15th, for a total of 176 coverage days. Eight participants helped with the fieldwork in 2015. A total of 194 species was recorded at Fish Point during PIBO's standard count period and 2493 birds of seventy-six species were banded in 3652 net-hours, for an average catch-rate of 0.68 birds/net-hour.

Spring migration summary

Another season of migration monitoring got underway at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve on April 2nd. It was a cold winter in Ontario and the island was still locked in ice at the end of March (as a result the island ferry didn't operate until the 7th), but migration was well underway by the time PIBO launched its first official census. Staff were greeted on April 2nd with steady south winds and light rain along with a nice variety of local wintering birds and passage migrants. Moderate numbers of eight waterfowl species were noted on the lake

and small groups of forest birds were found along the trail and beach including golden-crowned kinglets, eastern phoebes, a handful of tree swallows, and a savannah sparrow. Five bald eagles were observed on the walk. Fish Point was shrouded in fog on April 3rd. There were some birds around, but they were very difficult to see! Thirty American robins and a small group of eastern bluebirds were tallied along with a single cooper's hawk.

There were quite a few birds around on April 5th and 6th including the first ruby-crowned kinglet of the spring, 30 golden-crowned kinglets, and some yellow-rumped warblers. Three days of steady rain from April 7th - 9th didn't discourage the birds and a nice range of species was tallied including up to 90 dark-eyed juncos on the 7th, and 74 common goldeneyes on April 9th.



Ovenbird (Sumiko Onishi)

Hundreds of tree swallows feeding over the lake and up to 50 turkey vultures were observed in the afternoon on April 11th. The next day was notable for 2 black-crowned night-herons at Fox Pond and a colourful yellow-throated warbler singing around the Birdhouse rental cottage in the afternoon. Nine waterfowl species were noted on April 17th on an otherwise fairly quiet morning. The 19th saw the first house wren of the year along with small numbers of northern rough-winged swallows. The Tip was inundated with Bonaparte's gulls on April 23rd, with more than 1200 recorded, along with hundreds of red-breasted mergansers. The wind remained from the north from the 24th - 28th and migration tapered off, although a few birds were on hand including a pied-billed grebe, the season's first pine warbler, and 48 blue jays. Activity picked up the next day, with 49 species recorded during PIBO's six-hour coverage period. A small influx of warblers included spring 'firsts' for blue-winged, palm, and yellow. The final day of April saw increased numbers of hermit thrushes (7 banded, 13 total), another 47 blue jays, and 21 ruby-crowned kinglets.

May started off with a nice push of migrants – 52 species were tallied on the 1st including 18 hermit thrushes, 3 yellow-bellied sapsuckers, and five warbler species. Numbers dropped off over the next two days and there was little of note apart from the first gray-cheeked thrush of the spring on the 2nd, and 'firsts' for veery, American redstart, and rose-breasted grosbeak on the 3rd. The first white-eyed vireo of the season was banded the same day. While just 52 species were noted on May 4th, a surprising fourteen new arrivals were

documented including red-headed woodpecker, ruby-throated hummingbird, northern parula, and northern mockingbird, among others.

Steady rain on the 5th limited the morning coverage to just the 90-minute census, but there were lots of birds around – 61 species were observed during the census including nine members of the warbler family and a grasshopper sparrow. The morning of May 6th turned out to be the most active six hours of the spring. In all, 73 species were tallied and 60 birds of a startling twenty-eight species were banded, including 14 warbler species. A wonderful mix of birds was recorded on the day including an American bittern flushed up in the netting area, 21 gray catbirds, 19 ovenbirds (13 banded), and a nice variety of others.



White-eyed Vireo (Sumiko Onishi)

While the banding dropped off the next day, there were still lots of migrants around, with 64 species documented. Field coverage was limited from May 8th – 10th due to the Pelee Island Heritage Centre's Spring Song festival and PIBO's annual Spring picnic, but there were obviously quite a few migrants around including a station-high 10 willets recorded at the Tip on the 8th. Other notable sightings by other birders on the island that weekend included a marbled godwit at Sheridan Point and a Harris's sparrow along the road at the north end of the island.

Daily coverage resumed on May 11th. A banded male hooded warbler and a summer tanager on census were both highlights on the day. Near-gale force winds the next day didn't hamper migration too much – 14 warbler species were noted on the 12th along with a banded white-eyed vireo. Steady rain set in from May 14th – 17th and, despite the reduced coverage and banding, a steady stream of migrants continued to move through the area, including 66 species recorded on the 16th. A prothonotary Warbler (possibly the local male nesting further up the road) stopped by the netting area the next day. Songbird migration remained fairly steady from May 18th - 20th although species diversity declined gradually and Spring 'firsts' were limited to some new shorebird arrivals and a few late-migrant songbirds such as mourning warbler.

Other sightings during this time included another hooded warbler and banded white-eyed vireo (19th), and another two white-eyes heard singing near the PIBO cottage. A near station-high 50 ruddy turnstones showed up at the Tip on the morning of the 23rd and a single whimbrel on May 25th. The final week of May was fairly typical, with decreasing numbers of passage migrants and most of the local nesters back on territory. The

highlight of the week was a single willet noted at the Tip on the 27th. The final two weeks of spring coverage were typical for early June, with some migrants still on the move, including small numbers of flycatchers, vireos, and a few remaining warblers, but the bulk of sightings were local birds back on territory. A notable exception was the presence at the tip of a single American white pelican on the morning of June 8th.

Overall, the 2015 spring migration season at Fish Point turned out to be one of the quietest on record. While species diversity was consistent, the station experienced some of the lowest numbers on record for a wide range of species. Reduced totals were documented almost across the board, but a few species really stood out including rusty blackbirds, most warbler species, and hawks. While hawk migration is never very pronounced on the island, it was quite remarkable not to encounter a single northern harrier, merlin, or peregrine falcon this spring during PIBO's official count period. Despite the low-key campaign, it was another successful migration-monitoring effort and much was accomplished over the two month field season. Special thanks to Heather McBrien and Robert Tymstra for their help in the field and to Ontario Parks for permission to conduct the study at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve.



Black-throated Blue Warbler (Sumiko Onishi)

Fall migration summary

After a productive summer of breeding bird studies and a brief break in July, PIBO launched its thirteenth season of fall migration studies at Fish Point on August 1st. Although typically quiet this time of year, some species were on the move including shorebirds and swallows, some flycatchers, orioles and swifts, and ones-and-tvos of a few warbler species. Caspian terns were numerous at the Tip during the first week of coverage – up to 35 birds a day – along with 40 great black-backed gulls. The winds shifted to the north on August 7th, which produced a small influx of songbirds including the season's first least flycatcher, American redstart, and black-and-white warblers. There wasn't much to report on the 9th and 10th apart from the usual stream of migrating swallows – predominantly purple martins, barn, and bank swallows. August 12th was active – ones-and-tvos 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.

Migration activity picked up considerably in the second half of August, with new arrivals showing up almost daily. Thirty-two fall 'firsts' were noted over sixteen days, including seventeen warbler species. The jump in

diversity and abundance was evident in the netting area as well. A nice mix was encountered, from ruby-throated hummingbirds to wood thrushes, ovenbirds, and Baltimore orioles. Nineteen warbler species were banded from August 16th – 31st. Brief northwest winds on the 21st made for an active morning the next day – 49 species were recorded, including 13 warbler species and ten new arrivals. A hatch-year prothonotary was one of six warbler species banded in small numbers, along with a blue-winged warbler. A Connecticut warbler was discovered in the netting area on the 24th. It rained on-and-off throughout the day on the 25th and the wind swung around again to the northwest, resulting in another buildup of migrants over the next few days. August 26th saw ‘firsts’ for osprey, ruddy turnstone, and mourning warbler, followed by a busy day on the 27th, with 55 species tallied during the official coverage period. Warblers dominated again the next day – 14 species were noted – including 22 individuals banded of ten species. Fifty-six species were recorded on August 31st – redstarts, magnolias, and black-and-white warblers were active, along with a nice variety of others.

It was a busy two weeks at Fish Point from September 1st – 15th. New arrivals were noted daily throughout the first week, and a small ‘fallout’ was documented on the 3rd when 57 species were recorded and 61 birds of fifteen species were banded. It was especially active during the second week of coverage – lots of thrushes and warblers were recorded and a nice range of other species were observed and banded. As usual in September, *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 observed and 196 individuals of seventeen species were banded.



Bay-breasted Warbler (Sumiko Onishi)

It was hot and humid on September 1st but migrants were fairly active, with 55 species documented including fall ‘firsts’ for greater yellowlegs, scarlet tanager, and rose-breasted grosbeak. West winds and more warm temperatures on the 3rd didn’t discourage the birds either – in all, 57 species were noted. Migration started to slacken on the 6th and it was quiet on the 7th and 8th, although a couple of fall ‘firsts’ livened things up, with the season’s first peregrine falcon, along with a group of 8 American white pelicans at the tip. A steady week of southerlies finally abated and the wind shifted north on the 9th, resulting in a good push of birds over the next

four days. New arrivals from the 10th – 13th included merlin, Philadelphia vireo, northern parula, yellow-rumped warbler, and Lincoln's sparrow, among others.

Almost twelve days of southerly winds and unseasonably warm temperatures in the second half of September made for a fairly quiet time. There were a few active days from the 20th – 22nd and a very busy morning on the last day of the month but, otherwise, PIBO staff experienced one of the quietest stretches at the station for some time. Apart from the season's first white-throated sparrows (Sept. 17th), a northern parula the next day, and six bald eagles (19th), there wasn't much to report from September 16th – 19th. Conditions improved 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 on the day along with seventeen warbler species, including ten species banded. East winds settled in after September 22nd, activity tapered off, and it remained quiet for the rest of the week. A couple of rainy days on the 28th and 29th reduced field coverage to just the census and some additional observations, with the only notable sighting being an impressive group of cormorants on the 29th – a conservative estimate of 12,000 birds.

After a week of low-key activity, the floodgates opened on September 30th and two staff were kept busy both on the census and in the netting area. In all, 61 species were recorded and 78 birds of twenty-two species were captured. Large numbers of late-fall migrants were encountered, with season-high counts to-date recorded for white-throated sparrow (152) and yellow-rumped warbler (81), along with a wonderful assortment of others. Twelve warbler species were noted and all the common thrushes in Southwestern Ontario were detected – seven in all: eastern bluebird, American robin, wood thrush, veery, Swainson's, gray-cheeked, and hermit.



Mourning Warbler (Sumiko Onishi)

The first two weeks of October was a study in contrasts, with some of the largest numbers of migrant songbirds ever recorded at Fish Point moving through the area from the 1st – 8th, followed by a significant drop-off during the second week. The banding totals speak for themselves: 690 birds were captured from October 1st – 8th in 293 net-hours, for an average catch-rate of 2.36 birds/net-hour, compared to 132 birds banded from the 9th – 15th in 270 net-hours (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 there was a nice variety of others including 251 blue jays, 60 white-throated sparrows, blue-headed vireos, and ten warbler species.

October 2nd was equally busy, with 116 individuals of twenty-five species banded, including the first orange-crowned warbler of the fall. October 4th proved to be one of the most active days of the year when 158 birds of nineteen species were captured in thirty-six net-hours (4.40 birds/net-hour). More than half of the banded birds were kinglets, but lots of other species were captured in smaller numbers as well. The 5th was a near repeat, with 55 species recorded and 141 birds of twenty-one species banded. 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, although a couple of fall 'firsts' made an appearance that day – American bittern and red-shouldered hawk – and there were lots of blue jays (242) flying south, but kinglet and thrush numbers were much reduced. The pace continued to slacken until October 12th when just thirty-two species were recorded on the day and four birds were captured.



Swamp Sparrow (Sumiko Onishi)

A steady decline in the amount of bird activity in the netting area in the last two weeks of October was accompanied by a big increase of diurnal migration activity overhead. Tens-of-thousands of songbirds were observed streaming 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 on the daily ninety-minute census over sixteen days, as well as good numbers of robins, larks, pipits, goldfinches, siskins, and others. Activity picked up on the lake as well – hundreds of red-breasted mergansers and increased numbers of buffleheads were observed towards the end of the month. An active morning on October 17th produced 45 species including fall 'firsts' for northern saw-whet owl and American tree sparrow. The first purple finches of the fall were reported on the 18th, along with a banded orange-crowned warbler. Strong southwest winds on the 20th dampened migration activity and there wasn't much to report over the next couple of days apart from a stunning immature golden eagle at Fox Pond on the 22nd. Activity picked up again on October 23rd when 49 species were recorded including 5246 blackbirds, 662 crows, 44 vultures, and 90 golden-crowned kinglets. Twelve hermit thrushes were banded. October 25th was quiet in the netting area but there were still thousands of blackbirds and dozens of crows heading south, along with 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 on the daily census that day. Numbers rebounded somewhat on the last two days of the month, including the first buffleheads of the fall, and 185 robins on the 31st.

Bird activity during the final weeks of coverage was fairly typical for early November, although mild weather appeared to hold some species back, with only a few records this month for tundra swan, common merganser, common goldeneye, and snow bunting, among others. Diurnal migration during the first few days of the month saw a continuation of late October's flights, especially blackbirds, with more than 25,000 tallied heading south off the tip from November 2nd to 5th – along with large numbers of American pipits, horned larks, and cedar waxwings. An active day on the 2nd produced 52 species including 89 horned grebes, 1225 red-breasted mergansers, 96 American crows, and a station-high 185 horned larks. Eight sparrow species were detected during the census on the 4th – a season-high – including 155 dark-eyed juncos. Stormy weather from the southwest and steady driving rain the next morning made for a low-key census, with just eighteen species noted.

Two American coots and ones-and-twos of four raptor species were observed on the 10th and 11th, after which another powerful southwest gale developed over the next two days – wind gusts at South Bass Island, just southwest of Pelee, reached 51 knots (94 kph) on November 12th. With the exception of 300 unidentified scaup, a similar number of red-breasted mergansers, four gull species, and a handful of songbirds, it was a very quiet and rainy census. The rain let up and the wind abated somewhat on the 13th, but it wasn't much of an improvement, with just sixteen species recorded. Of interest, however, was the appearance of at least 3 Franklin's gulls at the tip – part of a large influx of this uncommon species into Ontario as a result of the southerly gales. The final two days of the 2015 coverage season saw a return to some cool but calm conditions. Scaup numbers increased to 700 on November 14th along with a nice variety of eleven other waterbird species including a mixed flock of 3 black, 3 surf, and 6 unidentified scoters. A cloudless November morning on the 15th made for an enjoyable walk down to the tip and back – bluebirds, kinglets, robins, and goldfinches were about in good numbers – and, after 107 mornings of consecutive coverage, brought the 2015 fall migration season to a close.

In all, 162 species and forms were documented this autumn at Fish Point during PIBO's standardized 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, for an average seasonal catch-rate of 0.75 birds/net-hour. A big thanks to Pat Woodford, Ricky Dunn, and Eric and Abbey Orosz, for their help with the fieldwork.



Migrant blackbirds (Sumiko Onishi)

2015 Summary

PIBO's 13th year of migration coverage at Fish Point was both predictable, as migrants usually are, and full of surprises as well. Like every year, weather patterns in 2015 played a large part in the ebb-and-flow of birds that stopped over on the island on their way north and south. Overall, it was quieter than usual at Fish Point (and elsewhere in Southern Ontario) due to factors ranging from a late-break-up of the ice on Lake Erie, extensive amounts of rain in April and May, a long stretch of southerly winds in September, and stormy conditions in late October and November. On the other hand, the station experienced one of the busiest weeks of bird activity ever recorded at the site in early October.

The coverage totals this year fall below the long-term average at the station over thirteen years in most categories including:

Species recorded on Pelee Island by PIBO staff and volunteers:	194	(Average 199)
Birds banded:	2493	(3258)
Species banded:	76	(83)
Net-hours:	3652	(4075)
Birds/net-hour:	0.68	(0.80)

Despite the somewhat low-key campaign there were still lots of birds to be seen including 22 waterfowl species, 13 different birds of prey, 9 flycatcher species, and 30 members of the wood-warbler family, just to name a few. No new species were recorded or banded in 2015, although some unusual visitors were noted on the island (including our summer studies): American white pelican – up to eight at Fish Point this Spring; Franklin's gull – three at Fish Point this Fall; Acadian flycatcher – singing in suitable habitat on June 17th; yellow-throated warbler – spring migrant; prothonotary warbler – successful fledging of young; yellow-breasted chat – at least two males on territory; and summer tanager – spring migrant.



Eastern Screech-Owl (Sumiko Onishi)

All told this year, eight participants conducted 69 consecutive mornings of field coverage at Fish Point this spring and 107 days back-to-back in the fall, for a total of 176 days. During this time, 194 species were documented and 2493 birds of seventy-six species were captured in 3652 net-hours, for an average catch-rate of 0.68 birds/net-hour.

It was another eventful and rewarding migration season on the island and a memorable encounter for all PIBO's staff and volunteers – a chance to witness hundreds-of-thousands of birds of all shapes and sizes, both common and uncommon, with habits and peculiarities all their own!

Table 1 - Combined 2015 spring and fall migration monitoring coverage at Fish Point

Description	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007
Coverage	April 2 Jun 9	April 1 Jun 10	Apr 1 Jun 6	Apr 4 Jun 10	Apr 4 Jun 8	Apr 2 Jun 10	Apr 1 Jun 10	Apr 3 Jun 14	Apr 1 Jun 15
	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15	Aug 1 Nov 15
Coverage days	176	178	173	174	173	177	178	180	183
Netting period	April 20 Jun 3	April 18 Jun 5	Apr 15 Jun 5	Apr 13 Jun 15	Apr 12 May 31	Apr 2 May 28	Apr 2 May 24	Apr 5 Jun 10	Apr 2 Jun 1
	Aug 15 Nov 8	Aug 15 Nov 8	Aug 15 Nov 8	Aug 13 Nov 8	Aug 11 Nov 15	Aug 4 Nov 10	Aug 5 Nov 11	Aug 3 Nov 11	Aug 1 Nov 15
Netting days	129	134	142	123	119	139	134	147	139
Birds banded	2493	2661	2519	3772	2404	3498	3296	3505	2672
Net hours	3652	4497	4209	4296	3356	4280	4500	5075	4739
Bird/net hour	0.68	0.59	0.60	0.86	0.72	0.82	0.66	0.71	0.55
Species banded	76	75	82	81	78	85	88	82	84
Recaptures	63	106	104	130	103	126	136	151	126
Species recaptured	13	17	19	25	24	23	28	25	23
Species recorded	194	197	200	201	203	193	198	194	205

Table 2 - Species recorded on Pelee Island in 2015 by PIBO staff and volunteers

Canada Goose*	Ring-billed Gull	American Pipit
Tundra Swan	Herring Gull	Cedar Waxwing*
Wood Duck*	Great Black-backed Gull	Northern Parula
Gadwall	Caspian Tern	Orange-crowned Warbler
American Wigeon	Common Tern	Tennessee Warbler
American Black Duck	Mourning Dove*	Blue-winged Warbler
Mallard*	Yellow-billed Cuckoo*	Nashville Warbler
Blue-winged Teal	Black-billed Cuckoo*	Yellow Warbler*
Northern Shoveler	Great Horned Owl*	Chestnut-sided Warbler
Green-winged Teal	Northern Saw-whet Owl	Magnolia Warbler
Redhead	Eastern Screech-Owl*	Cape May Warbler
Ring-necked Duck	Common Nighthawk	Black-throated Blue Warbler
Greater Scaup	Chimney Swift*	Blackburnian Warbler
Lesser Scaup	Ruby-throated Hummingbird*	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Surf Scoter	Belted Kingfisher	Yellow-throated Warbler
Black Scoter	Red-headed Woodpecker	Black-throated Green Warbler
Bufflehead	Red-bellied Woodpecker*	Western Palm Warbler
Common Goldeneye	Downy Woodpecker*	Pine Warbler
Hooded Merganser	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Bay-breasted Warbler
Common Merganser	Northern Flicker*	Blackpoll Warbler
Red-breasted Merganser	Eastern Wood-Pewee*	Black-and-white Warbler
Ruddy Duck	Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	Prothonotary Warbler*
American Bittern	Acadian Flycatcher *	American Redstart
Great Blue Heron	Willow Flycatcher*	Ovenbird
Great Egret	Alder Flycatcher	Northern Waterthrush
Green Heron	Least Flycatcher	Connecticut Warbler
Black-crowned Night-Heron	Eastern Phoebe*	Mourning Warbler
American White Pelican	Great Crested Flycatcher*	Common Yellowthroat
Ring-necked Pheasant*	Eastern Kingbird*	Hooded Warbler
Wild Turkey*	Red-eyed Vireo*	Wilson's Warbler
Common Loon	Warbling Vireo*	Canada Warbler
Pied-billed Grebe	Philadelphia Vireo	Yellow-breasted Chat*
Horned Grebe	White-eyed Vireo	Summer Tanager
Double-crested Cormorant	Blue-headed Vireo	Scarlet Tanager
Turkey Vulture	Blue Jay*	Northern Cardinal*
Osprey	American Crow*	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Bald Eagle*	Horned Lark	Indigo Bunting*
Northern Harrier	Purple Martin*	Eastern Towhee*
Sharp-shinned Hawk	Northern Rough-winged Swallow	American Tree Sparrow
Cooper's Hawk*	Bank Swallow*	Field Sparrow*
Red-shouldered Hawk	Tree Swallow*	Chipping Sparrow*
Broad-winged Hawk	Cliff Swallow	Savannah Sparrow
Red-tailed Hawk*	Barn Swallow*	Grasshopper Sparrow
Rough-legged Hawk	Black-capped Chickadee*	White-throated Sparrow
Golden Eagle	Red-breasted Nuthatch	White-crowned Sparrow
American Kestrel	White-breasted Nuthatch*	Fox Sparrow
Merlin	Brown Creeper	Song Sparrow*
Peregrine Falcon	Carolina Wren*	Lincoln's Sparrow
Sora	House Wren*	Swamp Sparrow
American Coot	Winter Wren	Dark-eyed Junco
Black-bellied Plover	Marsh Wren	Snow Bunting
Semipalmated Plover	Golden-crowned Kinglet	Eastern Meadowlark
Killdeer*	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	Bobolink
Spotted Sandpiper*	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher*	Brown-headed Cowbird*
Greater Yellowlegs	Eastern Bluebird	Red-winged Blackbird*
Willet	American Robin*	Rusty Blackbird
Whimbrel	Wood Thrush*	Common Grackle*
Ruddy Turnstone	Veery	Baltimore Oriole*
Sanderling	Swainson's Thrush	Orchard Oriole*
Dunlin	Gray-cheeked Thrush	Purple Finch
Baird's Sandpiper	Hermit Thrush	House Finch*
Least Sandpiper	Gray Catbird*	Pine Siskin
American Woodcock*	Brown Thrasher*	American Goldfinch*
Bonaparte's Gull	Northern Mockingbird	House Sparrow*
Franklin's Gull	European Starling*	194 species & forms

*Breeding evidence recorded in 2015 for 62 species marked **

Table 3 - Birds captured at Fish Point in 2015

Species	Banded	Species	Banded
Sharp-shinned Hawk	21	Cape May Warbler	6
Northern Saw-whet Owl	11	Black-throated Blue Warbler	68
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	Blackburnian Warbler	7
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	19	'Myrtle' Warbler	36
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1	Black-throated Green Warbler	7
Downy Woodpecker	20	'Western' Palm Warbler	2
'Yellow-shafted' Flicker	5	Bay-breasted Warbler	15
Eastern Wood-Pewee	1	Blackpoll Warbler	15
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	19	Prothonotary Warbler	1
'Traill's' Flycatcher	4	Black-and-white Warbler	49
Least Flycatcher	2	American Redstart	79
Eastern Phoebe	5	Ovenbird	79
Great Crested Flycatcher	1	Northern Waterthrush	33
Red-eyed Vireo	29	Mourning Warbler	3
Philadelphia Vireo	4	Common Yellowthroat	15
White-eyed Vireo	2	Hooded Warbler	2
Blue-headed Vireo	16	Wilson's Warbler	11
Blue Jay	5	Canada Warbler	24
Black-capped Chickadee	8	Scarlet Tanager	2
Brown Creeper	58	Northern Cardinal	7
House Wren	21	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	1
Winter Wren	16	Indigo Bunting	3
Golden-crowned Kinglet	300	Eastern Towhee	2
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	132	American Tree Sparrow	4
American Robin	11	Chipping Sparrow	1
Wood Thrush	19	White-throated Sparrow	89
Veery	46	'Eastern' White-crowned Sparrow	2
Swainson's Thrush	361	Song Sparrow	5
Gray-cheeked Thrush	149	Lincoln's Sparrow	4
Hermit Thrush	166	Swamp Sparrow	9
Gray Catbird	25	'Slate-colored' Junco	13
Brown Thrasher	1	Brown-headed Cowbird	3
Northern Parula	4	Red-winged Blackbird	83
Orange-crowned Warbler	2	Common Grackle	19
Tennessee Warbler	39	Baltimore Oriole	16
Blue-winged Warbler	2	American Goldfinch	5
Nashville Warbler	38	Total captured	2493
Yellow Warbler	39	Species & forms	76
Chestnut-sided Warbler	34	Net hrs.	3652
Magnolia Warbler	136	Birds/net-hour	0.68
*includes birds captured but not banded			

Owl monitoring

PIBO carried out ten evenings of mist-netting during the period October 17th to November 16th in order to sample migrant northern saw-whet owls passing through the island chain. Similar to other locations in Ontario this fall, there were few owls recorded on the island during the sampling nights, with just 12 saw-whets and one screech-owl captured in 149 net-hours (0.09 birds/net-hour).

The observatory has banded 234 migrant saw-whets over eleven years and captured more than ten owls originally banded at other locations, ranging from Southern Ontario to as far away as Minnesota. Our most active fall was 2012 when 55 saw-whets were banded in 313 net-hours, for an average catch-rate of 0.18 birds/net-hour. Among other findings, PIBO's owl monitoring studies have shown that, while migrant owls generally prefer not to cross the open waters of Lake Erie in the autumn, they will make the flight under suitable weather conditions. PIBO's most active owling sessions tend to occur on nights with very mild west or northwest winds, including our busiest evening on November 13th, 2012, when 27 owls were captured in 101 net-hours (0.27 birds/net-hour).



Visitors during one of PIBO's public owling nights (Sumiko Onishi)

Table 4 - Owls captured at Stone Road Alvar in 2015

Date	Species	Banded	Net-hours	Birds/net-hour	Temp.
17-Oct	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2	13	0.15	8° C
18-Oct	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	28	0.07	7° C
24-Oct		0	5	0	8° C
31-Oct	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	4	0.23	12° C
02-Nov	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2	14	0.14	15° C
03-Nov	Northern Saw-whet Owl	3	17	0.18	15° C
07-Nov	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	21	0.05	9° C
08-Nov	Northern Saw-whet Owl	2	18	0.11	7° C
15-Nov	Eastern Screech-Owl	1	16	0.06	12° C
16-Nov		0	13	0	11° C
Total	12 NSWO - 1 EASO	13	149	0.1	10° C

Breeding birds

Comprehensive breeding bird studies were conducted on the island this summer from May 25th to July 5th as part of PIBO's long-term Breeding Birds of Pelee Island Project. In addition to a range of other pursuits, two staff surveyed an alvar woodland site under the stewardship of the Nature Conservancy of Canada and mapped all of the singing males holding territories in the forest over eleven mornings of coverage. This ten-hectare Breeding Bird Census (BBC) plot is one of ten study sites PIBO has established in a wide range of habitats on Pelee to track long-range changes in the breeding ecology of the island's resident birds. The plots are surveyed annually on a rotating basis.

This year's study took place on one of the most active nesting sites on the island. The former Wilds of Pelee property off Curry Dyke Road is described as alvar woodland with dominant species including hackberry, hawthorn, white ash, sugar maple, and chinquapin oak; canopy 69%, 12 – 20 metres high. The habitat is largely mature forest overlying a mix of flat, rocky, outcroppings, marshy low-lying areas, and a sometimes dense understory.

The following table compares the number of species and males holding territories at the alvar woodland site in 2015 with totals from a similar study in 2010.

Table 5 – Species and territories mapped at alvar woodland site in 2015

Species	Year 2015	Year 2010	Change
Red-winged Blackbird	15	13	2
House Wren	11	12.5	-1.5
American Robin	10	13	-3
Yellow Warbler	10	8	2
Brown-headed Cowbird	10	6	4
Downy Woodpecker	8	9	-1
Common Grackle	8	12	-4
Tree Swallow	7	2	5
Northern Oriole	7	4	3
Indigo Bunting	6	13	-7
Red-eyed Vireo	5	2	3
Cedar Waxwing	5	4	1
Eastern Wood-Pewee	5	5.5	-0.5
Eastern Towhee	5	3	2
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	4.5	1	3.5
Northern Cardinal	4.5	8.5	-4
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	3	5.5	-2.5
Great Crested Flycatcher	3	2	1
Black-capped Chickadee	3	3	0
Wild Turkey	2	2.5	-0.5
Mourning Dove	2	2.5	-0.5
Blue Jay	2	2	0
Gray Catbird	2		2
American Goldfinch	2	2	0
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	1		1
Red-bellied Woodpecker	1		1
Northern Flicker	1	3	-2
Eastern Phoebe	1		1
White-breasted Nuthatch	1		1
Wood Thrush	1	0.5	0.5
American Woodcock		1	-1
White-eyed Vireo		1	-1
Carolina Wren		3	-3
Common Yellowthroat		1	-1
Scarlet Tanager		1	-1
Song Sparrow		1	-1
Orchard Oriole		1	-1
Chipping Sparrow		0.5	-0.5
Total Species	30	33	-3
Total Territories	146	149	-3



NCC Breeding Bird Census plot - Stone Road Alvar Conservation Area (BBC05)



In addition to collecting accurate data on common forest nesting species, the BBC fieldwork often uncovers secretive and rare birds with limited nesting ranges on the island, and even the province. While the uncommon white-eyed vireo encountered in 2010 was absent this year, an endangered Acadian flycatcher was observed and heard singing in suitable nesting habitat at the plot this summer. The flycatcher was recorded on only one of eleven visits, which suggests it wasn't holding a permanent territory, but it's a valuable record for this unusual species in Ontario. While not at risk, the 2015 monitoring also added to our understanding of the island's nesting avifauna, with PIBO's first probable and confirmed breeding records for white-breasted nuthatch and ruby-throated hummingbird, respectively.

Other highlights included a jump in blue-gray gnatcatcher territories this year compared to 2010 (from 1 to 4.5), and the decline in Carolina wrens (from 3 to 0). Although they seem to bounce back, an island-wide trend has seen a dramatic drop-off in wrens due to the recent cold winters. While there's not as much evidence for it, the same appears to be true with the island's population of re-introduced wild turkeys.



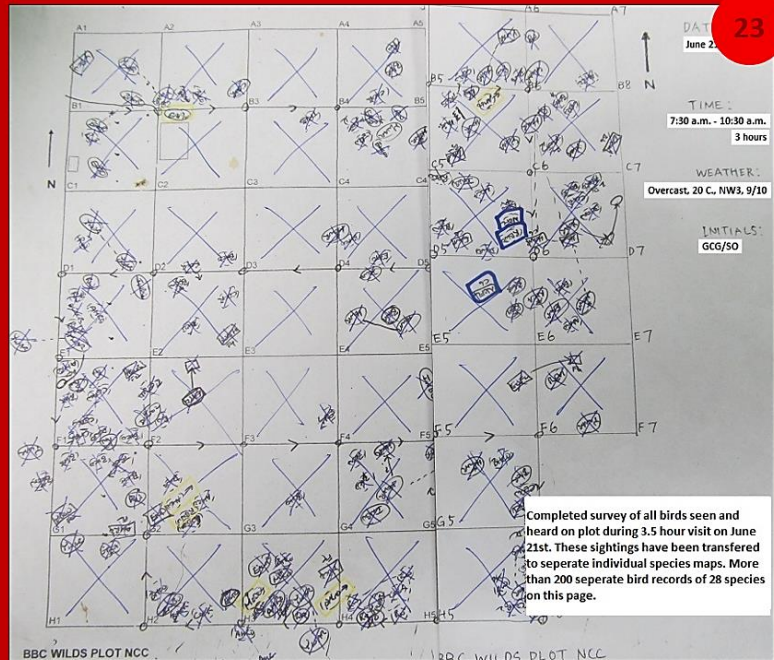
Curiosity killed the cat... ? (Sumiko Onishi)



A buggy morning in the forest! (Sumiko Onishi)

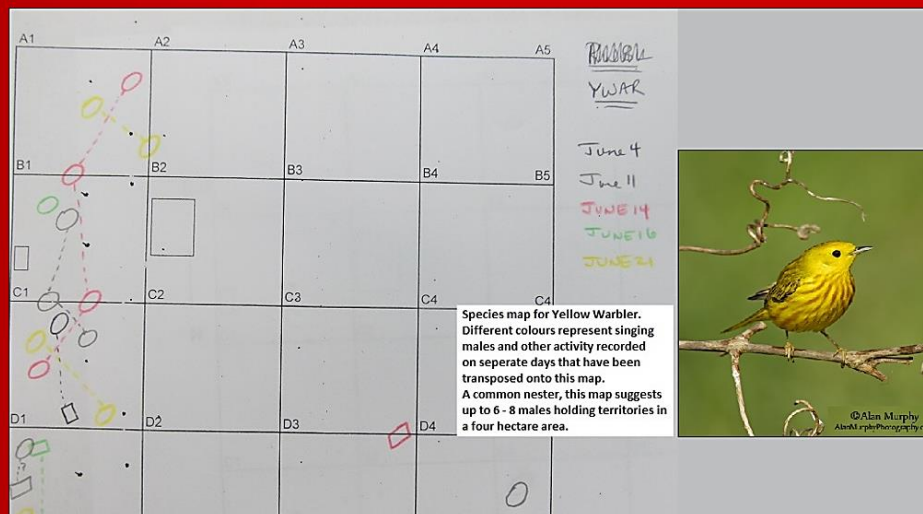
Example of BBC mapping sheet from a field survey conducted on June 21st, 2015

Example of a completed map of all bird activity recorded during a 3-hour visit to the site on June 21, 2015.



Partially completed species map for Yellow Warbler

Species map for Yellow Warbler after five visits to the study site. Different coloured circles represent singing males recorded on different days. Grid lines = 50 meters, four blocks = one hectare.



Species at Risk

PIBO collected data this year for nineteen of the thirty-six bird species designated 'at risk' in Ontario, including three endangered songbirds. Of the nineteen species detected, potential breeding evidence was obtained for nine: Acadian flycatcher (endangered), bank swallow, bald eagle, barn swallow, chimney swift, eastern meadowlark, prothonotary warbler (endangered), red-headed woodpecker, and yellow-breasted chat (endangered). The records were documented over the course of the research season from April to November and include sightings of species at risk tallied on migration i.e. horned grebe, golden eagle, etc., and other non-breeding birds.

Of particular interest this year was another successful fledging from a pair of endangered prothonotary warblers at Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve. The nest site has been active for six years, with successful broods reported on at least three occasions.



Prothonotary Warbler and nest (Sumiko Onishi)

At least two endangered yellow-breasted chats were found on territory this summer at their usual haunt at Stone Road Alvar. These traditional sites are located on properties under the stewardship of the Nature Conservancy of Canada, the Essex Region Conservation Authority, and Ontario Nature. The chat, recently upgraded to endangered, has experienced severe declines in Ontario in recent years and on the island as well. Pelee Island, along with Point Pelee National Park on the mainland, remain two of the last holdouts in Canada for this enigmatic sub-species.

2015 Christmas Bird Count (CBC)

PIBO staff took part in this year's Christmas Bird Count on December 20th with eleven other island residents. The hearty group recorded all the birds seen and heard on Pelee over a twenty-four hour period and sent the totals off to our friends in Ohio, who tally the combined efforts of Pelee and the American islands. It was a mild and calm day on the 20th and everyone had a great time, but there weren't many birds around. The species total of 50 was on par with the last few counts, but the number of birds in the area was down considerably

compared to the last two winters, with 1077 individuals documented in 2015, 1468 last year, and 4600 in 2013. Mild conditions throughout December appeared to keep many waterfowl further north (due to an abundance of open water), rather than concentrating them in the southern Great lakes, which perhaps accounts for much of the reduction this year, although even typical winter birds like juncos, larks, and buntings were few and far between.

It's a challenge to attract bird-watchers to Pelee for the CBC – participants have to fly to the island and back – but PIBO will continue to build on local support for the event and will work with B&B owners to initiate a Christmas Bird Count get-a-way package, and other promotional efforts.

Table 6 - Birds recorded on the 2015 Pelee Island CBC – December 20th

Species	2015	2014	2013	Species	2015	2014	2013
Canada Goose	293	135	271	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2		2
Tundra Swan	3	2	4	Downy Woodpecker	27	49	20
Gadwall	70	40		Northern Flicker	18	32	10
American Black Duck	3			Blue Jay	28	33	23
Mallard	119	48	3	American Crow		4	
Greater Scaup		12	5	Horned Lark	1	1	72
Black Scoter		4		Black-capped Chickadee	29	102	65
Long-tailed Duck		1		White-breasted Nuthatch	1	11	1
Bufflehead	104	266	205	Brown Creeper	12	21	10
Common Goldeneye	13	143	436	Winter Wren	3		
Red-breasted Merganser	166	554	935	Carolina Wren	2	12	6
Common Merganser			33	Golden-crowned Kinglet	1	7	5
Great Blue Heron		1		Eastern Bluebird	32		
Ring-necked Pheasant	1	10	5	Hermit Thrush	1		
Wild Turkey	119	3	4	American Robin	111	26	12
Common Loon			1	European Starling	996	3417	1268
Pied-billed Grebe	1			Cedar Waxwing	6		
Horned Grebe	1	1		Lapland Longspur			1
Double-crested Cormorant	3			Snow Bunting			3
Bald Eagle	5	16	7	Common Yellowthroat		1	
Northern Harrier		1	1	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	7	12
Sharp-shinned Hawk		1		Eastern Towhee			1
Cooper's Hawk	3	3	1	American Tree Sparrow	19	7	17
Red-shouldered Hawk	1			Song Sparrow	1	2	
Red-tailed Hawk	8	7	4	White-throated Sparrow	18	26	31
Rough-legged Hawk	1			Dark-eyed Junco	2	17	51
Sandhill Crane			23	Northern Cardinal	15	64	17
Killdeer	4			Red-winged Blackbird	4	2	10
Bonaparte's Gull	73	5	4	Rusty Blackbird		3	
Ring-billed Gull	21	80	11	Common Grackle			4
Herring Gull	57	101	26	Brown-headed Cowbird	2		34
Great Black-backed Gull		10	1	House Finch	2	29	12
Mourning Dove			10	American Goldfinch	15	1	11
Great Horned Owl		2		Pine Siskin		6	
Snowy Owl		1		House Sparrow	12	66	147
Red-bellied Woodpecker	8	21	6	Total	1077	1468	4600
				Total Species	50	51	48



Bald Eagle (Sumiko Onishi)

Monarch butterfly migration

The observatory completed its 13th autumn of standardized monarch butterfly surveys on Pelee Island in 2015 – the longest consistent record of migrant butterfly counts in Essex County. Each morning, starting one hour after sunrise, PIBO staff and volunteers count monarchs during our 90-minute bird census down to the tip of Fish Point and back. While not an ideal time of day for the survey, the routine is extremely consistent and allows for an unbroken record of more than ninety consecutive daily counts over three months from August to the end of October.

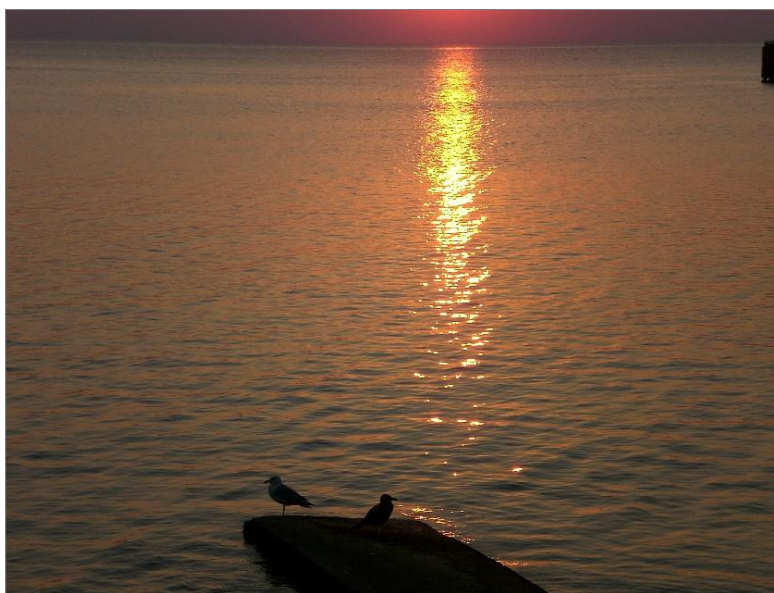
All told, a total of 269 monarch's was tallied at the 'point' this year, which represents an improvement from the 215 recorded in 2014, but falls well short of the station record of 2205 documented in 2010, including 1060 individuals recorded in a single day (September 19th).

Table 7 - Monarch butterflies recorded at Fish Point in 2015

August	Monarchs	September	Monarchs	October	Monarchs
1	0	1	2	1	0
2	1	2	0	2	1
3	0	3	0	3	0
4	15	4	0	4	3
5	3	5	0	5	0
6	5	6	0	6	0
7	2	7	3	7	4
8	3	8	1	8	0
9	2	9	0	9	0
10	5	10	2	10	3
11	5	11	3	11	0

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12	5	12	4	12	0
13	3	13	9	13	0
14	2	14	136	14	0
15	2	15	6	15	0
16	2	16	6	16	4
17	1	17	2	17	0
18	2	18	0	18	0
19	0	19	0	19	0
20	0	20	8	20	0
21	0	21	0	21	0
22	2	22	4	22	0
23	1	23	0	23	0
24	0	24	1	24	0
25	0	25	1	25	0
26	0	26	0	26	1
27	0	27	0	27	0
28	3	28	0	28	0
29	1	29	0	29	0
30	0	30	0	30	0
31	0			31	0
Month	65		188		16
Total					269



Gulls at sunset (Sumiko Onihhi)

SECTION 2 – EDUCATION & OUTREACH

Island education

PIBO enjoyed another successful year of education and outreach on the island in 2015. Members of the community and island visitors engaged regularly with staff and volunteers throughout the 6.5 month field season – PIBO's bird banding station is open to the public seven days-a-week for four months. Many questions about birds were asked – and some successfully answered – over the course of the year.

Even with the wet, muddy conditions in the bird banding area this Spring, 121 visitors stopped by in May to say hi and to see what was being captured in the nets. PIBO staff saw many old friends who have been to the station regularly over the years, along with lots of new faces, including three organized school groups from Windsor and Essex. Visitors to PIBO's 'humble laboratory' have the chance to partake in a 'hands-on' research station experience (although they don't touch the birds), and to learn first-hand about migrant songbirds and avian population monitoring techniques. During the fall – and despite the buggy conditions in August and September (and the poison ivy!) – a total of 93 visitors made their way into the woods for bird banding demonstrations.

On the home front, PIBO participated in a wide range of community activities in 2015 and hosted a number of events. The observatory's 6th annual Spring Picnic on Mother's Day saw some fine weather, a good turn-out, lots of food, and some generous donations to PIBO from those in attendance. Our four public owling nights in October/November saw a good turn-out as well for the time of year, with more than thirty guests stopping by for mulled wine and a chance to see Ontario's smallest owl – the northern saw-whet. The owl nights are a nice mix of research, education, and outreach, and an interesting and informative outing for islanders during a quiet time of the year. Additionally, PIBO enlisted the help of the community for the Pelee Island Christmas Bird Count on December 20th, which was well-attended, and a great chance for islanders to learn about local winter birds.



Sumiko with young 'ornithologists' Eric and Abbey!

As always, PIBO staff and volunteers were involved in many island events this year as well, all which further strengthened the observatory's ties with the community it's been a part of now for thirteen years. Whether it's PIBO's participation in the island's Canada Day parade and Unplugged Music Festival, attending potlucks, watching the Pelee Island Public School student's wonderful Christmas play, contributing to island fundraising events, and a host of other activities, more often than not, the PIBO crew are a part of the proceedings. It's been said that the 'bird counters' are the only conservation group with a permanent presence on the island. Also, from PIBO's start in 2003 it was clear that the success of the organization was almost entirely contingent on the acceptance and support of the community. In this respect, PIBO's ongoing presence on Pelee in 2015, and another successful year of education and outreach, speaks for itself.



The helpful crew from London, Ontario's Central Catholic High School

In-class presentations

PIBO education intern Rachel Hasson kept busy this summer organizing and launching informative 'curriculum-based' presentations about birds, biodiversity, migration, Species at Risk, and conservation, at local mainland schools in Essex County. PIBO's award-winning in-class programs have now run for six years and continue to reach a wide audience of young people with the observatory's message. Over the years many teachers have commented about the value for students of seeing biologists and conservationists working locally i.e. I could do that!, while at the same time having their attention drawn to Southwestern Ontario's remarkable natural diversity and stunning birdlife.

In all, seventeen classes at five schools received presentations in late May and June, for a total of 291 students.

Kingsville District High School	2 classes	20 students
Essex District High School	3 classes	46 students
Leamington District Secondary School	6 classes	110 students
Cardinal Carter Catholic High School	4 classes	75 students
Harrow District High School	2 classes	40 students

Video conferences

For various reasons, possibly including labour issues the education board was experiencing in Ontario last autumn, just one class at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School signed up this fall for PIBO's live video link-ups from the island. The program, now in its 5th year, introduces students to PIBO's migration monitoring research studies on the island, including a bird banding demonstration and discussion of the role banding plays in population monitoring studies. Unfortunately, no birds were captured during the video conference this year, but an engaging and lively group of young people had lots of interesting questions about birds, bird study, and conservation.

Despite the island's somewhat patchy internet service, the video link-ups have been technically successful and PIBO has received positive feedback about the project from educators and students alike. The program provides a reasonable alternative given the significant challenges involved in getting school kids to Pelee Island. Although primarily research-based, PIBO's mission has always included a strong education mandate – long before we recognized the logistical challenge of living on an island! – as evidenced by PIBO's now longstanding mainland education initiatives. With this in mind, the observatory will continue to promote the video conferences in an effort to reach as large an audience as possible. If we can't bring the mainland to PIBO and Pelee Island, we'll bring PIBO to the mainland!

Distance education

With what began as an effort to cast a wider net with our video conferences, this fall PIBO's General Manager contacted an acquaintance and teacher in the People's Republic of China in an effort to arrange a link-up. The attempt was unsuccessful for a number of reasons, including time zone differences, but a new and exciting educational and cross-cultural connection was forged none-the-less, via internet with a class from the Henan Experimental High School in Zhengzhou. The teacher, Miss Rusu, has created a unit called 'Take Flight' wherein students will watch PIBO's 15-minute educational video about bird migration in Canada and submit questions about what they learned. PIBO will follow up with answers online. A section of the unit also incorporates the writing of Canadian author Margaret Atwood that will encourage students to explore creative responses and impressions inspired by the word 'flight'. While still in its trial stage, PIBO looks forward to pursuing additional new and imaginative ways to help reveal the beauty and vitality of the natural world to young people everywhere.

Additional media, outreach, and education

The observatory connected up with thousands of additional viewers this year through the PIBO website and online venues such as Facebook and Twitter. PIBO's General Manager is now posting website content 'in house', which has dramatically improved the logistics of running the site and will increase traffic through more frequent updates and greater interactivity. Our Facebook site has drawn a very faithful group of followers who are attracted to the page by its focus on the daily happenings at the field station at Fish Point each spring and fall, accompanied by a wonderful selection of photos. Perhaps more than anything else, the observatory's Facebook page conveys what PIBO does and what PIBO is. While not as patched in to Twitter, PIBO keeps up with the latest bird 'tweets', and all our website and Facebook posts are automatically linked to the Twitter site.

Additionally, bi-monthly updates of migration activity on the island were sent out to members and posted on social media in the spring and autumn. And lastly, two editions of the Auspice newsletter were printed and distributed to PIBO members and the general public in 2015, with plans to produce four editions in 2016. The newsletter is another effective way to keep PIBO's friends and supporters up-to-date with the latest bird news from the island, along with recent developments at the observatory.

SECTION 3 – ADDITIONAL NEWS

Windsor fundraiser

The Fourth Annual PIBO Windsor Fundraiser, 'Margaret Atwood Presents an evening with Lawrence Hill', was a great success. After dinner at Beach Grove Golf and Country Club, Lawrence delighted attendees by reading from his acclaimed novel, 'The Book of Negroes', and taking questions from the audience. Ms. Atwood and Mr. Hill signed copies of their books to cap off a wonderful evening. PIBO extends its thanks and appreciation to Margaret Atwood and Lawrence Hill and to event sponsors Dr. Alan Wildeman, TD Friends of the Environment, Cooper's Hawk Vineyards owner Tom O'Brien, Caesar's Windsor, Balzac's Coffee, Biblioasis owner Dan Wells, and two anonymous donors.

Birding trip to Belize fundraiser

by Graeme Gibson, the Elder

In January this year twelve "Friends of PIBO" spent eight days in Belize exploring a marvelous mixture of lush forests, tropical birds, butterflies, and mammals, not to mention the country's powerful Mayan history. Our guides did an admirable job of introducing us to it all, with the unexpected addition of historical information that enriched our feelings of where we were. Moreover, among our guides there would always be one who could explain even the most arcane of creatures.

While there were recent sightings of a jaguar we sadly didn't see one, but even the possibility of it was almost worth the trip. We stayed at two of Belize's finest naturalist locations, Lamanai Outpost Lodge, and Chan Chich Rainforest Lodge. Each rests in a protected forest, but in areas that include savanna, marsh, and riverine habitats. The stirring of forest life awakened us each day with the croaking of Keel-billed Toucans, the groaning of Black Howler Monkeys and all the gathering voices of the morning. No wonder we were one very happy bunch of travelers.



Long-billed Hermit (Tim Stewart)

PIBO's new General Manager

PIBO is very pleased to announce the hiring of Suzanne Friemann this year as the organization's new full-time General Manager. Situated in Windsor, Ontario, Ms. Friemann came on-board in August and has already used her skills and knowledge to move the observatory forward in numerous ways – everything from sourcing and pursuing new funding channels and lining up an island migration festival, to planning outdoor nature activities for Windsor kids, booking Birdhouse guests, and obtaining quotes on canoe repairs! A former (and possibly future!) resident on Pelee Island, Suzanne's presence will go a long way to ensure the observatory's continued success in the years to come.

PIBO exhibit at the Pelee Island Heritage Centre

The highly anticipated – and much delayed – permanent PIBO exhibit at the island's Heritage Centre and Museum is finally taking shape and readying to launch in May 2016. Birds are a big subject, and difficult to sum up in a few words and pictures, so the presentation focuses largely on the Songbirds of Pelee Island. Topics include the island's critical importance as a stopover site for millions of migratory songbirds (or passerines), as well as the significance of Pelee's nesting songbird communities. The display features a variety of other bird-related subjects including the role of bird banding in avian population monitoring studies, breeding bird survey methods, Species at Risk, and a bird identification quiz! PIBO is also pleased to have our long-standing fall migration assistant Sachi Schott donate some of her bird mounts and dioramas to the exhibit, including a stunning northern saw-whet owl. Sachi has honed her skills preparing specimens and mounts for the Royal Ontario Museum, and the observatory is fortunate to have received some of her fine work.





The following are a few examples of the thirty-five information panels that make up part of the Heritage Centre exhibit:

Pelee Island – It's All About the Birds!

At four thousand hectares, or 10,000 acres, Pelee Island is just 1/27,000th of Ontario's landmass; yet, amazingly, almost two-thirds of all the bird species recorded in the province have been documented here!

It's a small part of a big region, but Pelee packs an ornithological punch when it comes to the spectacular birdlife that calls the island home. Birds are everywhere.

Clockwise from top left: Worm-eating Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, Eastern Bluebird



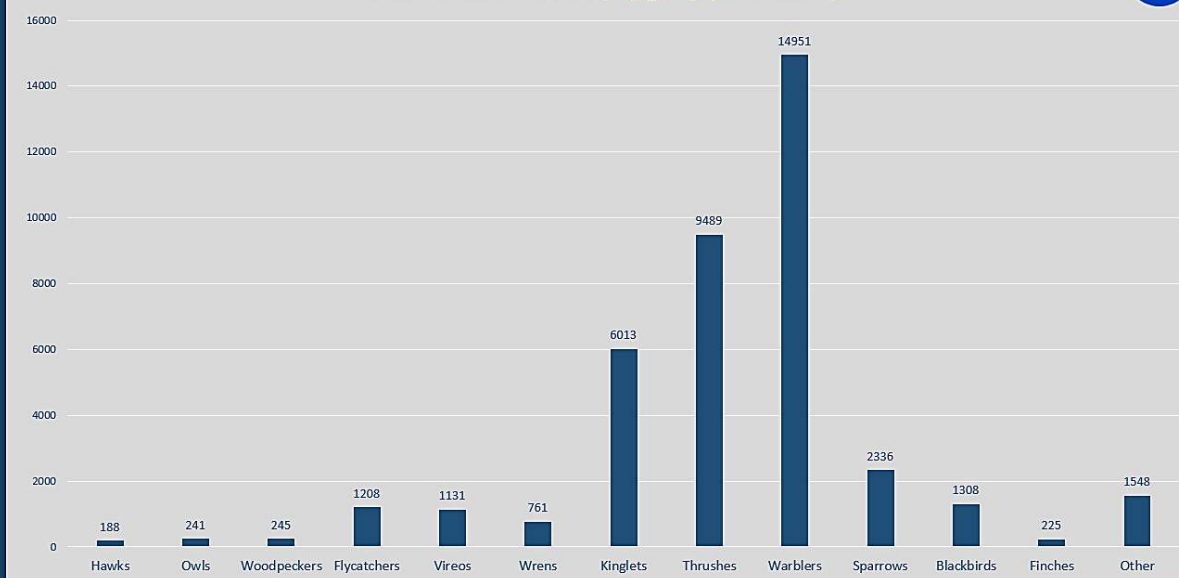
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PIBO has been a member of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network (CMMN) since 2005. Administered by Bird Studies Canada (BSC), the network tracks the migration of 'Canada's' birds each year, adding to our knowledge of population trends, demographics, phenology, and other essential information about species that pass through each location. More than twenty-five non-profits across the country make up the network. The information is used by governments, environmental organizations, scientists, and others, to improve our ability to conserve Canada's birds.



Birds banded at Fish Point, by group (2003 - 2014)

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Data Usage

PIBO has collected information about migratory and resident birdlife on Pelee Island for thirteen years and has amassed a substantial database of more than three million standardized sightings of 278 species i.e. date of record, time, weather conditions, observer experience, as well as full biometrics (species, age, sex, wing-length, mass, etc.) for more than 42,000 birds banded at Fish Point since 2003. While just a small 'outfit', and a small island, a handful of staff and dedicated volunteers generate data that are being used in real time by a far-ranging number of organizations and individuals including government ministries (Environment Canada & the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources), public and private institutions (the Nature Conservancy of Canada), universities, graduate & undergraduate students, and the general public.

First-and-foremost, PIBO's long-term migration monitoring data are sent annually to the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network for analysis as part of a nation-wide effort to track changes in the populations of native songbirds. The network is made up of more than twenty-five research stations across the country that, like PIBO, conduct daily counts of migrants in the spring and fall. Additionally, records from PIBO's bird banding program at Fish Point are submitted at the end of each season to the Canadian Bird Banding Office in Ottawa. PIBO's Species at Risk records are sent each year to the Natural Heritage Information Centre (OMNR) in Peterborough and added to the province's historic database, and used currently by species recovery teams.

All PIBO data are also freely available at the naturecounts.ca website managed by Bird Studies Canada. As stated on the website: "Naturecounts is the first Canadian node of the Avian Knowledge Network, a group dedicated to the understanding of the patterns and dynamics of bird populations across the Western Hemisphere". While PIBO records were not used in every instance, at least fifteen requests for data have come through the network (all approved for release) since 2012. Here are some examples of how the observatory's work is disseminated.

Fifteen requests for PIBO data from Naturecounts website from 2012 – 2015:

1. Purple Martins in Ontario
2. Prairie Warbler breeding habitat in Ontario
3. Classification of species for Canadian Migration Monitoring Network analysis
4. COSEWIC Update Status Report for Louisiana Waterthrush
5. Management plan for Horned Grebe in Ontario
6. Risk analysis for Marine Spills in Canadian Waters for Transport Canada
7. Modeling spatial and temporal patterns of landbird migration in the Gulf of Maine
8. Climate change and migratory bird populations
9. Draft Survey Protocol for Eastern Meadowlark in Ontario
10. Red-breasted Nuthatch irruptions in Ontario
11. Nest distribution patterns of Wood Thrush during the breeding season
12. Updating the COSEWIC status of Louisiana Waterthrush
13. Barn Swallow migration windows and peak counts for Ontario Barn Swallow Recovery Strategy
14. Gathering information on Chimney Swift for reference purposes for the species at risk branch, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources
15. Birds in the wind: modeling past and future spatial patterns of bird migration in the North Eastern US

While the observatory has yet to create a comprehensive file, data collected on Pelee Island have been published in a number of studies including:



Sunrise at Fish Point (G. Gibson)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Pelee Island Bird Observatory depends on the generous support of the many organizations and individuals who all contributed to the success of PIBO's operations in 2015. This help comes in many forms ranging from grants from major charitable foundations and government and donations from the public, to help furnishing the PIBO Birdhouse rental cottage, sewing bird bags, and organizing events. PIBO is grateful for the collective effort of so many people, their show of support for the work we do, and the vote of confidence it provides us.

With this in mind, we thank the following groups and individuals for all their support this year:

Organizations

Balzac's Coffee Roasters
Beau's All Natural Brewing Company
D&M Publishers Inc.
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The Echo Foundation
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Henry White Kinnear Foundation
The McLean Foundation
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Nature Conservancy of Canada
Ontario Parks
The Pelee Island Winery
The Pelee Island community
The Schad Foundation
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Individuals

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David Jiles
Penny Kavanaugh
Ron & Mia Meng
Heather O'Brien
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Gordon & Marilyn Pow
Rosemary Spears
Robert Tymstra
Paul Vasey
Pat Woodford



Origami family! (origami and photo by Sumiko Onishi)