

Migration Summary April 16th to 30th, 2019

By Sachi Schott



Canada Geese at Fox Pond. Photo by Sachi Schott.

Banding and census were mostly slow in the last weeks of April. Although the wind occasionally shifted to the south, which would be expected to push migrating birds further north, rain and cold temperatures may have slowed things down. But some new species for the season began to show up at the very end of the month, and as the banding station staff waded through the mud and the muck to check their mist-nets, they began to see signs that the spring season was properly underway.

Members of the wren family have some of the biggest personalities of any bird, and they definitely made their presence felt at the banding station. **Carolina Wrens**, with their piercing 'tea-kettle!' song were audible each morning, with up to four males heard around the banding station. One in particular took a shine to the station itself, and had to be gently but firmly discouraged from building a nest inside

the chute that PIBO's banders use to release the banded birds. The first **House Wrens** of the season were heard on April 23rd and immediately became engaged in fierce and energetic vocal contests, as at least two males have set up territories within the netting area.

The House Wrens aren't the only bird species at Fish Point to be feeling their oats these days. One male **American Robin** chased another straight into one net, and another contained two male **Yellow-shafted Flickers**, looking very shame-faced (or so we imagined). The **Canada Geese** in Fox Pond are mostly paired off, and have been vehement in driving off attempted intruders. At the banding station, numerous **Tree Swallows** have been busy house-hunting, investigating old woodpecker holes and other natural cavities as they look for a good place to build their nests. And on April 22nd, two **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were seen with their heads close together, murmuring sweet nothings – at least, until the female pecked the male hard on the head, and flew off. The course of true love, et cetera!

Pelee Island experienced several days of unsettled weather in the end of April, one consequence of which was daily sightings of hundreds of swallows of various species at Fish Point. Thunderstorms and rainy weather seem to drive these species down to ground-level, perhaps in pursuit of the flying insects they feed on, and from April 28th to 30th large flocks of them were seen in Fox Pond and on the west beach. **Tree Swallows**, **Barn Swallows**, and **Bank Swallows** were all counted in large numbers, though which species was the most common varied from day to day. Dozens of them would sweep back and forth above the waters of the lake before suddenly deciding *en masse* to settle down and perch on the phragmites in Fox Pond or on some spindly piece of driftwood on the beach, chattering to one another and jostling their near neighbours, before another whim would seize them and they would fly off once again. **Purple Martins**, a larger cousin of the swallows, were seen on census only rarely, but they are by now a well-established sight on the many Purple Martin houses that dot Pelee Island. The first **Chimney Swift** of the season (another aerial insectivore) was seen above Fox Pond on April 30th.

Pickings of warblers were slim in April, with only **Myrtle Warblers** and **Western Palm Warblers** being seen with any consistency – plus a rather early sighting of a single **Black-and-white Warbler** on April 19th. On April 30th, though, the three-part song of a **Northern Waterthrush** was heard in the netting area first thing in the morning; and then, later on in the day, the season's first **Nashville Warbler** was seen in a flock of **Ruby-crowned Kinglets**, along with a **Black-throated Green Warbler**. Meager though the diversity of this little group was, it was the first time that anything close to a mixed flock of warblers had been seen this spring – a hopeful herald for the month to come.

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In other migrant news, a **Green Darner** dragonfly was seen zipping around the banding station on April 17th. This migratory species is perhaps the earliest dragonfly species to be seen in Ontario each spring, and this individual would have hatched in the southern United States, Mexico or the Caribbean in February or March before flying north to Canada. It will breed here, and then its offspring will be the progenitors of the generation that will journey south in the fall, in a multi-part, multi-generational migratory journey similar to that of the Monarch Butterfly.

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STATION UPDATE: PIBO's banding station is currently operating under reduced hours due to a staffing shortage. For the time being, it will be open to visitors only from approximately 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. We apologize for any inconvenience.

As Pelee Island continues to be inundated with rain, conditions in and around the netting area have become even more challenging. The water is up to a foot deep in some places, and is deepest near the beginning of the trail in to the banding station. Visitors will need to bring the tallest rain boots they can find! Please walk very carefully, and be aware of submerged branches: the water is very dark, and it can be difficult to find safe footing. As usual, the banding station will not be open on mornings when there is rain.

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