

Migration Summary May 16th-31st, 2020

During the latter half of May, I started seeing many warblers hanging around the area. The abundance of species stayed for a week and then started tapering off with the arrival of vireos and waxwings. It was unfortunate that we could not welcome the birdwatchers to the island during this fantastic migration season due to the restrictions with COVID-19. But since we did not have many observers on Pelee Island, I spent a little bit of extra time recording those birds as much as possible.

On May 16th the air was filled with the lively sounds of Least Flycatchers and Eastern Kingbirds everywhere. I recorded a total of 62 species! Fourteen warbler species were observed including the season's first Golden-winged, Mourning and Hooded Warbler during census plus two more species including a Prothonotary Warbler as a non-standard record.

The temperature dropped the next morning (May 17th) with a north-east wind and on and off showers during the census. Spotted were numerous Nashville, Yellow and many Blackburnian Warblers and a season first Bay-breasted warbler as well as a Prothonotary warbler at a different location from the day before. Red-headed Woodpeckers, Least Flycatchers, Warbling Vireos and Scarlet Tanagers were singing everywhere. I spent a couple of extra hours on observation in the afternoon and recorded 21 warbler species including Northern Waterthrush. Also, a large group of Barn Swallows appeared!

From May 18th to 19th, the weather conditions were poor with low temperatures, strong north-east winds, and on and off rain. The census route had more obstacles because of fallen trees battered by the wind, and the sand and water that had been pushed over the trail. The boardwalk to the west beach was entirely underwater. Regardless of the lousy weather, hundreds of warblers had remained in the area, and the variety was remarkable – 19 species on May 18th and 18 species on May 19th. Many different birds were singing in the trees, making it challenging for me to distinguish the individual species. There were quite a few Cape May, and Blackburnian Warblers observed. A couple of Canada Warblers, a Philadelphia Vireo along the west shore and a Chimney Swift flying over were new for the season. I saw a total of 61 species on the 18th and 62 species on the 19th.

On May 20th and 21st, the variety remained – 16 warbler species were recorded, but the number of birds had fallen although there were numerous Swainson's Thrushes and Veerys. Many lively singing Red-headed Woodpeckers and Scarlet Tanagers were heard along the trail. A season first Cuckoo and more Cedar Waxwings were heard. The weather warmed up for the afternoon, and some flying insects started to show up. Indigo Buntings and Baltimore Orioles looked like they were rushing to begin their nest building.

Lots of rain for the last few days created many big puddles in the field along the drive to Fish Point on May 22nd. There were clouds of midges moving high up in the air in the early morning and evening sky. The drizzle of rain sounds mixed with many different birds' song in the trees, which finally grew the green leaves after the mild temperatures. A season first Ruddy Turnstone and some shorebirds were seen at the tip - we have not seen many shorebirds this season especially since the beach disappeared because of the high-water level. As a non-standard observation, five Common Nighthawks showed up with their buzzy calls in the twilight above our house.

May 23rd was a very dense foggy morning with less than 10-meters of visibility. Some Tennessee Warblers' tip tip tip' sound came over from the trees shrouded in the fog. While scoping out the bumps on a tree branch with my binoculars and thinking about the Common Nighthawks that I saw yesterday; I spotted another nighthawk sitting quietly on a limb. A Black-crowned Night-Heron flew out from the invisible tip at Fish Point.

The temperature jumped up to 18C on the morning of 24th, and numerous Red-eyed Vireos including quite a few Philadelphia Vireos showed up. Northern Mockingbirds were seen in the early morning at our feeder and the tip of Fish Point on my census. Many Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, including some Willow and Alder, were observed.

Finally, more Yellow-billed Cuckoos were singing on May 25th and migration season started shifting to breeding season based on the other birds I heard. Only a couple of Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers were heard, and an Acadian Flycatcher was recorded as new for the season on May 26th. Many American White Pelicans started showing up on May 27th - sixteen of them were resting at the tip.

The census was missed on May 28th, and now the forest has become much quieter than two weeks ago. Breeding birds like the Great-crested Flycatchers and Eastern Wood-Pewee started singing lively, and blackbirds were busy hunting for their young. Not many migratory birds could be heard. From the brief check on my way back from the census this morning two males were singing around the box site. For the last two days of May, the late arrival of a young male American Redstart and a Yellow-throated Vireo were observed.

It was a remarkably busy end of May since many birds arrived late and in haste to get ready for the breeding season. I will continue to do census for ten more days to finish the season and see if more migrants appear.

The summary was written by Field Supervisor Sumiko Onishi.

Ruddy Turnstone and Red-headed Woodpecker by Sumiko Onishi 2020



