

Migration Summary – April 1st to 15th, 2019

By Sachi Schott



Red-breasted Mergansers off Fish Point. Photo by Sachi Schott.

The Pelee Island Bird Observatory began its 2019 migration monitoring season on April 1st. Though the sun was shining there was still a thin layer of snow and frost on the ground and the tree branches along the shore were coated with ice, forming an unexpected background for a **Belted Kingfisher** and an **Eastern Bluebird**. The weather was warmer on April 3rd, which seemed to spur bird activity, and by April 7th Fish Point was alive with birds! Over a hundred **Slate-coloured Juncos** were out rifling through the leaf litter on either side of the path, and on the west beach flocks of **Field Sparrows** were feeding in the sand, alongside a small number of **Song Sparrows** and **Fox Sparrows**. In the forest, the trees were filled with **Golden-crowned Kinglets** flitting from branch to branch. Rain in the afternoon and overnight put a bit of a damper on bird activity, but there were still large flocks of Field Sparrows and **Mourning Doves** out on the west beach on April 8th.

On the lake, hundreds of **Scaup**, **Common Goldeneye**, and **Red-breasted Mergansers** were counted in the first half of April, flying past the shore and gathered in large rafts as they ride the waves. The first **Double-crested Cormorant** of the season was recorded on April 3rd, and many more are expected in the weeks and months to come! On April 7th, a **Common Loon** and a male **Common Merganser** were swimming close to the shore on the west beach, and their black and white plumage made a striking contrast with the blue-grey water. Meanwhile, in Fox Pond, **Mallards**, **Blue-winged Teal**, and **Ring-necked Ducks** have been seen almost every morning, and the whistling wingbeats of **Wood Ducks** are

frequently heard as they take off from the trees along the path. Pairs of **Canada Geese** have been making themselves at home in among the vegetation, and one was even seen crouched down over the beginnings of a nest on April 10th.

On April 11th, a strong east wind made it hard to stay on the observation deck at Fox Pond for long enough to count the Canada Geese and **Gadwalls**. Waves were washing over the south beach, but the west side was calm, and groups of **Red-winged Blackbirds** were rising from the trees to make sorties out over the water. More blackbirds, including some **Common Grackles** and **Brown-headed Cowbirds**, were reverse migrating on April 12th, flying south across the lake. Most turned back once they were a little ways out, but one group continued flying until they were out of sight.

The first (and so far only) warbler species of the spring, a **Myrtle Warbler**, was sighted on April 13th, and a **Hermit Thrush** was seen on April 14th, making it the first *Catharus* thrush species for the season. In spite of the rain and the chilly temperature, April 14th also found a flight of 70 **Tree Swallows** perched in the branches and on the sand along the west beach. Another large flock of Tree Swallows was seen resting in the phragmites at Fox Pond on April 15th, and more were observed flying past the tip of Fish Point, sculling hard against the wind, accompanied by a few **Barn Swallows** and **Bank Swallows**.

The mist-nets at PIBO's banding station were opened for the first time on April 15th, for just a few hours. No birds were captured, but the nets are in good shape, the banding station is well-stocked, and PIBO's banders are ready to welcome the migrants that will be arriving on Pelee Island in the weeks ahead. An announcement will be posted on PIBO's Facebook page once the banding station is fully open to visitors.

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