

PIBO Field Report - June 9th to 30th, 2019

With spring migration over, PIBO's field staff have closed up the banding station and taken down the mist nets until the fall – but even without birds to band, there has still been lots of bird activity going on! Instead of monitoring migrating birds, PIBO has moved on to observing and documenting the breeding birds of Pelee Island, through a variety of long-term and recently-established research programs.

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PIBO's field staff completed point counts at five survey sites in the Stone Road alvar and along East West Road on June 18th. Point counts are a survey method in which an observer stands at a designated point and records all of the birds they see and hear within a 100 meter radius for five minutes, creating a snapshot of bird activity at a given location. Each survey site can have anywhere from two to thirteen points that are visited twice in the month of June, between sunrise and 10:30 a.m.

Red-winged Blackbirds and **Yellow Warblers** were easily the most numerous of the species recorded in 2019, turning up at almost every point and at every survey site. **Northern Cardinals** and **Tree Swallows** were also common, and the melancholy notes of the **Mourning Dove** and the wooden 'chuck'-ing of **Black-** and **Yellow-billed Cuckoos** were frequently heard as well. For the most part point counts only record the presence or absence of a given species, but PIBO's field staff did have the chance to record some breeding behaviours. An agitated **Eastern Towhee** and a pair of **Yellow Warblers** gave away the locations of their respective nests; and **Chipping Sparrows**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **Common Grackles**, and **American Robins** were all observed carrying food, indicating that they had nestlings they were feeding nearby.

PIBO would like to thank the Nature Conservancy of Canada and the Pelee Island Winery for granting permission to conduct these surveys on their property. The point count sites that were visited this year were originally established in 2006 and have been surveyed once before in 2008: now, with the results from 2019, PIBO will be able to see how the populations of breeding birds that use these sites have changed or have stayed the same over the past decade.

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Each year, PIBO is proud to participate in Bird Studies Canada's Marsh Monitoring Program (MMP) by conducting marsh bird surveys in Lake Henry at Lighthouse Point Provincial Nature Reserve (Ontario Parks – Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources). The survey route is visited two or three times each summer, and PIBO's field staff use recordings of the songs and calls of five focal species to try and elicit a response from any marsh birds that are in the area. The first survey of 2019 turned up several **Least Bitterns**, one of the Species at Risk that is a target of the MMP. PIBO's field staff will launch their canoe again to conduct another MMP survey before July 5th, and hope to hear these secretive birds again soon.



Summer Student Melanie Denommé, recording birds as part of the MMP Marsh Bird Survey. Photo by Sachi Schott.

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2019 is the first year that PIBO has systematically monitored the two new Purple Martin houses on its property on South Shore Road. The first of these houses, which is made up of plastic ‘gourds’, was installed in 2018; the second is a Troyer ‘T-14’ Martin House (so called because it has room for fourteen Purple Martin pairs), which was installed this April. Both of these new boxes are installed on aluminum poles, with a metal cable and a winch to raise and lower the boxes for cleaning and inspection.

The first **Purple Martins** were seen and heard investigating the new Purple Martin houses on the evening of April 12th: since then, PIBO’s field staff have followed them through the stages of nest-building and egg-laying to the rearing of young. Out of the thirty-two nest compartments in the two Purple Martin houses, twenty-five are occupied by Purple Martin pairs who have each laid clutches of between three and seven eggs. The first nestling hatched out on June 19th; and now, as of PIBO’s latest nest check on June 27th, twenty-one of the nests have nestlings in them. All those mouths to feed means a lot of extra work for the Purple Martin adults! Fortunately, the recent hatch of mayflies has provided them with a convenient source of food for their new families.

PIBO would like to thank Nature Canada for providing the T-14 Purple Martin house as part of their 'Save Our Swallows' campaign, an initiative to halt the long-standing declines of Ontario's swallows; and Aaron Miller and his team from Newark Sheds & Lawn Furniture in Norwich, Ontario for constructing and installing it.



A female Purple Martin and her young, surprised during one of PIBO's nest checks. Photo by Sachi Schott.

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PIBO's fall migration monitoring efforts will resume on August 1st, and the banding station is expected to open again on August 15th (hopefully under drier conditions than this spring!). Please follow PIBO on Facebook for more updates, and photos from our summer breeding bird work!