

Migration Summary – May 16th to May 31st, 2019

By Sachi Schott



A hazy day at Fish Point. Photo by Sachi Schott.

Pelee Island was noticeably quieter in the wake of all the migratory bird (and birder!) activity that took place on the week leading up to Springsong Weekend on May 12th. The diversity of species seen continued to be good but abundance dropped, with only ones and twos seen of many migrant species. For the most part, the banding station captured local breeding birds, but every now and again a long-distance migrant would turn up, to prove that the spring migration wasn't quite over yet! – but by the end of the month, even these last, lingering migrants were gone, leaving only **Yellow Warblers** and **Red-winged Blackbirds** in PIBO's nets.

Catharus thrushes (a genus that includes the Hermit Thrush, Swainson's Thrush, Grey-cheeked Thrush, and Veery) are frequently captured by PIBO in both the spring and fall. They are long-distance migrants, who travel to their breeding grounds on the boreal forest from places as far away as Brazil (Swainson's Thrush) or as close as the southern United States (Hermit Thrush). They are an interesting species to observe during the migration season, because their dates of arrival correlate with how far they have to travel: the Hermit Thrush, which winters the closest to its breeding grounds, arrives first in the spring; the Grey-cheeked Thrush, which spends the winters in the Amazon Basin, arrives last. PIBO observed many **Swainson's Thrushes** and **Veerys**, both in the netting area and on census, on May 16th and May 18th, and on May 19th, the first **Grey-cheeked Thrush** was captured, heralding the beginning of the end of spring! One Swainson's Thrush was seen almost every day on census up until May 30th, and four were counted on May 29th, but there were none at Fish Point on the last day of the month.

Blackpoll Warblers are another late-arriving, long-distance migrants, and they too grew more common as the month progressed, with their high, insect-like 'tsit-tsit-tsit-tsit' song sifting down from the treetops at Fish Point, until they were replaced by the more musically-gifted **Indigo Buntings**. The **Red-eyed Vireo** is another songster who has become more numerous, and their tireless singing is frequently heard in the trees around the net lanes and along the trail at Fish Point. Warbling Vireos and Philadelphia Vireos have also been heard more frequently, and never more so than on May 22nd, when every tree along the west beach seemed to have a vireo in it!

The drizzling rain that so often punctuated the daily census over the past two weeks compounded the difficulty of identifying the different, but visually similar, species of *Empidonax* flycatchers. Fortunately both the **Alder Flycatchers** and **Least Flycatchers** were frequently in the mood to sing, which made things much simpler: the 'Reebeco!' of the Alder Flycatcher is very different from the short, sharp 'Chebek!' of the Least Flycatcher. A handful of **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers** were captured and banded. **Eastern Wood Pewees**, **Great Crested Flycatchers**, and **Eastern Kingbirds** are now seen and heard almost every day. No doubt they are enjoying the bounty of flying insects that have finally hatched and metamorphosed thanks to the warm weather!

PIBO's counts of **American White Pelicans** have not been as high as in previous years, possibly owing to the absence of the sandbar and spit that usually protrude from beyond the tip of Fish Point. Currently, all that sand is underwater, owing to the high water levels in the lake, and the single American White Pelicans seen on May 16th and May 24th were swimming far out on the water rather than standing on the shore. Slightly larger groups, of four or five birds flying together, have been seen more recently. The high water levels have also led to an absence of beach, which leaves a much smaller area for shorebirds to forage in than usual. Nevertheless, PIBO has had a few good sightings. A **Semipalmated Plover** and a **Semipalmated Sandpiper** were feeding together at Fish Point on May 23rd, and a **Killdeer** has occasionally been heard calling from the sandy area beyond Fox Pond. And on May 19th, a flock of ten **Whimbrels** flew by to check out the scene at the tip of Fish Point, but, finding it crowded with **Red-breasted Mergansers** and **Bonaparte's Gulls**, turned around and flew north along the island. One more **Whimbrel** was seen on May 24th, possibly wondering where everyone else had gone!

By May 25th, the daily census at Fish Point was beginning to grow predictable. With many birds on their breeding territories, busy building nests or feeding young (as one male **Northern Cardinal** was on May 27th), or even escorting their precocious young around Fox Pond (as families of **Canada Geese** have been doing), it became easy to predict which birds would be seen and heard where. It was time to think about closing up the banding station for the spring... But the month of May still had some surprises in store. First a **Black-crowned Night-heron** was spotted in Fox Pond on both May 29th and May 30th, quietly fishing from a small clump of vegetation in the middle of the water; and then on May 31st a female **Prothonotary Warbler** was seen on census, the first one seen this year! PIBO has been monitoring the Prothonotary Warbler nest boxes at Fish Point for several weeks now, but so far has seen only **Tree Swallows** using them. Now, it seems, it could be worth taking a closer look...

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PIBO's last day of banding will be June 1st. The banding station will be opened again for the fall migration on or around August 15th. Please keep an eye on PIBO's Facebook page for updates, and for posts about the breeding bird work PIBO will be doing on Pelee Island in the meantime!

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A new door for PIBO's banding station! Photo by Sachi Schott.

PIBO is happy to announce that, after much effort, and with the help of many people (and a lot of time spent waiting for good weather!), the banding station has a new door! A generous Facebook follower saw PIBO's post and responded with the offer of the perfect wooden screen door, in great condition. They even went to the trouble of trimming it to the right size! Another friend of PIBO picked up the door and brought it to the island, and yet another friend donated varnish and a paintbrush, to make it weather-tight. After an impressive thunderstorm the afternoon before, it was a long, slow, and very careful walk along the flooded path to the banding station... but the door made it safe and sound (though with more than a few splashes of mud!). It was soon in place, and ready to protect PIBO's field staff from the many hungry mosquitoes that have recently joined them at Fish Point!

As with all of the work PIBO does, this project, small as it is, could not have happened without the generous help and support of many people. It took many pairs of hands to get this door to Pelee Island – and to build PIBO's banding station – and to keep PIBO's field cottage in good repair, with everything running smoothly. We are so grateful to everyone who has contributed to PIBO's programs, whether by donating time, or by reading and 'liking' our posts on social media! PIBO couldn't happen without you! Thank you!

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