



Spring banding summary by Field Supervisor, Sumiko Onishi

It was the quietest banding season which I had experienced in the past fifteen years - we banded less than a half of previous spring seasons. Especially the large volume of migratory warblers was missed during both census and netting period. Although we had been recording a variety of warblers including season first Magnolia since May 7th, the first one was banded on May 16th. A season first Blackburnian Warbler which came through the area during early May was finally captured on the last day of banding operation (May 31st). An American Redstart originally captured on May 19th was recaptured again on May 31st and a few others singing were observed in the netting area. The following table shows the number of banded relatively common species during spring migration at our banding station compared to the previous seasons.

Species	Number of banded		
	2018	2019	2021
Swainson's Thrush	52	13	19
Least Flycatcher	10	18	4
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	16	4	4
Blue-headed Vireo	15	22	1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	38	53	11
Magnolia Warbler	61	53	11
American Redstart	43	19	4
Ovenbird	27	35	29
Northern Waterthrush	17	8	8
Total banded (April 20 - May 31)	790	770	354
Net-hours	1275.1	1074.25	1381.9
* No banding operation in 2020 due to shortage of field staff			

Banding Summary Late April, early May

After a period of snow and dreary weather, the birds have bounced back in full force! A quick check-in on the purple martins put our minds at ease after such a stressful time; there were no casualties! It seems that several pairs of migrants, including a pair of tree swallows, hunkered down in the martin boxes throughout the cold and now they are taking full advantage of the clear skies to hunt. On April 23rd, the sky around the banding station was filled with the twittering of tree swallows as they refuelled. Now is certainly not the time to be a flying insect.

The purple martins aren't the only newcomers to the island after the unfavourable weather; yellow-rumped warblers and ruby-crowned kinglets are taking the island by storm as they scour the undergrowth for gnats and other tasty morsels. They seem to be the most frequent visitors by the netting area at this time, although many new migrants have just started to pass through given the opportune weather. We saw our first pine warbler on April 23rd, a sign that the onslaught of warblers is just around the corner.

Southern winds and cloudy skies on April 26th brought a whole new wave of migrants to the island; the first black throated green warblers, orchard orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, purple finches, and gray catbirds passed through the netting area. The height of migration has finally begun! We caught a stunning male scarlet tanager on April 28th, which we had seen foraging around the station earlier that morning. This beauty was certainly not hard to miss amongst the sea of budding twigs and brambles.

The start of a fresh spring month was kicked off with our first, and only, blue-winged warbler capture! He was a rather interesting individual, as it sported secondary coverts tinged with gold. Usually, blue-winged warblers have characteristic white wing-bars; the dash of yellow on this fellow is evidence of some golden-winged warbler ancestry. On May 1st we also banded the first northern waterthrush and tree swallow of the season. Yellow-bellied sapsuckers are a frequent guest around the station although they seem to be quite proficient at avoiding the nets. Yellow-rumped warblers, despite such a booming abundance, have also managed to avoid our nets. We have only caught one so far, which is surprising, relative to the number we see consistently in the netting area. Perhaps the lack of lush foliage in the undergrowth is discouraging them from straying too far from the canopy.

Other familiar faces such as ovenbirds and white-throated sparrows have started to trickle in as migration proceeds. Warbler species such as black-throated blue warbler, black-and-white warbler, Tennessee warbler, blackburnian warbler and northern parula are starting to pass through in small numbers. Veery and wood thrush have also returned, following in the footsteps of the hermit thrush who have already sauntered through. The temperature is still relatively chilly, hovering around or below 10°C, but the birds must push through regardless and we're still here to process any that fall within our grasp. The highly anticipated spring migration has finally arrived, although in seemingly less force than previous years. Regardless, we can't wait to see what peak migration will bring!

In other news, the annual Pelee Island Bird Race occurred just in time for World Migratory Bird Day on May 8th. The PIBO team ended with 101 species and biked/walked a total of 53.6 kms! Despite subpar weather conditions for the first 12 hours, we were delighted to have an opportunity to explore so much of this wonderful island and see some amazing birds. The highlight was a sedge wren at the FDNR SE Field.

The summary was written by Alessandra Wilcox, assistant bander

Pelee Island Bird Observatory – census summary for May 1-15, 2021

The first two weeks of May in southern Ontario are generally considered to be the peak for bird migration but numbers this year were well below average. Not only were the expected big mixed flocks of tanagers, grosbeaks, and warblers not appearing but there were also no appreciable reverse migrations off the Fish Point tip. Nevertheless, every day there were new arrivals to keep things exciting.

The month started off with a bright pair of tanagers: one very orangy Scarlet Tanager along with a male Summer Tanager. Up to a dozen Blue-winged Teals could be observed for the first few days of the

month in Fox Pond. It appeared that many were pairing off and might stay to nest but they eventually drifted off elsewhere. Baltimore Orioles arrived on time at the beginning of May and their fluty calls could be heard everywhere. May 3rd saw temperatures warming and the first spring migrant warblers arriving such as Cape May and Black-throated Green Warblers as well as the first Eastern Kingbirds. Northern Parulas and Black-throated Blue Warblers were more common than usual and for several days their distinctive songs could be heard everywhere. On May 4, there was a good selection of sparrows which were otherwise quite rare this spring. Red-headed Woodpeckers were more common than usual with as many as 4 being seen daily.

On May 5, the first Prothonotary Warbler and Least Flycatcher were spotted. Another Summer Tanager appeared on May 7 and a Grey-cheeked Thrush was seen the following day.

The tip hosted a few exciting species. On May 9, the first American White Pelicans appeared as did a rare Lesser Black-backed Gull. Four Dunlin showed up there on the 11th.

The first Cedar Waxwings arrived on May 12 and became daily fixtures in the woodlands near the tip thereafter.

May 14 was an exciting day for heron spotting: there were the usual Great Egrets and Great Blue Herons present at Fox Pond but an uncommon Black-crowned Night Heron joined them briefly and an American Bittern was seen cruising down the west beach. Great Crested Flycatchers arrived this day as well and their distinctive calls livened up the woods thereafter. The period ended with a Common Tern and a singing Mourning Warbler near the tip.

The summary was written by Rob Tymstra, spring census recorder

PIBO Census summary Fish Point, 16-31 May 2021

Warblers continued to arrive daily but in smaller than expected numbers.

The Fish Point tip hosted various visitors throughout the period, beginning with the first Forster's Terns on the 16th, and a variety of more common shorebirds such as Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Dunlin, Sanderlings, Ruddy Turnstones, and Semipalmated Plovers. A lone Red Knot on the 23rd was unusual. A Black-bellied Plover appeared on the 28th. The most exciting shorebird sighting was the huge flock of 240 Whimbrels that flew over the tip on May 26. Pelican populations slowly increased with a high of 23 birds seen near the tip on May 24 and two Green Herons flew past the following day.

May 17 was 'beach day' for several families of Canada Geese as parents took their goslings out on to Lake Erie for the first time away from their birthplace on Fox Pond. A Wood Duck successfully raised a 10 duckling family.

The first Black-billed Cuckoos and a Willow Flycatcher were heard singing on May 20. Tennessee and Blackpoll Warblers were now the dominant migrant singers in the forest for a week or so before

continuing north. On May 22, a Prothonotary warbler arrived at Fox Pond and sang there daily throughout.

The most dramatic event of the period was a powerful gale-forced storm that blew out of the east on May 28. Huge waves, driving rain, and high water levels combined to create a great deal of damage to the east side of Fish Point. Fox Pond itself was inundated with water as the waves blew out sections of the sandy wall. The old trail to the point, part of the census route, had mostly disappeared under a thick layer of sand deposited by huge waves. With the sandy ground supersaturated with water, many trees could no longer stand and many trees had fallen over. There were also hazardous areas of quicksand to contend with as well.

The next day, the sandy spit at Fish Point was totally obliterated and the usual sandbar offshore had also disappeared. Fox Pond water level was actually higher than Lake Erie. Despite the intensity of the storm, it did little to dampen the spirits of the now resident Prothonotary Warbler singing its heart out every morning near the observation platform. This normally shy and retiring warbler would often sing from the highest branches of the tallest dead trees to spread his call far and wide, possibly in search of a mate.

As the month ended, the sounds of the forest had shifted away from those of migrants to those of the usual summer breeders such as Red-eyed and Warbling Vireos, Indigo Buntings, Baltimore Orioles, Yellow Warblers, and Yellow-billed Cuckoos.

The summary was written by Rob Tymstra, spring census recorder

Banding Summary for May

The weather held up great for most of May; it was mostly above 10°C with only a few cold spells and a short burst of rain and vegetation growth near the end. The migrants saw this as their chance to push on and we saw a significant increase of species diversity by the banding station. For a couple of weeks, the netting area was filled with the complex songs of all sorts of warbler species and fresh migrants. Some frequent visitors included hooded warblers, black-and-white warblers, Nashville warblers, blue-winged warblers, American redstarts, and magnolia warblers.

The first golden-winged warbler was seen on May 10th, and it hung around the station for a couple of days giving us decent views! She was a lovely female with indistinct wing-bars and a washed-out facial pattern with a relatively thinner eyeline; perhaps indicative of some blue-winged warbler ancestry. A male golden-winged warbler was heard singing almost a week after that just as the Canada warblers started rolling in. For a brief moment this month, the forest was filled with the flashing colours of warblers and finches, the air echoed with song, and there was never a dull moment! The undergrowth was constantly shifting as veerys, wood thrush, gray catbirds, and ovenbirds foraged among the waterlogged vegetation.

On May 13th Nashville warblers dominated the netting area and we were also starting to see decent amounts of black-throated green warblers, northern parula, and yellow warblers moving through. We

were also starting to see the first least flycatcher migrants.

But how could we forget the blackbirds? They still are not out of the picture with the arrival of charismatic Baltimore orioles. They set the stage around the banding station, frequently performing territorial displays that I could only describe as “rap battles”. It was a delight watching them interact with each other, but also how they interacted with their environment. Several individuals figured out that they could sit alongside the mist nets and pick off gnats and mosquitoes that became entangled. The chance of being caught was a fair gamble in their eyes because even after a miscalculation led to capture and processing, they still went back for more. Several females were also seen repeatedly trying to use the synthetic netting as nesting material.

Drum roll, please... We banded a yellow-breasted chat on the 15th!! Definitely the highlight of the entire season. They are incredibly secretive birds that can be difficult to see amongst their preferred dense brush and scrubland. A welcome surprise to be sure, and what a character on this one; it had such a feisty personality. There was also another chat calling around the netting area as we released the banded individual!

There was a noticeable boom of ovenbirds between the 13th-15th, with 29 banded by the end of the season. Ovenbirds ended up our 3rd most banded bird this season, falling just short of red-winged blackbird at 30, and yellow warbler at 34. These numbers however are surprisingly low compared with past years; warbler, sparrow, and flycatcher numbers were not as spectacular as has previously been recorded. This leaves us with many questions that will be interesting to investigate once data has been totalled and compared.

On May 16th we saw peak species diversity at the netting area with 68 species seen in total! Cuckoos have also started to become all the rage on the island, and their clatters and gulps can be heard in almost every forest stand. Species diversity started to noticeably dwindle after the 19th and we started seeing a transition of warbler species from early migrants like blackburnian warbler, Nashville warbler, and northern parula, to later migrants such as Canada warbler, bay-breasted warbler and blackpoll warbler. The Canada warblers hit all at once on the 20th and more or less stayed until the end of the banding season. Magnolia warblers also started becoming more common as the hoards of yellow-rumped warblers moved on. Yellow warblers have begun charting their breeding territories by performing dramatic aerial dogfights by the nets; of course, we always caught the losers. An Acadian flycatcher was first heard on the 21st; we were hoping it would go in the nets, or at least come into sufficient view, but it never did. By the end of the banding season, the forests began to settle once again. Eastern wood pewees would throw their eery calls into the thick morning air and the occasional trill of a blackbird always broke the silence. Yellow warblers and red-eyed vireos also kept us company from the canopy while we waited for the last of the migrants to trickle through. As the month progressed, we noticed many uncharacteristically late migrants around the netting area; our final bird banded on the 31st was a female blackburnian warbler. In the last couple of days, we had a small influx of blackburnians most likely pushed back from the mainland by the north winds; interesting to see them so late in the season.

That's all folks! Surely a longer summary, but justifiably so. Now that the banding season has ended, focus on breeding bird surveys will commence. Make sure to check for updates on the purple martins as they settle into their nests! A quick check last week revealed that many have almost completed their nests and are on eggs. We wish all the luck to them and the amazing migrants we had the privilege of studying as they reach their breeding grounds at last!

This summary was written by Alessandra Wilcox, assistant bander



Fish Point by Rob Tymstra and Yellow-breasted Chat by Alessandra Wilcox