

Bird Banding Summary 15-31/04/22



White-eyed Vireo. Photo by Alessandra Wilcox.

The second half of April brought some sensational birds and amazing adventures! Right from the start of the season we had been noticing some earlier migrants and interesting behaviours. All these promising signs held true as the month played out; there were rare birds and new migrants lurking around every corner, we could hardly take a break trying to observe them all!

Midway through the month we were pleasantly surprised by an American visitor! On April 16th a beautiful **yellow-throated warbler**, made its way to Lighthouse Point Provincial Park. These striking birds aren't usual visitors to Ontario; they typically breed throughout the southern and mid-eastern states. However, since the 1940s, isolated breeding populations have been documented as far north as New York and Michigan!

As the month continued and the undergrowth across the island flourished, **ruby-crowned kinglets** began to take the Island by storm as they joined the **golden-crowned kinglets** and **yellow-rumped warblers** in their foraging adventures. By the end of the month, the golden-crowned kinglets had almost entirely passed through, leaving the ruby-crowns in their wake. The week of the 17th brought heavy rain, intense storms, and cold weather; however, the rain and strong winds didn't seem to hold the migrants back. Just before the rains, yellow-rumped warblers had begun to flood the Island and show no signs of ceasing any time soon.

We had been seeing the occasional **hermit thrush** around the netting area throughout mid to late April, however on the morning of April 22nd they didn't waste the opportunity to get going. Thralls of hermit thrush could be seen foraging around the banding station throughout the day, and they certainly weren't net-shy. Perhaps the movement of hermit thrush marked the beginning of greatness; that night we slept unknowing of what was soon to come, but not unprepared...

On April 23rd, the floodgates burst, and hundreds of new migrants began touching down on the island! The favourable overnight south winds and warm temperatures must have been all the birds needed to submit to their urge to fly north. In the following days, strong north winds bound many to Fish Point and pushed some back across the lake; however, many were still able to make it to Point Pelee and beyond. On the first day of the birding peak in April, hundreds of individuals of 12 warbler species could be seen foraging along the beach and in the low shrubs along the west beach of Fish Point. Of these included a beautiful male **cerulean warbler**, who was uncharacteristically foraging on the ground with the expected **western-palm warblers** and **yellow-rumped warblers**. Other early specialties that were seen on April 23rd were **blackburnian warbler**, **Tennessee warbler**, and **bay-breasted warbler**. This bay-breasted observation is the earliest ever record for this species in the Point Pelee area and the second earliest in the province! It was certainly a treat give all these wonderful species an early welcome to Ontario.

The netting area and census were never quiet from then on; a constant stream of new migrants filled the Island with new song and action. On April 25th, nine **willets** and one unbanded, and endangered **piping plover** was spotted on census at the very tip of Fish Point! That same day, a female **summer tanager** was observed foraging around the banding station,

and a male summer tanager was reported near Fox pond. They were both frequently seen around the same area throughout the week. **Scarlet tanagers, Baltimore orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, ovenbirds, wood thrush,** and **northern waterthrush** could also be observed across the island, filling the forests with song. One of the most notable observations throughout the mass of new migrants over the past weeks was the abundance of **white-eyed vireos!** White-eyed vireos are shy, skulky birds that can be commonly found inhabiting shrubby thickets throughout south-east U.S.A. They are rare breeders in Ontario, and if they are found, it is almost exclusively in southern Ontario along Lake Erie. The first white-eyed vireo observed on the island was captured and banded on the 25th! Ever since, they have been relatively common finds across the Island; numerous individuals had been seen daily and consistently at multiple locations. We ended up banding four individuals across five days! Along with a white-eyed vireo, a stunning male **hooded warbler** was also captured and banded on the 26th.

With the sudden early flood of migrants, the bird observatory was busier than ever, banding and researching captured migrants, while counting individuals and species. These are all important research methods that can help in understanding future migration habits should a shift in timing be noted. All being said, the migration patterns this spring certainly look promising for incoming flocks...of birds and the people observing them!