



The Auspice

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

Spring 2010

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And a sincere thank-you to our many individual donors, to our friends and supporters, to our partners and PIBO's hard-working volunteers!! We couldn't do it without you.

On Lake Erie's Demise by Margaret Atwood



Lake Erie: Big, flat, beautiful, subject to unpredictable rages, and with dead spots in it – like Robert Mitchum's eyes, I said to a friend. He understood the comparison immediately.

Despite its usually sunny skies and its innocent aquamarine hue, Lake Erie does have something noir about it. Of all the Great Lakes, it's had the most shipwrecks, due to its wickedly shifting sandbars. Also, the western end of Lake Erie is the thunderstorm capital of Canada – the lightning displays are breathtaking, the winds can hit gale force, and, due to the lake's shallowness, the waves build very quickly. But despite these boating hazards, a great deal of alcohol crossed Erie during Prohibition. Mobster corpses were frequently dumped into the Detroit River, to wash up on the beaches of Pelee Island, where a special ice house was built to accommodate them.

Dead bodies haven't been the only kind of pollution Lake Erie's had to endure. Right now the visible junk is plastic, but the invisible stuff is more deadly. Erie, along with the other Great Lakes, has been treated as a sewage system for a very long time. Old industrial deposits are still seeping, and new poisons are tossed in regularly. In the mid-20th century, the Detroit River was so polluted it caught fire, and Lake Erie itself was so contaminated that one bright light

suggested draining the entire lake and using the resulting real estate as industrial parkland.

I've lived or worked on the shores of every one of the Great Lakes, with the exception of Michigan. Superior in the '40s, Huron in the '50s, Ontario in both those decades and beyond.

It was birdwatching that first brought Graeme Gibson and me to Lake Erie: Point Pelee is famous as a spring migration landing spot – it draws birdwatchers from all over the world – but Long Pont and Rondeau are also excellent.

In the early 1980s we began going to Pelee Island, which is the southernmost bit of Canada, as well as being home to a number of rare and endangered plants and animals. Pelee attracts the same migratory bird species, but without the human crowding. That was appealing to us, and before we knew it we were part-time Pelee Islanders. We then became caught up in the founding of the Pelee Island Bird Observatory – now an important migration monitoring station. We also helped establish Meadowlark Farm, a small organic-farming experiment that we hope will inspire a non-polluting use of agricultural land in this sun-rich location.

Because of our on-the-ground involvement, we've become very aware of the enormous challenges facing the Great Lakes and Erie in particular.

Much effort was put into cleaning up the lakes in the last third of the 20th century – the Detroit River no longer bursts into flames – but Erie faces many new challenges. Foremost among them is evaporation due to climate change.

Erie used to be so cold in winter that people drove cars to the mainland across the ice, or went sailing on iceboats; now it's unusual to have ice thick enough to support such activities. Ice prevents evaporation, open



water encourages it: Erie appears to be shrinking. All of the Great Lakes are being affected in this way, but the first to turn into a festering mud puddle will most likely be Erie, due to its shallowness.

The second challenge is the invasive species. There are so many of these it's hard to count them, and not all are bad – Pacific salmon, for instance – but several stand out. Zebra mussels have not only wiped out numerous native bivalve species by eating all their food, but they've filtered out so much sediment that deep-water, blue-green algae have made a couple of big oxygen-poor dead zones in Lake Erie.

Phragmites, that tall reed with the graceful plumes that gives nothing back to native ecosystems, has started to clog up important Pelee Island wetlands. The Carolinian woodlands on Pelee are being threatened by the same killer garlic mustard invasion that's menacing the rest of Ontario's hardwood stands, choking out the native plants and killing trees by poisoning their root systems. All of these pests have reached menacing proportions in only the last 25 years – about the time we've been on Pelee Island. It's not just change that's so disturbing, it's the rapidity with which negative change is now taking place.

But the most disheartening change has been even more recent: the apparent collapse of woodland warbler populations. The 2007 passage migrant count at the PIBO was down by 60 per cent. Perhaps the decline was due to peculiar weather conditions – maybe the birds flew around Erie rather than over it. But many bird populations worldwide are collapsing, due to habitat loss and to the same grisly farming practices that have killed off a lot of independent farmers, either financially or physically: monocultures, especially sun-grown coffee, corn, and soy; soil depletion and erosion; toxic chemicals.

Human beings will keep on saying, "It's not too late" until the very last gasp. It's our nature: Hope's built in. And hope's not always unjustified: Environments can be repaired; water can be cleansed; and species populations can recover, unless, of course, the species goes extinct first. So, ever hopeful, we'll beaver away at garlic mustard elimination and habitat preservation and so forth, and continue to push for change, while remaining fully aware that of all charitable giving, 97 per cent goes to human causes, and of the remaining 3 per cent, 1 1/2 per cent goes to pet animals. That leaves only 1 1/2 per cent for the non-human part of the planet that supports all life, including us.

So, what are the Great Lakes worth to us? The real answer is "a lot," as many southern Ontario cities depend on them for drinking water and much else; but the efforts being made to date have not really reflected that crucial importance. Maybe we should make a diagram for politicians – or why not for everybody?

A) MONEY. B) MOUTH. PUT A WHERE B IS.

That might help.

The Toronto Star, Jan. 19, 2008

PIBO in 2010: A time to reflect and plan for the future

As we enter the eighth year of migration monitoring, it's a natural time to stop, reflect on the last seven years, and begin to plan for the future at the Pelee Island Bird Observatory. PIBO has certainly come a long way from the first season when Graeme lived in a small trailer, with a volunteer, on a borrowed piece of property. Today, Graeme still lives in a trailer but now it's by choice! PIBO owns a very functional field house for staff and interns and even recently acquired a rental property to accommodate volunteers, students, and generate some income during the summer tourism season.

With these developments and with the submission of all of our migration data to Bird Studies Canada for trend analysis, PIBO is now a full member station of the Canadian Migration Monitoring Network. We've worked hard to acquire several major government grants through which I've had the joy of seeing programs expand and our partnerships grow. This year, the PIBO staff and Board will gather in Toronto to undertake a day of strategic planning. We owe a big THANK YOU to Ron Reid, former Executive Director of the Couchiching Conservancy in Orillia who will lend his extensive expertise with small ENGOs to facilitate the planning process.

Through this important work, we will ensure that PIBO will be around to collect data on many, many more migrations.



Need an Island Getaway?

Spectacular Carolinian birds and butterflies on Lake Erie! The Pelee Island Bird Observatory's Bird House offers a four-season lakeside cottage. It can be rented weekly in July and August, or for weekend birding packages with our Migration Stewardship Program during the rest of the year. The house has three bedrooms with double beds, a fully self-catering kitchen, and a large, comfortable common room with a view of the beautiful north bay of Pelee Island.

Contact us at info@pibo.ca or (519)-724-2829. View photos of the house and learn more about our programs at www.pibo.ca.



Birds of Pelee Island Checklist (311 species)

Compiled by the Pelee Island Bird Observatory

Loons & Grebes

- Red-throated Loon
- Pacific Loon*
- Common Loon
- Pied-billed Grebe
- Horned Grebe
- Eared Grebe
- Red-necked Grebe

Cormorants

- Double-crested Cormorant

Pelicans

- American White Pelican

Hérons & Bitterns

- American Bittern
- Least Bittern
- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Snowy Egret
- Little Blue Heron*
- Cattle Egret
- Green Heron
- Black-crowned Night Heron

- Yellow-crowned Night Heron*

- White Ibis*

- Glossy Ibis*

- Wood Stork*

Ducks, Geese & Swans

- Tundra Swan
- Trumpeter Swan
- Mute Swan
- Greater White-fronted Goose

- Snow Goose

- Brant

- Canada Goose

- Cackling Goose

- Wood Duck

- Green-winged Teal

- American Black Duck

- Mallard

- Northern Pintail

- Blue-winged Teal

- Garganey*

- Northern Shoveler

- Gadwall

- American Wigeon

- Canvasback

- Redhead

- Ring-necked Duck

- Greater Scaup

- Lesser Scaup

- King Eider

- Long-tailed Duck

- Black Scoter

- Surf Scoter

- White-winged Scoter

- Common Goldeneye

- Bufflehead

- Hooded Merganser

- Common Merganser

- Red-breasted Merganser

- Ruddy Duck

Vultures, Kites, Hawks

& Eagles

- Turkey Vulture

- Osprey

- Swallow-tailed Kite*

- Bald Eagle

- Northern Harrier

- Sharp-shinned Hawk

- Cooper's Hawk

- Northern Goshawk

- Red-shouldered Hawk

- Broad-winged Hawk

- Red-tailed Hawk

- Rough-legged Hawk

- Golden Eagle

- Crested Caracara*

Falcons

- American Kestrel

- Merlin

- Peregrine Falcon

Grouse, Pheasants & Turkeys

- Ring-necked Pheasant

- Wild Turkey

Rails, Galinules & Coots

- Yellow Rail

- King Rail

- Virginia Rail

- Sora

- Common Moorhen

- American Coot

Cranes

- Sandhill Crane

Plovers

- Black-bellied Plover

- American Golden Plover

- Semipalmated Plover

- Snowy Plover*

- Piping Plover*

- Killdeer

Stilts & Avocets

- American Avocet

- Black-necked Stilt*

Sandpipers & Phalaropes

- Greater Yellowlegs

- Lesser Yellowlegs

- Solitary Sandpiper

- Willet

- Spotted Sandpiper

- Upland Sandpiper

- Whimbrel

- Hudsonian Godwit

- Ruddy Turnstone

- Red Knot

- Sanderling

- Semipalmated Sandpiper

- Western Sandpiper

- Least Sandpiper

- White-rumped Sandpiper

- Baird's Sandpiper

- Pectoral Sandpiper

- Purple Sandpiper

- Dunlin

- Stilt Sandpiper

- Buff-breasted Sandpiper

- Short-billed Dowitcher

- Snipe

- American Woodcock

- Wilson's Phalarope

Gulls & Terns

- Parasitic Jaeger

- Laughing Gull

- Franklin's Gull

- Black-headed Gull

- Little Gull

- Bonaparte's Gull

- Ring-billed Gull

- California Gull*

- Herring Gull

- Iceland Gull

- Lesser Black-backed Gull

- Glaucous Gull

- Thayer's Gull

- Great Black-backed Gull

- Caspian Tern

- Common Tern

- Forster's Tern

- Black Tern

Pigeons & Doves

- Rock Dove

- Mourning Dove

- Collared Dove*

Cuckoos

- Black-billed Cuckoo

- Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Owls

- Barn Owl*

- Long-eared Owl

- Short-eared Owl

- Eastern Screech-Owl

- Great Horned Owl

- Snowy Owl

- Barred Owl

- Northern Saw-whet Owl

- Burrowing Owl*

Goatsuckers & Swifts

- Common Nighthawk

- Chuck-will's-widow*

- Whip-poor-will

- Chimney Swift

Hummingbirds

- Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Kingfishers

- Belted Kingfisher

Woodpeckers

- Red-headed Woodpecker

- Red-bellied Woodpecker

- Yellow-bellied Sapsucker

- Downy Woodpecker

- Hairy Woodpecker

- Black-backed Woodpecker

- Northern Flicker

- Pileated Woodpecker

Flycatchers

- Olive-sided Flycatcher

- Eastern Wood-Pewee

- Yellow-bellied Flycatcher

- Acadian Flycatcher

- Alder Flycatcher

- Willow Flycatcher

- Least Flycatcher

- Eastern Phoebe

- Great Crested Flycatcher

- Eastern Kingbird

- Western Kingbird

- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher*

Shrikes

- Northern Shrike

- Loggerhead Shrike

Vireos

- Warbling Vireo

- Philadelphia Vireo

- White-eyed Vireo

- Bell's Vireo*

- Red-eyed Vireo

- Yellow-throated Vireo

- Blue-headed Vireo

Crows & Jays

- Blue Jay

- American Crow

Larks

- Horned Lark

Swallows

- Purple Martin

- Tree Swallow

- N. Rough-winged Swallow

- Bank Swallow

- Cliff Swallow

- Cave Swallow*

- Barn Swallow

Chickadees & Titmice

- Black-capped Chickadee

- Boreal Chickadee

- Tufted Titmouse

- Great Tit*

Nuthatches & Creepers

- Red-breasted Nuthatch

- White-breasted Nuthatch

- Brown Creeper

Wrens

- Carolina Wren

- Bewick's Wren*

- House Wren

- Winter Wren

- Sedge Wren

- Marsh Wren

Kinglets & Gnatcatchers

- Golden-crowned Kinglet

- Ruby-crowned Kinglet

- Blue-gray Gnatcatcher

Thrushes

- Eastern Bluebird

- Mountain Bluebird*

- American Robin

- Townsend's Solitaire*

- Wood Thrush

- Veery

- Swainson's Thrush

- Gray-cheeked Thrush

- Hermit Thrush

Mockingbirds & Thrashers

- Gray Catbird

- Northern Mockingbird

- Sage Thrasher*

- Brown Thrasher

Starlings

- European Starling

Pipits & Waxwings

- American Pipit

- Cedar Waxwing

Warblers

- Northern Parula

- Orange-crowned Warbler

- Tennessee Warbler

- Blue-winged Warbler

- Golden-winged Warbler

- "Brewster's" Warbler

- Nashville Warbler

- Virginia's Warbler*



What's a Neotropical Migrant?

A Neotropical migratory bird is a bird that breeds in Canada and the United States during our summer and spends our winter in Mexico, Central America, South America or the Caribbean islands.

How Many Kinds are there?

There are about 200 species of Neotropical migratory birds in Ontario. The majority are songbirds but there are also many shorebirds, some raptors, and a few types of waterfowl.

How Far Do They Travel?

Some of the longest migrations are made by shorebirds that nest in the arctic tundra of northernmost Canada and winter as far south as Tierra del Fuego, a one-way distance of up to 16,000 km. Other birds that winter in South America, and thus travel great distances, include: common nighthawks, red-eyed vireos, purple martins, barn and cliff swallows, blackpoll and Connecticut warblers, scarlet tanagers, and bobolinks. A round-trip migration distance for many of these species is as much as 22,000 km!

Why do they fly so far?

Because it's too far to walk! Now, seriously, the best explanation for why birds fly such great distances is it allows them to take advantage of seasonally abundant food and to avoid times when or places where food and other resources are scarce.

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

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Come Celebrate the Migration with Us!



On May 7-9, Pelee Island will celebrate its eighth Spring Song Weekend.

Events kick off at noon on Friday, May 7, with the start of the Botham Cup Bird Race. It will be a Green Race so most contestants will scour the Island on foot or by bicycle. The race ends at noon on Saturday, May 8. After an afternoon of relaxing, all gather at the Winery at 6.00pm for the annual Spring Song Banquet.

Each year there has been an invited author, who gives a reading. Past authors include, Farley Mowat, Alice Munro, David Suzuki, and Vincent Lam. Our guest writer this year is Brian Brett, past chairman of the Writers Union of Canada and author of the best-selling *Trauma Farm: A Rebel History of Rural Life*, which won the Writers Trust Award for non-fiction. Guest birders are the internationally acclaimed Robert and Birgit Freybe Bateman!

In addition to the terrific activities planned by the Pelee Island Heritage Centre for the Spring Song weekend, PIBO plans to join in the fun by hosting its first annual community pig roast!

The festivities will take place on Sunday, May 9th at 2pm at the East Park Campground. Brian Brett has graciously offered to guide us with his pig roasting skills and PIBO staff and volunteers will be providing a drink and food for anyone who wants to come down and join us.

It's an opportunity for us to show our appreciation to our local community and welcome all of our guests and supporters to have a drink on us. There will be games for kids and fun and food for all!

May 9th @ 2pm. East Park Campground, Pelee Island.

Everyone is welcome!



Become a Friend of PIBO...

Please enroll me as a Supporter of the Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO), in the category indicated below. (You will receive a charitable receipt for the full amount of your donation. Cheques should be made out to the Pelee Island Bird Observatory.)

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