

Biweekly Summary for May 16-31

by Olivia Maillet

The second half of May brought a whirlwind of fog, rain, mud, heat, and swarms of insects. For about a week after May 17, we were greeted with an incessant high-pitched hum on our morning walk on the trail into the banding station. The performers of this lovely song were the recently emerged and innumerable midges and mosquitoes. While they may be annoying to hear, see, or accidentally swallow while riding a bike, they are a reminder of one of the main reasons birds migrate—seasonal peaks in food abundance!



A young male American Redstart observed during the daily census. Photo by Olivia Maillet

During the daily census, we often observed 2-4 Green Herons singing and chasing each other around Fox Pond. One morning, we even heard two Least Bitterns calling back and forth, and on May 30, we heard an Olive-sided Flycatcher singing at Fox Pond from the dead trees. The

lemon-yellow Prothonotary Warblers have continued to sing, check out nest boxes, and feast on the insects that have emerged from the flooded forest. At the netting area, highlights included an Acadian Flycatcher singing “pizza!” above the nets, and the tail end of warbler migration: mostly American Redstarts, Blackburnian Warblers, and Bay-breasted Warblers.

We saw another push of shorebirds at the tip of Fish Point. Throughout the second half of May, we observed many species of shorebirds: Ruddy Turnstone, Dunlin, Semipalmated Plover, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, and Sanderling. On May 21, we were thrilled to watch over 200 Whimbrel migrating north past the tip and even had the chance to hear some of them singing!



A Canada Warbler banded on May 21. Photo by Olivia Maillet

As expected, banding numbers slowed down during the second half of the month. The most common birds banded were Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, Swainson's Thrushes, and American Redstarts. Although it was slow, we banded some new species for the year: a Canada Warbler, a Mourning Warbler, and two Indigo Buntings. Our most exciting capture happened on May 16, a relatively slow morning otherwise: A Worm-eating Warbler, a species that breeds in the eastern United States and is only rarely seen, let alone banded in Ontario. Later that morning, we captured a banded female Ruby-throated Hummingbird, which had been banded by another bander in August 2023 elsewhere on the Island. PIBO does not band hummingbirds, and this is the first time that PIBO has recaptured one.



A Worm-eating Warbler banded on May 16. Photo by Olivia Maillet



A recaptured Ruby-throated Hummingbird on May 16. Photo by Olivia Maillet

After a very slow and rainy last week at the station, with just 2-5 birds banded each day between storms, we had an exciting day of 15 birds of 11 species on May 31st. Our spring banding ended on June 1st, and our final bird of the year was a bright blue adult male Indigo Bunting! In total, this spring season, we banded 553 birds of 58 species.



An adult male Indigo Bunting banded on June 1. Photo by Olivia Maillet

Unsurprisingly, the insect emergence coincided with new songbird nests, those of Carolina Wrens, Warbling Vireos, and Red-winged Blackbirds, while other species, such as American Robins, already have fledglings. With the breeding season beginning for many songbirds here on Pelee Island, this is a good time for a reminder on what to do if you encounter a baby bird.

The most likely scenario is finding a “fledgling”, a young bird that has left the nest but may not yet be able to fly, which is perfectly normal. A fledgling will be close to the size of their parents, fluffy, hopping, or hiding, and can either be begging or quiet. If a fledgling is uninjured and out of harm’s way, leave it alone! They may not yet be able to fly, but their parents are nearby, finding food for their young. Move fledglings to a nearby perch or a short distance away if they

are in the middle of the road, nearby pets (better to bring pets indoors), or otherwise in harm's way. Another scenario is finding a "nestling" on the ground. A nestling is sparsely feathered, pink, can't stand up on its own, and often does not yet have its eyes open. If you find a nestling out of the nest, look around. The nest will be close by. Return it to the nest if it is safe and possible to do so.

If you find both parents dead, the baby bird is injured, or you can't find the nest, the best option is to contact a licensed Wildlife Rehabilitator. We are happy to provide guidance, but we do not have the ability, nor the facilities, to rehabilitate animals at Pelee Island Bird Observatory.