



THE PELEE ISLAND BIRD OBSERVATORY

Making Pelee Island a unique and vital part of the
international effort to preserve wild and migratory birds

Dear Friends of Birds,

The Pelee Island Bird Observatory (PIBO) was founded in 2004 by my partner Graeme Gibson (author of *The Bedside Book of Birds*) and his son, Graeme the Younger. We were drawn to Pelee, the southernmost inhabited point in Canada, because of its singular location in the middle of Lake Erie and its astonishing range of habitats for migratory birds.

For millennia the island has been a crucial pinch-point of two great hemispheric flyways. During periods of peak migration, tens of millions of birds fly over Lake Erie. Faced with strong headwinds, inclement weather, or simple hunger, vast numbers of them 'drop out' to rest and feed on the island before heading north to summer nesting grounds in Canadian forests and tundra or south to winter habitats in the United States and Central and South America. When the migratory pulse is at its strongest, the woods, marshes and shores of Pelee Island seethe with birds. A hundred and fifty species are not uncommon for a day's outing by an experienced birder.

Bird migration is one of the great mysteries of the natural world — these fantastic journeys undertaken by small feathered creatures guided only by genes shaped over millions of generations. How do they pull this off? There is much to learn. According to recent research, migrating birds may use a form of quantum mechanics to navigate the earth's electro-magnetic field. Wonders nest within wonders in this corner of the biosphere.

Since its inception, PIBO has paid close and careful attention to the annual migratory flows on Pelee Island, banding and recording the vital statistics of over 50,000 birds at our field station in a 'drowned woodland'. We are part of a national and international network of observatories devoted to the well-being of migratory species. As the world changes and warms, these vulnerable creatures face unknown challenges.

In recent decades the news has been daunting. Since 1970, 3.2 billion birds – almost 30% of the continent's total breeding population – have disappeared from North American skies. The hour is late and the situation is increasingly dire, but this realization has only further motivated us and our fellow conservationists. The birds are humanity's canary in the coal mine: if they face wipeout, so will we.

We are upgrading our infrastructure on Pelee Island with a \$3M Bird Centre project devoted to the observation and study of migratory species. Our new Bird Centre will accommodate PIBO's research staff and provide a guest suite for bird scientists from up and down the hemispheric flyway. In addition, the Bird Centre will offer learning experiences for visitors via a robust citizen-science portal that will provide guidance for those taking action in their home communities. Its presentation space will also host talks by experienced birders and distinguished researchers.

This new living/working/gathering place will promote our revitalized mission, help us to make new connections with bird scientists from all over the Western Hemisphere, and strengthen the bird monitoring network across Canada. There is crucial work to be done on Pelee Island, and the first step is more and better knowledge.

My partner Graeme and I founded PIBO to lend a helping hand to Nature. We knew that tracking the ups and downs of migrating bird populations would provide a crucial snapshot of the well-being of the web of life on Planet Earth. With our ambitious plans for the future, PIBO will become a central node in the widespread field of migratory bird science.

If wings vanished from the world, so would a universal symbol of hope and a source of profound awe and joy.

PIBO is an important part of my life's work. I hope you will decide to join us on this journey.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Margaret Atwood".

Margaret Atwood
Founding Honorary Chair

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

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