

PIBO Migration Summary: May 16-31, 2023

By Danielle Lacasse

Migration was still in full swing from May 16 to 20. During this period, several new bird species were banded. A Canada warbler, northern parula, and female rose-breasted grosbeak were successfully banded. Additionally, an eastern wood-peewee teased banders by landing on the top trammel of an open net and calmly perched there for a few minutes before flying off. The second black-throated green warbler of the season was also banded during this time. This individual was a young female. In another interesting net round, a male and female Baltimore Oriole were captured together in a net. The male was new, while the female had originally been banded in 2019, making her four years old. The excitement continued when a staff member walked up to a net and saw not one, not two, but three bay-breasted warblers! (figure 1). This was the first time this species has been captured this season. All three individuals were males of different ages. A wave of American goldfinches washed through the netting area, allowing the staff to band a few of them. Overall, it was a thrilling period with various bird species making appearances and providing valuable data through the banding process.



Figure 1: A male bay-breasted warbler captured May 18.

Five minutes away at Fox Pond and Fish Point, census observers were also treated with some nice sightings. As observers strolled along the edge of Fox Pond, a black-crowned night heron flushed from its resting spot. During the census on May 19, nine semipalmated plovers and a sanderling were recorded as first of the year sightings. Throughout the week, various species of peeps continued to arrive at the point. Dave and Danielle successfully identified black-bellied plovers, ruddy turnstones, dunlins, a least sandpiper and spotted sandpipers. On May 30, Sumiko observed two red knots at the tip, which were likely on their migratory journey to their breeding grounds in the north (figure 2). Additionally, she spotted a black vulture feasting on the carcass of a dead fish.



Figure 2. Two red knots stopped at Fish Point on their way to the breeding grounds. Their salmon-coloured breasts are a key feature that sets them apart from other shorebird species.

A swarm of insects descended on the island. It was unsettling driving to the station and watching countless undulating black clouds of bugs hover over the water and treeline. An eerie hum greeted staff as they opened their car doors and mentally prepared themselves for the itchiness that they knew was coming. As much as staff complained about the mosquitoes and stable flies, they acknowledge that they are an important food source for the birds and play a crucial role in the ecosystem's food web.

As a birder, you can never be too confident that you know all of the birds in your area. It is this unpredictability that allows people to explore the same stretch of beach or forest every day in the hopes of encountering something different. It is only a matter of time before a bird comes along that bears a remarkable similarity to another species or appears in a certain area at an unexpected time. Staff had two noteworthy encounters on census. On the way back along the west shore surveyors were perplexed by a small raptor that kept offering less than stellar views. Thanks to a quick identification shot, it was determined to be a young female peregrine falcon. Another raptor observed on census that sparked much debate was a broad-winged hawk. This

species is not typically seen on the island at this time of year, but after much discussion and outsourcing of some photos, the decision to identify it as a broad-winged hawk was made. It just goes to show that even the professionals can be stumped at times.

On the topic of challenging bird identification, it's official: the flycatchers have arrived. While warblers often steal the migration spotlight, the Empidonax species make their appearance later in the season and truly put birders to the test with their subtle physical characteristics and distinct vocalizations. Some species, like the willow and alder flycatchers, are so similar that where ranges overlap, it is often best to leave them unidentified. On May 30, staff captured four different flycatcher species: eastern wood-peewee, least, trail's, and the endangered Acadian flycatcher, as endangered by COSEWIC.

Sadly, David and Patricia completed their last day at the station on May 26. It has been a pleasure getting to know them and we hope that they are well as they continue on their travels, and that hopefully one day they will come back for a visit (figure 3). May 31 wrapped up spring migration monitoring. The banding station will be closed until August while staff switch their efforts to conducting breeding bird surveys. Census will continue until June 10. This season we banded 650 birds from 68 different species.



Figure 3. Staff and volunteers had a dinner to celebrate the end of a successful spring migration season. From left to right; Sumiko, David, Graeme, Patricia, Kevin, and Danielle.