



The Pelee Island Bird Observatory Auspice

Fall 2008

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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.

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Fall Migration Report 2008



After a busy and productive spring and a short break from fieldwork in July, we started-up our 6th Fall migration coverage season at Fish Point on August 1st. Coverage ran until November 15th for a total of 107 consecutive days. Mist nets were open for 92 of those days.

Migration activity increased progressively through August, with ones-and-tvos of fourteen warbler species recorded in the third week. Activity picked up considerably at the Point by the fourth week with the arrival of the first significant waves of

Top 10 species banded this fall and previous fall totals

	2008	2007
Swainson's Thrush	294	316
Golden Crowned Kinglet	277	158
Magnolia Warbler	258	163
Ruby Crowned Kinglet	194	88
Myrtle Warbler	165	144
Hermit Thrush	156	142
Gray-cheeked Thrush	142	89
American Redstart	140	59
White-throated Sparrow	96	57
Black-thr. Blue Warbler	88	31

warblers along with a nice variety of other songbirds. Flycatchers moved through in moderate numbers and thrushes and vireos were active as well.

Some steady rain and strong south winds associated with hurricane Ike produced little migration activity at the beginning of September, but conditions changed dramatically on September 16th and a wonderful variety of birds appeared in significant numbers during the third week of the month.

Cool weather on October 3rd and 4th made for a busy time at the Point until the 6th, but then south winds, rain and balmy conditions produced a decline in activity towards the end of the week. We began our Saw-whet owl monitoring project on October 3rd.

By the third week of October, cool temperatures and brisk north winds made for an active time at the Point and PIBO staff and volunteers were kept busy. While overall diversity began to decline towards the end of the month, there were lots of Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes, Yellow-rumped Warblers and White-throated Sparrows recorded at the station along with a nice variety of other late-Fall migrants.

We recorded 171 species in the official census area this fall and banded 2711 birds of 68 species, which is slightly up from the 1983 birds captured last fall.

Another productive and enjoyable year of field research on Pelee was made possible thanks to the critical support of all of PIBO's friends and supporters. On behalf of the entire field crew, thanks for all your support and best wishes for the Holiday season. See you next spring!



Thank you volunteers!

PIBO sends out a big thank you to all of our short and long-term volunteers in 2008. This is the third year that we've had the pleasure of Jim and Pat Woodford's company at the field station. Jim & Pat were the first to band birds on Pelee Island back in 1957. They were instrumental in establishing the Ontario Bird Banding Association and have some wonderful stories of banding on Pelee all those years ago. We're so pleased that they came back 50 years later to help us during the busy banding season.

David Hussell and Erica Dunn visited the station for the first time and spent a week with us in September. Both David and Erica have contributed greatly to our knowledge of birds and bird migration. Among many other accomplishments, David is founder of the Long Point Bird Observatory and was recently co-chair of the CMMN and Erica is past president of the American Ornithologists Union. We hope to convince David and Erica to make Pelee Island an annual trip!

Emilie Germain worked with us in October during our busiest month for bird migration and owling. Emilie has previous experience with migration stations from working with Observatoire d'oiseaux de Tadoussac in Quebec and Haparanda Sandskär Bird Observatory in Sweden as well as field projects in Alaska, France, and Ecuador.

Did you know...?

Although the intricacies of how birds navigate remain a mystery, this much seems to hold true: all migratory birds use a variety of cues, and different species seem to rely on some cues more than others. The earth's magnetic fields, location of the setting sun and the pattern of polarized light created, topographic features of the landscape, and prevailing wind patterns are among some of the cues that birds rely on to navigate.

Experiments with Indigo Buntings have revealed one of the cues that migratory birds use to navigate: stars. Buntings specifically use the patterns around the North Star. If young buntings are prevented from seeing the night sky during a critical stage in their development, they will not be able to orient properly for migration. This ability, therefore, is learned rather than genetically programmed. Other nocturnal migrants probably also use stars for compass direction.

If you would like to receive this newsletter by email only, please contact us.

Pelee Island Owls

There are two species of owls that are permanent residents on Pelee Island – the Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl. The Great Horned is a large, powerful hunter with a wingspan of almost 4 feet. Because of their lack of sense of smell they are one of the only animals that will hunt a skunk. The Screech-Owl is a much smaller owl – only about 10 inches tall – and they make the distinctive descending whinny call, which sounds a lot like a horse. Screech-Owl pairs are often monogamous and will mate for life.

Other species of owls, like the Northern Saw-whet Owl, are migrant visitors to Pelee, using the island as an important stopover for a day or two before continuing their migration. Ridiculously cute and standing only about 8 inches tall (and able to fit in a tin can), Saw-whets are named for their call, which sounds like someone sharpening a blade with a whetstone. We use recordings of their call to attract them to our nets so we can count them and gather information about their migratory patterns. Over the last two years, we've captured Saw-whets that have been banded at other places in Ontario, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin

Our new owl netting location in the Essex Region Conservation Area Stone Road Alvar (across the street from our cottage!) made for a convenient and more consistent netting effort. Nets were open for 33 nights between October 3rd and November 15th and 45 owls were captured. This year we had several owling nights and had members of the community join us for mulled wine, hot chocolate, and owl banding at the PIBO cottage. Visitors enjoyed seeing both Eastern Screech Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls.



Sumiko shows young Celia and Ricki a Northern Saw-whet Owl



Journal From the Banding Station

By Sumiko Onishi

Migrating birds are like a calendar and each day new species arrive that tell us about the changing seasons. There are always small pleasures to be found throughout the year at Fish Point – it’s not just about how many birds we band.

After returning from a long winter in my hometown in Japan, it’s wonderful to hear the familiar bird songs I’ve learned in Ontario. I continue to learn new calls almost every day. Once the colourful warblers show up, we know it’s the start of another warm and cheerful spring!

It’s also exiting in the autumn as we await the arrival of lots of songbirds. Everyone tries to guess how many birds we’ll see with the next cold front. When it’s busy, I’m also reminded about how carefully we have to treat each bird we band. We have a chance to see many rare species too.

Of course, towards the end of the season I’m really happy to think about not waking up so early in the morning. But there are many enjoyable opportunities to observe birds even after most of the migrants are gone.

I watch a little Winter Wren on the path in early November and a bright male cardinal in a thicket. Through my binoculars I could see he was feeding on dogwood fruit. It was a beautiful picture in the winter trees. I wanted to watch him eat his breakfast, but the bright little bird gave the impression he wanted to dine alone, so I happily turned and walked away. On the trail home, I met a group of turkeys. Our eyes met in silence before we parted amicably.

There are many pleasurable moments in the quiet winter forest when we enter with some reserve for the wrens, cardinals, and the turkeys. I’m looking forward to seeing them all again next spring!



PIBO Greeting Cards Now on Sale

Set of 5 different images \$10



About the Artist: Sumiko Onishi, a native of Japan, is a biologist and an artist. 2008 is her second year as a volunteer at PIBO, where she is learning much about the spring and fall migrations.



Highlights!

PIBO had a number of interesting sightings on the island this Fall:

- American Avocets (3) (Aug 5)
- Upland Sandpipers (2) (Aug 18)
- "Brewster's" Warbler (Aug 27)
- Baird's Sandpiper (Sept 4)
- Hooded Warbler (Sept 6)
- Pine Warbler (Sept 18)
- Scarlet Tanager (Sept 29)
- Short-eared Owl (Oct 9)
- Red-Shouldered Hawk (Oct 30)
- Late arrival Yellow-bellied Flycatcher (Oct 19)
- Late arrival Tennessee Warbler (Nov 2)

We welcome inquiries from anyone with birding experience who would like to volunteer at the station. PIBO will cover accommodation costs for those able to commit one month or more to the study. Experienced bird banders who would like to visit the station should contact PIBO by phone or email.

Pelee Island Bird Observatory

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Feeding Winter Birds



By supplying food for overwintering and early returning migrants, you can enjoy birds and their complex social behaviours year round in your own backyard. A wonderful way to attract birds is to install a feeder in early-fall and to keep it clean and full until spring. Place feeders in a sheltered spot, away from the wind, and close to a

window so you can watch birds come and go. Hawk silhouettes, streamers or window coverings may be required to prevent birds from smashing into windows.

Sunflower seeds are among the most versatile food for birds. Many types of kitchen scraps can be given to birds. Of these, some of the most often used are baked goods (give sparingly and watch for mould) and fats. Larger pieces of fat, preferably beef suet, can be used as is or can be rendered by heating to separate the fat from the connective tissue. Melted fat can be mixed with breadcrumbs and seeds and packed into dishes or other feeders. Birds love peanut butter, but some people say it should be mixed with fat to reduce any danger of choking.

Most birds appreciate water to drink in the winter. Heated fountains are available and will attract a wide range of species to your backyard for a drink and winter bath.

Spring Song 2009!

On May 8-9, Pelee Island will celebrate its Eighth Spring Song Weekend. The weekend takes place at the height of spring migration, and this unique island is a favourite stopover for a large number of birds.

Events kick off at noon on Friday, May 8, with the start of the Botham Cup Bird Race. Bring a team and raise money for PIBO through the Baillie Birdathon.

It will be a Green Race so contestants will scour the Island on foot or by bicycle. Each year there has been an invited author, who gives a reading. This year the guest author is internationally acclaimed writer Joseph Boyden, Giller-winning author of Three Day Road. Margaret Atwood will introduce Joseph Boyden at the banquet.

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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