



The Pelee Island Bird Observatory Auspice

Summer 2010

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Spring Migration 2010



PIBO's 2010 migration monitoring season began on April 2nd and it was quickly evident that spring migration was well underway in southern Ontario due to mild weather throughout the region. A mix of early-spring migrants was encountered, along with hawk migrations noted on the 5th and 6th and a creamy white 'leucistic' Turkey vulture among more than 140 of its fellows.

A nice variety of new species arrived at Fish Point from April 10th - 19th and migrants filtered through the area on a daily basis despite generally cool temperatures and

Top 10 species banded in Spring 2010 and previous spring totals

	2010	2009
Red-winged Blackbird	68	102
Magnolia Warbler	44	49
Ovenbird	43	27
Nashville Warbler	39	12
Canada Warbler	29	15
Gray Catbird	27	30
Yellow Warbler	26	31
Swainson's Thrush	26	29
Northern Waterthrush	26	17
Common Yellowthroat	26	22

some steady northeast winds and rain. A southwesterly breeze on April 29th, resulted in a very busy morning on the 30th. Fifty-seven species were tallied including good numbers of Blue Jays and swallows. A banded Hooded Warbler was one of eight warbler species recorded on the day.

May 1st - 10th was active at Fish Point with lots of new arrivals and many interesting sightings. Thirty-five spring 'firsts' were recorded during PIBO's official count period including a variety of familiar species. Five days of southerly winds and mild temperatures produced a steady stream of migrants, including the season's first White-eyed Vireo, Hooded Warbler, a pair of Willets, a Worm-eating Warbler, and a Golden-winged Warbler.

Diversity peaked on May 12th when 78 species were recorded in PIBO's standard 'count' area during six hours of morning coverage, including 19 warbler species. Warblers were also abundant on May 16th, with 22 species noted on the day. A singing Western Wood-Pewee was seen on May 18th and a Lark Sparrow the following day. Ken Burrell discovered both birds. The pewee is possibly just the third record for the province and likely a first for Southern Ontario.

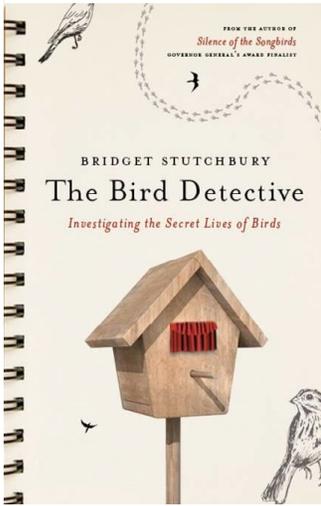
Migrants tapered off considerably by May 26th and it remained generally quiet, though the week started off on an interesting note with a Townsend's Solitaire at the Point. Two Acadian Flycatchers were banded during the week and two singing males were recorded on the 26th. The weather warmed up and migration activity continued to decrease towards the end of the month, with just 32 species tallied on May 29th.

We recorded 170 species in the official census area this spring and banded 710 birds of 66 species, which is slightly down from 780 in the spring of 2009.



Book Review

The Bird Detective: Investigating the Secret Lives of Birds, by Bridget Stutchbury (Toronto: HarperCollins), 247 pages, \$32.99.



Bridget Stutchbury's first book, *Silence of the Songbirds*, was a sobering account of the alarming decline in songbird populations, largely as a result of reduced or polluted habitat in their southern wintering grounds: it confirmed what PIBO has been recording for several years, that although the number of species is staying constant, the number of

individuals within species has been in steady decline.

In *The Bird Detective*, Stutchbury gives us a more general picture of the lives of songbirds, with accounts of many crucial aspects that affect the birds' survival and reproductivity. Written in an informal, highly readable style reminiscent of such scientists/essayists as David Quammen and Stephen Jay Gould, each chapter asks an important question – What is the evolutionary advantage of infidelity, for example – and brings us up to date on scientific findings relevant to the issue.

Of particular relevance to PIBO is the chapter on migration, "Frequent Fliers," and the light it sheds on songbird migration routes. Focusing on purple martins and wood thrushes, which migrate from the area around Lake Erie as far south as Brazil and Central America, respectively, Stutchbury attached light-sensitive geolocators to the backs of migrating birds and recorded their information upon recapture. "Though we knew a lot about each end of the journey," she writes, "we knew next to nothing about how individual birds made such a marathon trip." The geolocators gave an accurate account of where each bird was (plus or minus 150 kms), and showed that purple martins, who were thought to be slow migrators, made the 2,400-km leg to the Yucatan Peninsula in just five days, August 31 to September 5, and arrived in northern Brazil in mid-October. They made the return spring trip even faster: the entire 7,000 kms in just 13 days.

Like purple martins, wood thrushes crossed the 800-km Gulf of Mexico en route to Central America, arriving between mid-October and early December. In addition to route information, blood samples taken from wood thrushes showed that the stress of double brooding and the resulting late moulting meant that many thrushes

were setting out on their fall migration in poor physical condition, arriving late and therefore having to settle for poor territory – factors that may account for the declining numbers of wood thrushes in their northern breeding grounds.

The book is packed with much fascinating information – researchers can now tell where new feathers are grown by measuring the isotopes of rainwater they contain – and also addresses many issues that expand beyond ornithology. Changes in migration routes and destinations of European blackbirds and blackcaps, for example, are clear indications that global warming is not only advancing rapidly, but is also having a marked affect on natural processes that have been in place for millennia. As Bridget Stutchbury has been telling us all along, birds are our early-warning system, and they are sounding the alarm.

--Wayne Grady



PIBO joined in the Island's Canada Day parade in June. Hundreds of Islanders and visitors lined West Shore Road to watch the event. The theme of the parade, "Attractions on Pelee", couldn't have been more appropriate for a group of avid bird watchers!

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.



Other PIBO News...



PIBO hosted a community event in conjunction with the charitable organization, Computers for Kids. The CFK team came to the Island in mid-July to collect e-waste. They filled a truck and trailer with old computers, stereos, cell phones, and televisions, which they will take back to Windsor and recycle safely. CFK also generously supported PIBO with a donation of a refurbished computer for use at the field house.

PIBO's 2010 Birdathon was a smashing success thanks to the contribution of numerous friends and supporters who pledged a total of \$2500 to help birds and their habitats both locally and nationally. Due to the unflagging efforts of Ken Burrell from the University of Waterloo, who took the lead on the 'Big Day' as PIBO's honorary Birdathoner, a total of 123 species was recorded on the island over a 24-hour period. Equipped with his signature Mennonite summer sausage sandwich, Ken launched out the door in the wee hours of May 15th and wasn't seen again until long after dusk. Highlights from the day included Wilson's Phalarope, White-rumped Sandpiper, Olive-sided Flycatcher, two Hood Warblers, and a male Kentucky Warbler, along with a nice variety of other May migrants. The results were particularly impressive given the relatively low number of waterfowl and shorebirds that frequent the island in mid-May.

PIBO thanks everyone for their support and encouragement, along with a special thanks to Ken and all the residents of Pelee Island.

The Observatory finished its first full year of Breeding Bird Census work. Eight 10-hectare plots around the Island were surveyed during June and early July. The BBC is a habitat-based monitoring scheme that provides detailed information about the distribution, abundance and diversity of breeding birds in relation to specific vegetation communities. Many thanks to Erin Moffat, Adam Pinch, and Dean Ware for helping us through a hot, buggy field season! Results will be published at the end of the year.

Reverse Migration Project

by Ken Burrell, University of Waterloo

The end of my third year at the University of Waterloo, spring 2010, marked the beginning of my undergraduate research project, more commonly known as the undergraduate thesis. Having a keen interest in all aspects of birds, I decided I was going to look at 'reverse migration', something that has not been studied very extensively. "Reverse Migration" in the Spring is a term to mean birds launching themselves off land and flying south instead of north over open bodies of water. Knowing that Pelee Island is a great place to see birds, and with PIBO next door, I knew it was the perfect fit for my research. From April 26 to May 20 I counted the number of birds species that flew south off Fish Point, Pelee Island, out over Lake Erie. At the same time I recorded weather variables in the hope of determining why birds year after year fly south off Fish Point in the spring and what weather variables influence 'reverse migration'.

As classes don't resume for my final year until September, data analysis for my thesis has not yet begun. That being said, some clear trends can be seen from what I've recorded. For example, it appears that winds from the south play a major role in generating large movements of reverse migrants. Some other important observations were also recorded during the spring, such as large numbers of birds flying south. In total 17,669 individuals of 46 species were observed and counted flying south off Fish Point! Significant numbers were for particular species. For example, 426 and 342 Baltimore Orioles were observed flying south on May 5th and 14th, respectively! An impressive number to say the least! High numbers were also recorded for other species, including 126 Indigo Buntings and 50 Ruby-throated Hummingbirds on May 14th.

With the resumption of classes coming this fall, I am eagerly looking forward to trying to put the pieces of the puzzle pertaining to reverse migration together. I would sincerely like to thank the Pelee Island Bird Observatory, most notably Claire Sanders, Graeme Gibson the younger and Sumiko Onishi for generously providing me with accommodations and great friendship! It was a wonderful experience!





Highlights!

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

- Harlequin Duck (April 25)
- Willet (May 3)
- Worm-eating Warbler (May 3))
- Blue Grosbeak (May 6))
- Western Wood-Pewee (May 18)
- Lark Sparrow (May 19)
- Acadian Flycatcher (May 19))
- Summer Tanager (May 19)
- Townsend's Solitaire (May 21)
- Prothonotary Warbler (June 1)

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So Much to Celebrate in 2010!



Congratulations to the Pelee Island Heritage Centre for hosting another successful Spring Song festival! Hundreds of bird and book enthusiasts came to revel in the enduring enchantment of Spring migration. The community was graced with the presence of guest speaker Brian Brett - who read from his award-winning book *Trauma Farm* - and his partner Sharon, as well as guest birders Robert and Birgit Bateman, along with a surprise visit from Stuart McLean and Vinyl Café producer Jess Milton.

The Green Bird Race was a real challenge this year with strong winds and rain on Friday, starting shortly after the race began.

Nonetheless, eight brave teams entered the Green Bird Race on Friday afternoon; five were on bicycle and three used cars. The teams collectively saw a total of 135 species; among them were some very interesting and unusual sightings that included a Summer Tanager, a Blue Grosbeak, and a Yellow-breasted Chat.

Hearty congratulations go to team 'Piping Shovelers' - Paul Carter & Larry Cornelis- who won the Botham Cup with 109 species. Second place went to Jerry Demarco and his 11-year old daughter, Kestrel, with 89 species.

On Sunday, PIBO hosted our first annual Spring Song Community Pig Roast. Over 100 birders, Islanders, and cottagers joined us at the East Park Campground for good food and great company. It was a chance for us to make new friends and to thank the old ones for their enduring support.

Thank you to everyone who participated in the Spring Song weekend - we look forward to seeing you in 2010. Mark your calendars for May 7th for next year's festivities and stay tuned to find out who the next guest author will be!

Finally, the most joyful event of PIBO's spring was the union of PIBO staff in marriage on May 30th! Graeme and Sumiko were wed in a small ceremony on the north shore of Pelee Island. Best wishes for a lifetime of happiness and bird watching together at Fish Point! Congratulations!

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