

Middlesex Birds 2017

This year the total number of species I found in our records was 224, which is quite average compared to other recent years. Our highlights didn't include any new species, but we had some great birds, none the less. The best season was in the fall when an Eared Grebe (first in 4 years and 18th year), a Snowy Egret (our 3rd report), and a Little Gull (our 7th report) were all noted. However, a Connecticut Warbler (first in 3 years) was seen in the spring. A couple of Summer Tanagers (coming yearly since 2014) were seen in those two seasons, as well as two White-eyed Vireo (almost yearly since 2012). We also had a Red Crossbill (last in 2010 and prior to that 1998) reported from mid-summer!

For nesting, we had about 113 species, with a few others on territory, or possibly nesting, as from previous occasions, though no nests were located this year. Our most interesting nesting species was Dickcissel, reported from several sites near London.

The number of individual sightings reported to eBirds for Middlesex County was more than 61,700, some 20,000 more than last year. At least 40 birders entered data on their field trips. All these records are easy to retrieve from the eBird.org website. I have included data from the London (Dec 16) and Skunk's Misery (Dec 30) Christmas Bird Counts, the London one from our stats, and the Skunk's from eBird data submitted by Donald Pye and a few others to eBirds. The full results of the London CBC and data on who saw what, was published in the Cardinal as well as on our website, so I won't repeat most of those sightings, other than to mention them. As well, I have incorporated the many sightings given to me personally, and taken sightings from both the local Listserv, and Ontbirds Listserv. Thanks also to Jason McGuire who sent his year list to me. It does take a long while to go through over 65,000 records so forgive the list being published so late after the fact.

Weather-wise, we had a mild first winter, which allowed various species to survive into January and February. It didn't dip below 0 until about January 4, and after a few cold days we warmed up to +11 by January 12. Though we had a few quite cold nights, a good number of days were above 0 in January and February. March was variable as well, but many days induced migration, and by mid-May the temperatures were balmy. Many blackbirds, Killdeer, Horned larks, etc., came in February 22, and later migrants seemed to stream through rather quickly. The nesting season was good, but there was a prolonged period without rain. Fall began as relatively mild and although we had a few blasts of winter in mid-November, which tended to drive out many lingerers, it was not until the end of the year that things really froze up starting the second week in December.

Let's wander through the year in taxonomical order of bird families, looking at special species, noteworthy nestings, and interesting incidences.

In waterfowl, we had several Snow Geese reported, with a grand total of 35 seen on our CBC. Cackling Geese were reported in higher numbers than usual as well. The largest number at one time was a flock of 10 seen in mid-October by Laure Neish in west London. Both were also seen on the London CBC. As well,

Tundra Swans were seen on the London CBC, a flock of 30 were flying over. Most other waterfowl were present in usual numbers during migration and a few more species than usual were seen lingering to the CBC and further until the water froze up by January of 2018. Northern Pintail were seen in the first winter of 2017, and some stayed to be counted on the London CBC. A few Long-tailed Duck were reported this year and only one report of scoters, a White-winged Scoter in February. Open water along the Thames especially at Greenway Park allowed us to view a number these and of other species as well.

We had a good number of Wild Turkeys present and this year we had some other gallinaceous species to add to the list. There were a few reports of pheasant, likely escapes or releases in the County. But at Joany's Woods birders reported Ruffed Grouse so perhaps they survive in the County in this one spot.

This year we didn't have a complete count of Loons passing through, as previously counters spent time looking every morning during migration time in the Spring. Perhaps someone will take on that job. We did have a Common Loon reported in February, but one was released about the time of those sightings, so likely it was that individual. The Great Lakes appeared not to completely freeze up this year, so we didn't have an influx of escaping loons and grebes and other waterfowl that were lingering out there beyond the shore ice. Many grebes were reported, even some in winter periods, but a great find was an Eared Grebe lingering at Strathroy, or perhaps scouting for the future, at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons, first spotted by Diane Hayman on August 22 and seen last on November 5.

In the long-legged creatures, a great bird was located at Glencoe Sewage Lagoons, when Reuven Martin, Todd Hagedorn, and Kathryn Hoo found a Snowy Egret on August 6th. What a find for them. Our usual fall Black-crowned Night-Herons showed up in small numbers at Greenway in late July and August.

Raptors were well-represented. There were several sightings of Turkey Vultures in the first winter, but none were reported in December. Only a few reports of Northern Goshawk came in. Two from January and one seen on the London CBC were all that were reported. Golden Eagle continued to be found wintering in south-west Middlesex. Bald Eagles likely had 3 or 4 nests in the immediate area of London. And we had a huge total of 40 reported on the London CBC, many of them seen between Komoka and Delaware. A good number for both species were seen on the Skunk's Misery CBC as well, with 5 golden and 2 baldies. Besides Bald Eagles, Osprey were noted in large numbers. There were no less than 12 nest sites for Osprey this year, tabulated by Ric and Sandy Symmes. Many of them were successful in raising young. I heard that the original nest site near Plover Mills, is still functioning, or one close to it, that nest which Jack Mayos and I repaired in 2002, after their initial first year in 2001, the first nest in this area, and the furthest south in Ontario at that time. As usual, a few nesting Broad-winged Hawks appeared in Skunk's Misery.

It was nice to see that we had a Common Moorhen reported in May of the year; Luis Villamil had one in Westminster Ponds. They have been absent as nesting species since the waters

at Komoka Park Pond rose several years ago, around 2012, and washed out nesting habitat for them and the American Coot, among other species.

More nesting for Sandhill Cranes were seen, as one pair apparently fledged a youngster, found at the Delaware Sportsman's Ponds. Others likely nested in the County as pairs of cranes were found elsewhere. They possibly started nesting in 2009, as we had reports of them in June, but the first fledged young were reported in 2014.

Shorebirds were well-represented as several locations were found to attract them in migration. London's Dingman Constructed Wetland, Strathroy Sewage Lagoons, and several other spots were helpful in bumping our shorebird numbers. Our first migrants, Woodcock and Killdeer were first reported in the relatively mild end of February, beginning early this year on February 22. You will note on the chart that other early migrants arrived about that time. No particularly rare species were reported, other than a few phalaropes found. Wilson's and Red-necked Phalarope were in the fall, both reported at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons, the latter by Paul Nicholson chronologically first, and the former by Laure Neish at the same location a few days later. One likely species not reported was a Short-billed Dowitcher, so if you have a record, please let me know. Our usual unusual species were noted nesting such as Upland Plover in small numbers, mostly in the grasslands northwest of Strathroy.

Gull species were not reported as populous as some years. No White-winged Gulls appeared on our London CBC, probably due to the use of Saturday as our date. Less activity at the dump means any lingering gulls which have not learned that day to be a lean day for goodies are hard to find out in the nearby fields. However, Iceland and Glaucous and Great Black-backed Gulls were all noted there in January. And one great find was a Little Gull seen at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons, by Laure Neish on November 16. A few Caspian Terns showed up in the fall to be tallied.

We like owls, right. Well we were treated to the usual numbers of Snowy Owls in the traditional places in both winter periods of the year. Birders found up to three at the area along Highway 22 and School Roads, and the same number seem to winter in the Lucan area. One or two others were reported elsewhere, especially one along Carriage Road south of our Club Property. Lucas Foerster found a couple of Long-eared Owls in March of the year, leading me to put a question mark in the breeding column. Others were reported around Nissouri North, (likely wintering there) by Linda McCutcheon. We had some sightings of Short-eared Owls in the fall and winter months of the year, and one was seen at the dump in January.

Nighthawks are usually not represented well, but with the potential for nesting in Arva, and the huge number (50) seen on August 10 by Quinten Wiegertsma at Killaly Meadows ESA, we had good numbers. I was able to get some information about the London Swift watch and the high totals are recorded on the table. Interestingly, both spring and fall highs were at the Labatt's Garage/Warehouse.

Our latest Ruby-throated Hummingbird was reported on September 30. Do you have a later sighting for the County?

We had a few Red-headed Woodpeckers reported, even one in the first winter period at Springbank Park. A few nesting areas for that species were also noted. Ian Platt and I found one pair on our

Strathroy area Breeding Bird Survey as well. Several sites for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker were also reported, and a couple managed to survive at feeders and elsewhere to be counted for our CBCs. Generally, numbers of woodpeckers appear higher, probably due to the number of dead ash in the area. Record numbers were reported for Red-bellied Woodpecker on the London CBC.

Continuing with raptors, since taxonomically falcons are now placed after woodpeckers, we continue to have three species potentially nesting in Middlesex. Merlins are still reported from South London, but no nest was found that I know of, and Kestrels, while still in low numbers, nest hereabouts. Our local Peregrines are still reported from the downtown area, and some likelihood for nesting is still prevalent, but no young have been spotted in many years.

We had a few reports more than usual of Olive-sided Flycatcher, and ditto for Yellow-bellied. Acadian Flycatcher still is nesting in Skunk's Misery, and likely a few other significant woodlots.

We had a White-eyed Vireo reported from Donald Pye in Skunk's Misery, first on July 16, and while on territory, it is not known if an actual nesting occurred. We also had a late report of one on October 16 by Lucas Foerster, in his own yard in London. And a larger number of Philadelphia Vireos were reported in both migration periods.

Corvids appeared in good numbers as usual, and at the usual time. For most of the winter, the largest roost I know of in Middlesex was about 2500 along Parkhouse Drive south-west of Mt. Brydges.

Tufted Titmice seem to be spreading into new areas. More have been reported and a grand total of 11 were noted on the London CBC, a new high number. At least one pair of Marsh Wren likely nested in Delaware Sportsman's Ponds, and our numbers of Carolina Wren were higher indicating a good winter survival rate.

Thrushes were represented by all the likely ones.

We had good numbers of bluebirds on the London CBC (21, a new high). And we had more reports of Gray-cheeked Thrush in both migrations periods. A large number of American Robins wintered in January, and February, and we had a good number lingering for our London CBC as well. One notable count was made by Ian Platt at his place in north London, when over 250 were seen heading into a roost spot, on January 24.

While we had a couple of reports of Northern Mockingbird this year, there doesn't seem to be any suggestion that they are doing better in the area, as we noted with other species gradually moving in from southern areas, such as the titmice and Carolina Wren.

Just a note about Starlings. The high count seemed to be about 4200 at the Westminster Dump, reported from February 1, by Lucas Foerster.

American Pipits were seen in both migration periods this year, but as usual in low numbers.

Lapland Longspurs and buntings were seen in both winter periods, with the highest numbers of in mid March. The Snow Buntings, as usual peaked in late November and early December.

We had 28 species of warbler reported this year. Our best was perhaps the Connecticut Warbler seen by Cathy Quinlan in Joany's Woods on May 23. We had some high one-day totals reported in the spring, as many birders loved getting out and looking for new arrivals. Generally,

warblers did arrive somewhat early due to the good weather. There were at least 8 warbler species nesting, and the potential of two or three others. Magnolia Warbler was noted in Skunk's Misery in June, as was Black-throated Green. While they could have been late migrants, as some warblers are, they have been found nesting there before. The number of Chestnut-sided and Hooded Warbler nesting at Skunk's Misery continues to be good, with at least 9 of the former and at least 10 of the latter, having singing males on territory. Also noted were one Mourning Warbler from there, and one from Joany's Woods. I think there were fewer Cerulean Warblers nesting in Skunks, as I have only about 3 being reported on territory. Let's hope that there is not a decline in that species.

Although the Grasshopper Sparrow continues to nest in Middlesex, the numbers of them seem to be continuing the steady decline, due to habitat loss but also human disturbance in their preferred nesting areas. Clay-colored Sparrow nesting continues at a few sites and I know of 3 locations now. It is certainly possible that a White-throated Sparrow nested at the Sifton Bog, as one was seen there well into June. This location has had them nesting in the past, but not recently.

We had two reports of Summer Tanager in the County this year. One was found in the spring by John Luke Wheatley in Cavendish Woods in London. Then in the fall, Laure Neish reported one at a friend's place for a while in November, which didn't stay until the CBC, oh well, better for the bird.

It was an exciting time during nesting period, with about 7 sites for Dickcissel in the area near London. I think the first reported one was from June 12, north of London, by Cathy Quinlan. Soon after that there were several reports from near there, and south of London. They have been found more recently, almost yearly with another good insurgency in 2012. Another note in blackbird types, a few Eastern Meadowlark were noted in the winter months of January and February, one seen at a feeder.

I will end with winter finches of course. What a relatively poor number of them arrived in the fall and winter periods. We had a few wintering Purple Finches, and a few seen on migration. A few Pine Siskins were also reported, but only one Redpoll in each winter was recorded. Amazingly, a Red Crossbill was reported by Laure Neish in August, in Komoka PP. She heard it only, but she has very good experience with their calls and had recently heard them in Tobermory, where they had been reported by others and they likely could breed. I don't know what happened to cause that strange occurrence, so far out of season, but they are known as wanderers and there were several other southern Ontario sightings reported not too far away, at about the same date. Besides Tobermory, sightings were also near Uxbridge, Peterborough and Cobourg.

That is it for the annual Middlesex County Bird Report for 2017. The chart is a working copy, as there may be some of you out there whom have other records that I was not privy to. Please send me corrections and additions as soon as you can.

I have kept these summaries since 1983, and have a table which has all those years, and have added back to 1967, the last year an annotated list of Middlesex Birds were tabulated and published, using the pre-67 data.

If you need to figure out the status of the Birds of Middlesex, or their arrival dates, etc, please let me know.

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