

Middlesex Birds 2018

This year has been a good year for birds in Middlesex County. A number of rare and unusual birds were found by a number of people. I went through the almost 84 000 sightings records from eBird, entered by about 200 observers. I also had a few dozen people submit records to me via other options. And of course, I glean sightings from our MiddlesexElginOxford Listserv and that of Ontbirds. We recorded 234 species which is higher than average. Also, about 110 species either nested or attempted nesting, with a few more potential nesters due to being found during nesting period, such as White-throated Sparrow, singing on territory for a number of weeks. I have included information for the Christmas Bird Counts in Middlesex for 2018. The London one is in the last column of the accompanying chart. The Bothwell Count, aka, Skunks Misery CBC which occurred on December 30 is included in the regular data. Thank you to Jason McGuire who continues to submit an annual report on the survey sheets. If you want to keep tabs that way, let me know and I can send you the forms via email.

I usually mention about the weather conditions of the year. Our first winter, January through February, ended up rather mild by the end so migration of the more hardy species like Robin, and some blackbirds began in mid to late February. Spring was a bit cool through April but conditions in May promoted migration to move on rather well. Summer season was quite hot so breeding was not affected by bad weather. The Fall season however, was quite cool and wet, in October and especially November, which seemed to move birds through more quickly and discourage lingering. And the winter of December was a bit colder at the beginning, freezing the still water and driving out some of the lingering waterfowl but right around the Christmas Bird Count it was milder with little snow cover so birds were more scattered and not hunkered at feeders. As the month progressed it became somewhat cooler but snowfall was not great. Neither was it very cold.

No new species were recorded but several species rated as accidental in Middlesex were found, species we have had before but in so few sightings that they wouldn't be expected to be seen again in Middlesex in the near future, or birds which have been found in a season which they a seldom present. These included Black-headed Grosbeak, American White Pelican, Eared Grebe, Common Raven, Willet, Cattle Egret, Yellow-breasted Chat, Dickcissel and Barred Owl. There were also several out-of-season winter birds noted such as winter period warblers like Nashville and Orange-crowned, and even a House Wren. There was a possible sighting of a Barrow's Goldeneye. Unfortunately, Ben Evans, who saw the bird, didn't get photographic or other conclusive evidence for acceptance to our records.

Let's run through the more interesting sightings and trends.

It was a good year for Snow goose with seven sightings from a variety of places with maximum of 9 seen together near Ailsa Craig by Laure Neish.

There was a single sighting of Greater White-fronted Goose on February 27 in Ivey Park by Jackson Kusack.

A number of records for Cackling Goose were recorded but mainly the same birds. One at Springbank, first seen on January 11 by Laure Neish which seemed to linger until March 10. Shortly after that one turned up at Komoka Pits, on April 2 reported by Quinten Wieggersma. In the fall we had a report from Gord Saunders and then one on December 2 at Komoka by Ben Evans.

Three reports came in of the increasing Trumpeter Swan. One group of 3 was reported in Strathroy Sewage Lagoons late March and first of April, by a few observers including Diane Hayman and Quinten Wiegersma on March 31. In the fall Jason McGuire found one on the Wilton Grove Storm Pond and later Estela Quintero-Weldon found one on a farm south of London.

Tundra Swans moved through in good numbers in the spring and fall. Over 1000 were noted at the flooded field in the southeast part of Middlesex on Pigram Line on the border with Oxford County. Interestingly, 3 flocks were noted flying near London in December.

From the dates for Blue-winged Teal it may be possible they nested this year.

A number of ducks spent at least some time here in the first winter of 2018, A Northern Shoveler was found at Greenway Park on February 15 by Stacie and Lucas Foerster, an unusual winter sighting. And an American Wigeon was reported from Springbank Park through much of the winter. Up to 9 Northern Pintail were seen in Springbank Park during January and February. A rare winter Green-winged Teal was reported from the end of January by Frank King and Ben Evans in Springbank Park. Finally, up to 3 Redhead were noted in 3 different locations in January and February,

Once again, a Common Merganser was noted well past migration dates on the Thames River, at Springbank Park on June 26, and perhaps the same one July 27 at Gibbons Park.

Red-breasted Merganser is quite rare in Middlesex, but we had one in Springbank and Greenway through much of the first winter and a few seen in the fall at a few sites.

A Red-necked Grebe was reported on July 25 by Estela Quintero-Weldon on a Medway Road Gravel Pit. Ben Evans got great pictures of the full breeding plumage bird. There are actually sites for nesting in Southern Ontario, but the sites are on Lake Ontario.

Sandhill Crane continue to nest in Middlesex County. Several pairs and some young were noted in a few scattered sites.

Stilt Sandpiper are rarely seen in migration, but a few were reported in the fall, and a very late record from October 16 was given by Laure Neish, seen in Komoka Provincial Park.

One shorebird we seldom see in Middlesex County is Willet. Very surprising to have two at the Dingman Constructed Wetland on Dingman Drive east of Wellington Road, on July 17, reported by Will Van Hemessen.

A group of 3 sanderlings, rare for the County, were seen on July 26 by Laure Neish and Ben Evans at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons.

A group of 29 Short-billed Dowitchers were found May 15 at Kirk Cousins CA by Sarah Bonnett and Will Van Hemessen. At Dingman Constructed Wetlands, a few more were seen in the fall

Shorebird species are seldom seen in the winter period, but a Wilson's Snipe was found along White Oak Road on January 23 by Lucas Foerster.

Despite having both Ring-billed and Herring Gulls present for every month of the year, neither have been shown to nest in Middlesex County. Throughout the breeding season for these birds, a few non-nesting gulls are usually found in the County. Building in numbers up to into December both species, but

particularly Herring Gulls, linger at the Westminster Dump, up to over 3000 Herring Gulls, before the numbers decrease to low levels in January and February of the next year as temperatures drop. So it is difficult to pinpoint a beginning or end to migration periods, so I looked for a sudden significant change in the numbers of those species to determine dates. This is the same for other species which have a few sightings during the breeding season but are not known to breed in Middlesex. Most are species which have non-breeding years before becoming adults. A few may linger due to illness or lingering.

And the rare gulls like Iceland, Glaucous and Lesser and Great Black-backed Gulls all seem to mostly disappear in January and/or February depending on the winter conditions, and don't arrive until later November or early December. They are found with those large congregations at the Westminster dump.

Of note with these birds were up to 4 Glaucous seen a few times at the dump in December, up to 5 Lesser Black-backed, up to 4 Iceland, and also seen for an amazing number of Great Black-backed Gulls on December 21, when 63 were recorded by Lucas Foerster.

There was an unsubstantiated report of a flyover of a Red-throated Loon near Gibbons Park on October 13. Regular migration dates in the fall for Common Loon are usually in September but there was a sighting July 6 at Komoka by Laure Neish, perhaps an injured bird.

A Double-crested Cormorant was noted on the Thames River, south of Wharndiffe to Springbank Park through much of December. Similar to the gulls, this species has been found lingering in suitable habitat, such as large ponds/lakes in our County during its breeding season but there has not been a nesting in our County.

A remarkable sighting was on August 28 when Corey Hayes found an American White Pelican at the Komoka Ponds. He took a great picture of the bird. I am not aware of any further reports of that bird.

An Eared Grebe was found on January 11, on the ground in Whitehills subdivision and brought into Salthaven where it was rehabbed and released on the Thames River.

We had a successful nesting of Least Bittern at the Delaware Sportsman's Pond this year. At least 2 young being fed by parents was noted in early July.

A Great Egret hanging around at the Dingman Constructed Wetland from late May through August interfered with the usual dates for migration of that species. Usually they disperse from the nest sites in July. There was also a later spring sighting of an apparent pair in June from Cuddy woods SCRCA. No further reports but no nesting is suspected. They have not been reported as nesting in our County.

Another great sighting was that of a Cattle Egret in November, seen first by Jason McGuire on the 4th out on Hyndman south of Melbourne

Bald Eagles continued to nest in Middlesex, with 2 or more nests in the City and several others known along the Thames River and one over in Coldstream.

And Golden Eagles continued to winter in south-west Middlesex with up to 4 seen in January.

Northern Goshawk is a rarely seen species in Middlesex and usually reported in the Fall. This year we had three sightings listed in the Fall.

Interestingly, a Snowy Owl was located near 1625 Centre Road, near Strathroy until at least August 1. A couple of other spots in the County had sightings into June. Very strange behavior for this Arctic specialty.

Exciting to have a Barred Owl in the area of UWO reported first November 14 by Brian Beharrell. It was seen a number of times into December.

About a dozen sites were reporting Red-headed Woodpecker which is somewhat encouraging, due to their decline. At least some of those birds were successfully breeding.

The uncommon Pileated Woodpecker was sighted in more than usual numbers this year. There have been increases in that species for the last few years.

There continued to be a decline in the number of American Kestrels in Middlesex. It is difficult to tell when migrants come and go with such low numbers being recorded, and only a few are known to be nesting.

In contrast, the number of Merlin sighted has gone up a lot. Again, it is tough to tell when the migrants are coming through for the reason that birds are present most of the year, and several are nesting in the city.

And despite the quite large number of sightings for Peregrine Falcons, with some hanging around our buildings in London, I don't know of any successful nesting. One of our 2000-year nestlings, Buffy was found with a broken wing at the St. Mary's Cement plant. Unfortunately, she did not survive surgery. She was known to be nesting in the area of that plant.

For several days in early May a White-eyed Vireo was reported from Northbrook Park, first spotted by Quinten Wiegiersma. And a very late one was found by Don Webb and Frank King in Komoka PP on October 18.

Common Ravens are listed as accidental due to the low numbers we have recorded in the County. But in 2018, one was reported by Lucas Foerster on September 11, at Five Points Forest, a TTLT property. And Gord Cameron and Mike Channon reported one on January 13 on Whalen Line, near Granton.

Sightings of Tufted Titmouse continue to rise. There are a number of nesting sites in the County, including Skunk's Misery and along the Thames River in and near London.

A really excellent winter bird, a House Wren, was found and photographed by Frank King on December 19 at the Coves. We had one on a Christmas Bird Count in 1975, and there have been a handful of other winter sightings over the years.

And speaking of winter birds, two reports for Gray Catbird came in for December. Lucas found one at Fanshawe CA on the 11th, and Dianne Hayman had one on the 31st at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons. And one was reported by Jill Crosthwaite on Becher Street in London from January 11 to February 1.

Hayden Bildy found a Bohemian Waxwing on December 9 in London, our first in a few years.

Laurie Neish was visited by 2 Hoary Redpolls on November 21 at her home.

Our only crossbill sighting was a single White-winged seen by Quinten Wiegiersma in Virginia Park, London.

Only one report of Northern Mockingbird was from late Spring in the yard of Chris Goodwin in Oakridge.

At least one White-throated Sparrow, and possibly two, were found singing on territory in Sifton Bog, suggesting the potential for breeding. I believe they have nested there before but not for many years.

Another great potential nesting bird was a Yellow-breasted Chat. But it was only recorded once that I know of, on May 30, by Paul Gelok and Travis Cameron in on the south side Komoka PP off Gideon Drive.

We had a Prothonotary Warbler at Westminster Ponds in late April, first reported by David Rodenhiser, but the bird was not recorded after April 30.

Remarkably up to 3 Orange-crowned Warblers were reported from the Coves, first by Ben Evans, though one was found there first on October 3 by the Lucas Foerster, and that may have been one of the ones Ben found. Also noted by Ben on December 10, was a Nashville Warbler. Another one of the latter species was also found in December on the 8th, reported from the Strathroy CA, by Cathy Quinlan.

Various rare and unusual warbler species had breeding evidence for our County. In Skunk's Misery there were a good number of Chestnut-sided and Hooded Warblers on territories. Cerulean Warblers were also noted there. There was a sighting of a Magnolia Warbler on the first of July, by Blake Mann, in Skunk's Misery. One was noted there in late May as well which suggests that the species might have been on suitable territory.

There was an attempted nesting of Dickcissel south of London, from May 27 to at least July 4. It was during that time a singing male was there. And reports up to two females in the same area in that period. It is not known what happened after that. So many have been found in the area over the last few years, the status has been upgraded to occasional from accidental.

I received an email with a great picture of a Black-headed Grosbeak which came to a feeder for a day in June. Hank Haliday who contacted me, said the bird had visited his neighbours, Ed and Judy Preszcator, and they live not too far from Ailsa Craig. It is unfortunate it didn't stick around for the birding community to enjoy.

Our Christmas Bird Count was on December 15 and produced a number of good finds. Among the special birds were Tundra Swan, Northern Pintail, Canvasback, Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Phoebe, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, Gray Catbird, Fox Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird. As well, the afore-mentioned warblers, the Orange-crowned Warblers, as well as a Yellow-rumped Warbler were also noted on the Count. We had several good gull species, including Iceland and Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Over-all we had far fewer individuals found on the Count, possibly due to a number of factors but mainly I think from weather conditions, the poor weather in the Fall preceding the Count, and the relatively mild weather on the Count day. The number of species was a bit lower than average at 74.

So as you can see, a great year for birding in Middlesex in 2018. The chart is a working copy, so if you have any alternative dates, please let me know. There is an accompanying file which explains the structuring and completing of the chart.

Please continue to submit your sightings through eBird.org. Or send directly to me via email. And consider using the MiddlesexElginOxford and Ontbirds Listservs. Through your records we can get a clear picture of the birds of Middlesex.

I continue to work on a spreadsheet with data back to the beginning of London Birding to give average arrival dates and so on. But some of it is completed so be sure to get in touch with me if you want to obtain an electronic copy of that to see status of our birds.

Pete Read

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Since 1983

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