

Tips on Record Keeping and How to Read the Bird Chart

1) **STATUS** -I've tried to give some idea of the chances of seeing our birds with letter codes just after the name of the bird. Abundance symbols are not as on many checklists, they give the *probability of seeing a species on an outing in Middlesex*, rather than totally an imperial value. However, in the last few years, owing to the large number of sightings reported through eBird, by about 200 observers, our status codes have been revised. In many cases a sighting could be reported by a number of observers, leading to many reports outlining the same bird, so that the number of reports does not always reflect the abundance or regularity of a bird. For instance, a Trumpeter Swan which lingers for a few weeks, might end up with 30 or more reports in eBirds. With this many apparent sightings it would seem shift the category of this species in the year from occasional to rare. So when I use the word sightings in the descriptions below, it refers to the sighting itself and not the reports sent to eBirds. I look through those reports to determine how many actual different birds are involved. So a sighting for this report is actually different from empirical sightings on eBirds.

c –common- Present in numbers, widespread or conspicuous, and should be seen in habitat and in season on almost every trip. Species likely to have more than 100 sightings reported per year and often in large numbers or reported consistently throughout the year in an easily accessible location.

u -uncommon- Present but due to low numbers, migration span, behaviour, or distribution, will be seen in habitat and season on only some trips. A species with usually 30 to 99 sightings reported per year.

r -rare- Present in low numbers or due to other factors not expected to be seen without special effort. Probably able to be seen every year, 10 to 29 sightings in most years.

o- occasional- Not expected to be seen each year but may be present. Less than 10 sightings involved during dates seen.

a -accidental- Birds that have been reported in Middlesex but not expected to be found in Middlesex again in the near future or they could be out-of-season bird dates when species is not likely in the County.

y - A resident species in Middlesex although some species experience migration.

w –winter seasons (2 times, Jan-Feb, and Dec)

S –spring season (late Feb-May, and some species until June)

s –summer season (Jun-Jul, Aug for some species)

f –fall season (Jul and Aug for some, like shorebirds but usually Sep – Nov, a few arrive in Dec)

m –migrant -species that mainly migrate through this area although some will nest here

i – irruptive migration, irregular numbers perhaps winter finches or Snowy Owls which come south in erratic numbers.

***** - has nested or has had nesting evidence

2) **BIRD CATEGORIES AND COLUMNS USED**-Where possible and when available, all of the listed dates will be given, depending on the species being present in the county. London Christmas Bird Count is included for all birds in the last column. Skunks Misery CBC data is within the table.

a. **Wintering birds** -birds that breed elsewhere but will spend all or part of the winter in this area. Examples include winter finches, juncos, etc. The pertinent dates include...

-first fall arrival date, high number date, latest spring date, out-of-season dates sometimes indicating high numbers of individuals in brackets.

b. **Nesting birds**- birds that come to this area to breed are found in the breeding column with a Breeding Bird letter code denoting breeding evidence and

sometimes a significant breeding date where available as well as a few other pertinent dates

- ? Indicates a possible nesting species,

-first spring arrival date, high number date, Breeding Code Letter(s), latest fall sighting, high fall number date, out-of-season dates

c. **Resident birds** -Birds that appear to be here all year but may migrate somewhat, or be joined by those from elsewhere. This could be like Blue Jay which appears to remain but since others migrate through the County, it is hard to decide in which category, migrant or resident, particular birds may be classed. Dates including...

-Some key dates including migration highs, highest breeding evidence, and CBC totals

d. **Migrant birds** –birds that travel through this area to nest further north. Some species might remain rarely to breed or in very small numbers but are considered migrants mainly and the following will be recorded...

- First spring date, high number spring date, latest spring date, first fall date, high number fall date, latest fall date, out-of-season dates, and if suspected of breeding a breeding date with code

e. **Rare, Occasional, Accidental birds** -usually all sightings will be listed but if sometimes just the key ones. For example, if an eruption of a species of owl occurs, which is usually very rare, only a few days would be listed.

3) COLUMN NAME DEFINITIONS –each column heading explained

First spring -First sighting of the species in spring if a migrant, or nesting bird, March being considered first “spring month” A few species arrive sometimes arrive in late February. Some not arrive until May or early June.

Spring high -Highest one day total seen for a migrant, seen by a single person or number of people's sightings on that date. Note that high number dates can be totalled for a number of sites, indicated with a dash followed by a number. For instance, May 2(10-2) means high count on May 2 is 10 individuals, at 2 sites.

Latest spring -Latest date to be recorded for a migrant species or for a wintering species. Some non-breeding birds or lingering birds stay longer into the breeding period but in low numbers, and rather than skew our data to include so few aberrant birds may be left off the chart.

Breeding evidence - Breeding evidence for the species indicated by letters as in the Breeding Bird Codes are as on the eBird site at

<https://support.ebird.org/support/solutions/articles/48000837520-ebird-breeding-and-behavior-codes>

If possible a date is put in for when the code was achieved. The Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) from near Strathroy to near Glencoe and the Ontario Field Ornithologist (OFO) Skunk's Misery outing are in early June so often a T in the column would be from one or both of those dates. Other dates indicate being present in breeding season. If unsure of nesting status the date or a blank space has a question mark in the box.

First fall -First sighting of a migrant in the fall or a wintering species arrival.

Fall high-Highest one day total seen in one day for a migrant, or nesting species about to migrate as per flocking behaviour seen, or flock of wintering arrivals, seen either by a single person or multiple sightings from the same date. Note that high number dates can be totalled for a number of sites, indicated with a dash followed by a number. For instance, Sep 2(10-2) means high count on September 2 is 10 individuals, at 2 sites.

Latest fall -Latest record for a migrant or last date for a breeding species. Last "migrant month" is considered as November though some don't leave or arrive until December.

First/second winter, out-of-season -Records for these 2 columns include dates for species encountered not in their usual times, eg. Species here but not known

to nest, winter birds lingering into spring or summer, nesting or migrant birds lingering into winter, etc.

CBC total - London CBC from first Saturday in Count period is listed. Other Counts which have part of their list in Middlesex County are tabulated into the table. This column gives an idea of lingering birds and their abundance, resident birds and wintering birds and their abundance.

4) RECORDS VS SIGHTINGS and NOTES ON RECORDKEEPING -Note that the sightings given in the chart are considered authenticated/substantiated records unless otherwise stated. Since our records are being used more and more for research purposes, the Middlesex Birds Record Committee (MBRC), Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) and eBird are trying to make records more accountable by insisting on documentation for unusual and rare species, or out-of-season records when necessary. Many flagged birds are reviewed through eBird soon after a sighting has been made. Some bird sightings are also adjudicated by the MBRC for authenticity but usually only for a new bird for Middlesex which has not been already adjudicated by either eBird or the OBRC. A completed rare bird report or detailed oral report will do for most sightings. However, for new species to our checklist and accidental species, full documentation or photos, etc, are required. For information on how to document your sighting of a New, Accidental or out-of-season bird please contact me. Or if you would like to know the Middlesex Bird Record Committee criteria for acceptance of a record, let me know also.

The number and quality of sightings continues to be high. You can help in a few ways.

As mentioned above, you data-keepers could keep track of your sightings and trip lists, and then at year's end, transfer them onto Middlesex Recording sheets. A new one is available for each year. These computer files are available from me. The sheets have our Middlesex County list on them as well as columns

as on the chart to fill in your sightings for the particular species in the appropriate time slot, throughout the year. By filling them in, you can save me a lot of time.

Obviously for significant sightings (see u,o,r,a on our checklist), please contact me as soon as possible so others may see your goodies (birds). For sure report such birds to Ontbirds, and to eBirds in order to spread the word. In case of very sensitive species, let me know privately and we can see what can be worked out if possible for others to enjoy your finds.

(Besides eBirds, bird sightings can be submitted to Pete Read at 519-472-2887, or e-mail at psread11@gmail.com or by giving them to Pete at Club meetings.)