

MIDDESEX BIRD LIST FOR 2016

The total number of species for the 2016 year was 223 which is a very good number of species. The discovery of a Lark Sparrow near Komoka by two birders was very noteworthy, only our second sighting for Middlesex ever. Also interesting was our third year of Harlequin Duck wintering in London, though none were subsequently found in the second winter of the year. Several other waterfowl species were exciting too, including a number of White-fronted Geese, Cackling Geese, and even a Trumpeter Swan. We had a Yellow-throated Warbler reported in the spring. A Raven was found in the first winter. A group of Dickcissel appeared on territory northwest of Strathroy in an area where they were trying a few years ago. As well, there were a few interesting warbler species, other than those that have been there for years were on territory in Skunk's Misery. An unusual sighting of Ruddy Turnstone added to the great year. Check below for more details and more interesting trends and birds.

The number of individual sightings reported to eBirds for Middlesex County was in excess of 49 650. At least 30 birders entered data on their field trips. These records are easy to retrieve from the eBird.org website. I have included data from the London and Skunk's Misery Christmas Bird Counts, the London one from our stats in a column, and the Skunk's from eBird data submitted by Donald Pye, imbedded in the first winter column. As well I have incorporated the many sightings given to me personally, and taken sightings from both the local Listserv, and Ontbirds Listserv. Consistent records have come from Bill and Colleen Lindley, and Bill Maddeford, among others. Thanks also to Jason McGuire who sent his year list to me. It does take a long while to go through over 50 000 records so forgive the list being published so late after the fact.

I also included all the Middlesex sightings from the many reported on the Middlesex/Elgin/Oxford Listserv, monitored by Peter Burke. Thanks to all who contributed to that data.

A big loss to our records for subsequent years will be having Dave Martin and Linda Wladarski moving out of our County. They were responsible for many sightings over the years and Dave particularly helped to produce this report with his generous review of the data. They will be an asset to Essex County bird record-keeping. Thanks so much you two for providing all those sightings, and for the help you have given over the years.

The first winter season in January and February proved variable in weather conditions, but as a whole it was a relatively mild winter. In very early January there was open water on the Thames River and Komoka Pits which allowed some lingering waterfowl, a few in large numbers. Besides species of duck including a few dabbling and diving ducks there was a cormorant reported. This situation was corrected by the second week of January however, and most still water froze, forcing subsequent waterfowl sightings to the river. One particularly notable sighting was that of up to 300 Coots at Komoka in early January.

Highlights for our waterfowl sightings included a Greater White-fronted Goose which lingered around in the area of the Coves and Springbank. It was first reported by Will Van Hemessen at the Meadowlily area and likely the same bird was then spotted by Paul Nicholson in the Coves, and which again likely was that one moved to Springbank. A single Snow Goose seemed to get around as well. First seen at Komoka by Mike Vermue and Dianne Hayman and then apparently, the same bird at Fanshawe by Dave Martin and others. As well, for the third year in a row, we had Harlequin Duck and first 3 were seen by Gord Cameron and Mike Channon on February 15 at Springbank, and one of those remained from March through to May 21. A good number of Tundra Swans were also reported in that first winter with at least three flocks being reported. Swans in Middlesex in winter are quite unusual. A few grebes were located in January, one each of Pied-billed and Horned Grebes and one cormorant surfaced for a single report.

At least one heavy storm occurred about January 17, which crowded birds at our feeders including a number of siskins, a few of which seemed to stay and breed in the area. A few cowbirds were reported at that time coming to feeders. Early in February weather was mild but another blast of winter came in mid-February, which concentrated the birds at feeders once again.

Hawks were quite numerous in the usual places, including southwest Middlesex and northwest of Strathroy. A few Golden Eagles set up territories especially in the southwest of the County. One Red-shouldered Hawk was also noted in this time frame. A good number of Merlin was reported during this first winter period.

The area northwest of Strathroy and the area of Lucan along the Roman Line again supported about 3 Snowy Owls. One other location was up at the junction of New Ontario and Fernhill Roads. The other owl of note was a group of Long-eared Owls found at Komoka Provincial Park.

The London Dump held white-winged gulls until about the first week or so of March, and included Iceland and Glaucous Gulls and others like a Lesser Black-backed Gull and a few Great Black-backed Gulls.

Of note was the Raven spotted by Jason McGuire in South-west Middlesex on January 24. We seldom get this corvid at all and now have three winter records from the last three years.

Of the smaller passerine types, by far the most exciting bird was the lingering Summer Tanager, which remained at Daphne Lowe's feeders until February 22, and disappeared as mysteriously as it appeared last year in December. Tufted Titmice were reported from a number of sites, including on Gord Cameron's Nature London walk to Gibbons on February 20. A few Winter Wren, kinglets, bluebirds and Hermit Thrush were noted during this winter period. There were a good number of robins seen, up to 75 at one location. Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs were noted in small numbers and disappeared in early March. A Common Yellowthroat was reported by Jim Jarrett in February, likely a wintering bird, though most of our winter sightings of this species are in December only. A number of Savannah, White-throated and Swamp Sparrow were reported in or near London, some of these individuals at feeders. Four Meadowlark were reported in February on the 20th, which could have been early migrants as other early species had arrived by that time including Killdeer, Red-winged Blackbird and Common Grackle to name a few. Earlier in February there were single sightings of the latter two species and several cowbirds were also reported.

Winter finches were very few in numbers but Purple Finch, Common Redpoll and Pine Siskin, but the latter appeared in larger numbers and a few of them apparently remained to breed.

As mentioned spring seemed to roll in by late February with the usual suspects making us dream of things to come, like redwings and blackbirds, but there were a few set-backs in weather. Despite those set-backs, migration seemed to progress quickly with some interesting birds there to brighten our days.

In fact, due to early ice clearing from such places as Strathroy Sewage Lagoons and Komoka Pits, there were many early records of waterfowl, almost a month early in some cases. These early birds included grebes and cormorant and coots, too. For data on Average Spring Arrivals and other key dates for birds in Middlesex, ask me for the chart I have compiled. It covers 1983 to the present.

Early dates were noted for American Bittern, Sandhill Crane and Virginia Rail, and as well a few raptors including Northern Harrier and vulture. Woodcock were back early and so were quite a few Bonaparte's Gulls.

Also in early March, with earlier than average arrival dates were species such as meadowlark, cowbird, and many sparrow species. Most of their populations came back on dates later in March or April though.

Earlier than Average Spring Arrival dates were noted for Merlin and Osprey which now both breed in London so perhaps they arrive early to protect territories.

The Eastern Phoebe was also early, again indicating the rather mild spring to start. Most swallows were also back very early. Some of these passerine migrants suffered when a cold system interrupted the mildness, and many seemed to retreat until later dates to be able to survive. Swallows were seen skimming over the open water for a few days but then disappeared. I assume southward, or to areas that were milder and they could find hatching insects. They did not return to this area until the cold weather left for good. Our early phoebe disappeared and did not return to nest and I suspect other early individuals from other species suffered a lot and either succumbed or scrounged food to survive.

A Gray Catbird was record early at March 7, but most of that species followed well into April. Also in April, American Pipit, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Pine Warbler, Palm Warbler and Eastern Kingbird, among others were found much prior to their Average Spring Arrival dates.

The most exciting find of the spring was the result of two rather clandestine sightings. I first heard about the Lark Sparrow from someone who noted it recorded in eBirds for the date of May 17. I was down at Pelee at the time and checked it out but found it had been removed as a sighting by the originator Robin Brown. When I contacted him, he said it was on private property and the owners were not likely to allow birders to view it so he removed the record, so others were not able to seek it out. But I found out later that another birder, Lars Kristensen

had found what I assume was the same bird at Komoka Provincial Park, on May 3. He mentioned it at Pelee when he saw me in late May. The important thing is that we have our second record in the books. The only other one I have is from 1885.

There were a few Cackling Geese reported with the flocks of Canadas by Chris Leys in east London and Laure Neish at Springbank. A great sighting was that of a Trumpeter Swan, reported at Komoka ponds seen by Lucas Foerster. The largest flock of Tundras noted was 500 in a field in south Middlesex. Of course, most waterfowl arrived in the first couple of weeks of March and lingered into May, as did the wintering waterfowl. A few, like Redhead and Ring-necked seemed to stay longer than usual, into June. A few others were noted in breeding season and may have nested.

As mentioned above, of special note, for the third year in a row, we had Harlequin Ducks in London. First spotted by Gord Cameron and Mike Channon, there were 3 at Springbank, and one was still there until May 21.

The first Long-tailed Ducks came through in mid-March, and none were noted in May, our usual time to see them coming through. Loons started flying over in late March and continued into late May. We had a number of Horned Grebe and a single Red-necked Grebe.

American Bitterns are rarely reported but we there was one at Westminster Ponds on two days reported separately by Tim Arthur and Nathan Schoelier. Another was found at a small pond on our Breeding Bird Survey southwest of Strathroy on June 4.

We don't usually get many Great Egret or Black-crowned Night-herons reported in Spring but there were a couple of reports. And a good number of Sandhill Crane was noted and there was the possibility of a nesting site in southwest Middlesex.

Shorebirds wandered through in respectable numbers, mostly reported from Strathroy Sewage Lagoons. Included was a very rarely found Ruddy Turnstone, the first in many years seen at Strathroy SL by Peter Blancher. A few White-rumped Sandpiper were also noted there.

Those lagoons supported a large number of Bonaparte's Gulls this spring, and as I mentioned, by the end of March and early April was when the dump gulls of note decided to head out. Only one report came in of Caspian Tern this spring.

Most passerines and other smaller species were found in usual numbers and arrived generally at average times. Of special note, there was a report of a Yellow-throated Warbler in the Medway Valley Heritage Forest by Kyle Elliott.

We did have more Whip-poor-wills reported than in quite a while, from 5 sites to May 22 so they may have bred in the area. A Red-headed Woodpeckers may have been noted in greater numbers as well.

A Northern Mockingbird was reported in early May. A Brewster's Warbler was seen by Paul Nicholson on May 18. A few Clay-colored Sparrows were noted in migration and at least one stayed on to nest near Napier and Calvert Drives, located first on our BBS on June 4. Another Summer Tanager was reported May 12, seen by Richard O'Reilly in north London. A good number of Rusty Blackbirds were reported this spring as were Orchard Orioles, the latter remaining to breed.

Lapland Longspurs lingered until late April and most of the other wintering species departed more or less on schedule.

Approximately 122 species were known to have breeding evidence, with another half dozen possible, particularly given the dates when they were reported.

Ian Platt and my Breeding Bird Survey for Strathroy area, the only BBS I know of for Middlesex County produced 68 species this year, including a spot for Clay-colored Sparrow, and a spot for Dickcissel. More about them later.

The usual waterfowl that typically nest in Middlesex were joined by Mute Swan which raised broods at Komoka Pits. It is quite possible that a few others were nesting including Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal and Northern Shoveler as those species had pairs at Strathroy Sewage Lagoons at the appropriate time.

With Black-crowned Night-Heron it is hard to tell if they are nesting. They formerly bred in Thames Park many years ago, and since there is suitable habitat along the Thames River, it is certainly possible, but no sightings

were noted in June or July until some showed up in early August. This suggests post-breeding dispersal but again, it is not certain if they nested within Middlesex.

Our Ospreys had about 5 successful nests. The Bald Eagles had at least 3 nests and likely a few others. Cooper's Hawk is a known nester now, even in urban areas. As well, there is at least one Merlin nest in south London each year, often in the top of an old Norway Spruce. The fate of the nest of the Peregrines on the City Towers is unknown, though we know that there is still a pair in the area. Broad-winged Hawks were noted in breeding season at Skunk's Misery but no nest was located that I know of this year.

Both Virginia and Sora were present into June, indicating potential nesting activity. As well the sighting of a Sandhill Crane in June could be a nesting bird. A few Upland Sandpipers were noted in the usual areas of grassland pasture.

It is uncertain if Common Nighthawk nested but they were present in the downtown area, where they have nested in previous years. Of some excitement, at 5 locations this spring, Eastern Whip-poor-Will were calling, and the last date of May 22 could mean that some of them were at least on Territory, and thus perhaps nesting.

There are a few locations for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker and thankfully at least 5 potential territories for Red-headed Woodpecker.

Our rarest flycatcher, the Acadian Flycatcher, was noted at Skunk's Misery again this year with a few locations. The White-eyed Vireo that was likely nesting at the Clark Wright Conservation Area for the last three years was not reported this year. However, a June sighting of a Blue-headed Vireo there, indicates that species might have nested. Only one other nesting record exists for that species.

Uncommon nesters included Red-breasted Nuthatch, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Creeper, Marsh Wren, all possible due to either territorial males (being on a site for at least a week during breeding season) or sighting of a pair in suitable habitat.

Of special note in this unusual bird nesting we have to include possible nesting for several warblers on single territories at Skunk's Misery. These include Mourning Warbler, Blackburnian and Black-throated Green Warblers. These birds were joined by Chestnut-sided (with about 10 territories in Middlesex), Hooded Warbler (about 10 territories) and Cerulean Warbler (at least 4 territories) A Northern Mockingbird was reported from southwest Middlesex by the Turnbulls on June 1, which could be a bird breeding in the area.

Ian and I had found a couple of species on our Breeding Bird Survey on June 4 which remained to try to nest. There was a successful nest of Clay-colored Sparrow and at least one group of Dickcissels which had some difficulty as the fields they tried to nest in were cut. Both were in west of Strathroy. Other birders who flocked out to the area found at least one other area where Dickcissels were trying to nest. Unfortunately, it appears at least some of those spots were cut for hay during the nesting time and the birds abandoned the spots.

It appeared that Orchard Orioles were nesting in stronger numbers as at least 5 territories were located. And as mentioned elsewhere, a couple of Pine Siskins nestings were likely as young showed up at a few local feeders.

Moving on to the fall migration, most nesting species appeared to leave more or less on time. Weather didn't push out all the species and move along all the migrants until early October in some cases.

Waterfowl are likely to linger, which many did right through to late in the year. We had a good group of 16 or so White-fronted Geese show up to the north of London, first reported by Bev and Dennis Rock. Two reports of Snow Goose, one at Coldstream (Dianne Hayman) and one in the Byron area (Laure Neish) and as well Cackling Goose were reported by Will Van Hemessen at Meadowlily and Laure Neish in ponds along Wonderland South. Only one each of White-winged Scoter and Long-tailed Duck were reported as one-day-wonders in the fall.

Up to 7 Great Egrets were reported in the fall, dates starting on July 23 and ending on October 10. Sandhill Cranes were reported several times, mostly in small flocks.

Good numbers of shorebirds were noted, especially from the Strathroy Sewage Lagoons. Quite a few sandpipers and plovers were seen there from July through October in some cases. Elsewhere, some shorebirds were reported as well. Of note were the 40 American Golden Plovers reported by Gord Saunders in the Lucan area. Three others were found by Daryl Nethercott on Calvert Drive.

As in the spring, Bonaparte's Gulls were noted at Strathroy SL in larger numbers. Another single report of a Caspian Tern in late August was made by Jason McGuire at Pond Mills.

As I mentioned, most migrant and breeding birds left on time, and the arrival dates of wintering birds was normal as well. Not many winter finches were found amongst the migrants, just a few Purple Finches and Pine Siskins were recorded.

As for the second winter, we did have a few interesting sightings as well. Since the ice didn't fully form until the early part of 2017, there were many lingering waterfowl. Unusual ducks included Gadwall, Wood Duck, Shoveler, and Green-winged Teal. Up to 75 coots were noted at Komoka Pits. There were 5 flocks of Tundra Swans seen in December, when we often don't have any.

Once again Golden Eagles were found wintering in the southwest of the County. Good numbers of other hawks were wintering as well.

Sandhill Cranes were seen in December, with large flocks noted by Lucas Foerster flying over south London.

A few of the Bonaparte's Gulls found at Strathroy SL lingered into early December. A Lesser Black-backed Gull was noted at Greenway by Frank King.

Snowy Owls were again located in the usual spots near Strathroy and Lucan. About 6 were involved in various sightings in those spots.

An immature Red-headed Woodpecker was found on a Nature London field trip and remained in Springbank Park for weeks to be counted on our London CBC.

Unusual wintering birds included Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, and Hermit Thrush, all found in small numbers on scattered dates. A surprise for the last day of the year was a Vesper Sparrow which I found out near Mt Brydges. A few Fox, White-crowned, White-throated and a Savannah Sparrow also lingered into December, some found in the woodlands and others at feeders.

Blackbird types included a few Red-winged and Rusty, as well as a group of meadowlarks and a few cowbirds. As mentioned, not many winter finches were around, only a very few Purple Finches and Common Redpoll and Pine Siskins.

Our London Christmas Bird Count was held on December 17 and the numbers are recorded on this chart. It had just snowed and the numbers of individuals were down, but it was average for number of species. There is a full summary of this count available wherein the numbers and species are discussed. The unusual ones included Gadwall, Cackling Goose, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Common Coot, Osprey (our second), Merlin, Red-headed Woodpecker, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Tufted Titmouse, Eastern Bluebird, Chipping Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, and Red-winged Blackbird.

Another CBC which has part in Middlesex is the recently developed Skunk's Misery Count, which is covered through the eBirds reports and is in January so it is included within the chart in the first winter column.

As always, the chart is a working copy. It is certainly possible some of you out there will have corrections or additions about which you can let me know. Missing species which we usually get in small numbers every year include Least Bittern and Northern Goshawk as well as Ruffed Grouse. There are also a number of spaces for dates in the chart. Please check your records and let me know if you can fill them.

That is it for the 2016 year. If you have any questions about the sightings, or can help to fill in missing species or make changes to the chart, please let me know. And please keep the sightings on eBirds, as it helps to collate the chart.

Pete Read
Middlesex Bird Records

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 an imperial value. Also noted is the season when one would expect to find the species.

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 20 sightings reported per year and often in large numbers

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 6 to 19 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, up to 5 sightings in most years.

o- occasional- Not expected to be seen each year but may be present.

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

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

w –winter seasons (2 times, Ja-Fe, and De)

S –spring season (Mr-Ma, and some species Jn)

s –summer season (Ju-Jy, Au for some species)

f –fall season (Jy and Au for some, but usually Se – No)

m –migrant -species that mainly migrate through this area

* - has nested or has had nesting evidence

Example 1 A species marked as “ow om” means occasional winter and occasional migrant, meaning that it is not expected to be seen every year, but can be seen in winter or as a spring or fall migrant.

Example 2 A species marked as “uSm rfm 0*” is uncommon migrant in the spring, rare in the fall migration and sometimes a breeding bird.

Example 3 A species marked as “y u*” is one that is found all year and is an uncommon nesting species.

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. A blank space means we need a date. London CBC data is included for all birds in the last column. Skunk’s Misery CBC data is included as info for the first winter column.

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

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

b. **Nesting birds**- birds that come to this area to breed are found in the breeding column with a letter code denoting breeding evidence and a significant breeding date where available as well as a few other pertinent dates including...

- ? depending on the column it indicates a possible nesting species, or an unknown first spring arrival date, high number date, 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. Dates might include...

-Some key dates, highest breeding evidence, and CBC total

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 but if fairly regular migrant just the key ones

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 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.

Latest spring -Latest date to be recorded for a migrant species or for a wintering species.

Breeding evidence - Breeding evidence for the species indicated by letters as in the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas Breeding Code. These letters such as FY, AE, etc, can be found at the website <http://www.birdsontario.org/atlas/codes.jsp?lang=en> . 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.

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

First/second winter, out-of-season -Records for those two 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 data is recorded in this column. This column gives an idea of lingering birds and their abundance, 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 for research purposes, the Middlesex Birds Record Committee is trying to make our records more accountable by insisting on documentation for unusual and rare species, or out-of-season records when necessary. For many birds, you could give pertinent details over the phone, or send details via the internet. For new species to our checklist and some other rare species, full documentation or photos, etc, are required. For information on how to document your sighting of a Rare, Occasional, 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. Our Listserv, eBirds, Middlesex data sheets, personal communications are all methods to submit info.

If you wish you can obtain Middlesex Recording sheets. A new one is available for 2017. 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. Then submit a copy at the end of the year.

But the preferred method is to keep track of your sightings and trip lists, and then transfer them into eBirds. It is easy to join and submit data. Go to their website at <http://ebird.org/content/ebird/>

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). Or report them on the Listserv or on eBirds as below.

Join http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/midd_elgi_observations/ , the Middlesex/Elgin/Oxford Listserv mentioned above and which is invaluable for me to glean info.

(Besides the Listserv, and 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.)

The following is a “working table”, with records that I have been given from 2016. You may have other records. Remember to look carefully through the data to see if you can provide those records of species missed or records prior to, after, in lieu of, besides, instead of, etc or if you can fill the spaces.