

SUMMARY OF ESSEX COUNTY'S 2023 CHECKLIST

– 309 species –

2023 proved to be a truly unprecedented year for birding in Essex County. The 309 species recorded in the county represent the highest total for any single Canadian county in a year (per eBird data). In the process, Essex added a staggering 5 species to its checklist (Willow Ptarmigan, Glaucous-winged Gull, White-winged Tern, Ferruginous Hawk, and Cassin's Kingbird), with one additional species added to the Point Pelee Birding Area Checklist (Limpkin). The previous record (both county and provincial) of 304 species was set in 2022. Almost 24,000 checklists were submitted to eBird this year for Essex, along with over 20,000 photos and over 250 audio recordings.

The names of 105 unique observers appear in this summary, though dozens of other birders also made significant contributions to the 2023 list (see also the eBird Top 100 for [species](#) and [checklists](#)).

To keep this report succinct, not all notable records of the year are given complete documentation below. There are known records pending a decision by the Essex eBird Regional Review team or Ontario Bird Records Committee (OBRC) which could increase the year total. The complete checklist of all **accepted** species observed in the county, with early and late dates and high counts for all notable species, can be found [HERE](#) and is also linked at the end.

It must be noted that this summary is **constructed almost exclusively from eBird data**. If you have information or documentation pertaining to records not listed that you feel belong in this Summary, please contact me at cameronchevalier9@gmail.com or message me privately on Discord (User: *Cameronkeith*) from the Ontario Bird Alert or OFO servers.

NOTABLE MISSES:

Eurasian Wigeon - county records in 3 of last 5 years

Hudsonian Godwit - county records in 3 of last 5 years

Common Redpoll - county records in 4 of last 5 years

RECORD BREAKERS:

PROVINCIAL

Ring-necked Duck – highest count by 170 (8170) - *Hugh Kent/HBMO, Paul Pratt*

American White Pelican – highest count by 40 (540) – *PIBO*

Sabine's Gull – ties earliest fall migrant record (Aug 15) – *Cameron Chevalier, Jeremy Hatt*

REGIONAL (COUNTY)

Canvasback – highest count by 36075 (52000) - *J. Hatt, Aaron Rusak, et al.*
Ring-necked Duck – highest count by 1410 (8170) - *H. Kent/HBMO, P. Pratt*
Long-tailed Duck – earliest fall record by 29 days (Aug 11) [or poss. summer] - *Jeremy Bensette*
Common Goldeneye – highest count by 7000 (15000) - *J. Bensette*
Pacific Loon – earliest fall record by 8 days (Oct 18) - *Keith Burk*
Western Grebe – earliest record by 29 days (Mar 4) - *Michael McAllister*
American White Pelican – highest count by 340 (540) – *PIBO*
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron – earliest fall record by 6 days (Aug 16) - *Dorlisa Robinson*
Black Vulture – earliest record by 12 days (Feb 16) – *unknown finder, shared by Diane Naluzny*
Swainson's Hawk – earliest fall record by 1 day (Sep 10) - *Cherise Charron*
Golden Eagle – highest count by 5 (29) - *H. Kent/HBMO*
Sora – earliest record by 33 days (Feb 28) – *M. McAllister*
Purple Gallinule – latest fall record by 45 days (Nov 12) - *Cindy Andrews*
Semipalmated Plover – latest fall record by 7 days (Nov 18) - *C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, A. Rusak*
American Avocet – earliest fall record by 6 days (Jun 28) – *C. Chevalier*
Purple Sandpiper – latest spring record by 11 days (May 23) - *Ben Ivens*
American Woodcock – latest record by 5 days (Dec 27) - *C. Chevalier, Harrison Priebe*
Red Phalarope – earliest fall record by 9 days (Aug 18) – *Jacob Stasso, C. Chevalier, K. Burk*
Lesser Black-backed Gull – highest count by 29 (125) - *J. Hatt*
Sabine's Gull – earliest fall record by 13 days (Aug 15) – *C. Chevalier, J. Hatt*
Eastern Whip-poor-will – latest record by 14 days (Nov 3) - *Sonya Bezeau*
Loggerhead Shrike – latest spring record by 23 days (Jun 6) - *Brandon Holden*
Common Raven – highest count by 1 (2) - *J. Hatt*
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – earliest record by 1 day (Apr 3) - *Vicki McKay, Brett Groves*
Gray-cheeked Thrush – earliest fall record by 6 days (Aug 21) - *Jason Bojczyk*
Wood Thrush – earliest record by 2 days (Apr 11) - *Cecilia Heuvel*
Blue-winged Warbler – latest record by 16 days (Oct 11) - *Ray Akey*
Black-throated Blue Warbler – latest fall record by 4 days (Nov 4) - *Blake Mann*
Bay-breasted Warbler – latest fall record by 18 days (Nov 12) - *Jim Burk*
Blackpoll Warbler – latest spring record by 1 day (Jun 18) - *M. McAllister*
American Redstart – highest count by 25 (225) - *B. Holden*
Wilson's Warbler – earliest fall record by 5 days (Aug 7) - *Devin de Zwaan*
Snow Bunting – highest count by 200 (3200) - *M. McAllister*
Indigo Bunting – latest record by 14 days (Nov 6) - *Ken Burrell et al.*

TRUE RARITIES:

* = OBRC Review Species (total: 15)



Willow Ptarmigan
Photo: Rain Saulnier



Yellow-crowned Night Heron
Photo: C. Charron



Glaucous-winged Gull
Photo: Donny Moore

****Willow Ptarmigan* (1) - a NEW species for Essex and Point Pelee**

May 9 – one adult, Tip, Point Pelee National Park [PPNP] (found by Curtis Haslehurst, Nina Szpakowski [Essex], Christine Ouellette [Point Pelee Birding Area], m.obs.)

- A strong candidate for Essex County's best bird of the year, this was a county first and is one of the southernmost records of this species in the world per eBird. This individual's trajectory was followed via posts to regional Facebook groups, having been reported in Toronto (April 30, found by Dibyendu Das), Elgin (May 6, found by Katey Berzins), and ultimately in Chatham-Kent the night before its appearance at Point Pelee (May 8, found by Christine Ouellette). The bird was enjoyed by hundreds during the Festival of Birds.

****Limpkin* (1 + 1 hypothetical) - a NEW species for Point Pelee (*not included in Essex total*)**

July 17 – one, Windsor, general location (unknown finder)

- A third-hand report, documented with a photo, was shared with the birding community in July. However, the initial observer was never able to be contacted for details confirming the location and date of the proposed sighting, despite several attempts. This hypothetical third provincial record comes after several dozen Limpkins were discovered in nearby states and provinces in 2023 (see below).

December 18 into 2024 – one, Highlands Campground, Wheatley Provincial Park (found by Peter Kelly, Pete/Sue Read, Tammie Dobbie, m.obs.)

- This record falls within the range where the borders of the Point Pelee Birding Area and neighbouring Chatham-Kent County overlap in Wheatley. It is not included in the 2023 total for Essex but does count toward the Point Pelee Birding Area checklist.

****Little Blue Heron* (2)**

August 3 to 4 – one juv., John R Park Homestead CA, Oxley (found by Tristan Snip, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario.

August 8 to 29 – two juv., County Road 20 Egret Roost, Amherstburg (found by Kory Renaud, m.obs.)

****Yellow-crowned Night Heron* (2) - first for Point Pelee Birding Area (PPBA) since 2012**

August 16 to September 6 – one juv., Mersea Rd 19, Leamington (found by D. Robinson, m.obs.)

September 1 – one adult, Mersea Rd 2 West Bridge, HMCA (found by Beverley Scott)

****Purple Gallinule* (1) - first for Essex since 2018, first for PPBA since 1981**

November 12 – one, HMCA (found by C. Andrews)

****Black-necked Stilt* (3)**

May 12 to 13 – one, Concession Road 3, Harrow (found by Janice Pelan, m.obs.)

May 14 – one, Essex Eastern Sewage Lagoons, Essex (found by Mike Burkoski)

- The above two records definitively pertain to different individuals due to unique aspects of plumage.

May 16 to 17 – two, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by Avron/Terri Kulak, m.obs.)

****California Gull* (1)**

November 12 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, seen by C. Chevalier, Jim/K. Burk)

****Glaucous-winged Gull* (1) - a NEW species for Essex and Point Pelee**

November 25 to 27 – one second winter, Leamington Municipal Marina and Selkirk Drain, Seacliff (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

- A candidate for Essex County's best bird this year and an excellent addition to the Essex and Point Pelee checklists. This extends the total number of gull species recorded in the PPBA alone (and Essex by extension) to a whopping 20 species, solidifying it as one of the premier gull sites in the ABA. To put this into perspective, other renowned gull counties are listed with their respective species total: Cook County, Illinois (20 species), Los Angeles County, California (21 species), King County, Washington (21 species), and San Mateo County, California (22 species). This was also the 14th gull species of the year in Essex, the first time this total was achieved.



White-winged Tern
Photo: C. Chevalier



Swallow-tailed Kite
Photo: D. Moore



Cassin's Kingbird
Photo: Isabel Apkarian

****White-winged Tern* (1) - a NEW species for Essex and Point Pelee**

July 5 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, seen by Zheng Dong Fan, J. Bensette, P. Pratt)

- A candidate for Essex County's best bird this year, this individual was first found by Adam Byrne on June 30 at Pointe Mouillee SGA in Michigan. It remained at that location until July 13 but was seen leaving after being flushed by a Bald Eagle on July 5 around 7:15 AM (the date of its 9:26 AM discovery at PPNP). Interestingly, it returned to Pointe Mouillee and was refound there on July 8.

***Arctic Tern* (1) - first since 2008**

October 19 – one imm., East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

***Neotropic Cormorant* (1)**

July 3 – one, Detroit River, Amherstburg (found by J. Hatt, seen by J. Bensette, C. Chevalier, Kate Derbyshire)

****Swallow-tailed Kite* (1) - first since 2020**

August 18 to September 3 – one, Laurier Parkway, LaSalle [*Aug 18 to Sep 2*] and PPNP [*Sep 3*] (found independently by Dane Clark [*Aug 18*], Mark Nenadov [*Aug 21*], Nancy Bauer [*Aug 22*], and C. Charron [*Sep 3*], m.obs.)

- A long-staying bird that garnered significant media attention due to its public location in LaSalle. All finders were unaware of the bird's presence at the time of their sighting.

***Swainson's Hawk* (2) - first since 2020**

September 10 – one, Northwest Beach, PPNP (found by C. Charron)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario.

November 14 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by Hugh/Liz Kent)



"Audubon's" Warbler
Photo: C. Charron



Townsend's Warbler
Photo: Isaac Polanski



Western Tanager
Photo: Brian Chan

****Ferruginous Hawk* (1) - a NEW species for Essex**

May 26 – one, Essex Rd 14, east of Blytheswood (seen by anonymous observer)

- This bird's appearance in neighbouring Chatham-Kent, the circumstances surrounding its subsequent rehabilitation, and its release with a GPS tracking device generated significant conversation and controversy in the Ontario birding community. With all available information considered, the bird is arguably best assigned "provisional" status, and should therefore be "countable". For the purposes of this Summary and the all-time checklist of birds recorded in Essex County, the fact that the bird was seen and photographed (rather than simply tracked) renders it worthy of inclusion on both lists.

****Cassin's Kingbird* (1) - a NEW species for Essex and Point Pelee**

June 14 to 16 – one, Point Pelee Drive, Leamington (found by Nicole Shangi, m.obs.)

- A highly sought-after species by many birders who maintain an Ontario list as it has remained elusive; records have frequently involved a single observer. It also establishes itself as a strong candidate for Essex County's best bird of the year.

***Loggerhead Shrike* (1) - first since 2013**

June 6 – one, County Road 14, Leamington (found by B. Holden)

****Eurasian Tree Sparrow* (1) - first since 2018**

May 31 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, seen by Fred Grenier)

****Yellow-rumped Warbler (Audubon's)* (1) - first since 2016**

November 2 – one, PPNP (found by C. Charron)

- This was the first record of this taxon for the year in Ontario.

****Townsend's Warbler* (1) - first since 1988**

May 1 – one adult male, Blue Heron Trail, PPNP (found by Quinten Wiegersma, m.obs.)

****Western Tanager* (2-3) - first since 2011**

May 6 – one adult male, Tecumseh, general area (found by Maurice Bottos and Theresa Lucas, m.obs.)

May 7 – one adult male, Tip, PPNP (found by D. Moore, m.obs.)

- The above two records could feasibly pertain to the same bird. The OBRC will presumably rule on their individuality for their 2023 Report.

May 18 – one second-year male, Tip tram loop, PPNP (found by Peter Blancher, Janis Grant, Christine Hough, Margaret Hough, Anthony Kaduck, Richard Lott)

NOTABLE RECORDS:

† - *provisional*

***Ross's Goose* (3) - notably missed in 2022**

January 5 to 15 – two, Belle River (found by J. Bensette, m.obs.)

November 13 to 17 – one, Canard Dr, River Canard (found by Jason Wilson, m.obs.)

December 16 – one, 6th Concession Rd, Pleasant Valley (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

***Brant* (1) - first since 2020**

October 19 – four, East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

†*Egyptian Goose* (1)

October 1 – one, 6th Concession Rd, Pleasant Valley (shot and collected)

***King Eider* (1)**

December 4 – one adult male, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

- Adult male King Eiders are highly irregular in Ontario, with only a handful of records in the last decade; historical records for Essex are not documented sufficiently enough to determine how many have been seen in the region.

***Harlequin Duck* (1) - first since 2019**

February 7 – one, East Beach Road, Leamington (found by Victor Serrano, J. Bensette, m.obs.)

***Pacific Loon* (3)**

October 18 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk)

November 5 – one, HMCA Southeast Access, Leamington (found by K. Burrell, m.obs.)

November 10 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, m.obs.)

Red-necked Grebe (7)

March 28 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by Leon Barlow)

April 2 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by Karen Padbury)

November 4 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by M. McAllister, m.obs.)

November 4 – two, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

November 4 – three, East Beach at Shuster Trail, PPNP (found by K. Burk)

November 10 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

December 9 – two, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk, Steve Pike)

Western Grebe (1) - first since 2014

March 4 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by M. McAllister)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario.

Snowy Egret (2)

May 10 to 12 – one, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (unknown finder, m.obs.)

August 11 to 12 – two, HMCA, general location (found by J. Hatt [1], F. Grenier/Sean Macey/M. McAllister [2], m.obs.)

Black Vulture (3)

February 16 to 25 – one, Point Pelee area (unknown finder, refound by D. Naluzny, m.obs.)

Apr 26 to May 3 – one, PPNP (found by Michael Nelson)

May 30 to June 11 – one, Fish Point, Pelee Island (found by Sumiko Onishi)

Mississippi Kite (1)

May 13 to June 7 – one, multiple locations, Point Pelee area (found by Andrew Mactavish, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario. This individual was first reported by Dean Post and Karla Everard within the range where the borders of the Point Pelee Birding Area and Chatham-Kent County overlap in Wheatley. Examination of photos to determine the individuality of reports was not conclusive enough to overrule the case of a single lingering bird.

King Rail (2) - not including records of calling birds on territory from marsh surveys

April 26 – one, Sanctuary Pond, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, S. Pike)

May 10 to 12 – one, Couture Dyke, HMCA (found by J. Hatt, Andrew/Kara Wiebe)

Piping Plover (2)

April 27 – one, Mettawas Park, Kingsville (found by M. Burkoski)

April 30 – one, Seacliff Park, Leamington (found by Heidi Staniforth, Kelly Moore, m.obs.)



Mississippi Kite
Photo: Rowan Keunen



Piping Plover
Photo: M. Burkoski



Purple Sandpiper
Photo: B. Ivens

Purple Sandpiper (4) - fourth spring record and first since 2012

May 23 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by B. Ivens)

November 4 – three, East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

November 20 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier) and one [presumed same], East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

December 25 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

Red Phalarope (3)

Aug 18 – one moulting adult, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Stasso, m. obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario and all of the Great Lakes region. This is also one of the earliest-ever fall migrant records for the province.

November 20 – one, East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

November 22 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, K. Burk, m.obs.)

Laughing Gull (1)

June 26 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

Franklin's Gull (3)

June 25 to 27 – one, Mettawas Park [June 25] and Kingsville Dock [June 27], Kingsville (found by J. Hatt)

July 14 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by Roz Hayes, Theresa Schiller)

October 7 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by M. McAllister, m.obs.)



Red Phalarope
Photo: Mike Nelson



Sabine's Gull
Photo: C. Chevalier



Black-legged Kittiwake
Photo: Marcus Buck

Sabine's Gull (1-2)

August 15, August 22 – one first summer, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, J. Hatt)

- This is the first record of a first summer bird for Essex and Point Pelee, and possibly Southern Ontario as a whole. This (Aug 15) was also the first record of this species for the year in Ontario and ties the provincial record-early fall date.

September 11 – one first summer, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk)

- The rarity of this age would seem to support the case of a single lingering bird.

Black-legged Kittiwake (2-4) - fourth-ever spring record and first since 1996

May 10 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by Jon P. Ruddy, m.obs.)

- There is insufficient documentation to determine how many adult Black-legged Kittiwakes have been seen in Essex, but this is unquestionably one of very few.

November 13 – one juv., HMCA Southeast Access, Leamington (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

November 18 to 19 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by Kit McCann, m.obs.)

December 2 – one juv., HMCA at Mersea Rd 2, Leamington (found by B. Groves/V. McKay)

- The above three records could feasibly pertain to the same lingering individual.

Parasitic Jaeger (4)

August 10 – two juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

August 17 – one juv. intermediate morph, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

September 1 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by B. Holden)

October 30 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier) and one [presumed same], East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

Long-tailed Jaeger (2)

August 20 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, seen by K. Burk, C. Chevalier)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario.

September 3 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

Upland Sandpiper (2)

July 23 – one, Lakeshore Road 302, Lakeshore (found by P. Pratt)

August 4 – one, Marsh Boardwalk, PPNP (found by J. Bensette)

Pileated Woodpecker (7)

March 11 – one female, Brunet Park, LaSalle (found by Mike Coffin)

April 9 – one, Essex Western Sewage Lagoons, Essex (found by M. Burkoski)

April 15 to May 15 – one female, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, K. Renaud, m.obs.)

May 8 – one, Holiday Beach CA (found by J. Stasso)

May 13 – one, Cedar Creek CA (found by Galina Szlapetis)

June 15 – one, 3rd Concession Rd, Arner (found by Jim Raymond)

December 10 to 16 – one, Cedar Creek CA, Arner (found by Dean Ware [*Dec 10*]) and one [presumed same] Cedar Creek, general area (found by J. Burk [*Dec 16*])

Western Kingbird (1) - first for PPBA since 2019

May 25 – one, Main Road between Visitor's Centre and Tip, PPNP (found by Louis Sobol)

Fish Crow (2)

March 29 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

April 24 – one, McCormick Road, Pelee Island (found by Robert Tymstra)

Common Raven (6)

March 16 – one, Talbot Road, Leamington/Wheatley (found by B. Groves)

April 15 – one, Woodland Nature Trail, PPNP (found by Susan Nagy)

April 16 – one, Morris Road, Comber (found by J. Hatt)

May 3 to 14 – one, PPNP (found by Lev Frid, Amanda Guercio, Kyle Holloway, Dawn Sherman [*May 3*]) and one [presumed same], HMCA (found by Jason White [*May 14*])

May 26 – possible breeding pair, Mersea Rd 11, Staples (found by J. Hatt)

May 28 to June 25 – one, Highway 3, Ruthven (found by C. Chevalier)

Boreal Chickadee (1) - first since 2010 (continuing from 2022)

December 27, 2022 to February 23, 2023 – one, Memorial Forest, Amherstburg (found by C. Chevalier, M./S. McAllister, m.obs.)

- Substantiating documentation was uncovered for a record from Holiday Beach CA, Amherstburg, in 2010. The 2022 Summary erroneously marked this as the first record for Essex since 2005.



Pileated Woodpecker
Photo: L. Frid



Townsend's Solitaire
Photo: C. Chevalier



LeConte's Sparrow
Photo: M. McAllister

Townsend's Solitaire (1)

November 19 into 2024 – one, DeLaurier parking lot, PPNP (found by J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire, m.obs.)

Kirtland's Warbler (1)

May 7 – one, Fish Point, Pelee Island (found by R. Tymstra, m.obs.)

- Barring a situation similar to 2022's retroactive photo submission (see *Amendments to Previous Summaries* below), 2023 is the first year without a Kirtland's Warbler at Point Pelee since 2014 (excluding the 2020 park closure).

Lark Sparrow (1)

May 31 to July 16 – breeding pair, McAuliffe Woods, Tecumseh (found by Cathy Lapain [1], Dave D'hondt [2])

Henslow's Sparrow (1)

April 4 – one, Serengeti Tree, PPNP (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

LeConte's Sparrow (2)

May 13 – one, Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by Scott Fairbairn, John Reaume, m.obs.)

October 13 – one, Serengeti Tree, PPNP (found by L. Frid, m.obs.)

Nelson's Sparrow (4)

September 30 – one adult (Interior), North Dyke, Pelee (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

October 7 – one adult (Interior), West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, M. McAllister, Samuelle Simard-Provençal, J. Stasso, m.obs.)

October 7 to 9 – two adults (Interior), North Dyke, Pelee (found by A. Wiebe [1], J. Hatt [2], m.obs.)

October 7 – one adult (Interior), East Beach marsh access, PPNP (found by M. McAllister)

Bohemian Waxwing (1) - first since 2020

January 4 – one, Shuster Trail, PPNP (found by M. McAllister)

Blue Grosbeak (1)

May 12 – one, Tip, PPNP (unknown finder, m.obs.)

Western Meadowlark (1)

April 13 – one, East Beach Road, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

Yellow-headed Blackbird (5)

February 3 to 10 – one, Mersea Rd B, Leamington (found by Rick Mayos, m.obs.)

February 5 – one, Rochester Townline (found by Andrew Campbell, Laura Foy, m.obs.)

May 13 – one, HMCA (unknown finder, m.obs.)

May 15 – one, River Canard, general area (found by Tyler Hoar)

July 30 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt)

AMENDMENTS TO PREVIOUS SUMMARIES:

2022 Summary:

****Nelson's Sparrow (2 → 3) - additional record***

September 28 – one, extreme Tip, PPNP (found by Connie/Fred Grenier)

****Black-necked Stilt (2 → 3) - additional record***

May 11 – one, West Beach, PPNP (found by Heidi Grether)

Kirtland's Warbler (1 → 2) - additional record

May 9 – one male, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by Nick Nolan, m.obs.)

Western Sandpiper (1 → 2) - additional record

July 23 – one, Couture Dyke, HMCA (found by J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire, m.obs.)

****Bell's Vireo (1 → 2) - additional record***

May 23 – one, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by Rowan Keunen)

- This record was accepted by the OBRC, which mistakenly credited the finders of the May 12 stakeout bird for which no report was submitted.

****(Cassin's/Plumbeous) "Solitary" Vireo (1) - removed record (total remains unchanged)***

May 10 – one, Kopegaron Woods CA, Leamington (found by C. Charron)

- This objectively unusual "Solitary" Vireo, submitted as Plumbeous Vireo, was rejected by the OBRC.

FULL CHECKLIST, INCLUDING ALL OTHER RECORDS, IN THE SHEET BELOW:

Essex County 2023 Checklist

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1S_s3Mi3mBtyWRS9WmBz8L6TjkkA6EgIX1gwgG8-6q6k/edit?usp=sharing

NATURE NOTES:

Notable Nesters of 2023 - *by C. Chevalier*



- **Lark Sparrow** (*photo: Aldo Bertucci*) was recorded nesting in Essex County for the first time. Cathy Lapain found one individual on May 31 and Dave D'hondt noted a possible two individuals on June 1, a suspicion later confirmed and well-documented. Young were not observed, but birders did note an adult carrying food on June 16: <https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S142736462>. The pair were seen until at least July 16.
- **Yellow-breasted Chat** (*photo: C. Chevalier*) was confirmed as having bred in Sparrow Field in PPNP, when a recently fledged bird was seen on July 25: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S145587848>. This is the first confirmed breeding record for Essex since 2008, despite many probable breeding records.
- **(Common Raven)** (*photo: J. Hatt*) was not confirmed as breeding, but a pair was recorded in Essex for the first time: <https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S139366813>. All previous records have involved a single bird.
- **(Mississippi Kite)** (*photo: Dean Post*) was not confirmed as breeding, but the lingering individual was photographed by Dean Post apparently carrying a branch as nesting material on May 13.
- **(Pileated Woodpecker)** was not confirmed as breeding but has recently bred just outside county borders, and the number of annual records continues to increase suggesting potential current or future local breeding.
- **American White Pelican** has been a known breeding species on offshore islands in Lake Erie for several years, but juvenile birds were noted as wandering more than previously observed (see <https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S144608597> and other checklists).

Greater Numbers of Lesser Black-backed Gull - by C. Chevalier

On July 6, Jeremy Hatt counted 125 individual Lesser Black-backed Gulls at Mettawas Park (<https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S143764958>). This represents the highest-ever count for Essex and the second-highest count for this species in the province (behind a count of 136 from Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry on October 19, 2019 - <https://ebird.org/checklist/S60739302>). It perpetuates a perceptible trend of increasing numbers for this species in Essex, in Ontario, and in North America as a whole. This has led birders to ponder the origin of these birds, as Lesser Black-backed Gull has never been observed nesting on the North American mainland.

A 2022 study by Zawadzki et al. proposed that the species' relatively recent expansion in Greenland is the source of these birds, though the paper's data and use of terminology (e.g. "vagrant") are somewhat dubious. Many theorize that a more local breeding population awaits discovery. In Essex, summering individuals have all been noted as first-, second-, or third-cycle birds. The lack of both juveniles and adults does support the classical concept of the species summering as a non-breeder. The first juveniles appear in Essex towards the end of September, with adults disappearing in May and returning at approximately the same time.

The appearance of a fresh juvenile bird in the summer months would provide crucial information, as such a record would seem to point to a proximal breeding site. With Essex regularly netting regionally significant counts of 100 or more birds over the last several years, careful observation of summering birds in the county could be instrumental in solving the puzzle.

Little Gull, Big Numbers (13 records / 15 individuals) - compiled by C. Chevalier/J. Hatt

- Little Gull was noted more than average in 2023, especially through the summer months. Analysis of photos and the "naming" of individuals allowed for their separation in the field and in later compiling. Further monitoring of summer records could help fill in the gaps in this species' cryptic provincial breeding habits:

- 1 / April 29 – Adult at Tip (Mark Patry)
- 2 / May 13 – First summer on Pelee Island (Nathan Miller)
- 3 / May 13 to 21 – First summer at Tip (Dana Latour)
- 4 / May 25 to June 11 – "Hoodie" first summer at Tip (C. Chevalier)
June 6 – "Hoodie" at East Beach Rd
- 5 / May 27 to June 1 – First summer at Tip (M. McAllister)
- 6 / June 16 to July 4 – "One-foot" first summer at Mettawas (J. Hatt)
July 8 – "One-foot" at Tip
- 7 / June 25 – "Teardrop" first summer at Mettawas (J. Hatt)
July 1 – "Teardrop" at Tip
July 1 to 2 – "Teardrop" at Leamington Marina
- 8 / June 26 – Adult at Tip (C. Chevalier)
June 29 – Continuing adult at Tip
July 1 to 3 – Same adult at East Beach Rd

- July 4 – Same adult at Mettawas
July 7 – Continuing adult at Mettawas
July 23 – Adult at Tip
9 / June 29 – Additional adult at Tip (Dave Martin, Doug Martin, also seen by K. Burk)
10 / July 8 – “Black spot” first summer at Tip (C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, J. Stasso)
11 / July 12 – Second summer at Tip (Chris Chappell)
12 / August 7 – Second summer at Tip (C. Chevalier)
13 / October 14 – Three adults on Mersea Rd C (J. Hatt)

Record-breaking Year of High Counts Reemphasizes the Importance of the Detroit River for Overwintering Canvasbacks - *by J. Hatt*

Essex County is one of the best places in Ontario to reliably view large numbers of overwintering Canvasback. In particular, from December to February it is common to see rafts of Canvasback numbering in the many thousands in the west ends of Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair and on the Detroit River. The Lower Detroit River is designated a Key Biodiversity Area by BirdLife International and Birds Canada as over 1% of the global population uses this area to overwinter.



2023 was an exceptional year for Canvasback counts in Essex County. On January 8, Michael and Steve McAllister carefully estimated an enormous raft of 40,000 birds on Lake St. Clair off Brighton Beach Park in Tecumseh. An excellent description of their experience and how they estimated the group can be found on eBird at <https://ebird.org/checklist/S125682134>. This was the highest count of Canvasback in the county by double at the time. (*Photo: S. McAllister*)

On December 10, during an Essex County Field Naturalists' Club outing, observers estimated 52,000 Canvasback on Lake Erie off of Holiday Beach CA. The flock was carefully counted by groups of 1,000 after being flushed by a tanker. This number constitutes ~8% of the global population of Canvasback. The eBird checklist that includes this count can be found here: <https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S156111463>.

Finally, on December 27, during the Holiday Beach Christmas Bird Count, participants tallied a Count record of 40,501 Canvasback in the area of Amherstburg and LaSalle. This included a raft of an estimated 30,000 birds off of the Amherstburg Birding and Nature Trail (<https://ebird.org/canada/checklist/S157239838>).

Counts like these are not unprecedented for the region. U.S. observers estimated a group of 50,000 birds from Lake Erie Metropark in 2014 and an exact count of 49,631 birds was made at Pte. Mouillee in 2016 (this exact count was achieved by Jerome Jourdan who took video of the raft in flight and later meticulously counted the birds in the video one by one).

The west ends of Lake Erie and Lake St. Clair and the Lower Detroit River are the best places for witnessing this spectacle of large numbers of Canvasback. To put things into perspective, the estimate of 52,000 birds is the second-highest count of Canvasback for all of Canada! There is only one count higher than this one in Ontario; an estimate of 75,000 birds in the Long Point area by Alan Wormington in December 1973.

New Insight Into the Habits and Movements of Gulls in the Western Basin of Lake Erie - by J. Hatt

Essex County is an excellent place for watching gulls and 2023 was no exception. Several exciting rarities were found, and good numbers of uncommon species were present; and yet, one of the highlights of the year involved learning more about one of our most abundant species, the Herring Gull. As a result of discovering an influx of banded Herring Gulls this summer, we were able to learn a significant amount on the movement of the species within the county and on the Great Lakes.

The first known banded Herring Gull to show up was on June 26 when I photographed a bird at Mettawas Park in Kingsville and posted the picture to the North American Gulls group on Facebook. I was directed to Bruce Buckingham, a research technician with USDA Wildlife Services who has been banding Herring Gulls in Ohio since the 1980's. Bruce was quick to respond on Facebook Messenger w/ the information on 5E2: a third cycle bird banded near Sandusky, Ohio, on June 8, 2020. *(Photo courtesy of Bruce Buckingham, showing researchers banding a young Herring Gull near Sandusky, Ohio)*



By July 9, Cameron Chevalier, Jacob Stasso, and I had found and reported three additional bands and it was clear that a pattern of occurrences was starting to take shape. Cameron and I began paying closer attention and to our excitement, started finding several banded Herring Gulls at the Tip of Point Pelee, Kingsville Dock, and Mettawas Park in Kingsville. I was sending our band numbers and photos to Bruce in real time, and he was ecstatic and quick to answer. He had never received so many reports at once and expressed how important it was for monitoring movements of Herring Gulls on the Great Lakes as well as studying moult timing in first cycle to third cycle birds.

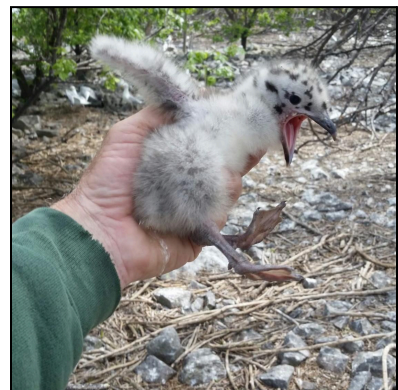
By the end of the summer, we reported a staggering 82 bands in total. In June and July we were finding new bands almost every time we looked through gulls. The highest number of banded Herring Gulls was tallied at Kingsville Dock. On some days, it wasn't unusual to find 5 or more birds w/ bands in a single visit. By mid-August, we began noticing a drop off in the number of bands we were seeing and by September 30, I found the last known banded bird of the year at the Tip. This last bird was 9Y8, banded as a first cycle bird in 2022 in Lorain, Ohio after being rehabbed.

Almost every band seen had black characters on a white band on the left leg and a small silver band on the right leg. The black characters are always a combination of numbers and letters. Each of these numbers identifies the gull to an individual and it is encouraged that if you ever find a band that you report it to the United States Geological Survey at <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/bblretrv/>. Each time you report a band, you will receive confirmation from USGS and a Certificate of Appreciation that gives details on the date the bird was banded, its age at banding, location, and bander. During the summer, we only saw two different band colours which both had white characters on a red band. These are older bands that are no longer used. *(Photo: J. Hatt, showing the classic black-on-white band on juvenile bird 67P)*



Over the course of the summer, we learned several important pieces of information about Herring Gull movement in Essex County and the Great Lakes:

- Sandusky, Ohio is an important breeding area for Herring Gulls on Lake Erie and nestlings begin to hatch at the end of May and into June. The colony near Sandusky supports about 900 breeding pairs and likely accounts for most of the juveniles we see arrive in Essex County in the summer. These beautiful juveniles in fresh dark brown plumage begin to wander on Lake Erie at the end of June. Bruce theorizes that fish stocks may be higher in the northern part of Lake Erie and that these birds are following their main food source. *(Photo courtesy of Bruce Buckingham, depicting a nestling from one of the Ohio colonies)*



- Herring Gulls start to breed in their fourth year when they reach adulthood. Nonbreeding second and third cycle birds make up most of the birds we see in our area during the summer. Some of these birds return to the Sandusky colony to breed when they reach their fourth year.

- Adult Herring Gulls in Ohio only stray about 20 miles from their breeding colony in the summer. This is why we mostly see second and third cycle birds along with the influx of juveniles in the summer. Herring Gulls do breed in small numbers in Essex County, however, so some adults are always present. One known breeding spot is the break wall off Leamington Marina. In the fall and winter when gull numbers increase in our area, we are seeing an influx of migrants moving to find areas of open water. Many more adults appear at this time.

- There are five main areas along the Lake Erie coastline in Essex County that gulls use to loaf during the day when they aren't feeding. They are all important locations for gulls to rest and preen. These locations are the sandspit at East Beach Hillman Marsh, the Tip of Point Pelee, Leamington Marina, Kingsville Dock, and Mettawas Park. Ephemeral sandbars west of Kingsville near the shore are also a good spot for resting gulls but these sandbars were not present during the summer of 2023.

- Birds move between these resting spots throughout the summer with some banded birds being found in multiple locations on different dates. One bird, 50H, was seen in the morning at the Tip of Point Pelee by Cameron and then found by me later the same day at Mettawas Park!

In the process of reporting bands, we also discovered some interesting information on individual birds and their movements as well. The life history you can learn about an individual bird by reporting a band makes it worth the effort and the data that Bruce is able to collect is imperative to understanding the movements of Herring Gulls. We were excited every time we found a band that was reported by other observers as it told a much deeper story for these individual birds. I've outlined some of the highlights below:

The youngest bird we encountered was 13E, banded June 20, 2023 in Sandusky and subsequently seen July 28, 2023 at the Kingsville Dock.

79A was one of our furthest traveling birds within Ontario. It was found at the Tip by Cameron on August 2. 79A was a second cycle bird banded June 10, 2022 and reported on November 18, 2022 in Hamilton, Ontario, and also on December 6, 2022, in Brantford, Ontario.

OC3, found August 7, 2023 at the Tip by Cameron was banded on May 7, 2021 in Port Clinton, Ohio. It is a well-known bird that was originally banded in the Jet Express parking lot and has nested in three different spots in Port Clinton; most recently on the rectory of a Catholic Church where it raised two young to flying stage. OC3 has been reported in Port Clinton during all four seasons but is known to "disappear" in August. Our report solved the mystery of where it leaves to during that month.

01H has traveled the furthest of any of the gulls we reported in 2023. It was found by Cameron and me on August 15, 2023 and was banded in Sandusky, Ohio, on June 10, 2022. Interestingly, it was reported on May 9, 2023 in Harrison County, Mississippi and was back in Ohio on July 13, 2023, only to make its way over to Essex County by August!

The oldest bird we encountered was _5 (white on red), found by me on July 17 at Mettawas Park. Unfortunately, its band was mostly worn but the two white characters on a red band indicated that the bird was banded in 2017. The next two oldest birds we found were 4K9 and 7K9, banded on the same date in 2019 in Sandusky. 4K9 was seen by Bruce in late May of 2023 defending a nest in the same colony that it hatched in 4 years ago. *(Photo: J. Hatt, depicting 4K9)*



We hope that more banded Herring Gulls move into Essex county next summer. It is likely we will see some familiar bands and newly banded juveniles. We highly encourage anyone who sees a band to record its number and try to get a photo. You can either send band numbers and photos to Jeremy Hatt or Cameron Chevalier to send directly to Bruce Buckingham, or submit the band numbers to the USGS website listed above. We hope recording these bands annually will help develop a much more detailed picture of Herring Gull movement in Essex County.

A full spreadsheet containing all observations of banded HERGs in 2023 can be found here:

 Tracking Banded Herring Gulls - 2023

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wluIDXZofxIS9PFWtlhGdR5eZbvNSl0p7qFo5zmIuoM/edit#gid=0>

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