

**SUMMARY OF ESSEX COUNTY'S 2025 CHECKLIST**  
– 305 species –

**BIRDS OF ESSEX COUNTY AND LAKE ERIE ISLANDS, ONTARIO**



**Bird of the Year:** Rock Wren (*Photo: Donny Moore*)

**[LINK TO FULL CHECKLIST](#)**

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2025, Essex exceeded 300 species for the fourth straight year. With this year's total of **305 species**, Essex now occupies the top three spots for the highest year total in a Canadian county (308 in 2023; 305 in 2024; 305 in 2025). While no species were added to the all-time checklist from 2025 observations (see *Nature Notes* section below for details), many significant rarities were recorded. Over 23,000 checklists were submitted to eBird this year in Essex, along with over 23,000 photos and over 200 audio recordings.

The names of 103 observers appear in this summary, though dozens of other birders also made significant contributions to the 2025 list (see also the eBird Top 100 for [species](#) and [checklists](#)).

To keep this report concise, not all notable records of the year are given complete documentation below. There are known records pending a decision by the Essex eBird Regional Reviewers 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](#).

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

A database of bird records in Essex is available at [www.essexbirds.ca](http://www.essexbirds.ca). Currently, this site helps visualize record early and late dates and high counts for all species. It also houses birder-friendly maps to several hotspots in Essex, and all previous Annual Summary reports (2006 to 2024). In the future, this site will house more historical records and detailed species accounts for all species. I want to acknowledge the hard work invested by Mike/Steve J. McAllister, Donny Moore, Steve Pike, and Andrew Wiebe toward the site's creation and continued development.

## NOTABLE MISSES

**Little Blue Heron** - seen 4 / last 5 years  
**Gyr Falcon** - seen 4 / last 5 years  
**Black-necked Stilt** - seen 4 / last 5 years

**Red Phalarope** - seen 3 / last 5 years  
**Black-legged Kittiwake** - seen 4 / last 5 years  
**Kirtland's Warbler** - seen 3 / last 5 years

## **RECORD BREAKERS**

### **FOR ONTARIO**

**Green-winged Teal** – highest count by 160 (1660) - *Kiah Jasper*

**American White Pelican** – highest count by 6 (1006) - *Erik Van Den Kieboom, with Paul Gosselin, Noel Herdman, Mike Jaber, Hugh Kent, Peter Veighey*

\***American Avocet** – highest count by 37 (95) - *Steve Pike*

\***White-rumped Sandpiper** – latest record by 10 days (Dec 13) – *S. Pike*

**Long-billed Dowitcher** – highest count by 27 (68) - *Fred Grenier*

**Lesser Nighthawk** – latest spring record by 28 days (June 5) - *Jeremy Bensette, Kate Derbyshire, Chris Gaffan*

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** – earliest record by 2 days (Apr 26) - *Sarah McAllister, David Puglia*

\***Great Crested Flycatcher** – highest count by 27 (59) - *K. Jasper, Alessandra Kite*

\***Northern Yellow Warbler** – highest count by 254 (1342) - *K. Jasper, A. Kite*

**Cape May Warbler** – highest count by 150 (550) - *K. Jasper, A. Kite*

**American Goldfinch** – highest count by 667 (6682) - *K. Jasper*

\* - *also Essex County records*

### **FOR ESSEX COUNTY**

**Ross's Goose** – earliest fall record by 8 days (Sep 11) - *Brandon Holden*

**Trumpeter Swan** – highest count by 5 (13) - *Jeremy Hatt*

**Gadwall** – highest count by 970 (3200) - *K. Jasper, A. Kite*

**American White Pelican** – highest count by 291 (1006) - *E. Van Den Kieboom, with P. Gosselin, N. Herdman, M. Jaber, H. Kent, P. Veighey*

**Glossy Ibis** – latest spring record by 5 days (June 15) – *Michael/Steve J. McAllister*

**Glossy Ibis** – latest record by 4 days (Nov 8) – *K. Jasper*

**Black Vulture** – highest count by 1 (2) - *Kory Renaud*

**Black-bellied Plover** – latest record by 2 days (Dec 3) - *Keith Burk, F. Grenier, Mike St Pierre*

**Piping Plover** – earliest spring record by 11 days (Apr 4) - *Mike Burkoski*

**Killdeer** – highest count by 144 (750) - *B. Holden*

**Hudsonian Whimbrel** – earliest fall record by 10 days (Jul 9) - *B. Holden*

**Red Knot** – latest record by 4 days (Nov 9) - *Sarah Bonnett*

**Sanderling** – highest count by 22 (282) - *Jim Burk*

**Short-billed Dowitcher** – earliest spring record by 2 days (Apr 18) - *J. Hatt, Marianne Balkwill*

**Long-billed Dowitcher** – highest count by 38 (68) - *F. Grenier*

**Pomarine Jaeger** – earliest fall record by 10 days (Aug 31) - *J. Bensette, Joshua Vandermeulen*

**Lesser Nighthawk** – latest spring record by 37 days (June 5) - *J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire, C. Gaffan*

**Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** – highest count by 18 (80) - *B. Holden*

**Olive-sided Flycatcher** – earliest record by 7 days (Apr 26) - *S. McAllister, D. Puglia*

**Least Flycatcher** – latest record by 7 days (Oct 20) - *Alexis Van Esch*

**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher** – earliest record by 6 days (May 1) - *Richard Carr*  
**Tufted Titmouse** – highest count by 6 (25) - *Karen Cedar*  
**Tennessee Warbler** – earliest record by 2 days (Apr 21) - *Simone Parr*  
**Northern Parula** – latest record by 21 days (Nov 21) - *M./S. J. McAllister*  
**Cape May Warbler** – highest count by 300 (550) - *K. Jasper, A. Kite*  
**Black-throated Blue Warbler** – latest record by 1 day (Nov 5) - *Megan Irwin, Paul Pratt*  
**Bay-breasted Warbler** – latest spring record by 1 day (Jun 12) - *F. Grenier*  
**Louisiana Waterthrush** – earliest record by 6 days (Mar 22) - *Kelly Moore, Heidi Staniforth*  
**Savannah Sparrow** – highest count by 1 (76) - *K. Cedar, P. Pratt*  
**Eastern Meadowlark** – highest count by 4 (44) - *S. Pike*  
**American Goldfinch** – highest count by 2152 (6682) - *K. Jasper*

## TRUE RARITIES

\* = OBRC Review Species (Total: 14)



**Neotropic Cormorant (left)**  
Photo: David Turgeon



**Black-headed Gull**  
Photo: Cherise Charron



**Chuck-will's-widow**  
Photo: Cameron Chevalier

**\*Common Eider (number of records: 1) - first-ever fall record and first for Essex since 2004**  
November 30 – one female, Tip, Point Pelee National Park [PPNP] (found by J. Hatt)

- This exceptional rarity is only the fourth record for Essex, all of which have hailed from PPNP. This record comes after six Common Eiders were reported from Netitishi Point in southern James Bay between November 8 and 11 (found by J. Hatt, Nathan Hood, Sasha Smith, and Jacob Stasso), and an inland rash of Common Eiders was recorded in Saskatchewan (up to four individuals, Kannata Valley, November 15 to 23, found by Brian Burgess; two individuals, Round Lake, November 12 to 29, found by Don Weidl) and Minnesota (November 21 to 25, found by Alex Burchard).

### **\*Neotropic Cormorant (2-6)**

April 26 – one imm., Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve [PNR], Pelee Island (found by Rowan Keunen, Liam Thorne, m.obs.)

April 27 – one imm., Tip, PPNP (found by M. McAllister)

May 4 – one, Point Pelee Drive, Leamington (found by Ken Burrell)

May 10 to 21 – one adult, Florian Diamante Nature Reserve, Pelee Island (found by J. Vandermeulen)

May 11 to June 17 – one imm., Hillman Marsh CA [HMCA], general location (found by Bill/Sarah Lamond, m.obs.)

- Despite a gap in observations between May 18 and June 5 (refound by David Bell, Ava Belrose), all records from HMCA are treated as involving the same individual due to consistent age and location.

May 14 – one, flyover at Visitor Centre parking lot, PPNP (found by Andrew/Daniel/Garth Riley, Nancy McPherson, m.obs.)

**\*Tricolored Heron (1) - first for Essex since 2015**

May 10 – one adult flyover, Tilden’s Woods, PPNP (found independently by Eric Baldo, Brett Groves/Vicki McKay)

**\*Black-headed Gull (1) - first for Essex since 2018**

August 28 to September 5 – one adult basic, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs. [Sep 5])

- This is the first August record for Essex. There were a significant number of Black-headed Gull records in the Great Lakes region in 2025, including a long-staying bird in Lambton County, Ontario (May 18 to June 2, first cycle, found by B. Holden). Observations on Lake Erie included birds seen in Cleveland, Ohio (Mar 16 to 25, adult alternate, found by Ken Andrews); Erie, Pennsylvania (Mar 26 to Apr 5, adult alternate, found by Jerry McWilliams); and Niagara, Ontario (April 2, adult alternate, found by Brad Reinhardt). Four other individuals were seen elsewhere in the Great Lakes region. The present Pelee record could plausibly involve any of the adult alternate birds documented in the region earlier in 2025.

**\*California Gull (1)**

May 15 – one third cycle, Tip, PPNP (found by James Kennerley, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario, and marks an impressive fourth record of this species in Essex in the last five years.

**\*Lesser Nighthawk (1) - first for Essex since 1974 and second overall**

June 4 to 5 – one, HMCA, general location (found by J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire, C. Gaffan, also seen by D. Bell, A. Belrose, S. Pike)

- An extreme rarity in Canada, this represents only the ninth apparent national record and the third for Ontario. The two previous Ontario records occurred much earlier in spring, on April 29, 1974 (Point Pelee; found by Alan Wormington, first record for Canada) and May 8, 2019 (Long Point; found by Andrew Couturier). Elsewhere in Canada, records have extended to similar dates, including June 5, 2006 (offshore of Tofino, British Columbia; found by Mike Yip) and May 28, 2011 (Sooke, British Columbia; found by Jeremy Gatten, Jeremy Kimm). A bird also lingered from May 26 to June 2, 2017 in Somerset, New Jersey (found by Ben Barkley). The 1974 OBRC account noted that “weather conditions and a strong migration surge surely played a role” in that occurrence; no comparable phenomenon is evident for the present record, which is best treated as an isolated vagrant event.

**\*Chuck-will’s-widow (1)**

May 5 to 6 – one male, Main Road near Tip, PPNP (found by Quinten Wiegersma, m.obs.)

- This is the first Essex record since 2022. On May 6, the bird made brief overhead flights, perched close to the road for prolonged views, and later vocalized.



**Scissor-tailed Flycatcher**  
**Photo: Aidan Germain**



**Rock Wren**  
**Photo: Jude Szabo**



**Painted Bunting**  
**Photo: K. Jasper**

**\*Scissor-tailed Flycatcher (1) - first for Essex since 2016**

May 1 to 2 – one imm., Tip area, PPNP (found by R. Carr, m.obs.)

- Refound further up the East Beach of PPNP by Frank Letniowski on May 2. A crowd-pleaser species in all plumages, this individual's two-day stay allowed it to be enjoyed by hundreds of birders just as Point Pelee's Festival of Birds began.

**\*Black-billed Magpie (1) - first for Essex since 2018**

May 10 – one, Lighthouse Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by Alex Mills, m.obs.)

- This species' status in southern Ontario has long been a subject of controversy, with birders divided on whether records involve genuine vagrants or captive releases. This individual was observed actively migrating with Blue Jays (*Cyanocitta cristata*), a behaviour more suggestive of a wild bird. By the details of rectrix wear/loss, it can be confirmed as the same individual seen earlier the same day at Magee Marsh, Ohio. In 2023, a total of 9 extralimital records of the species were recorded in the province, two of which persisted into 2024. In 2024, there were 2 additional extralimital Ontario records, and 3 extralimital records on the American side of Lakes Erie and Ontario (where the species was unrecorded in 2023). This was the only extralimital Ontario record in 2025, though unlike the previous two years, the species was recorded east to Quebec (1), New Brunswick (1), and Nova Scotia (2).

**\*Rock Wren (1) - first for Essex since 1993 and second overall**

April 22 – one, East Beach at Tip, PPNP (found independently by Don Cecile, F. Grenier, and Bob Shpak)

- The Bird of the Year in Essex. An exceptional rarity anywhere in Ontario, this represents only the tenth provincial record. This individual afforded prolonged, close observation, exhibiting characteristic behaviour including frequent bobbing while perched and rapid running and hopping while foraging in and around a deteriorating cement cistern.

**\*Painted Bunting (1) - first for Essex since 2013, first alternate-plumaged male since 2002**

May 1 – one adult alternate male, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by Lynn Beaton, K. Jasper, m.obs.)

- This is also the first-ever record of this species for Pelee Island.

**\*Eurasian Tree Sparrow (1)**

May 24 – one adult male, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

- The number of records of this species in Ontario continues to increase annually. The OBRC has accepted 18 records in the last 3 years, and breeding has been confirmed nearby in Michigan. This is the second record for Essex in the last three years.

**Swainson's Hawk (1) - first spring record since 2011**

May 3 – one adult light morph, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by E. Baldo, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario, flying over many observers attending the Ontario Field Ornithologists (OFO) Shorebird Celebration at Hillman Marsh CA. This is also the earliest record for the PPBA, and the second-earliest record for Essex.



**Swainson's Hawk**  
Photo: Josh Cunningham



**Crested Caracara**  
Photo: C. Chevalier



**Cave Swallow**  
Photo: Wally Simpson

**\*Crested Caracara (1) - first for Essex since 1994 and first mainland record**

April 6 to 7 – one adult, multiple locations, Amherstburg area (found by Eric Leene, m.obs.)

- A strong candidate for the Bird of the Year, this was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario, and in a typical year would represent the only record for the province. However, additional records hailed from Thunder Bay (June 25, Oliver Paipoonge area and June 30 to July 1, Polly Lake area, unknown finders, presumably representing the same bird) and a long-staying individual in Sudbury (approximately July 6 to November 24, found by Taylor Gervais). The present individual later appeared in neighbouring Chatham-Kent on April 9, found by Garry/Steve Sadler, and its time in Essex generated considerable media attention (see: <https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6716732>).

***Cave Swallow (1)***

November 7 to 9 – seven, Marsh Boardwalk, PPNP (found by Christine Parthemore, refound by Blake Mann, m.obs.)

- These birds were observed circling overhead and flying to roost beneath the boardwalk surface. By November 9, they began to show signs of ill health, including lethargy and reduced wariness of humans. By November 10, one had died, and the remainder were presumed dead. The individual found deceased was collected by the author to be delivered to the Royal Ontario Museum for their specimen collection. As in 2024, there was a significant movement of this species in the Great Lakes region.

***\*Western Tanager (1)***

April 29 – one, adult female, Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario, and the third consecutive year Western Tanager has occurred in Essex after going unrecorded from 2011 to 2023.

## NOTABLE NESTERS OF 2025

2025 produced an impressive number of records of potential breeding species in Essex, though few were confirmed as nesting. That said, the list below includes several endangered, sensitive, or otherwise scarce species, and provides encouraging news for their establishment or re-establishment as breeders in Essex.

**(Species Name)** – Possible/probable breeding species



**American White Pelican** (*photo: M. Burkoski*) was confirmed as breeding in larger numbers than previously documented. Targeted effort focused on locating nesting sites and quantifying breeding birds. Recently fledged young were observed among adults on Middle Sister Island, where a total of 492 individuals were recorded (August 4, J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire, J. Hatt). 40 adults in suitable habitat were observed on Middle Island (June 3, P. Pratt), where 16 nests with eggs were later recorded (July 6, Emma Burbidge). Occupied nests were recorded with 175 adult birds on Big Chicken Island, while six adults were observed on Little Chicken Island on the same date (June 28, J. Hatt). These observations make important contributions to documenting this species' colonization of the western basin of Lake Erie and help contextualize increasing counts of this species in Essex, highlighted in 2025 by the record-high count for Ontario of 1006 individuals (tallied at Holiday Beach CA by E. Van Den Kieboom, with P. Gosselin, N. Herdman, M. Jaber, H. Kent, and P. Veighey). A flightless juvenile was present June 29 to July 1 at Mettawas Park in Kingsville (M. Burkoski, pictured bird), suggesting over-water dispersal of approximately 30 kilometers from the nearest known breeding site on Middle Sister Island or closer, previously undocumented breeding.

**(Neotropic Cormorant)** (*photo: J. Vandermeulen*) was not confirmed as breeding but a breeding adult was photographed carrying a branch (May 10, J. Vandermeulen). Inanimate object manipulation has been reported in this species and described as nest-building-like behaviour, but does not alone constitute evidence of nest construction (da Silva *et al.* 2018). That said, this species has bred annually since 2021 in nearby Macomb, Michigan, and the present record is at least strongly suggestive. An immature bird also lingered at Hillman Marsh CA for over a month (May 11 to June 17, B./S. Lamond). With up to six records this year and six in the last five years, including three summer records, local breeding seems imminent.

**(King Rail)** was not confirmed as breeding but a breeding code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved, indicating probable breeding, and a possible juvenile was recorded.

**(Wilson's Phalarope)** was not confirmed as breeding but a pair was observed copulating in the Shorebird Cell at Hillman Marsh CA on May 15 (multiple observers, copulation photographed by Rosanne Petrich; <https://ebird.org/checklist/S280875732>). The pair was recorded together until at least May 21, and the male continued until at least June 6.

**American Herring Gull** is a known breeder in Essex, but targeted effort was directed in 2025 to documenting nesting locations in mainland Essex and the Lake Erie archipelago. Breeding was confirmed on five islands and in the towns of Kingsville and Leamington, while probable breeding sites were identified along the Detroit River. The results of this work are detailed in a dedicated article in *Nature Notes* at the end of this report (*Breeding Sites of American Herring Gull in Essex County*), which provides the most comprehensive synthesis of breeding distribution for the species in Essex to date.

**(Long-eared Owl)/(Short-eared Owl)** were not confirmed as breeding but both species were recorded into spring. Three Long-eared Owls lingered in suitable habitat until approximately April 5, and possible nest-building was observed (Harrison Priebe). Two Short-eared Owls lingered in suitable habitat until at least March 30 (J. Hatt).

**(Acadian Flycatcher)** was not confirmed as breeding but a singing bird was recorded in suitable habitat in June (June 10, D. Bell).

**(Eastern Whip-poor-will)** was not confirmed as breeding but single birds were recorded singing in Amherstburg (approx. May 15 to 30, Russ Jones) and on Pelee Island (July 1, Madison Mcknight). The species' safe breeding dates begin on May 14.

**(Pileated Woodpecker)** was not confirmed as breeding but a pair was recorded in suitable habitat for 7+ days (June 7, Joan Affleck, P. Pratt), and a single bird was recorded vocalizing in suitable habitat (June 4, Peter Burke). The same pair was recorded again at the site on January 4, 2026 (J. Hatt), confirming resident status. Also noteworthy was an adult male present at another site for at least two days (August 12–13; M. Burkoski).

**(Yellow-throated Vireo)** was not confirmed as breeding but a singing bird was recorded on June 17 (D. Bell), well into the species' safe breeding dates that begin on May 24.

**(Common Raven)** was not confirmed as breeding but the volume (17 records in 2025) and pattern of records strongly suggest that breeding is likely occurring. Seven records involved multiple individuals, including a summer record of a pair in suitable habitat (June 5, J. Hatt). Particularly suggestive was a summer record of three birds, including at least one juvenile (July 30, J. Bensette). However, Common Ravens, including juveniles, are known to disperse widely with a reported median natal dispersal distance of 7.9 kilometres (Webb *et al.* 2009), and the location of breeding cannot be determined with confidence as being in Essex. Also noteworthy was a bird observed on October 18 and again on November 14 in the same location (F. Grenier), likely representing a local resident, especially in light of an observation at the same site on November 12, 2024 (H. Priebe).

**(Northern Mockingbird)** was not confirmed as breeding, but there were several records of possible and probable breeding birds (June 1 to 4, D. Bell; June 2 to July 1, J. Hatt; June 10 to July 5, J. Hatt; June 15, J. Hatt; June 22, J. Hatt). Most significant was a pair in suitable habitat for 7+ days (June 30 to July 6, J. Hatt).

**(Cerulean Warbler)** was not confirmed as breeding but singing birds were recorded in suitable habitat as late as June 18 (Mike Austin), providing very encouraging breeding evidence alongside an observation on May 24 (K. Derbyshire, J. Hatt), the first day of the species' safe breeding dates. This species bred historically in PPNP, but has not been confirmed as breeding there since 1986 due to landscape-level habitat changes (Wormington 2006).

**(Chestnut-sided Warbler, Blackburnian Warbler, and Mourning Warbler)** were not confirmed as breeding but singing birds were recorded on May 31 (C. Chevalier, J. Hatt), June 6 (M. Austin), and June 11 (K. Burrell) respectively. The safe breeding dates for the former two species begin on May 24, and on May 31 for the latter.

**(Yellow-breasted Chat)** was not confirmed as breeding but a singing bird was recorded on July 19 (Mark Anderson, Linda McDougall), in close proximity to where a lingering individual was seen in suitable habitat in May (until at least May 17).

**(Grasshopper Sparrow)** was not confirmed as breeding but a singing bird was recorded in suitable habitat in July (July 5, J. Hatt).

**(Henslow's Sparrow)** (*photo: M. St Pierre*) was not confirmed as breeding but singing birds were recorded in suitable habitat at two separate sites (June 11, K. Burrell and June 27 to July 2, C. Chevalier, M. St Pierre). A singing bird on territory in 2024 (June 6 to 16, B. Holden) represented the first record of possible breeding since 2015, making the 2025 observations the second and third such occurrences. Together, these recent records are encouraging news for this species' breeding in Essex. See *Henslow's Sparrow: Silenced* in *Nature Notes*.

**(Blue Grosbeak)** was not confirmed as nesting but a singing bird was recorded in suitable habitat (July 18, P. Pratt). An immature bird was recorded on consecutive days in September, representing the first-ever fall record for Essex (September 11 to 12, Jake Nafziger, B. Holden). This record likely represents the first-ever fall migrant record for Ontario, barely preceding another fall migrant record of an immature bird in Thunder Bay, Ontario (October 22, Rinchen Boardman/Thunder Cape Bird Observatory). All previous late-season records for the province have involved lingering birds. The identification of the 2025 birds as immatures supports recent arrival in Ontario, either via post-nesting dispersal from nearby U.S. populations or by recent fledging within the province. These records follow the first confirmed nesting of Blue Grosbeak in Canada, documented in Essex in 2024 (Chevalier 2025).

**Dickcissel** (*photo: P. Pratt*) was confirmed as breeding in Lakeshore and north of Harrow. This species was widely reported between Harrow and Essex during the breeding season, one of their few remaining strongholds in the county.

**(Western Meadowlark)** was not confirmed as breeding but a singing bird was present for at least 4 days (June 7 to 10, C. Chevalier). This is the first possible breeding record for Essex since 2004.

## **NOTABLE RECORDS**

### ***Snow Goose x Canada Goose (hybrid) (1) - first for Essex***

January 24 – one, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by R. Carr)

- Additional recognizable forms of note can be found in the complete checklist linked at the beginning of this document.

### ***Ross's Goose (7)***

February 23 – one adult, Mersea Rd 12, Leamington (found by C. Chevalier)

February 26 to March 4 – one adult, Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary, Kingsville (found by F. Grenier, m.obs.)

March 7 – one adult, Sandwich West Retention Pond, LaSalle (found by Mark Nenadov, m.obs.)

September 11 – one adult, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by B. Holden, m.obs.)

November 29 to December 5 – one imm., Jack Miner Bird Sanctuary, Kingsville (found by M. St Pierre, m.obs.)

December 5 to 7 – one, HMCA, general location (found by R. Carr, m.obs.)

December 24 – one, Essex County Regional Landfill, Harrow (found by M. McAllister)

### ***Eurasian Wigeon (1) - first for PPNP since 1994***

March 15 to 18 – one adult male, East Cranberry and Redhead Ponds, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

### ***Canvasback x Redhead (hybrid) (1) - first for Essex***

February 9 – one, Visitor Information Centre, Amherstburg (found by J. Hatt)

### ***Ring-necked Duck x Lesser Scaup (hybrid) (1) - first for Essex***

March 29 – one, Lighthouse Cove (found by B. Holden)

### ***King Eider (1)***

December 26 – one female, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Stasso)

### ***Harlequin Duck (1)***

January 26 – one adult male, Wheatley Harbour, Wheatley (found by C. Charron)

### ***Common Goldeneye x Barrow's Goldeneye (hybrid) (1) - first for Essex***

December 31 – one male, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

### ***Pacific Loon (2)***

May 7 – one imm., Tip area, PPNP (found by Jon Ruddy, m.obs.)

May 19 to 20 – one imm., Tip area, PPNP (found by J. Bensette, m.obs.)

***Red-necked Grebe (2)***

March 16 – two, East Beach at Shuster Trail, PPNP (found by B. Mann)

November 18 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

***Snowy Egret (1-2)***

May 4 to 8 – one adult, Big Creek [May 4 to 5] and Holiday Beach CA [May 5 to 8], Amherstburg (found by Tara Bischof, m.obs.)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario. This species was unrecorded in Essex in 2024. Observations from Big Creek at Creek Rd and Holiday Beach CA are treated as involving the same individual due to the rarity of this species and the relative proximity of these locations. The record below could potentially involve the same lingering bird, but the time between observations suggests a new individual.

June 30 – one adult, Big Creek, Amherstburg (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

***Glossy Ibis (3-5)***

May 5 to 8 – one adult, multiple locations, HMCA (found by Jeff Tunstall, m.obs.)

May 19 – one adult, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by K. Moore, H. Staniforth, m.obs.)

May 21 to 22 – one adult, Middle Side Rd, Amherstburg (found by K. Renaud, m.obs.)

June 6 to 15 – one adult, HMCA, general location [June 6 to 14] and West Cranberry Pond, PPNP [June 15] (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

- All HMCA/PPNP area records may pertain to a single lingering individual.

November 4 to 8 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

- The only previous November record of this species for Essex also hails from the Hawk Tower at HBCA (November 1 to 4, 2013, found by Cindy Cartwright).



**Ross's Goose**  
**Photo: Aldo Bertucci**



**Snowy Egret (right)**  
**Photo: Tim Hain**



**Glossy Ibis**  
**Photo: C. Charron**

### ***Black Vulture (4)***

January 13 – one, Onion Fields, Leamington (found by K. Derbyshire)

March 9 – one, Onion Fields, Leamington (found by Leon Barlow)

March 23 – two, Holiday Beach CA, Amherstburg (found by K. Renaud)

- This is the first record of multiple individuals for Essex.

October 17 – one, Holiday Beach CA, Amherstburg (found by E. Van Den Kieboom, m.obs.)

### ***Mississippi Kite (1)***

May 17 – one adult, Kennedy Woods, Kingsville (found by Brian Elder, Ray Wershler, m.obs.)

### ***King Rail (1)***

May 6 to July 15 – one to two, Essex County, general location (found by K. Jasper, A. Kite, m.obs.)

- The *Notable Nesters* section above offers additional details on this record.

### ***Piping Plover (2)***

April 4 – one, Mettawas Park, Kingsville (found by M. Burkoski, m.obs.)

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

April 18 to 19 – one, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by Harpreet Opal, m.obs.)

### ***Purple Sandpiper (3)***

November 1 – two, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, M. St Pierre)

November 11 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by R. Carr, m.obs.)

December 1 to 3 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by R. Carr, m.obs.)

### ***Laughing Gull (1)***

May 7 – one adult, Mersea Rd E, Leamington (unknown finder, m.obs.)

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

### ***Franklin's Gull (4-5)***

May 1 to 2 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by Jeff Skevington, m.obs.)

May 7 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Vandermeulen, m.obs.)

May 24 – two, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found independently by J. Hatt [2], C. Gaffan [1])

May 27 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

- An above-average eastward movement of this species was noted in 2025, leading most Essex records to be treated as involving different birds. The two early May records from the Tip of PPNP are likely to involve the same individual.

October 23 to 24 – one first summer, Mettawas Park, Kingsville (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)



**Piping Plover**  
Photo: M. Burkoski



**Franklin's Gull**  
Photo: Jack Belleghem



**Parasitic Jaeger**  
Photo: S. Bonnett

***Sabine's Gull (1)***

September 3 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk, m.obs.)

***Pomarine Jaeger (1)***

August 31 – one imm., Tip, PPNP (found by J. Bensette, J. Vandermeulen)

- This is just the fourth August record for Ontario, and comes after the first-ever July record from Hamilton (July 18 to 22, found by Richard Poort).

***Parasitic Jaeger (5)***

September 3 – one juv. intermediate morph, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

September 5 – one juv. intermediate morph, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk, Richard Carr)

September 15 – one juv., Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by S. Bonnett, Dennys Plazas-Cardona)

September 22 – one juv. dark morph, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

September 22 – one juv., Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by S. Bonnett)

***Long-tailed Jaeger (2)***

September 3 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

September 5 – one juv. dark morph, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk, R. Carr)

***Upland Sandpiper (3)***

May 1 – one, West Pump Rd, Pelee Island (found by Taylor Kennedy)

August 10 – one, flyover at Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by J. Hatt)

August 11 – one, flyover at Seacliff, Leamington (found by J. Hatt)

### ***Western Sandpiper (1)***

October 29 – one, Mersea Rd 2 east bridge, HMCA (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

- This was one of only two records for this species in Ontario in 2025, with the other hailing from Ottawa (September 4-6, found independently by Tony Tran [*Sep 4*] and Daniel Cadieux [*Sep 6*]).

### ***Pileated Woodpecker (5)***

April 22 – one, Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by Marc St Onge)

April 27 – one, Cemetery, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, M./S. J. McAllister, J. Stasso)

June 4 – one, Deer Run Rd, Wheatley (found by P. Burke)

June 7 to 8 – two, Cedarwin Scout Camp, private location (found by J. Affleck, P. Pratt)

August 12 to 13 – one adult male, Marianne Girling Nature Reserve, Harrow (found by M. Burkoski, m.obs.)

### ***Fish Crow (2)***

May 2 – one, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by Martin Parker, m.obs.)

May 15 – one, Tip area, PPNP (unknown finder, m.obs.)

### ***Common Raven (17)***

January 11 – one, Blytheswood, general area (found by M. Balkwill)

March 1 – one, Highway 3, Maidstone (found by M. St Pierre)

March 16 – one, Mersea Rd 19, HMCA (found by J./K. Burk)

March 29 – two, Lighthouse Cove (found by B. Holden)

April 7 – one, Memorial Forest, Amherstburg (found by Steve LaForest)

April 8 – two, Arner Townline, Arner (found by Oliver Love)

April 27 – one, PPNP, general area (unknown finder)

May 7 – two, McCormick Rd, Harrow (found by Andrew/Kara Wiebe)

May 26 – one, McCormick Rd, Harrow (found by A./K. Wiebe)

June 5 – two, County Road 46, Pleasant Park (found by J. Hatt)

July 30 – three including at least one juv., Wheatley Rd, Wheatley (found by J. Bensette)

August 5 – one, County Rd 8, Windfall (found by P. Pratt)

October 9 – two, Park Orientation, PPNP (found by B. Holden)

October 14 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by E. Van Den Kieboom, m.obs.)

October 18 to November 14 – one, Rowsom's Tilbury West CA, Comber (found by F. Grenier)

November 16 – one, Cedar Creek CA, Arner (found by Dean Ware)

December 25 – three, Coulter Sideroad, Harrow (found by S. McAllister/D. Puglia)

- This species continues to be detected with increasing frequency in Essex, with records in 2025 spanning nearly the entire calendar year. It is also the first year with multiple records that involve multiple individuals. The *Notable Nesters* section above offers additional details on several of these records.



**Henslow's Sparrow**  
Photo: D. Puglia



**Harris's Sparrow**  
Photo: M. St Pierre



**Yellow-headed Blackbird**  
Photo: Carolyn Bennett

***Townsend's Solitaire (1)***

November 19 – one, Meadows Rd, Amherstburg (found by J. Bensette, M. St Pierre)

- This is the fourth consecutive year that Townsend's Solitaire has been recorded in Essex.

***Henslow's Sparrow (3)***

April 18 – one, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by R. Carr, m.obs.)

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

June 11 – one singing male, Essex County, general location (found by K. Burrell)

June 27 to July 2 – one singing male, Essex County, general location (found independently by C. Chevalier, M. St Pierre)

- The *Notable Nesters* section above offers additional details on the above two records.

***LeConte's Sparrow (1-2)***

August 29 – one imm., Tip, PPNP (found by Hayden Epp, m.obs.)

September 12 – one imm., Tip, PPNP (found by Heiko Heerklotz, Philip Roessler, Rekil Prashanth, m.obs.)

- Despite the 14-day period between observations, these two records may involve the same individual, given that they were found in the exact same location and both identified as juveniles, a scarcely recorded age in Essex.

***Nelson's Sparrow (1)***

October 9 to 13 – three to four adults (Interior), Point Pelee North Dyke, Leamington (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

### ***Harris's Sparrow (1)***

November 11 to 13 – one imm., DeLaurier, PPNP (found by J. Bensette, m.obs.)

- This marks just the second fall record at PPNP in three decades, with the first since 1992 having occurred in 2024 (found by Anil/Elias Joshi). This individual was seen feeding at a bait pile set out by Park staff as part of the white-tailed deer culling program, together with a Gambel's White-crowned Sparrow. It probably lingered beyond November 13, but PPNP was closed to visitors from November 14 to 21.

### ***Blue Grosbeak (3) - first fall migrant record for Ontario, first fall record for Essex***

April 30 – one adult male, McCormick Rd, Pelee Island (found by K. Jasper, A. Kite, m.obs.)

July 18 – one singing male, Puce Landfill, private location (found by P. Pratt, K. Cedar)

September 11 to 12 – one imm., PPNP, general location (found independently by J. Nafziger, B. Holden)

- The *Notable Nesters* section above offers additional details on the above two records.

### ***Western Meadowlark (1)***

June 7 to 10 – one, Windsor International Airport, Windsor (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

- The *Notable Nesters* section above offers additional details on this record.

### ***Yellow-headed Blackbird (5)***

January 19 – one adult male, Mersea Rd 21, Leamington (found by K. Moore, H. Staniforth)

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

January 20 to 29 – one adult male, Harrow, general location (found by Stephen Ivanisko)

February 12 – one, Sherk St and Seacliff Dr, Leamington (found by F. Grenier, m.obs.)

May 20 – one adult male, Lighthouse Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by C. Bennett)

November 15 – one adult male, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by P. Gosselin, m.obs.)

- This is just the second record for the HBMO and the fourth for Holiday Beach CA.

## NATURE NOTES

### **Breeding Sites of American Herring Gull in Essex County – by Jeremy Hatt**

During the final year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, volunteers doubled their efforts to identify breeding sites of American Herring Gulls [AHGU] in Essex County. Confirmed breeding was documented on five islands in Lake Erie and in the towns of Leamington and Kingsville, and a few probable breeding sites were found along the Detroit River.

#### Confirmed Breeding

##### *Town of Leamington*

The largest mainland colony of nesting AHGU in Essex County is located in the town of Leamington. Breeding pairs nest on the break wall at Leamington Marina, apartment buildings near the marina and further north on Erie Street, and on rooftops all the way to the downtown core several kilometers away from Lake Erie.

##### *Town of Kingsville*

The second largest mainland colony of nesting AHGU in Essex County is located in the town of Kingsville. Breeding pairs nest on industrial buildings near Kingsville Dock and on rooftops of businesses along Main Street East.

On July 23, the author and Cameron Chevalier did a census of adult AHGU in the towns of Leamington and Kingsville to get an approximation of the number of breeding pairs across these two major colonies. In total, they counted 196 adults, which puts the mainland breeding population in this area at around 100 pairs. These populations have steadily increased over the last few years and will likely continue to do so. A trip report of their census including more specific locations of breeding pairs can be found here: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/397056>. Efforts to monitor these colonies will continue in 2026.

##### *Lake Erie Archipelago*

Atlas volunteers made it out to almost all of the known breeding sites of AHGU on the Lake Erie Islands this summer and confirmed breeding on Pelee Island at the Scudder Marina (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S254709909>), Middle Island (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S246380332>), Big Chicken Island (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S255396926>), East Sister Island (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S245997498>), and Middle Sister Island (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S186641517>). By August 4 on Middle Sister Island, most juvenile AHGU were already capable of flight but at least one downy chick was still present.



*AHGU chick on Middle Sister Island (photo by J. Hatt)*

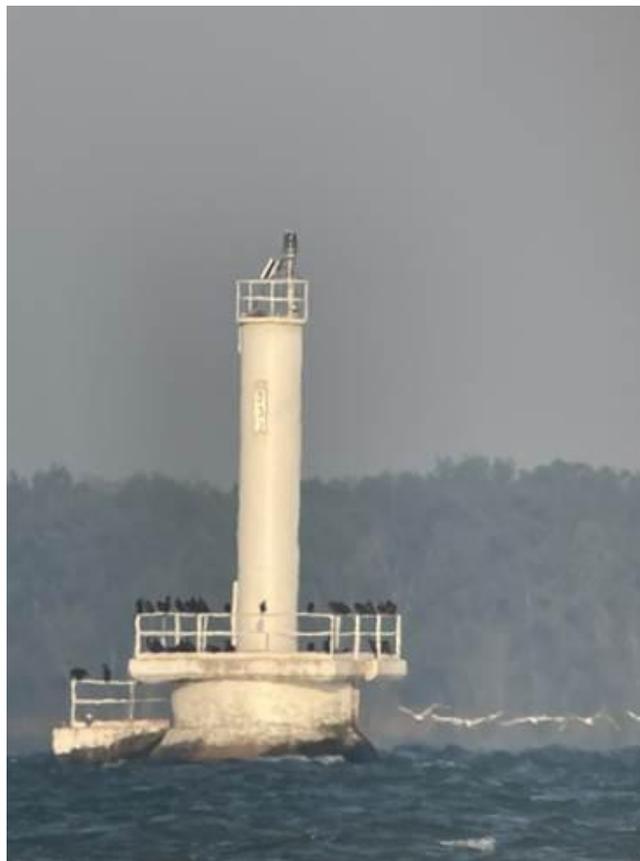


*Fresh AHGU juveniles capable of flight amongst American White Pelican colony on Middle Sister Island (photo by J. Hatt)*

### *Bar Point Pier Light D33*

On June 10, a single nest with two adults was found on the Bar Point Pier Light D33 just north of the Detroit River Lighthouse (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S250393456>). This was the only confirmed breeding on the Detroit River this year. A large Ring-billed Gull colony that included many AHGU used to breed on Fighting Island until the population crashed due to various causes including high water levels, disturbance, and contaminants. A report by Environment and Climate Change Canada includes the following recent history of AHGU breeding on the Detroit River:

“Large scale changes in populations of breeding colonial waterbirds on the Canadian side of the Detroit River have been evident over the last two decades. In 2007, over 29,000 colonial waterbird nests (=breeding pairs), comprised largely (96%) of ring-billed gull (*Larus delawarensis*) nests, were recorded on the Canadian side of the River. Since then, numbers of breeding pairs of colonial waterbirds have declined precipitously and by 2013, there was no evidence of colonial waterbirds nesting on this side of the River. Herring gulls were last reported nesting in 2010.” (Hughes 2023).



*AHGU pair with precarious nest on top of the Bar Point Pier Light D33 on the Detroit River  
(photo by J. Hatt)*

## Probable Breeding

### *Detroit River*

Pairs of AHGU were observed along the Detroit River in suitable habitat although no nests or recently fledged young were confirmed. These included a pair on the Canadian National Railway Ferry Leveling Ramps near Caesars Windsor, and at least two pairs near the Ambassador Bridge at McKee Park. Many inaccessible industrial properties along the river in this area could be suitable for small numbers of breeding AHGU. Pairs were also observed near the Gordie Howe International Bridge and Gil Maure Park, and adults present in Amherstburg in the summer may represent rooftop nesters, though no sites were confirmed. Amherstburg could end up being another site for a colony of rooftop nesters in the future similar to Leamington and Kingsville.



*Pair of adult AHGU (female left, male right) at the Canadian National Railway Ferry Leveling Ramps on the Detroit River (photo by J. Hatt)*

### *Colchester Harbour*

A few likely pairs of adults were present in suitable habitat at Colchester Harbour this summer. The break walls at the harbour could provide nesting sites for small numbers of AHGU similar to Leamington Marina though none were confirmed to breed there this year.

### Possible Breeding

#### *Lake St. Clair*

Although they require more monitoring, sites that could be suitable nesting locations for small numbers of AHGU include Belle River and Lighthouse Cove, however, no adults were present during visits to these locations in the summer.

#### *Wheatley Harbour*

Adults were present at Wheatley Harbour in the summer where suitable rooftops for nesting are present in the vicinity.

#### *Detroit River*

A few inaccessible islands on the Lower Detroit River could be suitable for small numbers of breeding AHGU but more monitoring is needed.

#### *Lake Erie Archipelago*

Islands where breeding wasn't confirmed due to inaccessibility but where nesting possibly occurs include Hen Island and North Harbour Island. Other structures in Lake Erie that could provide suitable nesting spots for a few pairs include the Southeast Shoal off Point Pelee and the Colchester Reef Lighthouse.

#### *Point Pelee National Park*

The marsh habitat at Point Pelee was not expressly investigated for AHGU nesting evidence in the summer, but has historically hosted one to two pairs (Wormington 2006).

**Gone and Almost Forgotten: Gray Partridge Added to eBird in Essex – by Jeremy Hatt**



*Covey of Gray Partridge in Ottawa County (photo: Amanda Guercio)*

In an effort led by Cameron Chevalier to finalize a Checklist of Birds of Essex County and to have the full list documented on eBird, no stone has been left unturned when investigating records that could add a potential new species to the county’s checklist. This effort has involved delving into historical documents, publications, and field notes to find records from the distant past (Greater Prairie Chicken, Thick-billed Murre), finding documentation of recently split species (Eurasian Whimbrel), and reviewing records that were not accepted at the time but where new information or knowledge could inspire a different outcome (reviewing the cases of Common Gull and Vega Gull, for ex.). Investigating extinct or extirpated species that once inhabited Essex County has also proved fruitful, including adding a record of a naturalized species whose history in the county was almost lost to time: the Gray Partridge.

Once known as the Hungarian Partridge, the Gray Partridge was first brought to North America in the late 1700s but these small, isolated releases largely failed. It wasn’t until the early 1900s that the species was widely introduced into North America and quickly became established across a large range within southern Canada and the United States.

The establishment of the two major Gray Partridge populations in Ontario (formerly the region southwest of Hamilton and currently the St. Lawrence Lowlands) is well-documented. Much less information is available on the rest of the counties where partridges were released. According to the Second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, from 1909 to 1938, 3,800 Gray Partridges were released in Ontario in 37 counties (Baillie and Harrington 1936; Dawson and Patrick 1960).

In 2021, eBird updated its Exotic Species Policy, allowing released birds and escapees to be reported to the database without affecting personal lists, county lists, and other data, as well as being searchable in Explore functions. Four new categories now exist for designating records: native, naturalized, provisional, and escapee. This change meant that new procedures had to be created for species more recently extirpated from most of their Ontario range that now persist from releases or escaped birds. Mike Burrell, Ontario eBird Coordinator, announced guidelines for how to deal with three tricky Ontario (and Essex) species including Gray Partridge, Northern Bobwhite, and Ring-necked Pheasant.

For Gray Partridge records, Ontario uses the following guidelines in eBird:

*There are lots of sources of information on the status of this species over time, mostly in the form of government reports. There were established populations in much of the province but it has steadily declined since the 1970s. The true status in a given region is muddied by the continued release of captive-bred birds. The current status appears to be that self-sustaining populations are likely only present in extreme eastern Ontario (Leeds and Grenville, Ottawa, Prescott and Russell, Renfrew, and Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry). For those counties, the default status has been set as naturalized, but everywhere else in the province be set as escapee by default.*

*For the remaining parts of the province, this is our best estimate as to the date before which there were established populations (= naturalized status should be applied):*

*2015: Brant, Halidmand, Norfolk, Oxford*

*2005: Frontenac*

*2000: Elgin, Hamilton*

*1995: Lanark, Waterloo, Wellington*

*1990: Halton, Lennox and Addington, Niagara*

*1985: Hastings, Northumberland, Prince Edward, Thunder Bay, York*

*1975: Middlesex, Durham*

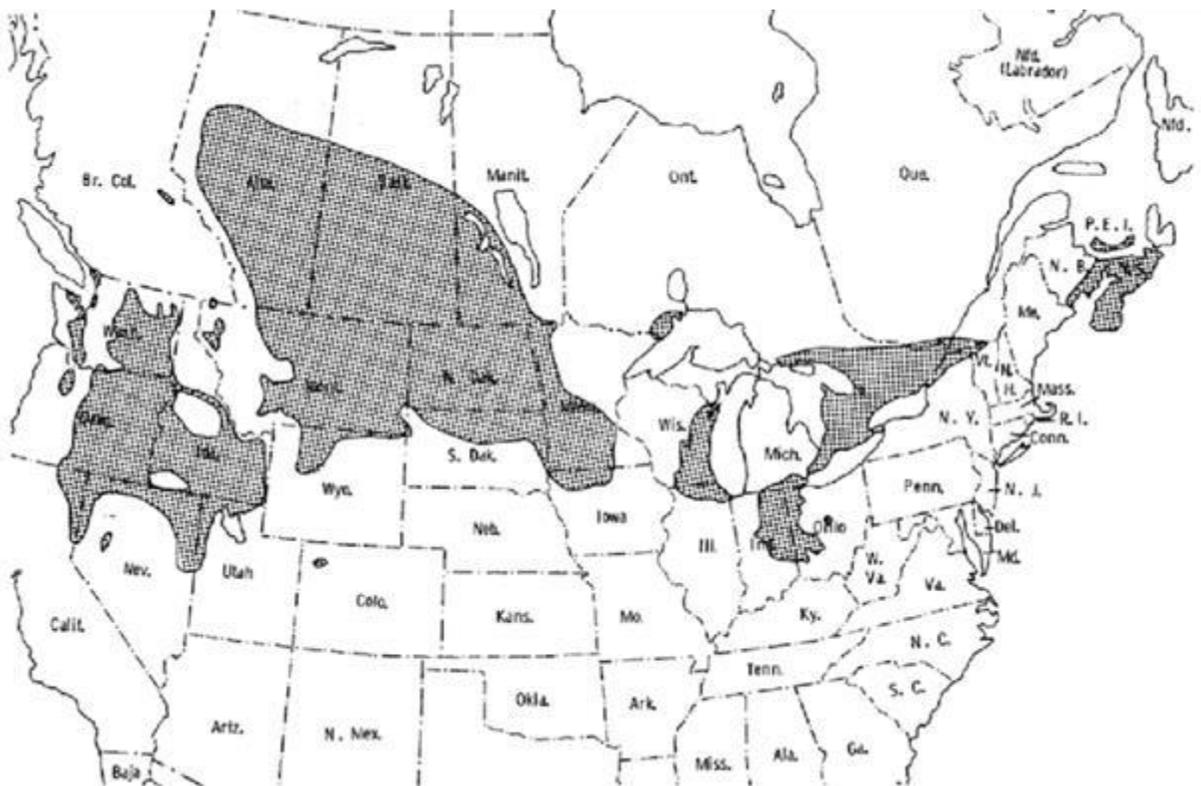
*1970: Bruce, Chatham-Kent, Essex, Huron*

*1960: Dufferin, Grey, Kawartha Lakes, Lambton, Perth, Peterborough, Simcoe*

*1950: Algoma, Peel, Toronto*

Based on this note, more research on the history of Gray Partridge in Essex County was clearly needed. Unfortunately, documents online were scarce and references to Gray Partridge were often single lines. One such document produced by Environment Canada titled *Exotic Mammals and Birds in Canada – A Historical Review* contained the line, “Birds were released in 1909 from Essex County to Leeds County and from Mischoka [sic] to North Frontenac.” Though vague, this anecdote at least substantiated that Gray Partridges had been released at some point in Essex County but provided no additional details.

Further examination uncovered a 1973 report by Johnsgard, which included a map of the estimated distribution of Gray Partridge in North America using data from the 1960s. The map suggested a more widespread range for Gray Partridge in southwestern Ontario that included Essex County. Regarding the distribution represented on the map, Johnsgard wrote, “Little information is available as to the density and geographic range of the southern Ontario and adjacent Quebec population...I have accepted Godfrey's estimation (1966) of the eastern Canada distribution, which indicates that most of the area south of forty-nine degrees north latitude is occupied range.” This provided additional evidence of the broader range of Gray Partridge in southwestern Ontario including Essex County and even a possible timeline of their presence.



Estimated distribution map of Gray Partridge in North America from the 1960s - *Grouse and Quails of North America*

Subsequent investigations led to repeated dead ends and it appeared that the species' occurrence in Essex County simply might not have been adequately documented. However, while simultaneously researching the history of Ring-necked Pheasant in Essex County, several Ministry of Natural Resource reports contained valuable information on pheasants in the region, so the prudent next step was to reach out to the MNR for similar data regarding Gray Partridge. This eventually led to an informative email chain with Patrick Hubert, Senior Wildlife Biologist for the MNR. Patrick agreed to have a look through his files to dig up any information he had on Gray Partridge in Essex County. His findings did not disappoint.

He produced three major discoveries:

1. Between 1927 and 1938, 2,247 Gray Partridges were released in Ontario. Of these, 205 were released during the same time period in Essex County, more than in any other county in the province (Thomas and Geoffrey 1973; Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources Report).
2. The first parts of the province in which Gray Partridge were considered established were Essex and Kent Counties but they were never considered abundant there (History of the Hungarian Partridge in Ontario, MNR Report).
3. Essex County had its first open hunting season on Gray Partridge in 1932. It was a short season with small bag limits. The season was closed by 1945. It was apparently reopened again in the 1950s and remained open for some time (History of the Hungarian Partridge in Ontario, MNR Report).

These reports were prepared sometime after 1963 and confirm that Gray Partridge was once considered an established resident of Essex County, was abundant enough for an open hunting season within five years of release, and that birds were present until after 1950 when the hunt was reopened, suggesting they were likely established for at least 18 years. As of the publication of this article, no information has been found on when Gray Partridge ultimately disappeared from Essex County. Paul Pratt and Bob Curry, prominent birders who began their birding careers in the 60s, regularly birded Essex County during that period. Neither has any recollection or information on Gray Partridge being seen in the region at the time. Due to the lack of observations or details from this period, this would roughly approximate that Gray Partridge likely died out sometime in the mid-50s to early 60s.

So what happened to the Gray Partridge population in Essex County? Hubert suggests that "It's unclear whether Gray Partridge would have persisted longer in Essex if they had not been hunted. Hunting may have contributed to the Gray Partridge decline somewhat in Essex as bird numbers were already declining, but as with other game birds (Northern Bobwhite, Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse) in that part of Ontario, landscape/habitat changes were much more important."

Other factors, including climate, may have already limited the species' population as well, but Hubert adds, "In the case of Gray Partridge, you could probably plot their decline as a direct relationship with the decline of small grains and pasture and inversely with increased field size."

Gray Partridges rely on agricultural landscapes and prefer areas with clay and clay-loam, one of Essex County's primary soil types. Best habitats include cereal grains, pasture, and hayfields with extensive hedgerows (Carroll 1993). This habitat would have been widespread in Essex between 1927 and into the 1950s allowing them to establish quickly and survive in sustained numbers. However, as with Ring-necked Pheasant and Northern Bobwhite, which rely on similar habitats, declines were closely linked to habitat loss and the increased intensity of farming practices in the region.

Since the Second Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas, Gray Partridge has now become extirpated from their previous stronghold in the region of Brant County and continues to decline in their remaining diminished range in eastern Ontario. If current trends hold, it's possible the species could disappear from Ontario entirely. Though not a native species, the loss of Gray Partridge in southwestern Ontario mirrors the decline of many native grassland birds, making it part of a much bigger story of habitat loss, and a small but important part of Essex County's history.



A search of eBird records of Gray Partridge reveals that several counties outside of the two well-known southern Ontario ranges have accepted historical naturalized records in areas where the species is now gone including Northumberland, Durham, Toronto, Elgin, and Middlesex. Following this example, a single incidental record has been added to eBird for Essex County: January 1, 1932, the year Gray Partridge was considered established enough for an open hunting season. <https://ebird.org/checklist/S285115317>

Female Gray Partridge  
Photo: Susan Nagy

### Additional note on the status of Northern Bobwhite in Essex County on eBird

Northern Bobwhites were already on the decline in Essex County by the 1960s due to the conversion of grassland habitat and orchards to cash crop, and an increased intensity in farming practices. The species still persisted in Essex County during this time, however, with stable populations in Point Pelee and the Ojibway Prairie Complex, and occasional sightings within the wider county.

In 1978, record-breaking winter storms all but wiped out the remaining Northern Bobwhite from the region. A grim description of the aftermath of this event was provided by Paul Pratt: "I believe that naturally occurring Bobwhite persisted right up to the winter storms in early 1978. I remember after one storm Alan Wormington and myself birded the park by foot and could only find a single live bird between the VC to the tip (but several dead birds). I never saw a native Bobwhite after that." He later added, "...didn't find any more details on that birdless walk to the tip around Jan. 30. The huge difference from my Jan 23 list with 12 RCKI and 27 BRRCR etc to my Feb 5 list of 20 total individuals can provide an inkling of the storm's toll on wildlife." The winter storm described above took place on January 26, 1978.

Three Point Pelee records past this date were considered wild by Alan Wormington: a male heard at White Pine on May 26, 1978 (Ernest A. Carhart), a female at the entrance to the park on June 8, 1978 (James C. Wilson), and a male at the Tip on June 13-20, 1981 (William Fielding, Alan Wormington et al). Another male heard near the Visitor Centre by Stan Koster on May 6, 1980, was also presumably part of a few persisting wild birds at Point Pelee.

Northern Bobwhite was also native to Pelee Island according to several sources including Ford Crawford, a lifelong farmer and property owner on the island. Pers. comm. with local hunter and birder, Dean Ware: "Ford Crawford said they were on the island [in the] 60s 70s and the 78 blizzard wiped them out."

eBird records have been entered under the Essex County Field Naturalists' Club Data account to accurately document the Northern Bobwhite's local history, including incidental records on Pelee Island. All Essex records prior to 1978 are accepted into the database as native birds, and all records after this year are designated as exotic since modern records now pertain to releases or escaped birds (with the exception of the Point Pelee records listed above).

A future article will detail the treatment of Ring-necked Pheasant records on eBird in Essex County.

## **Banded Bird Breakdown of 2025 - by Jeremy Hatt**

Several banded birds of interest were found in Essex County this year, providing invaluable information on the age, movements, and populations of various species. This new Nature Notes feature aims to summarize and keep track of banded birds found in Essex each year. Banded birds should be reported to the North American Bird Banding Program at <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov>. For some species, specific organizations can also provide information on banded birds and are mentioned in the following species accounts. If you found a banded bird that is not in this summary, please consider sending details of the record to Cameron Chevalier or Jeremy Hatt.

### **American Herring Gull**

Local birders continued to monitor American Herring Gull [AHGU] bands in Essex County in 2025. These banded gulls are part of a project run out of Sandusky, Ohio, by Bruce Buckingham. A more detailed description of Bruce's work and a summary of banded gulls detected in 2023 and 2024 can be found in the [Summary of Essex County's 2023 Checklist](#) and [Summary of Essex County's 2024 Checklist](#). A spreadsheet including all banded AHGUs recorded in Essex since 2023 can be found here: [Tracking Banded American Herring Gulls in Essex](#).

One clear outcome of monitoring banded AHGU is that patterns of local movement are consistently inconsistent. In 2023, almost every banded gull was found in July and August with only two birds detected outside of these months (one in June and another in September). In contrast, in 2024, an influx of banded gulls appeared in May and June and banded birds were observed right through to December. The date range of banded birds found in 2025 was similar to 2024, however, far fewer birds were present throughout the year including at previously popular resting sites.

Only 34 individual banded gulls were detected in 2025 compared to 81 individual bands in 2024 and 85 in 2023. 14 new bands for the county were detected this year. One possible factor for these lower numbers was that 2025 was the last year of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Priorities of local birders greatly shifted to collecting data for the Atlas and less time was spent actively searching out AHGU bands in the summer months. Even so, regular visits throughout the year to hotspots where banded AHGU like to rest such as the Tip, Kingsville Dock, and Mettawas Park often resulted in only finding a single banded gull or an absence of bands altogether. Another possible reason for less detection in Kingsville in particular was low lake levels, which formed sandbars far out on the lake where hundreds of AHGU frequented. On most days, gulls were too distant to detect a leg band, even with a scope.

Only five banded juvenile gulls were detected in Essex County this summer. This result is similar to 2024 where only four were found. These results are drastically different from 2023 where 29 banded juveniles were found; sometimes several together at one site and containing birds banded on the same day!

Ten banded gulls returned to the shores of Essex in 2025 that were detected in either 2023 or 2024. Of these, two have been detected in all three years of monitoring. Interestingly, these birds, 01H and 38A, were found a day apart on August 10 and 11 this year. 01H spent half the year in Essex County in 2024; first detected on June 9 at the Tip and last seen on December 16 at Wheatley Harbour. During this period it was also seen twice in Kingsville. In 2023 it was seen only once at the Tip. 38A spent the spring of 2024 in Essex observed from May 28 to July 5 between the Tip and Kingsville and in the summer of 2023 from July 11 to July 31 in Kingsville. The significance of seeing returning birds, especially if photographed, is getting to observe the advancement of plumage from their first to fourth years. In the case of 01H and 38A, both hatched in 2022, plumage details of their first three years have now been observed by birders. It's likely that they will return to the Sandusky colony in 2026 to breed in their fourth year.



*01H on August 15, 2023, at the Tip; December 16, 2024, at Wheatley Harbour; and August 10, 2025, at the Tip (all photos by J. Hatt)*



*24A on July 14, 2023, at Mettawas; and August 10, 2025 at the Tip (photos by J. Hatt)*



*24E on August 4, 2023, at Kingsville Dock; and August 10, 2025, at the Tip (photos by J. Hatt)*



*38A on July 11, 2023, at Mettawas Park (photo by J. Hatt); May 28, 2024, at the Tip (photo by C. Chevalier); and August 11, 2025, at Mettawas Park (photo by M. Burkoski)*



*45A on June 14, 2024, at the Tip (photo by C. Chevalier) and October 5, 2025, at Wheatley Harbour (photo by J. Hatt)*

The oldest banded AHGU observed this year was 2A9, which is now at least 10 years old, having been hatched in 2015 or earlier. It was found at Wheatley Harbour on October 26. In fact, of the 34 banded AHGU detected this year, 19 of them were spotted at least once at Wheatley Harbour. In 2024, only nine banded gulls were spotted at Wheatley Harbour and none in 2023! This data is anecdotal since consistent searches aren't being done at each known site but it at least suggests evidence of specific locations being preferred year to year. As Bruce Buckingham has concluded from years of studying AHGU, local gulls wander from their breeding colony to follow fish stocks. It's possible that many of the Ohio breeding population of AHGU wandered to more distant shores in search of food in 2025, which could account for the lower numbers of banded gulls detected in Essex County this year. It is merely conjecture, but perhaps this correlates with a lower number of jaegers, Sabine's Gulls, and Black-legged Kittiwakes this fall on the western basin of Lake Erie as well.



*2A9 on October 26, 2025, at Wheatley Harbour (photo by J. Hatt)*

Unfortunately, rising levels of avian flu has resulted in a higher frequency of dead gulls and waterfowl being found in Essex County this year. Perhaps not coincidentally, 2025 also marked the first year banded AHGU were found dead. This included 26Y, a fresh juvenile found dead near East Beach Hillman Marsh, and 33Y, first detected at Wheatley Harbour on September 27 and subsequently found dead at the same location on October 13.

The consistent monitoring of banded gulls in Essex County will continue to advance our knowledge of our local breeding populations of AHGU as well as advance our understanding of the Great Lakes population of the species as a whole. We encourage anyone who sees a band to record its number and try to get a photo so we can continue to learn more from this project. Several new observers contributed band numbers again in 2025 and we hope birders will be on the lookout in 2026. You can send band numbers and photos to Jeremy Hatt or Cameron Chevalier to send to Bruce Buckingham directly, or submit the band numbers to the USGS website at <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/bblretry/>.

### **Ring-billed Gull**

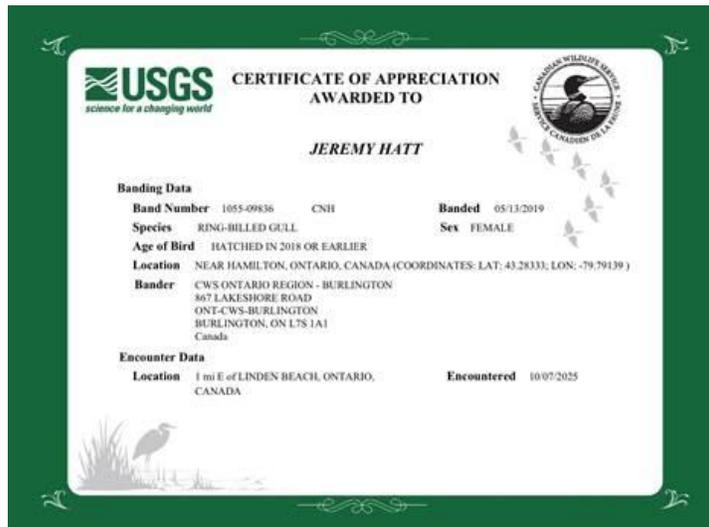
While banded American Herring Gulls are regularly recorded in Essex County, Ring-billed Gull [RBGU] bands are seen much less frequently. However, in 2025, two birds were found, which provides some insight into movements of the species. Both birds were found by the author at Mettawas Park, but were part of different banding projects.

The first was an adult male banded on June 26, 2017 with white characters 282 on a blue band. It was hatched in 2016 or earlier making it at least 9 years old. This individual was banded on Ile Deslauriers in Varennes, Quebec, by L'Universite du Quebec a Montreal Department des sciences biologiques. The island is listed as a Key Biodiversity Area and has an extremely large RBGU colony: "At last count in 2000, 51,667 pairs nested on the island, which makes this colony the largest in Quebec as well as one of the largest in Canada, and represents over 5% of the world's population" (IBA Canada). And from the Quebec Breeding Bird Atlas: "The colony on Ile Deslauriers at Varennes, which numbered about 51,000 nests in 2006, is still the largest, although by 2016, there were only about 32,500 nests" (CWS, unpubl. data).



*282, found on September 29, resting at Mettawas Park (photo by J. Hatt)*

The next RBGU found was an adult female banded by Canada Wildlife Services (CWS) in Burlington on May 13, 2019. Its band had black characters CNH on white and was hatched in 2018 or earlier making it at least seven years old.



*CNH, found on October 7, preening at Mettawas Park and accompanying Certificate of Appreciation for reporting (photos by J. Hatt)*

Like American Herring Gulls, RBGU show high fidelity to their nesting colonies. In the fall, many RBGU migrate south before lakes and rivers freeze. Most Ontario and Quebec RBGU overwinter along the Atlantic coast but many now overwinter inland as well (Brousseau 1998). These two banded RBGU are fall migrants that will either continue to the coast or possibly overwinter on Lake Erie. Hopefully more banded RBGU will be found in Essex County to learn more about their timing and movements.

### **Piping Plover**

Two Piping Plovers [PIPL] were found in Essex County this year and excitingly, both birds were banded. Photos and descriptions of the bands were sent to Birds Canada to learn their stories. The first was a record early spring migrant found on April 4 by Mike Burkowski at Mettawas Park. This individual was record-early for Essex County by 11 days and represents the earliest modern record for both Ontario (April 10) and the Great Lakes region, exceeding the previous earliest arrival of April 5. The bird was only present at Mettawas Park for one day.

JulieAnn Prentice, Ontario Piping Plover Biologist, Birds Canada, provided the following details: “The Great Lakes PIPL team has been able to confirm that the Piping Plover observed in Kingsville is ‘Obie’, a 9 year old male who hatched from South Manitou Island, in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Park. He breeds annually on Cat Island in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Since he began nesting in 2018, he has fledged 18 wild chicks. He is also the father of 5 captive reared chicks. Older, experienced males are usually the first to arrive on breeding grounds, so this ID certainly checks out! He hasn't been spotted since visiting Ontario, but the folks in Green Bay are checking for him daily.”

Later that month, JulieAnn provided another update: “I'll also mention that Obie has returned to his breeding grounds on Cat Island, Wisconsin. Their monitoring team confirmed he was back on [April 18] and already courting a female nicknamed Violet.”



*'Obie' at Mettawas Park on April 4, 2025 (photo by F. Grenier)*

The next Piping Plover was another spring migrant found on April 18 by Natalie Merola and Harp Opal at the tip of Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve on Pelee Island. It stayed until at least April 19 when it was further documented by Kiah Jasper, Taylor Kennedy, and Alessandra Kite.

The following information was provided by JulieAnn: "Happy to confirm this bird was Of,BL:X,R (Orange flag over dark blue and black (left), metal over red (right)). This bird is nicknamed "BLuR". She is a female who nests on North Manitou Island in Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore!"



*'BLuR' at Fish Point Provincial Park on April 18, 2025 (photo by H. Opal)*

Please report Piping Plover sightings to Birds Canada. Exact location, leg bands (including any colour dots or numbers), and photos can be sent to [ontarioplovers@birdscanada.org](mailto:ontarioplovers@birdscanada.org).

## Peregrine Falcon

The local Peregrine Falcons that breed on the Ambassador Bridge in Windsor are well-known to locals but a bird found on August 11 this year by Russ Jones was originally banded in Michigan, providing insight into short-distance movement of resident birds.



Russ posted the following summary to the Windsor Essex Nature Sightings Facebook group:

*I spotted this Peregrine Falcon in Amherstburg today, scanning over a flock of shorebirds that were very much aware of its presence, making for a tense morning on the marsh for any bird smaller than it. It sat there for a few minutes allowing for some great photos before moving on, but not before buzzing by the shorebirds, no attempt to catch one, but almost as if it enjoyed scattering the birds by its mere presence.*

*This bird had bands on its legs and the photos were clear enough to resolve the ID numbers. After sharing the photos with the @CPF-Windsor Peregrine Falcon Watch group, who subsequently shared them with the Peregrine Falcons Southeast Michigan group, I learned the following;*

*“This bl/blu C/79 peregrine falcon is a male who hatched in Mt. Clemens, Macomb County, MI, in 2024. He is named Gabe for Gabe Anton, a Mt. Clemens benefactor. Thanks for the pictures and sighting. Thanks to Susan Stevens for identifying this peregrine falcon.”*

*As Gabe flew off I smiled to myself knowing that he would have forgotten about me almost instantly, but I will likely never forget our brief encounter.*

## American White Pelican

Increased monitoring of the nesting population of American White Pelican on the Lake Erie Islands has brought new insight into the expansion of this species into Essex County. As with American Herring Gull, banded birds will also provide valuable information on the movements of pelicans in the region. One such banded bird was found by Russ Jones on October 17 at Holiday Beach. Although the code on the metal leg band was not visible due to distance, it provides encouragement to birders to be on the lookout for bands or wing tags on pelicans in the future.



*Banded American White Pelican, left, at Holiday Beach (photo by Russ Jones)*

## **Henslow's Sparrow, Silenced** - by C. Chevalier

“*Tsilik*” - a quarter-second song, subtle and easily missed. It is the shortest and one of the quietest songs in the country, made by one of Canada's rarest birds.

The Henslow's Sparrow (*Centronyx henslowii*), a secretive grassland species far more often heard than seen, teeters on the brink of disappearing from Canada entirely. The newly released *State of Canada's Birds* estimates that only ten breeding individuals remain (Birds Canada 2024).



*A Henslow's Sparrow, showing its trademark large, flat, olive-green head, huge pink bill, and crisp black breast and flank streaking (photo: Mike St Pierre)*

While never abundant in Canada, the species has experienced a precipitous decline. Southern Ontario is the only remaining stronghold for this species in the country. During Ontario's first Breeding Bird Atlas in the early 1980s, Henslow's Sparrow was found in 38 atlas squares across southern Ontario. By the second atlas (2001–2005), that number had plummeted to nine. In Essex County, one singing male was documented in 2024, followed by two at separate locations in 2025. These were the first records of possible breeding of Henslow's Sparrow in the county since 2015. As of November 2025, one of the 2025 sites has already been cleared and prepared for development, further reducing the already scarce habitat the species requires.

Henslow's Sparrow is classified as endangered under Ontario's Endangered Species Act (ESA), which historically afforded automatic protections to the species and any habitat it occupies. Yet recent provincial legislation in the form of Bill 5 and the replacement of the ESA with the Species Conservation Act 2025 erodes these protections, weakening environmental safeguards and facilitating the decimation of sensitive habitat in the interest of development. Approvals and project timelines are accelerated while habitat protections are narrowed, species at risk are de-listed, and recovery planning is scrapped.

The consequences are visible on multiple 2025 sites: one Henslow's site also held many Short-eared Owls and an Eastern Meadowlark (both threatened) along with many Barn Swallows (special concern). The site has since been cleared and prepared for development. Another supported many Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks (both threatened). This site was mowed before the nesting season was complete, likely destroying many active nests (Wolcott et al 2023). A third Essex County site hosted a Grasshopper Sparrow (special concern) and a Clay-colored Sparrow - it, too, has already been cleared for development.

Lindsay Rodger's 1998 tallgrass prairie recovery plan issued a warning: "to make significant strides toward recovering tallgrass communities region-wide, a larger, more coordinated and strategic approach is required." Urban development, agriculture, pollution, and mismanagement have reduced southern Ontario's tallgrass prairie to under 3% of its original extent, now confined to small, isolated remnants. As these diverse communities decline, the species that depend on them face the same threats. The State of Canada's Birds reports that grassland birds have declined by 67% nationwide since 1970, more than any other group (Birds Canada 2024). The birds that remain are clinging to the last patches of tallgrass, early-successional fields, and meadow complexes that survive in an increasingly developed landscape.

But there is hope: grassland species have been shown to respond positively to restoration of grassland habitat, especially if coupled with management (Swengel 1996). Research shows that well-managed restored grasslands can support breeding bird communities comparable to those found in native prairie (Fletcher and Koford 2002). Effective management is not inherently labour-intensive; even simple actions such as delayed mowing can significantly reduce the risk to active nests (Wolcott et al. 2023). Management can also take the form of land-use decisions; for example, regions with larger amounts of agricultural set-aside land experienced corresponding increases in local Henslow's Sparrow populations in the U.S. (Herkert 2007).

Essex County retains some of Ontario's last viable grassland landscapes, and decisive action is now required to secure them. A county-wide inventory of intact, suitable habitat should be undertaken, followed by formal designation of these areas within planning processes. Development proposals should be required to avoid and buffer these sites, and any location known to support Henslow's Sparrow must receive the highest level of protection, with no allowance for encroachment or fragmentation. Preserving these sites is essential not only for the species' survival, but for the broader grassland community that is rapidly disappearing from the county and the province.

Henslow's Sparrow is already quiet. Its loss would mark a permanent break in the natural future of Ontario; a species gone, and a warning that other grassland voices will follow. Whether it vanishes from Canada forever depends on the choices Ontario makes now.

**From the Archives: New Additions to the Essex County Checklist - by C. Chevalier**

In an effort to finalize a Checklist of Birds in Essex County and to have the full list documented on eBird, numerous historical records have been extensively investigated. As mentioned by Jeremy Hatt in *Gone and Almost Forgotten: Gray Partridge Added to eBird in Essex*, this can at times involve re-reviewing records with new information. One such case is the story of Common Gull (*Larus canus*) in Essex County.

On March 31, 2006, Alan Wormington observed an “immaculate adult” small, dark-mantled gull associating with 200–300 Ring-billed Gulls (*Larus delawarensis*) near Wheatley Harbour. Any gull similar in size to Ring-billed Gull but with a distinctly darker mantle warrants scrutiny. He obtained several photos on film and reported the bird at the time as a ‘Mew’ Gull, a rare vagrant in Ontario. At the time of the observation, what we now call Common Gull and Short-billed Gull (*Larus brachyrhynchus*) were treated as a single species under the name ‘Mew’ Gull. Based on its appearance and the likelihood of occurrence, Alan assigned the bird to the North American form (*L. canus brachyrhynchus*), which is now recognized as Short-billed Gull. Subsequently, the photographs were shared with other observers, some of whom noted features suggesting the bird may instead have been Kamchatka Gull (*L. c. kamschatschensis*), a northeastern Asian taxon now treated as a subspecies of Common Gull. These features include: its large size, comparable to Ring-billed Gull; a very dark mantle, nearly approaching Lesser-black Backed Gull in shade; a sloping forehead and long, strong bill, giving a ‘lanky-faced’ impression; an iris that shows as slightly paler than the pupil; and rather large apical spots/white primary tips at rest.



*The 2006 ‘Mew’ Gull, left, with a Ring-billed Gull (photo: Alan Wormington)*

Remarkably, upon request, Alan’s original slides were located by Mark Peck at the Royal Ontario Museum and obtained by Steve Pike. Two different slide scanning sessions orchestrated by the author and Steve reproduced digital images in high definition for better analysis. Based largely on these images, a letter was drafted by the author and Jeremy Hatt to send to experienced ‘gullers’ around the world. Their feedback is generally in alignment with the identification as a Kamchatka Gull, representing a new species for Essex, its 19th gull species (for the time being - see below). The record will be resubmitted to the OBRC, which will ultimately rule on the bird’s identity.

The 2006 bird is not the only historical gull record that has resurfaced. There is also a well-documented 2012 record of Vega Gull from the Point Pelee area, found by Kevin McLaughlin, that lingered from September 29 to October 13. A similar review process is anticipated for this record, which is strengthened by detailed in-flight observations and the involvement of multiple observers. This would mark the 20th gull species for Essex.

The story of the 2006 Common Gull shows that historical records, when preserved and revisited, can continue to refine our understanding of birds in Essex County. As the county’s checklist nears completion, these records remind us that the past still has the power to reshape the list and our understanding of Essex County’s birdlife.

*Owing to a taxonomic split, Essex also adds Eurasian Whimbrel to its checklist in 2025, based on an observation from September 3, 1989 (Alan Wormington, Robert G. Finlayson, James A.N. Dowall, William F. Smith; <https://ebird.org/checklist/S281758999>).*

## **AMENDMENTS TO PREVIOUS SUMMARIES**

### **2022 Summary**

***\*Bell's Vireo (1) - appropriately crediting finders***

May 12 – one, White Pine, PPNP (found by Bas van den Boogaard, Han Zevenhuizen and Ruud van Beusekom, m.obs.)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **ACRONYMS AND OTHER RELEVANT DEFINITIONS**

**AHGU** – American Herring Gull

**CA** – Conservation area

**Confirmed breeding** – Level 4 breeding evidence as defined by the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Breeding is confirmed, by such behaviours as nest-building, distraction display, or food-carrying, or more simply by the presence of eggs or young in a nest.

**HMCA** – Hillman Marsh Conservation Area

**Imm.** – Immature

**Juv.** – Juvenile

**M.obs.** – Multiple observers

**OBRC** – Ontario Bird Records Committee

**PIPL** – Piping Plover

**Possible breeding** – Level 2 breeding evidence as defined by the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Breeding is not confirmed, but a species is found occupying suitable habitat during the breeding season.

**PPNP** – Point Pelee National Park

**Probable breeding** – Level 3 breeding evidence as defined by the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas. Breeding is not confirmed, but is strongly suspected based on such behaviours as copulation, territory establishment, or agitation, or the presence of a mated pair in suitable habitat during the breeding season.

**RBGU** – Ring-billed Gull

**Safe breeding dates** – Range of dates defined by the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas within which a species can safely be considered a non-migrant and possibly engaging in breeding behaviours.

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