

SUMMARY OF ESSEX COUNTY'S 2024 CHECKLIST

– 305 species –

2024 continued a trend of impressive totals in Essex, with the county exceeding 300 species for the third 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; 304 in 2022). The county added a new species to its checklist for the third straight year (Black-headed Grosbeak) and remarkably added a new breeding species to the list of Canadian avifauna (Blue Grosbeak). Over 31,000[†] checklists were submitted to eBird this year in Essex, along with over 17,500 photos and over 250 audio recordings.

The names of 103 unique observers appear in this summary, though dozens of other birders also made significant contributions to the 2024 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](#) and linked at the end.

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 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. 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 Summary reports from 2007 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:

Snowy Egret - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Black-necked Stilt - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Marbled Godwit - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Purple Sandpiper - recorded 5 / last 5 years

Red Phalarope - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Kirtland's Warbler - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Redpoll - recorded 4 / last 5 years

Evening Grosbeak - recorded 5 / last 5 years

[†]see *Amendments to Previous Summaries* below

RECORD BREAKERS:

PROVINCIAL

American White Pelican – earliest spring record by 28 days (Feb 23) - *Noel Herdman*

American Avocet – highest count by 2 (58) - *Jerry Horak*

Warbling Vireo – highest count by 18 (138) - *Kiah Jasper/Alessandra Kite*

Tree Swallow – earliest record by 6 days (Feb 7) - *Sumiko Onishi*

Sedge Wren – earliest record by 4 days (Apr 17) - *Fred Grenier*

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher – highest count by 36 (156) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite, Allannah Vokes*

Nashville Warbler – earliest record by 3 days (Apr 9) - *Josh Vandermeulen*

Nashville Warbler – highest count by 1004 (1624) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite*

Yellow Warbler – highest count by 88 (1088) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite*

Yellow-rumped Warbler – highest count by 4331 (11331) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite et al.*

Palm Warbler – highest count by 40 (500) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite et al.*

REGIONAL (COUNTY)

Trumpeter Swan – highest count by 1 (8) - *Brandon Holden*

Gadwall – highest count by 705 (2230) - *Hugh/Liz Kent*

Eurasian Wigeon – earliest record by 11 days (Mar 3) - *Leon Barlow*

Greater Scaup – highest count by 30000 (90000) - *Keith Burk, Blake Mann, Steve Pike*

White-winged Scoter – highest count by 2600 (4300) - *Aaron Rusak*

Barrow's Goldeneye – latest spring record by 19 days (Apr 6) - *Karl Overman*

Wild Turkey – highest count by 47 (310) - *Jeremy Hatt, A. Rusak*

American White Pelican – highest count by 175 (715) - *S. Onishi*

- This count on Sep 23 is the highest for a single record, but a minimum total of 765 American White Pelicans were present in Essex on Oct 14 (K. Jasper, A. Kite, H. Kent [500], Mike McAllister [265]).

Neotropic Cormorant – earliest record by 10 days (Apr 14) - *B. Holden*

Yellow-crowned Night Heron – earliest fall record by 2 days (Aug 2) - *Shikha Singh*

Glossy Ibis – earliest fall record by 1 day (Aug 23) - *J. Hatt*

White-faced Ibis – latest spring record by 4 days (May 22) - *H./L. Kent*

Mississippi Kite – earliest fall record by 7 days (Sep 1) - *K. Jasper*

Red-shouldered Hawk – earliest fall record by 22 days (Aug 10) - *C. Chevalier, J. Hatt*

Ferruginous Hawk – earliest record by 16 days (May 10) - *Jacob Stasso [see species account]*

Yellow Rail – earliest record by 7 days (May 4) - *J. Hatt, J. Stasso*

Yellow Rail – latest fall record by 13 days (Oct 25) - *Adam Pinch*

Sandhill Crane – highest count by 339 (879) - *Jim/K. Burk*

Piping Plover – earliest fall migrant record by 11 days (Jul 29) - *F. Grenier*

Whimbrel – highest count by 1015 (1415) - *K. Burk, C. Chevalier*

Sanderling – earliest fall record by 6 days (Jul 7) - *C. Chevalier, J./K. Burk, J. Hatt*

Stilt Sandpiper – latest record by 4 days (Nov 9) - *Dan Nauta*
Red-necked Phalarope – latest spring record by 6 days (June 2) - *Donny Moore*
Sabine's Gull – latest record by 14 days (Nov 19) - *S. Pike*
Arctic Tern – latest spring record by 32 days (Jun 19) - *C. Chevalier*
Eastern Whip-poor-will – latest record by 7 days (Oct 27) - *Jeremy Bensette*
Olive-sided Flycatcher – earliest record by 3 days (May 3) - *Quinten Wieggersma*
Great Crested Flycatcher – earliest record by 4 days (Apr 19) - *Dwayne Murphy, Ian Woodfield*
Great Crested Flycatcher – highest count by 4 (32) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite*
Warbling Vireo – highest count by 88 (138) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite*
Tree Swallow – highest count by 4800 (12000) - *K. Jasper*
Sedge Wren – earliest record by 6 days (Apr 17) - *F. Grenier*
Townsend's Solitaire – latest spring record by 28 days (Mar 30) - *Andrew/Kara Wiebe*
Golden-winged Warbler – earliest fall record by 4 days (Aug 14) - *S. Onishi*
Golden-winged Warbler – latest fall record by 2 days (Sep 26) - *Pelee Island Bird Observatory*
Orange-crowned Warbler – earliest fall record by 19 days (Aug 20) - *J. Stasso*
Nashville Warbler – earliest record by 3 days (Apr 9) - *J. Vandermeulen*
Nashville Warbler – latest record by 21 days (Dec 27) - *S. Pike*
Northern Parula – highest count by 7 (68) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite*
Black-throated Blue Warbler – earliest record by 7 days (Apr 20) - *Aileen Petrozzi*
Pine Warbler – earliest record by 11 days (Mar 11) - *I. Woodfield*
Palm Warbler – highest count by 100 (500) - *K. Jasper/A. Kite et al.*
Palm Warbler – latest record by 2 days (Nov 30) - *C. Chevalier, Harrison Priebe*
Northern Waterthrush – earliest record (overwintering bird) by 54 days (Jan 7) - *B. Mann*
Connecticut Warbler – earliest fall record by 4 days (Aug 14) - *Cherise Charron*
Mourning Warbler – earliest record by 1 day (Apr 28) - *Olivia Maillet*
Hooded Warbler – earliest fall record by 2 days (Aug 28) - *C. Chevalier*
Western Tanager – earliest record by 6 days (Apr 25) - *Alison Baldwin*
Clay-colored Sparrow – latest record by 21 days (Dec 14) - *A. Pinch, Joe McGorman, Dean Ware*
Lark Sparrow – latest record by 12 days (Sep 5) - *Paul Pratt*
Dickcissel – latest record by 6 days (Nov 18) - *P. Pratt*
Baltimore Oriole – earliest record by 5 days (Apr 18) - *I. Woodfield*

TRUE RARITIES:

* = OBRC Review Species (Total: 11)



Neotropic Cormorant
Photo: M. McAllister



White-faced Ibis
Photo: Rémi Regnault



Arctic Tern
Photo: C. Chevalier

****Neotropic Cormorant (2)***

April 14 – one adult, Lighthouse Cove, general location (found by B. Holden)

May 19 to 21 – one adult, Tip, PPNP and East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by M. McAllister, m.obs.)

****Little Blue Heron (1)***

April 28 – one adult flyover, Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, J. Hatt)

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

****Yellow-crowned Night Heron (1)***

August 2 – one juv., Malden Park, Windsor (found by S. Singh)

****White-faced Ibis (2)***

May 14 to 15 – one adult, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by Delmar Doucette, m.obs.)

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

May 22 – one adult, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by H./L. Kent, m.obs.)

Gyr Falcon (1)

January 2 – one gray morph, Essex-Windsor Regional Landfill, Harrow (found by J. Hatt)

- This marks the fourth year of the last five with a gray morph Gyr Falcon in Essex, suggesting a returning individual.

***California Gull (1)**

June 29 – one third cycle, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt)

- This was the first record of this species for the year in Ontario. This is the second straight year with a California Gull at the Tip of Point Pelee and the third record of the species in Essex in the last four years, with all birds found by the same observer.

Arctic Tern (3)

May 17 – one adult, Wheatley Harbour, Wheatley (found by Britta/Mike Runtz)

June 1 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, K. Burk)

June 19 – one adult, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

- This individual lingered for several hours, resting on the Tip and showing little to no fear of humans. A large elementary school group was able to see the bird through optics shared by birders on site, and the experience was later used as a learning tool to teach the students about migration. An influx of this species was recorded in the southern Great Lakes region in late spring 2024 (between May 17 and June 19), with records on Lake Erie from Point Pelee and Long Point, and on Lake Ontario in Oakville, Toronto, Whitby, Oshawa, and Cobourg. One of the Toronto records (May 21, Eric Baldo) involved a flock of 13 birds, and several others involved multiple individuals. A juvenile bird was recorded in Whitby on July 11 (Patricia Schleiffer). Given this context, the three Essex records are treated as distinct individuals. With these records, 2024 doubled the number of Arctic Terns previously recorded in the county (three). The maximum number of Arctic Terns recorded in a year in Essex before 2024 was one.

***American Barn Owl (1)**

November 20 to 24 – one, Essex County, general location (found by Mike St Pierre, m.obs.)

- This excellent record was a strong candidate for the Bird of the Year. This marks the fourth photo-documented American Barn Owl in Essex since 2014, and the fifth report overall. This individual was found occupying suitable habitat on inaccessible private property. This species breeds in tiny numbers in Ontario and its eastern population is designated provincially endangered by the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada (COSEWIC). Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-2 estimated the breeding population at only 5-10 pairs. Essex birders have suspected that the species has recently bred in the county, as it possesses a small amount of suitable habitat, has several historical nesting records, and has an impressive number of recent records. Another proposed source is birds wandering from more stable nearby populations including in Ohio, where the species bred as close as Ottawa County in 2024, and in Ottawa and Sandusky counties in 2023. Though not all recent Essex records have been submitted (and the same is likely true across Ontario), the OBRC has only accepted 14 records of this species in the province in the requested review period of 1990 to the present.



American Barn Owl
Photo: M. St Pierre



Ferruginous Hawk
Photo: B. Holden



Western Kingbird
Photo: J. Bensette

****Swallow-tailed Kite (2-3)***

May 10 – one, multiple locations, HMCA area (found by Kory Renaud [*Essex and PPBA*], originally found by Jon Ruddy [*Rondeau, Chatham-Kent*])

May 20 – one flyover, Visitor Centre, PPNP (unknown finder)

May 22 – one, multiple locations, HMCA area (found by L. Kent, m.obs.)

- These two records may pertain to one lingering individual.

Swainson's Hawk (2)

September 30 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, seen by Peter Veighey)

October 15 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by Paul Gosselin, m.obs.)

- This individual was confirmed to be the same bird recorded at Hawk Cliff, Elgin on October 14 on the basis of distinctive underwing markings and rectrix pattern.

****Ferruginous Hawk (1)***

May 10 to 19 – one adult, County Rd 14, Wheatley [*May 10, J. Stasso*], Holiday Beach, Amherstburg [*May 19, D. Ware*], Ferris Rd, Harrow [*May 19, A./K. Wiebe*] (originally found independently by Matt Furst, Daniel Giesbrecht [*May 8*] and B. Holden [*May 8*] in Chatham-Kent)

- This remarkable record comes on the heels of a Ferruginous Hawk found less than 20 kilometres away in 2023 (for more details, see the 2023 Summary in *References*). The 2024 bird lingered in Chatham-Kent long enough to be seen by hordes of birders, before wandering into Essex and apparently lingering there unseen for over a week.

***Limpkin (1) - recorded for Point Pelee Birding Area (not included in Essex total)**

January 7 to 14 – one, Wheatley Provincial Park, general location (found by P. Pratt [2024], originally 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. Present since December 18, 2023, this individual was controversially captured by concerned observers on January 14 and taken to a rehabilitation facility where it later perished due to stress. The specimen was delivered to the Royal Ontario Museum.

Western Kingbird (2)

May 30 – one, West Beach, PPNP (found by J. Bensette)

August 3 – one, Rowsom's Tilbury West CA, Tilbury (found by P. Pratt)

- 2024 is the first year with multiple Western Kingbird records in Essex since 2005.

***Bell's Vireo (1)**

May 15 – one, Tip area, PPNP (found by Bob Curry, m.obs.)

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

Cave Swallow (6)

Nov 11 – three, East Beach, PPNP (found by J. Bensette)

Nov 16 – two, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper/A. Kite, m.obs.)

Nov 22 – one, Marsh Boardwalk, PPNP (found by F. Grenier)

Nov 22 – one, Wheatley Harbour, Wheatley (found by C. Charron)

Nov 23 – one, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by J. Bensette, m.obs.)

Nov 24 – one, main gate, PPNP (unknown finder)

- This individual was found deceased, having roosted on the vent of the gatehouse at the entrance to Point Pelee. The specimen was preserved for the Royal Ontario Museum. Given the significant movement of this species in the Great Lakes in 2024, all records are treated as involving different birds.

***Western Tanager (2) - first fall record since 1983 and second overall**

April 25 to 26 (approx.) – one adult male, Willowood, general location (found by A. Baldwin, m.obs.)

October 26 – one female, Sanctuary, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)



Bell's Vireo
Photo: J. Bensette



Cave Swallow
Photo: J. Bensette



Western Tanager
Photo: C. Chevalier

***Black-headed Grosbeak (1) - a NEW species for Essex**

January 18 to April 5 (approx.) – one imm. male, Kingsville, general location (found by Barb Gritke, m.obs.)

- This excellent rarity was Bird of the Year in Essex, found visiting a feeder on inaccessible private property and posted to a public Facebook group. Weeks later it was refound nearby, and the homeowners accommodated a handful of visitors. This individual was aged and sexed by most consulted observers as an immature male in first prealternate moult, showing moult contrast between brown juvenal primaries, secondaries, and rectrices, and some fresh black inner primaries, tertials, and rectrices (see first and second images below). In Black-headed Grosbeak, male first alternate plumage is known to vary significantly between female-like plumage and male definitive alternate-like plumage and is best distinguished by the presence of brown juvenal primaries (Hill 1987). Initial photos of the bird appeared to show an injury to the neck, suggesting it had possibly survived a recent predation attempt.



Black-headed Grosbeak
Photo: B. Gritke



Black-headed Grosbeak
Photo: D. Moore



Black-headed Grosbeak
Photo: J. Bensette

***Black-headed Grosbeak (1) - a NEW species for Essex [continued]**

- Additionally present in the Kingsville bird were several atypical plumage features which led to the suggestion of a Rose-breasted Grosbeak x Black-headed Grosbeak hybrid, including a white postocular stripe extending into a broad white nape and a whitish belly (though the bird was missing many feathers in this area, likely having not moulted them yet). None of these features aligned with commonly accepted traits of that hybrid taxon, which include intermediate underwing covert colour (orange, between the rosy-red of Rose-breasted and lemon-yellow of Black-headed) and at least a small amount of darker red colour in the breast [see <https://ebird.org/checklist/S56077999> for a textbook hybrid male exhibiting both features and <https://ebird.org/checklist/S74577793> for a more subtle male still showing obvious orange underwing]. That being said, the extent to which these or other hybrid features may be present in an immature bird is not well documented, and the confident identification of hybrids seemingly favours birds approaching Rose-breasted rather than Black-headed in phenotype. West (1962) cites an example of a “young bird” (exact age unspecified) collected 29 July 1902 and deemed a hybrid by the presence of pink underwing coverts on an otherwise typical Black-headed Grosbeak. Features of the Kingsville bird in alignment with pure Black-headed Grosbeak include lemon-yellow underwing coverts, a solid orange breast with no sign of red, a lemon-yellow patch on the lower breast into the belly, fine flank streaking, and a perceptibly bicoloured bill with a darker upper mandible. Several observers with extensive familiarity with the species in the field and the hand were consulted, and the unanimous opinion was that the bird was a pure Black-headed Grosbeak.

NOTABLE RECORDS:

Eurasian Wigeon (1)

March 3 to 5 – one adult male, West Cell, HMCA (found by Leon Barlow, m.obs.)

Ross's Goose (1)

February 5 to 6 – one, Sandwich West Retention Pond, LaSalle (found by Stan Lee)

Barrow's Goldeneye (1) - first since 2015

April 6 – one adult female, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by K. Overman, m.obs.)

- This is only the fifth record of this species for Essex and Point Pelee. Found shortly after 10:30, this individual was seen by many birders throughout the day, a number of whom noted it as being potentially unwell. At 19:20, the author and H. Priebe found the bird deceased in excellent condition and collected the specimen, which they later delivered to the Royal Ontario Museum.

Pacific Loon (3-4)

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

October 26 – one, Lighthouse Cove, general location (found by J. Hatt)

November 15 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by M. St Pierre)

November 16 – one, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by J. Bensette)

- The above two records may pertain to the same individual.

Red-necked Grebe (7)

March 22 – six, Tip, PPNP (found by K. Burk)

March 25 – fifteen, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Stasso)

- This is the highest count since 2014.

March 26 to 30 – one, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by Chris Gaffan, m.obs.)

March 27 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Stasso)

April 6 – one, HBCA, general location (found by K. Renaud, seen by J. Hatt)

- Typically a scarce species in Essex, early spring 2024 netted a significant number of Red-necked Grebe records comprising a significant number of individuals. For a detailed breakdown of this influx and its theorized weather-related causes, see Brandon Holden's excellent video on the subject: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-kvBkQYrew>.

October 10 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by David/Regan Goodyear)

Western Grebe (1)

March 25 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Stasso)

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

Glossy Ibis (3)

April 29 to 30 – one, multiple locations, HMCA area (found by Michael Hudak, m.obs.)

May 22 – ten, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by H./L. Kent, m.obs.)

August 23 to 30 – one, Florian Diamante Nature Reserve, Pelee Island (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

Black Vulture (1)

May 11 – one, Mersea Rd B, Leamington (found by Lucas Liu, m.obs.)



Barrow's Goldeneye
Photo: J. Burk



Glossy Ibis
Photo: Eric Lamond



Mississippi Kite
Photo: K. Jasper

Mississippi Kite (2-4) - first fall record since 2010 and second overall

May 15 – two, Point Pelee National Park, general location (found by Monica Carre, Neil Colman, S. Pike, m.obs.)

- This is the first record involving two individuals for Essex since 1999 and second overall.

May 16 – one, Kopegaron Woods CA, Wheatley (found by Andrew Keaveney)

May 21 – one, Point Pelee National Park, general location (unknown finder, m.obs.)

- Individuality is difficult to assess in the above three records, though photos confirm the presence of at least three birds between May 15 and May 21.

September 1 – one, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

Yellow Rail (2) - first since 1997

May 4 – one, Pelee Island, general location (found by J. Hatt, J. Stasso)

October 25 (approx.) – one deceased, Leamington, general location (found by A. Pinch)

- These are only the fifth and sixth records of this species for Essex, and 2024 marks the first year with multiple records. All spring records have fallen between May 4 and 12 and all fall records between October 10 and 25. The October record is the fourth for the PPBA and involved a wing readily identified to this species found in excellent condition inside a greenhouse. The bird had presumably entered through an open vent, become trapped inside, and been predated by a feral cat.

King Rail (1)

June 4 to August 23 – one, Essex County, general location (found by O. Maillet, Andrew Brown)

- This well-documented summer record strongly suggests successful breeding though this was not confirmed. This sensitive species is suspected to breed annually in tiny numbers in small patches of suitable habitat in Essex.

Piping Plover (4)

April 20 to 21 – one unbanded, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by O. Maillet, m.obs.)

April 22 – one banded, E Beach Access, HMCA (found by J. Hatt, m.obs.)

May 3 to 7 – one banded, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by Patrick Berens, m.obs.)

July 29 – one unbanded, Tip, PPNP (found by F. Grenier)

Western Sandpiper (2)

May 11 – one adult, Shorebird Cell, HMCA (found by J. Ruddy, m.obs.)

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

August 24 – one juv., West Cranberry Pond, PPNP (found by M. McAllister, seen by C.

Chevalier, Steve J. McAllister, Sarah A. McAllister, Emma Thomson)

Laughing Gull (1)

May 12 – one adult, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by S. Pike)

Franklin's Gull (2)

May 28 – one first summer, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

November 24 – one first winter, Wheatley Harbour, Wheatley (found by C. Charron)

Sabine's Gull (4)

September 11 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, seen by K. Burk)

September 30 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by M. St Pierre, seen by S. Pike)

October 6 – three juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier/H. Priebe [1], J. Bensette [1], M. McAllister [1]; all seen by J. Bensette, J./K. Burk, C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, M./S. J. McAllister, H. Priebe, E. Thomson)

- This is the highest count of Sabine's Gull for Essex since 2007 and equals the second-highest overall.

November 19 – one imm., Wheatley Harbour, general location (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

- This is the long-awaited first record of this species at Wheatley Harbour, bringing the total number of gull species recorded there to a whopping 18 (not including pending records of Common/Kamchatka Gull [2006] and Vega Gull [2012]).

Black-legged Kittiwake (2)

November 26 – one juv., Tip, PPNP (found by C. Charron)

December 17 to 23 – one adult, Wheatley Harbour, Wheatley [*Dec 17 to 19*] and Amherstburg Birding and Nature Trail, Amherstburg [*Dec 23*] (found independently by J. Bensette, J. Vandermeulen [*Dec 17*] and Robert Linfield [*Dec 23*], m.obs.)

- The rarity of this age supports the case of a single lingering and wandering bird; the comparison of photos is not definitive.



Piping Plover
Photo: F. Grenier



Black-legged Kittiwake
Photo: J. Bensette



Loggerhead Shrike
Photo: J. Vandermeulen

Parasitic Jaeger (3) - first spring record since 2011 and fourth overall

June 2 – one adult light morph, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt, seen by C. Chevalier, J./K. Burk)

- This is the second-ever June record for Southern Ontario.

October 6 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Hatt; seen by J. Bensette, J./K. Burk, C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, M./S. J. McAllister, H. Priebe)

November 17 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, seen by J./K. Burk)

Long-tailed Jaeger (1)

October 6 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by J. Burk, seen by J. Bensette, K. Burk, C. Chevalier, J. Hatt, M./S. J. McAllister, H. Priebe, E. Thomson)

Upland Sandpiper (1)

May 18 – one, Richardson Side Rd, Lakeshore (found by Brett Groves)

Pileated Woodpecker (7)

April 8 – one, Hillman Marsh CA, Leamington (found by Ed Zaborski)

April 20 – one, Cedar Creek PP, Essex (found by D. Moore)

April 28 – one, Seacliff Dr, Leamington (found by Mike Biro)

May 16 to July 3 – one, Wheatley, general location (found by B. Groves/Vicki McKay)

June 19 – one, Hillman Marsh CA, Leamington (found by Jessica Rose)

June 26 – one, Mersea Rd 2, Leamington (found by D. Ware)

September 23 – one, Marsh Boardwalk, PPNP (found by Isma Giralt, m.obs.)

Loggerhead Shrike (1-3)

May 2 – one, Tip, PPNP (found by A. Rusak, m.obs.)

May 8 – one, Mersea Rd 21 fields, Leamington (found by Jon G, m.obs.)

May 10 – one, Fish Point PNR, Pelee Island (found by James Thompson, m.obs.)

- The May 10 record is the first ever for Pelee Island.

Fish Crow (1)

April 19 to May 3 – two, PPNP, general location (found by F. Grenier, m.obs.)

- The time between reports and the presence of at least two distinct individuals makes individuality assessment challenging. This is most safely assigned as a minimum count of two birds present between the specified dates.

Common Raven (9-11)

April 29 to May 9 – one, PPNP, general location (found by S. Pike, m.obs.)

May 10 – two, PPNP, general location (unknown finder, m.obs.)

May 16 – one, Wheatley Rd, Wheatley (found by A. Keaveney)

May 19 – one, Seacliff migration lookout, Leamington (found by J. Hatt)

May 21 – one, PPNP, general location (unknown finder, m.obs.)

- Individuality is difficult to assess in the above PPNP records. The pair of birds on May 10 may have involved the bird present since April 29 and may have contributed to records as late as May 21.

June 15 – one, Highway 401 west of Tilbury, Lakeshore (found by J. Stasso)

Sep 27 – one, Kogegaron Woods CA, Wheatley (found by Kai Millyard)

Oct 8 – one, Harrow, general location (found by A./K. Wiebe)

Nov 12 – one, Rowsom's Tilbury West CA, Comber (found by H. Priebe)

Dec 22 – one, Trans Canada Trail at Lakeshore Rd 310, Comber (found by J. Hatt, Matt Timpf)

Dec 22 – one, Trans Canada Trail at South Middle Rd, Comber (found by J. Hatt, M. Timpf)

- As anticipated, the number of records of this species continues to increase in Essex as in much of southwestern Ontario. See *Notable Nesters* below for more information.

Townsend's Solitaire (2)

November 19, 2023 to March 30, 2024 – one, DeLaurier parking lot, PPNP (found by J. Bensette, Kate Derbyshire, m.obs.)

October 22 – one, DeLaurier, PPNP (found by Terry Hastings)

- This marks the second winter in a row with a Townsend's Solitaire in Point Pelee, with the bird lingering nearly to April in 2024. With a probable record on August 7 (Fred Grenier) and the October record, the gap between spring and fall observations of this species within a year in Essex continues to narrow.

Lark Sparrow (1)

September 5 – one, Marsh Boardwalk, PPNP (found by P. Pratt, seen by Joan Affleck, A. Petrozzi)



Townsend's Solitaire
Photo: Brian Morin



Harris's Sparrow
Photo: Amanda Guercio



Blue Grosbeak
Photo: P. Pratt

Henslow's Sparrow (3)

April 27 – one, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by J. Burk, m.obs.)

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

June 6 to 16 – one singing male, Essex County, general location (found by B. Holden)

July 3 – one, Sparrow Field, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier)

- See *Notable Nesters* below for additional details on the above records. This is the first mid-summer record of Henslow's Sparrow for Point Pelee and Essex since 1973.

LeConte's Sparrow (2)

April 22 – one, Redbud Footpath, PPNP (found by M. St. Pierre, m.obs.)

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

October 13 – one, West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by H./L. Kent)

Nelson's Sparrow (1)

October 6 – one, Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve, Pelee Island (found by Taylor Kennedy)

Harris's Sparrow (2)

April 30 – one adult, Visitor's Centre, PPNP (found independently by Bill/E./Sarah Lamond [07:57], Liz/Paul Hunter, Mike Nelson [07:30], m.obs.)

October 12 to 13 – one juv., West Beach Footpath, PPNP (found by Anil/Elias Joshi, m.obs.)

- This is the first fall record of Harris's Sparrow for PPNP since 1992.

Bohemian Waxwing (1)

January 21 – one, Holiday Beach Rd, HBCA (found by J. Stasso)

Blue Grosbeak (5)

April 28 – one adult male, Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve, Pelee Island (found by K. Jasper, A. Kite, m.obs.)

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

June 5 – one imm. male flyover, Tip, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, seen by Norman Franke)

June 7 – two (pair), Seacliffe Migration Lookout, Leamington (found by B. Holden)

June 13 to 14 – one imm. male, Harrow (found by A./K. Wiebe, m.obs.)

June 23 to September 1 – three (pair + juv.), Spring Garden, Windsor (found by P. Pratt, m.obs.)

- See *Notable Nesters* below for additional details on the above record. The five records in 2024 represent the most records in a single year for this species in Essex.

Yellow-headed Blackbird (4)

April 20 – one adult male, Gesto Side Rd, Gesto (anonymous finder, seen by Cathy Lapain)

May 21 – one adult male, East Beach Rd, Leamington (found by S. Pike, Karen Graham, Mike Westbrook, m.obs.)

November 17 – one imm. male, Mersea Rd 21, Wheatley (found by B. Groves)

December 22 to 23 – two adult males, Agris Co-Op, Comber (found by P. Pratt [1], Garry Sadler [2], m.obs.)

Brewer's Blackbird (1) - first since 2017

April 14 – one flyover, Lighthouse Cove, general area (found by B. Holden)

Red Crossbill (2)

November 5 – one flyover, HMCA, general location (found by J. Bensette, K. Derbyshire)

November 25 – one flyover, Mersea Rd 2 East Bridge, HMCA (found by C. Chevalier, H. Priebe)

White-winged Crossbill (9)

November 2 – two flyovers, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

November 7 – four flyovers, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

November 8 – one, Tremblay Beach CA, general location (found by P. Pratt, m.obs.)

November 9 – five flyovers, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by K. Jasper, m.obs.)

November 9 – two, PPNP, general location (found by P. Pratt, m.obs.)

November 12 – one flyover, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by J. Bensette, H./L. Kent, m.obs.)

November 16 – one flyover, DeLaurier, PPNP (found by C. Chevalier, m.obs.)

November 18 – one flyover, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by H./L. Kent, m.obs.)

November 22 – one flyover, Hawk Tower, HBCA (found by H./L. Kent)

- This is the first year with multiple records of White-winged Crossbill in Essex since 2012. Both 2012 and 2024 were known years of major southward irruption in this species, with numerous reports across southern Ontario and in nearby states.

AMENDMENTS TO PREVIOUS SUMMARIES:

2022 Summary:

Total number of checklists submitted in Essex: over 28,000

- eBird's public display of this total is inaccurate, as proven by analysis of downloaded eBird data (S. J. McAllister)

2023 Summary:

Total number of checklists submitted in Essex: over 29,000

****Willow Ptarmigan* (1) - additional finder**

[...] 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 independently by Karen Dickson and Christine Ouellette).

****Glaucous-winged Gull* (1) - removed record (total decreased from 309 → 308)**

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

- The OBRC voted to not accept this record on the basis that a hybrid could not definitively be ruled out. The number of OBRC review species in 2023 decreased from 15 to 14.

Lark Sparrow was stated as nesting in Essex for the first time in 2023. Per Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas-2, the species had previously nested at Point Pelee in 1884, 1905, and 1913. See <https://view.publitas.com/birds-canada-gyqxaz9yrrpp/atlas-of-the-breeding-birds-of-ontario-2001-2005/page/329>.

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

Essex County 2024 Checklist

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1UyummyB73bV8ptNwNWDSk6TG2XXIfneRIJoiUn_x4enQ/edit?usp=sharing

NATURE NOTES:

Notable Nesters of 2024 - by C. Chevalier

While there were many interesting summer records of potential breeding species in 2024, very few were confirmed as nesting. That said, the list of probable breeding species includes several endangered, sensitive, or otherwise scarce species, and provides encouraging news for their establishment or re-establishment as breeders in Essex.



(Mississippi Kite) (*photo: N. Colman*) was not confirmed as breeding but two individuals were seen together in Essex for the first time since 1999 (M. Carre/N. Colman/S. Pike). This comes after an individual was seen carrying nesting material in 2023 (for more details, see the 2023 Summary in *References*).

(King Rail) (*photo: A. Brown*) was not confirmed as breeding but a breeding code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved, indicating probable breeding.

(Pileated Woodpecker) was not confirmed as breeding, but the June 26 record (D. Ware) was indicated as possibly involving a juvenile bird. This record was also one of three late spring/summer records in Essex in 2024.

(Acadian Flycatcher) was not confirmed as breeding but a code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved (June 6 to 21, C. Chevalier/B. Holden). This was potentially the same bird heard earlier on June 2 by J. Burk/J. Hatt, but distinct from another singing individual in suitable habitat heard on June 14 by Mike Austin.

(Common Raven) was not confirmed as breeding, but records in three straight months from April to June and four straight months from September to December are suggestive of resident birds. 2024 also had the most records of this species in a year in Essex, and the second record of two birds together after a record of a possible pair in 2023 (for more details, see the 2023 Summary in *References*).

(Sedge Wren) was not confirmed as breeding but there were two records of singing birds in suitable habitat in June (June 8, P. Pratt; June 11, M. Austin). The June 8 record involved a minimum of two singing birds.

(Yellow-breasted Chat) was not confirmed as breeding but a code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved, with two birds recorded singing from at least June 22 to July 3 on Pelee Island (O. Maillet, Elisha Miller).

(Clay-coloured Sparrow) (*photo: B. Holden*) was not confirmed as breeding but a code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved (June 7 to 18, B. Holden). This individual was also notable for singing a song intermediate between that of a typical Clay-coloured Sparrow and a Chipping Sparrow, suggesting hybrid parentage despite appearing to be a typical Clay-coloured Sparrow in phenotype.

(Grasshopper Sparrow) was not confirmed as breeding but there were two records of singing birds in suitable habitat in June (June 18, C. Chevalier/J. Hatt/J. Stasso; June 29 to July 3, A./K. Wiebe).

(Henslow's Sparrow) was not confirmed as breeding but a code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved (June 6 to 16, B. Holden). The last record of possible breeding in Essex was in 2015. The recently released *State of Canada's Birds* from Birds Canada estimates that a mere 10 Henslow's Sparrows breed in the country every year. The June and July records from 2024, particularly a singing male (S7+) in suitable habitat in June, suggest a possible re-establishment of this endangered and declining species as a breeder in Essex.

Blue Grosbeak (*photo: C. Chevalier, juvenile bird*) was confirmed as breeding. This year's amply-documented Windsor record constitutes the first confirmed nesting of Blue Grosbeak in Canada (Mark Peck, pers. comm.), despite a previous record of a mated pair exhibiting some breeding behaviours (May to September 1995 in Chatham-Kent, found by Doug/Nancy Barnett). The male was first observed on June 23, the female on June 30, and the juvenile on August 12 (all found by P. Pratt). Before the juvenile's discovery which cemented the record, the male and female had been observed carrying food (week of August 10, David Hanifan). There are numerous Canadian records of singing males on territory or birds otherwise observed in suitable habitat during the breeding season (July 1988 in New Brunswick; June 2014 in Quebec; July 2021 at Long Point, Norfolk, found by Erik Van Den Kieboom; July 2022 at Tilbury, Chatham-Kent, found by P. Pratt; June to Aug 2023 at Jeannette, Chatham-Kent, found by P. Pratt; among others). The Windsor pair was readily distinguished from the pair on June 7 in Leamington as the males were adult and immature respectively. It should also be noted that the Harrow bird was observed singing in suitable habitat over two days. The nearby counties of Lambton and Middlesex also recorded Blue Grosbeak in 2024, including an immature male at Komoka Provincial Park that lingered to June 12 (found by Laure Wilson Neish). All of the recent records listed above suggest the potential future establishment of Blue Grosbeak as a breeding species in southwestern Ontario. There were several 2024 records of confirmed nesting nearby in Michigan (Monroe, Washtenaw, and Wayne counties) and Ohio (Erie County).

(Dickcissel) was not confirmed as breeding but a code of S7+ (established territory) was achieved. This species breeds almost annually in Essex; suitable habitat is rarely surveyed, especially over a period of time sufficient to confirm successful nesting.

(Purple Finch) was not confirmed as breeding but a male lingered at the author's home feeder for at least ten days from June 13 to June 23. All previous summer observations of this species in Essex have been single records. It should be noted that House Finch is a regular breeder on the property and that House Finch x Purple Finch hybrids have previously been documented elsewhere. All *Haemorhous* finch young observed later appeared to be typical House Finches.

Counting Birds At Point Pelee - by Kiah Jasper

How many Red-winged Blackbirds are in your local wetland? How about Yellow Warblers? Even though these are abundant birds that you are familiar with and may even see daily, giving a number that's not a rough estimate may be challenging. When I first got into eBirding, I was always really excited to try and get "big lists" when spring came around. Checklists of 100 species or more was the ultimate challenge, and once a bird was added for the day, inevitably less attention was given to it. The result of this is when the day of birding was complete, I would look through the list to finalize numbers and the time of the estimates would begin. "hmm how many blackbirds did I see on my walk today? I'll put 50. Maybe 20 redstarts". This is the way a lot of birders I know approach creating eBird checklists, especially on busy days when you can't keep up entering stuff on your phone in real time.

In recent years my focus has shifted away from listing and more towards a holistic approach of birding. I spend most of the best birding days doing visible migration watches, where I try to keep as accurate of a count as possible on every species that migrates past. Sometimes seeing a lot of one, common species can be just as exciting as a rarity. For example, this past spring Alessandra Kite and I were birding at Fish Point on Pelee Island, and we witnessed a phenomenal reverse migration of over 11,000 Yellow-rumped Warblers. No rarities were seen that day, but it was one of my favourite all time birding days in Ontario. For keeping track of these large counts, I use hand handheld clickers, so when I see a new individual I just have to do a click. This allows me to do it without really looking and is much less distracting than using my phone. On Days with mass migration have 5 or even 10 of these clickers going at once, usually on a clip attached to my belt. Since I started this method, it's made me realize just how frequently birders undercount things. Where I used to estimate "maybe 1000 grackles", clicking reveals there are actually closer to 20,000!

In mid May of 2024, Alessandra and I arrived at Point Pelee National Park for two weeks of birding and leading guided tours for our business (GyrKite Birding Tours). After a few slower days of Migration, we had a free day without any tours on May 15th and were deciding what we should do. We'd started at the tip for the last several days, and the reverse migration had been underwhelming. We decided that we'd get away from the crowds and try walking the entire park in a day, starting at the north end, going down to the tip and back again. I had been watching some of the eBird lists submitted by other birders over the past week, and noticed the majority of them had counts for Yellow Warbler of 5-30. It seemed to me that there were many more than that in the park, so I decided to make it my goal for the day's walk to count all of the Yellow Warblers on our walk through the park. I zeroed one of my handheld clickers for Yellow Warbler, while Alessandra decided to count Red-winged Blackbird with another clicker. We walked up the West side of the point, took a break for lunch near the tip, then walked along Sparrow Field, Woodland Trail and all of the other areas we had missed along the East.

14 hours and 30 minutes, and 29 kilometres after we had begun, we ended up back at the North end of the park. Despite not trying too intensively for a big day, we ended up with a solid 115 species, our best for the park all month (goes to show what you get with that much walking). And the totals for the birds we counted? I ended up with 1,088 Yellow Warblers, while Alessandra counted 5,730 Red-winged Blackbirds! The warbler total was a nice high count for Ontario on eBird, and the blackbird tally the highest anyone had recorded in the park that May. It's worth noting too that this wasn't a massive migration day, nor a particularly good day for migrant Yellow Warblers... The 1,088 recorded were almost entirely territorial birds that will breed in the park. That means on huge migration days, you could probably encounter upwards of 2,000 Yellow Warblers at Pelee. Between the Visitor Centre and the Tip alone there were at least 450 Yellow Warblers, which is pretty crazy when you consider most people put under 30 on their daily checklists! Next time you're at Point Pelee, or even your local patch, I encourage you to try and accurately count one or two of the most common species. You may be pretty surprised about the result and even find some newfound joy in birding.

Banded American Herring Gulls Provide a Deeper Understanding of the Local Population in the Western Basin of Lake Erie – by *Jeremy Hatt*

2024 was an exciting year for the Herring Gull. The biggest seismic shift to occur was the splitting of Herring Gull into four separate species globally, the American Herring Gull (the abundant species found locally in Essex County and across North America), European Herring Gull, Vega Gull, and Mongolian Gull. A few promising records are pending, but for now the split doesn't affect the species total for Essex, and it will hopefully encourage birders to be on the lookout for European Herring Gull and Vega Gull in the county.

2024 was also another exciting year for monitoring banded American Herring Gulls (AHGU) in Essex County. In 2023, an unprecedented number of banded AHGU were found at Mettawas Park, Kingsville Dock, Leamington Marina, Point Pelee National Park, and East Beach Hillman Marsh. In total, 85 individual bands were reported, many multiple times in different locations. It sparked a new passion for observing and studying the local AHGU population and in 2024, 81 bands were found by birders in Essex County, 61 of which were unique from those found in 2023. Bands were found at all the same locations as the previous year as well as one new location in 2024: Fish Point Provincial Park on Pelee Island. All of these sites are important resting spots for gulls.

The banded AHGU we see are part of a long-term project run by Bruce Buckingham at a nesting colony on Turning Point Island in Sandusky, Ohio, since the 1980's. Since 2023, we have kept in close contact with Bruce, reporting every band we find and getting the history of each individual gull in real time. It has taught us a lot about local AHGU habits and movements, including how different patterns can be from one year to the next.

In 2023, the first known banded AHGU to arrive was on June 26, which led to many subsequent sightings throughout July and August. In 2024, the first band was found much earlier in the year on May 10. This individual was 53H, banded as a nestling on Turning Point Island on June 10, 2022. Nearly all banded birds found during the spring are subadults. According to historical observations by Alan Wormington, local breeding adults (including banded adults) are on territory as early as mid-March, whereas Arctic breeders pass through later in the spring, typically around the end of April (Point Pelee Natural History News Vol 1 No 2, Summer 2001).

In total, 55 bands were eventually found in May and June of 2024 compared to only a single band in the same time period in 2023! This could be the result of many factors but the main reason is likely shifting availability of their main food source (fish and aquatic invertebrates), as well as weather conditions influencing both fish and gull movements.

We do find occasional banded adults. OC9, for example, was found on September 13 at Wheatley Harbour. This female was banded as a breeding adult in Port Clinton, OH, on May 15, 2021. It has been nesting on the lift bridge tower there since 2022 and is seen daily from early April till late August when it disappears. We now know that one of the places it wanders to after leaving its nesting site is Wheatley. The oldest birds found this year were 3H1 and 4H9, both banded as nestlings on June 7, 2018, on Turning Point Island. Both of these gulls have subsequently returned to their original nesting colony to breed in 2023 and 2024.

Over time as we continue to monitor the presence of banded gulls in Essex County, we hope to be able to fill in knowledge gaps on the arrival times of local subadults during spring and fall migration and get a sense of how many typically overwinter here. Although subadult birds in their first, second, and third years have been shown to wander more widely than adults during migration, in the summer, many banded subadults return to the western basin of Lake Erie from June to August. This suggests that local subadults spend the summer relatively close to their original nesting colonies (and many eventually return to breed in their fourth year). Outside of summer, several bands of subadults from Bruce's study have been reported from great distances, even as far as the Atlantic coast and Mississippi!

Presence of banded birds in the fall was also quite different between the two years. In 2023, the last banded AHGU was found on September 30. In 2024, four new bands were found beyond September and several repeats were found into November and December. The last band found on December 16 was 01H, the most-reported gull of the year, seen 10 different times between Kingsville Dock, the Tip, and Wheatley Harbour in June, August, and December.

Another significant difference between years was the number of banded juveniles found. In 2023, a total of 30 banded juveniles were found in Essex County, all within July and August, with the first found on July 8 at the Tip. In contrast, in 2024, only 5 banded juveniles were found in total in the county. The first was found on August 1 at Mettawas Park and two additional birds were found much later in November, already moulting into first winter plumage. The first fresh juvenile of the year at the Tip was found on July 4 and was likely a non-banded bird from one of the Lake Erie Islands where several colonies of AHGU nest, or perhaps it made its way across from Turning Point Island. The youngest banded birds encountered in 2024 were 10V and 23V, both banded as nestlings on Turning Point Island on June 14 and encountered in Essex County on August 1 and August 16, respectively. Bruce Buckingham believes the main reason for this discrepancy in the number of juveniles moving into Essex County year to year is food availability.

Despite fewer banded juveniles being found in Essex County in 2024, one band in particular was very exciting on a personal level, 98V. On June 22, Cameron Chevalier and I had the incredible experience of visiting the AHGU nesting colony on Turning Point Island where Bruce bands juvenile gulls every year. We helped band 30 birds including 3N6 to 3N9, 4N0, and 76V to 00V. Our eBird checklist for the trip can be found here: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S183372632>.

One of the most rewarding moments of our involvement with this project occurred on November 21 when I found 98V at Wheatley Harbour. This was one of the gulls that Cameron and I helped band with Bruce. It was exciting to find one of the birds that we got to hold, photograph, and band show up in Essex County and see how much its appearance had changed from nestling to first winter in a span of five months. Another one of the gulls that Cameron and I helped band, 99V, was unfortunately found dead at Kingsville Dock by Xander Campbell on November 6. The iNaturalist record for this bird can be found at <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/251041159>.

Left: Newly banded 98V held by Cameron Chevalier on Turning Point Island, Sandusky, OH – June 22, 2024 (photo by J. Hatt)



Right: 98V at Wheatley Harbour on November 21, 2024 (photo by J. Hatt)

Another takeaway from our visit to Turning Point Island was the number of banded adults we saw that return each year to the same nesting colony. One of the major findings of this project is that AHGU exhibit strong nesting site fidelity, suggesting local Great Lakes populations of AHGU may be at least partially genetically isolated from other breeding populations. Even more, Bruce has observed that most adult AHGU in Ohio hardly stray away from the nesting colony during the winter, moving only a short distance west to Port Clinton, OH. The notion of genetically isolated populations is supported by exciting independent work being done by Brandon Holden, Tim Lucas, and others showing that AHGU from the Great Lakes, Arctic, and Atlantic Coast can often be reliably identified to population with careful study of subtle plumage and structural differences.

One final interesting pattern we noted is the effect of southerly winds on the number of banded AHGU present at the Tip of Point Pelee. On several days with stronger south winds, we documented higher number of banded AHGU, which supports the theory that local movement of gulls is correlated closely with food availability influenced by winds and wave direction. For example, on June 23 during strong 30-35km/hr southwest winds, feeding frenzies were taking place off the Tip and a significant influx of 13 banded gulls were present. Anecdotally, even on days with light south winds there was a noticeable increase in the number of banded subadults with an influx of six birds on June 4 and seven birds on June 5 (18-20km/hr S winds).

It should be noted that the study of moult timing and plumages of first to third cycle gulls is one of the main goals of this banding project. In 2024, we found 20 banded AHGU that were also found in Essex County in 2023. In some cases we were able to get photos of both observations, which give an excellent comparison of plumages from one year to the next. Details of moult timing and aging is beyond the scope of this article but important work is being done using photos of banded gulls to study the Great Lakes population of AHGU.



3H1 photographed January 11, 2019 in Ohio (photo provided by Bruce Buckingham) and October 26, 2024 at Wheatley Harbour (photo by J. Hatt)



72H photographed September 2023 in Ohio in its second year (photo provided by B. Buckingham) and May 27, 2024 in its third year (photographed by C. Chevalier)

A final note regarding accuracy in comparing years: between 2023 and 2024, the number of AHGU banded in Sandusky was nearly the same and the detection rate of banded birds in Essex County (85 and 81 individuals) was very close. As long as a similar amount of effort to find banded gulls continues, we should be able to draw further conclusions about local movement of adults, subadults, and juveniles, causes of these movements, and migration timing moving forward. We also hope this will lead to a more thorough understanding of the different populations of AHGU in North America and how to better identify these subgroups.

Once again, 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 in 2024 and we hope more birders will be on the lookout in 2025. 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/>.

A full spreadsheet containing all observations of banded gulls in 2023, 2024, and upcoming years can be found here:

Tracking Banded American Herring Gulls in Essex

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1wluIDXZofxIS9PFWtlhGdR5eZbvNSI0p7qFo5zmIuoM/edit?usp=sharing>

Using Drones to Confirm Breeding of AHGU in Essex County - *by Jeremy Hatt*

The presence of adult AHGU in June and July is a great indicator of local breeding in Essex County. In 2024, we made a concerted effort to identify locations of adult AHGU on mainland Essex County to confirm local nesting sites. We knew from previous observations and Breeding Bird Atlases that AHGU breed in the Leamington area and on Pelee Island and the surrounding Lake Erie islands, but we wanted to identify specific nesting sites in Leamington, and also confirm breeding in Kingsville where adults are present in the summer in low numbers.

Local nesting sites are primarily on break walls or flat gravel or pebbled rooftops of apartment buildings and businesses. With help from Donny Moore, we came up with the idea of using his drone to confirm rooftop nesting sites in Leamington and Kingsville.



Donny's drone; built-in camera allowed us to view rooftops in real time to search for AHGU nests (photos by J. Hatt)

On June 30, Donny and I searched around Leamington Marina and found an AHGU nestling on the break wall with a nearby adult. We then sent his drone up to check the apartment buildings just north of the marina and found at least 5 pairs nesting on Bayview Towers and a single nest on Lakeview Towers. The rooftop of Bayview Towers had more broken concrete, weeds, and cracks and crevices, which appeared to be better-suited for nesting compared to the roof of Lakeview Towers which was better kempt.



Aerial view of Bayview Towers rooftop (photo via drone by D. Moore)



Two nestlings with adult AHGU on Bayview Towers rooftop (photo via drone by D. Moore)



Nestling AHGU (left) on messy, weedy, pebble rooftop suitable for nesting (photo via drone by D. Moore)

During the summer, adults were also noted on rooftops of businesses along Seneca Drive in Leamington and apartment rooftops on Cherry Lane and Erie Street South. It is very likely that several buildings with gravel or pebble rooftops in south Leamington are used for nesting by AHGU.

On July 7, Donny joined me again in Kingsville and we used his drone to confirm rooftop nesting on Peterson Spring on Wigle Avenue and Delta 7 on Industry Road. Both buildings have suitable flat gravel rooftops. Only inactive nests were seen on Peterson Spring but several active nests and two nestlings were seen on Delta 7 (including one dead). Delta 7's rooftop was messier with broken concrete and cinder blocks which appear to be preferable for nesting, similar to Bayview Towers in Leamington. Subsequent to these sightings, nestlings that had fallen off rooftops were found next to the Subway and The Grove Brewing Company buildings in Kingsville, confirming them as nesting sites. There are no doubt several other rooftops in Kingsville that are used for nesting by local AHGU.

One of our goals in 2025 is to confirm more local AHGU nesting sites in Essex County, particularly along the Detroit River in Windsor where adults likely use rooftops for nesting. Historically, AHGU bred alongside a large colony of Ring-billed Gulls on Fighting Island in the Detroit River but this colony eventually collapsed and gulls no longer use the site.

Bands on the Run: Tales of Two Piping Plovers – by Jeremy Hatt

Of the four Piping Plovers recorded in Essex County this year, two birds were found to have colour bands providing significant additional information on these individuals.

The first banded Piping Plover was found by Jeremy Hatt on April 22 at East Beach Hillman Marsh. Although the bird was too distant to see any leg bands, Fred Grenier was able to manage excellent photos of the bird later the same day that allowed for the band combination to be read. The band combo was left leg (orange flag on tibia, dark blue over green bands on tarsus) and right leg (silver band on tibia, orange band on tarsus). Fred's photos were submitted to Birds Canada and we quickly received details from Sydney Shepherd, Ontario Piping Plover Program Coordinator.

“Of,BG:X,O” or “BiG O” as it was nicknamed, hatched in 2021 from Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in Michigan. This male nested at Sturgeon Bay, Wilderness State Park, Michigan, fledging two chicks in 2022 and three chicks in 2023. According to Sydney, “BiG O was the male that was present at Wilderness State Park in July of 2023, when two captive-reared fledglings hatched from abandoned eggs Birds Canada salvaged from Wasaga Beach were released there as fledglings. In a way, BiG O is sort of a step-dad to those two Ontario fledglings.”

The two Wasaga eggs were salvaged when they were abandoned due to extra pair copulation (one male and two females). Big O was reported back at its nesting ground in Michigan on April 23, just one day after it was reported at East Beach Hillman Marsh.



“Big O” at East Beach Hillman Marsh (photo by F. Grenier)

The second banded Piping Plover was found at Fish Point Provincial Park on Pelee Island by Patrick Berens and Heather Fotherby on May 3. This individual was seen by many observers at this location until May 7.

The band combo was left leg (silver band on tibia) and right leg (orange band with green circle on tibia, yellow band on tarsus).

Sydney sent along the following information:

“This individual is “X,-:O,Y gdot Y471”. It doesn’t have a nickname yet since it hasn’t bred. This bird spent their winter enjoying the sun at Bunche Beach in Florida. The bird looks female, but we’ll have to wait to confirm. This bird hatched from Presqu’ile in 2023 to parents “Saga” and “Chewie”. Saga was a second-time

Presqu'ile nester and hatched from Wasaga Beach in 2021. Chewie was born at Sandy Island Beach in New York in 2019. She has a bit more of an interesting breeding history. In 2021, she laid two nests at Darlington, both unsuccessful, as the male was already paired up and supporting a different bird, Ms. Howard. In 2022, Chewie and Ms. Howard laid 6 eggs in a nest together, sharing incubation duties – this is the first documented female-female pairing for the species! Sadly, Ms. Howard went missing a few days into incubation, and Chewie abandoned this nest – the eggs were found to be non-viable. A few days later, Chewie found a mate at Hanlan's Point on the Toronto Islands (who our supporters voted to call “Han”) and they raised two chicks together.

In 2023, Chewie and Saga found each other again at Presqu'ile and successfully raised three chicks to fledge! All three chicks from their Presqu'ile nest in 2023 were reported throughout the winter – many of our birds are unreported/undetected throughout the winter, so this is very impressive.”



“Nickname: Null” at Fish Point Provincial Park, Pelee Island (photo by J. Vandermeulen)

With recent attempts at breeding at Rondeau Provincial Park and the continued success of breeding pairs on Lake Huron and Lake Ontario, hopefully Essex County will one day have a breeding pair on its shores again.

My Season on the Hawk Tower - by Kiah Jasper

On September 1st, 2024, I began my season as the Official Hawk Counter at Holiday Beach Conservation Area. This count has been running since 1974, with over 100,000 hours of hawkwatcher effort on the tower over the 50 years! Over the next three months I spent a total 55 days on the hawk tower, for normally at least 8 to 9 hours a day, observing visible migration pass by the shoreline of Lake Erie. My contract ended on Nov 15 due to the funding running out, but volunteers continued until Nov 30.

It was an interesting season for a few different reasons. September was dominated by poor birding weather, with blocking high pressure sitting over Northeastern North America for what seemed like weeks. This led to many hot, sunny days spent on the tower with light lake effect south winds. We didn't have a single good day of strong Northeast wind during peak Broad-winged Hawk season, and as a result the count recorded its lowest Broad-winged Hawk total (4,319) in the 50 years since it started! Broad-winged Hawks aside, we recorded above average numbers of several raptors, including Turkey Vulture, Golden Eagle, Northern Harrier, Bald Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk. For the full report on raptor numbers, check out the annual report when it comes out on the HBMO website.

(Photo: Golden Eagle at Holiday Beach by K. Jasper)



One of the main reasons I wanted to do this position for the season wasn't for the raptors though, it was to discover what kind of visible songbird flight passes by Holiday Beach every fall. While there have been a few seasons in the past with good data on non raptors, often numbers of smaller birds flying over are estimated and species left unidentified (depending on the counter). My goal for the season was to document all migration with the same thoroughness that the hawkwatch is conducted with. At the end of November the hawkwatch volunteers and I had collectively recorded 200 species from the tower, an all-time season record for the station by 16 species! In my opinion it wasn't an outstanding season for diversity either, so that goes to show what you get when trying to record every bird possible.



That's not to say it wasn't a good season, but conditions just didn't line up perfectly in a few ways. As I said above, September was dominated by non-ideal conditions. This affected visible songbird migration just as it did for raptor numbers, and it wasn't until the last few days of the month that we saw large pushes of neotropical migrants such as wood warblers. Another factor leading to a lower species was the lack of a big finch movement. We did record several White-winged Crossbills (locally rare), but Evening

Grosbeak and Redpoll were missed entirely. With an ideal season for weather, I feel like 215 species or more is a possibility for a season at this site. *(Photo: Yellow-rumped Warbler flying over the Hawk Tower by K. Jasper)*

There were some interesting discoveries I made as well, in terms of the makeup of songbird morning flight and the conditions related to it. Some of my findings weren't too surprising, for example my top 6 days for warbler numbers all occurred during a morning with light wind featuring a mainly north component, and all of them had favourable migration conditions the previous night (clear skies and north wind). On 4 different days I recorded over 1,000 American Goldfinch from the tower. 3 of these days had light wind from the NE (2) or NW (1), over 50 percent cloud cover and coincided with a large flight of other passerines. The remaining big goldfinch day, the one with the highest count of individuals too (1,492) was a bit of an outlier. This day had light winds from the South all morning and had relatively few other species engaging in morning flight in large numbers. At other spots I've done morning flight watches I've seen finches often migrating into a headwind in large numbers, so this makes sense (I still find it pretty interesting though!). Large Blue Jay flight days seemed to be tied to major flight days for other species and occurred on a variety of wind conditions ranging from East, Southwest Northwest and North, with East and North being the most productive for high numbers. All this is mainly just incidental data from looking at an excel spreadsheet where I recorded weather and species numbers, not using statistical analysis software. My season of observation here left me with a lot of questions, most of which would require dedicated research and a few seasons of data to compare against.

(Photo: Blue Jay by K. Jasper)



I do plan on writing up something on my blog (Chronicles of an Ontario Birder) later this winter though, so for those wanting some more information you can check it out there. I am especially interested in the morning flight potential of Holiday Beach in the spring, because it's an East-West shoreline in a promising spot. As far as I'm aware dedicated spring watches haven't been conducted there, so it would be a good opportunity to try out something new for anyone interested.

Field Note: An Un-Whimbrel-ievable Event - by *Cameron Chevalier*

On May 22, 2024, a handful of other birders and I were treated to a spectacle at the Tip of Point Pelee: over 1000 migrating Whimbrel. While not earth-shattering on a provincial scale, a count of this magnitude is unprecedented for Essex. The previous high count was 400 birds, achieved in 2022 by Brandon Holden (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S111207983>). The morning's Tip watch began very slowly, but shortly after 08:00, the first flock of Whimbrel (80, counted from photos) were spotted flying east to west over the Tip by Peter Veighey. Next came a flock spotted by Keith Burk flying northeast to southwest over Pelee that we estimated at approximately 400 birds - we'd already eclipsed the record-high count!

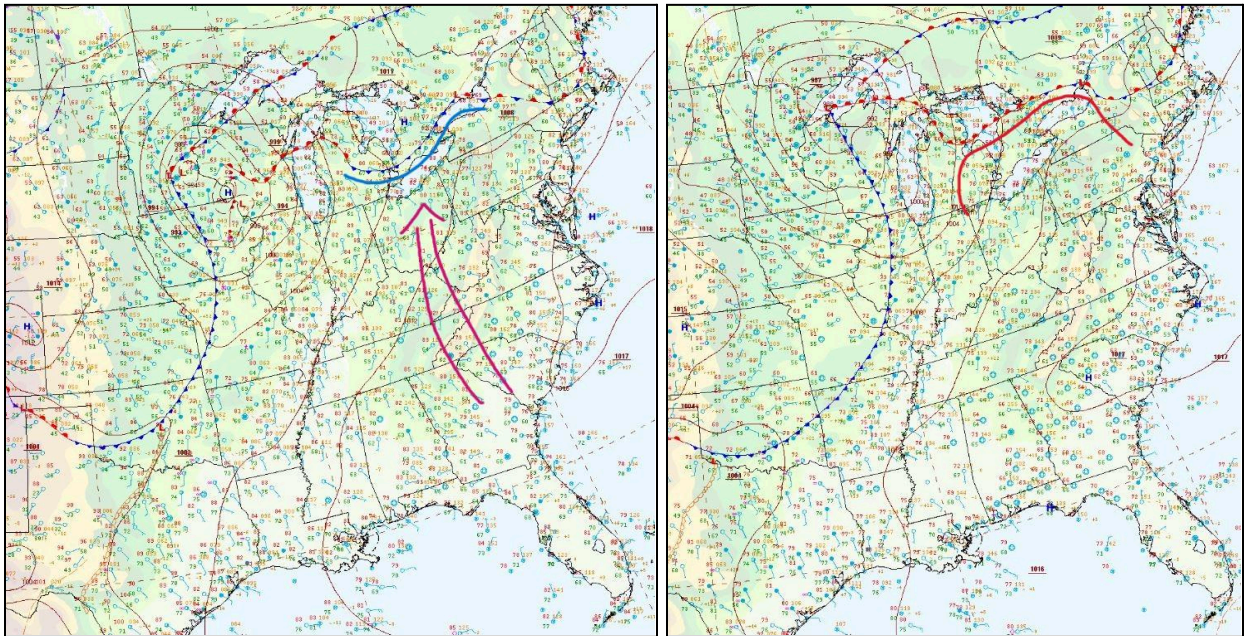
Over the next two hours, we spotted many more flocks of Whimbrel flying by the Tip and reached a conservative total of 1415 birds. Some birds flew just overhead, even touching down on the Tip briefly, but many remained distant and identifiable only with scopes. The visibility was poor with significant haze at a distance, and some flocks surely slipped by out of view. This does raise the question of how individuality was assured, considering distant birds could feasibly have looped back and flown by the Tip several times. However, all birds were seen following one of three distinct flight paths: (A) from the southwest to the north in front of Pelee Island; (B) from the southeast to the north towards Wheatley; and from the east toward (A).

(Photo: Whimbrel flying by the Tip on May 22 by C. Chevalier)



Later, I attempted to determine the cause of the significant influx. With my rudimentary but burgeoning understanding of the influence of weather on migration, I made a few guesses. Weather conditions overnight at the Tip were 15-30 km/h south-southeast winds and 22-25 °C temperatures, while morning conditions were 15-30 km/h south-southwest winds and 22-27 °C temperatures. Winds were therefore favourable to migration from a general standpoint.

In examining meteorological data from the National Weather Service's Weather Prediction Center, I noted a cold front over Lake Erie and Lake Ontario from the evening of May 21 into the early morning hours of May 22. Takeoff conditions from the US Atlantic coast were favourable for migrants, and this cold front likely halted many actively migrating Whimbrel once they approached the lower Great Lakes. By the time birders reached the Tip on May 22, this cold front had given way to a warm front, and I suspect that eager Whimbrel resumed their movement. Many birds likely used islands in the Pelee Island Archipelago as rest/stopover points overnight.



Left: Map from 19:00 May 21, indicating the general migration pathway of Whimbrel (pink) and a cold front over the lower Great Lakes (blue)

Right: Map from 01:00 May 22, showing a warm front in the same region

The morning of May 22 taught me several things. For one, I'll always bring my scope to the Tip, regardless of the time of year! It was an essential tool to pick up some of the more distant groups migrating through the haze. This experience was also a friendly reminder to take things slowly, even in the excitement of May at Point Pelee; had I left the Tip at a more typical hour of 8:30-9:00, I would have missed much of the action.

My checklist from this date is available at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S176470364>.

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