

NEWPORT FOREST ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2011

APPENDIX A

2.3 Birds

The following list of bird species observed in either or both of the last two years gives an approximate idea of annual fluctuations in populations, as well as in the samples themselves. Although 139 bird species have been observed in Newport Forest since the year 2000, in any one year we do not see them all. In fact we normally see about half of them, picking up one or two new species a year at the present rate of accumulation.



Screech Owl caught on trail camera

The numbers in the two columns below are based on bird records that we keep during most visits. We deliberately go birding only on occasion, perhaps on some 15% of our site visits. On the remaining occasions we pick up our birds casually

in the midst of some other project or task. Thus while checking for fish in the Lower Rapids of Fleming Creek we might see an Eastern Phoebe hawking flies at the Upper Rapids (if we're lucky) or hear the shrill call of a Red-bellied Woodpecker. On each visit we fill two or more tray feeders in the immediate vicinity of the trailer and use these to enhance the day's "take." Without such facilities it is doubtful that we would see the Tufted Titmouse as often as we do (admittedly not that often in any case). It is significant that the occasions when we make a bird report we do so as a response to an apparent abundance noticed within the first half hour or so of a visit. If few birds are about, we may well neglect a report for that visit. This may not be a defensible practice, as it distorts the data. For an example of this see the next section.

Although we have progressed greatly as birders in our own estimation, we are best considered as "average". An expert birder going about the same business as we do on site might well observe half again as many birds.

A bird sample is normally taken by following a fixed protocol such as the point-count method. Although our day-records cannot be treated as samples in this respect, they may come close because of our tendency to always visit the same places and to go about the same tasks in most of our visits. To provide more context for the data of 2011, we have added the corresponding numbers for 2010. These appear under their respective years in the list below. The numbers in square brackets result from a scaling process to be explained below. The symbols m, s, w, and y denote birds that are migrants, summer (warm season) birds, winter birds, and year-round residents, respectively.

		2010	2011	[adj.]
Anatidae				
Canada Goose	y	10	24	[16]
Tundra Swan	m	0	1	
Wood Duck	y	4	4	
Mallard	y	2	3	
Common Goldeneye	m	0	1	
Hooded Merganser	y	1	0	
Common Merganser	y	0	1	
Phasianidae				
Wild Turkey	y	14	17	[11]
Ardeidae				

Great Blue Heron	y	13	10	[7]
Green Heron	y	1	0	
Carthartidae				
Turkey Vulture	s	15	19	[13]
Accipitridae				
Bald Eagle	s	3	11	[7]
Northern Harrier	y	1	3	
Sharp-shinned Hawk	s	2	1	
Red-tailed Hawk	y	7	7	[5]
Charadriidae				
Killdeer	s	5	0	
Scolopacidae				
Spotted Sandpiper*	s	4	4	
Woodcock	s	3	0	
Columbidae				
Mourning Dove	y	18	19	[13]
Cuculidae				
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	s	2	4	
Strigidae				
Eastern Screech Owl	y	7	4	
Great Horned Owl	y	3	2	
Short-eared Owl	y	1	0	
Trochilidae				
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	s	2	3	
Trogonidae				
Belted Kingfisher	y	1	1	
Picidae				
Red-bellied Woodpecker	y	19	28	[18]
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	y	2	1	
Downy Woodpecker	y	23	24	[16]
Hairy Woodpecker	y	4	3	
Northern Flicker	y	15	20	[13]
Pileated Woodpecker	y	10	0	
Tyrannidae				
Eastern Wood-Pee wee	s	3	1	
Great Crested Flycatcher	s	4	11	[7]
Eastern Phoebe	s	2	0	
Eastern Kingbird*	s	2	2	
Red-eyed Vireo	s	1	0	

Philadelphia Vireo	s	1	0	
Corvidae				
Blue Jay	y	22	40	[26]
American Crow	y	23	44	[29]
Hirundinidae				
Tree Swallow	s	5	14	[9]
Barn Swallow	s	0	1	
Paridae				
Black-capped Chickadee	y	27	29	[19]
Tufted Titmouse	y	9	1	
Sittidae				
White-breasted Nuthatch	y	31	41	[27]
Brown Creeper	y	4	1	
Troglodytidae				
Carolina Wren	s	1	0	
Regulidae				
Gold-crowned Kinglet	m	1	0	
Ruby-crowned Kinglet	m	1	1	
Musciapidae				
Eastern Bluebird	s	1	1	
Wood Thrush	s	4	5	
American Robin	y	18	34	[22]
Mimidae				
Gray Catbird	s	12	13	[7]
Brown Thrasher*	s	0	1	
Sturnidae				
European Starling	y	3	1	
Bombycillidae				
Cedar Waxwing	s	7	5	
Parulidae				
Blue-winged Warbler	m	1	0	
Northern Parula	m	1	0	
Yellow Warbler	m	2	0	
Yellow-rumped Warbler	m	2	1	
Ovenbird	s	1	0	
Common Yellowthroat	s	7	23	[15]
Fringillidae				
Eastern Towhee	s	12	17	[11]
American Tree Sparrow	m	1	0	

Field Sparrow*	s	10	15	[10]
Vesper Sparrow*	s	0	2	
Song Sparrow	s	17	21	[14]
White-throated Sparrow	w	2	1	
White-crowned Sparrow	m	2	0	
Dark-eyed Junco	w	9	12	[8]
American Goldfinch*	y	9	10	[7]
Cardinalidae				
Northern Cardinal	y	25	28	[18]
Rose-breasted Grosbeak	s	12	18	[12]
Indigo Bunting	s	1	1	
Icteridae				
Bobolink*	s	1	1	
Red-winged Blackbird	s	7	2	
Common Grackle	s	16	16	[11]
Brown-headed Cowbird	s	9	16	[11]
Baltimore Oriole	s	4	14	[9]
Purple Finch	s	2	0	

2.3.1 Discussion:

The counts for 2010 and 2011 reflect the number of observations for each species in the respective years. The numbers are not directly comparable, however, since they are based on 33 bird reports filed for 2010 and 50 reports for 2011. They can be made comparable by scaling one set of numbers by a proportion that reflects the ratio of reporting effort. We have chosen to scale the 2011 frequencies by the ratio $33/50 = 0.66$, producing a new set of figures enclosed in square brackets. Editors of the Ontario Breeding Bird Atlas use the same basic technique. Owing to the notorious vagaries of low frequencies, we have not applied scaling to frequencies that are 5 or less. The asterisks denote birds that have been designated as priority grassland birds by Bird Studies Canada.

In the absence of previous sightings data, someone viewing our numbers would be able to make very little out of them. And even with such data (as we have, going back 12 years), one can do little more than assign empirical probabilities to what look like significant increases or decreases. For example, our sightings of Bald Eagles increased from 2 to 7 (adj.) in 2011. Sightings data from previous years give this increase a little more context. The sightings records for Bald Eagles on site over the six years prior to 2010 yield the following counts: 1, 3, 2, 1, 5, 3.

The average of these counts is 2.5 and the standard deviation is 1.52. The number of observations in 2011 is close to three standard deviations away from the mean and this enables one to assign a probability of 0.11 to the event of seven or more sightings of a bald eagle. Is that “significant”? Who knows? Extracting meaningful conclusions or trends from such low-frequency and highly localized data is a mug’s game.

One may note, based on the adjusted counts, that some populations are observed more often than they were in 2010, while others were observed less often. While some of these changes are easy to account for, others are not. For example, the Eastern Screech Owl appeared to become distinctly less abundant in 2010. And yet these night birds are generally heard during our overnight stays and we had only three of these in 2011, whereas we had 9 overnight stays in 2010. The Common Yellowthroat, on the other hand, was observed or heard distinctly more often. Last year, however, there appeared to be one nesting right beside the Lower Meadow, near the trailer.

Some birds observed in 2010 were not observed at all in 2011. Among those that we have seen more often are the Pileated Woodpecker and the Killdeer. The Pileated has been “absent” before, once for a year, once for three, so this may not be surprising. Lately it may have been exploiting the standing deadwood of which there a lot in recent years, thanks to the Hickory Borer. We have been seeing their digs quite frequently over that period. Has this food source diminished? Last year’s Killdeer scarcity seems to have no simple explanation; we had been seeing or hearing them 3 to 6 times a year -- quite regularly.

2.3.2 Birds of Concern

When should we be “concerned”? The American Ornithologists’ Union rates all of the species listed above as of “least concern”. That is because most of these species are reasonably abundant within their respective North American ranges. However, those same ranges intersect Ontario, some extending no further than southern Ontario. Not surprisingly, considered as inhabitants of Ontario, the same species may receive a much higher conservation rank in that context, especially if they happen to have low abundance in southern Ontario. The prevailing ethic in regard to regional conservation values is to be nearly as alarmed at losing a species here as if it were being extirpated throughout its range. For some of the birds mentioned below, the “concern” is at the provincial level; for the remainder the concern is specifically our own.

Ruffed Grouse:

Regular flushes of this bird 2 to 6 times every year from the 2000 on, ended abruptly after the year 2006, when we had four flushes. The Ruffed Grouse appears to be declining throughout its range.

Bald Eagle:

Still ranked as “endangered” by the OMNR, this bird has been seen with increasing regularity in recent years. This is consistent with estimates of an increasing population in Ontario generally.

American Woodcock:

Woodcocks that buzzed at dusk every summer have not been heard or seen for two years now. Will we see or hear it again? This species is apparently experiencing a “large decline” throughout the hardwood forests of Ontario.

Short-eared Owl:

This is not a common bird regionally, but its onsite record has lots of zeros. We would have to label it as “occasional” in the Newport Forest context, with a total of four sightings over 12 years. It is a species of “special concern” to the OMNR.

Tufted Titmouse:

The Tufted Titmouse was seen only once in 2011. In prior years the counts went like this: 0, 1, 1, 0, 0, 1, 6, 4, 5, 2 (09) Should we worry? Probably not. It is currently ranked S4 by COSEWIC.

Bobolink:

The “1” that appears beside this species for 2010 involved a flock of some 40 birds congregating in the meadow under the powerless. Perhaps they were in the process of selecting a nesting ground and moved on after that. This bird has been experiencing a long-term decline in numbers.