



February-Winter Wildlife Conservation News

SOUTH LAKE SIMCOE NATURALISTS

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Well, this has certainly been another traditional cold and snowy Canadian winter and even more severe than last year! This year, cold/snow events have been forecast in south Lake Simcoe and to the north of us. The amount of snow was predicted in much climate change science modelling for south-central Ontario for many years. Consequently, given the extreme weather events we have not been able to plan consistently safe winter outings in past years, ie. trail outings for x-country skiing and walking. We are hoping to plan and advise members of March and April outings in the coming weeks as spring approaches.

Every year in December we participate in the **Sutton Christmas Bird Count**. We had the 39th annual count in 2025! The air temperature varied generally from - 4 to 2 degrees C, with snow-covered ground, icy and brief sunny spells throughout the day resulting in varied optical bird observation conditions. Our total species count for the day was a solid 49 species. Please read the full Official Report summary below.

In 2025 it was the last year of the third Ontario Breeding Bird atlas program. Some members had been contributing their observations to the effort consistently. In a future meeting we hope to have some conversation and updates, review of the

compilation information in our area and the broader Ontario picture. Of note, from all SLSN outings during the last 4 years, the avian data collected was included in the program data base.

Some really great news! Recently the LSCRA has been moving forward with consultation and design work with community partners on the early concept design of the original North Gwillimbury forest lands. Our organization SLSN contributed right from the very start of the save the North Gwillimbury Forest (NGF) movement.

Support, even in the earliest meeting about the conservation of the habitat in the area, came with fieldwork and academic support from SLSN members. Technical information was contributed years earlier in identifying core and corridor wildlife conservation habitat in the Town of Georgina and York Region. This culminated in the first Green Plan document for the Town/Region in Town of Georgina “Natural Features and Greenlands System Study” Report June 7, 1996. SLSN later supported NGF local area resident group fighting government at Georgina council meetings and with written reports about the important conservation, natural heritage and conservation science for the establishment of the eventual parklands by the province in 2022, to be led by the local conservation authority (LSRCA).

Below is LSRCA formal consultation information “open houses” recently released about the **Lake Simcoe Conservation Preserve Park** which our members can attend and make comments on the plans as they are currently evolving at the public meetings. Keep in mind, the important conservation and restoration of the provincially significant North Tract, short and long-term research wildlife, habitat and landscape features, passive recreation, and sensible planning concerns for which our organization has always been an advocate.

Paul Harpley, SLSN

LSRCA Open Houses Consultations – Location: Georgina Ice Palace

- **Saturday, February 21st - 4:30 to 7 p.m.**
- **Tuesday, March 3rd - 5:30 to 8 p.m.**

Hey Georgina!

We'd like to hear from you!



We are working on a long-term plan for the Lake Simcoe Conservation Preserve.

Join us for an in-person open house to learn more about the project and provide your input

4:30 – 7 pm, Sat February 21st 2026

or

5:30 – 8 pm, Tues March 3rd 2026

Georgina Ice Palace

90 Wexford Drive, Keswick

You can also submit comments and learn more about the project online at [YourSay.LSRCA.on.ca](https://www.yoursay.lsrca.on.ca)



Lake Simcoe Region
conservation authority



Open House
February 21
& March 3

The 2025 Annual Sutton Christmas Bird Count (C.B.C.) Report

The 39th Annual Sutton Christmas Bird Count was on Monday, December 29, 2025 with a total of 3,106 individual birds documented, a noticeable decrease from last year's 8,319 birds counted. Central to this decrease was far fewer Canada geese, Mallards, and swans counted on Lake Simcoe, as remaining open water along the shoreline from Roches Point to Jackson's Point and east was primarily ice far out into the lake. On the official count day participants documented 49 species in the entire count area. Geographically, the survey area includes parts of York Region's municipalities Georgina, East Gwillimbury, Durham Region's northwest Uxbridge districts, and a part of south-east Simcoe County. A total of 35 birders formally participated in the field and at feeders for the count area.

The observation day weather started as overcast with a 37 kph wind from the southwest at 6:40 a.m. for those "owling". Roads were icy and side roads difficult to travel. The air temperature was -7 C. Barred owl (4) and Eastern screech owl (1) were documented. As the sun rose it warmed to -4C at 7:45 a.m. and as the day progressed, the temperature rose to +4C in sheltered areas. It continued to be cloudy to the end of the day, with a few very short sun appearances. Some sheltered small bays on Lake Simcoe were still ice covered even into the afternoon. Indeed, Jackson's Point inner harbour remained completely frozen, and Cook's Bay was ice covered south of Lakeview Park with extensive thin ice patches to the north in the main lake. Snow flurries were reported after 2 p.m. with gusty winds up to 70 kph and full blown blizzard conditions at 4:30 p.m. in most of the count area.

Feeder watchers this year noted, in most cases, that birds were not visiting in numbers they had seen in previous years although some notable species were observed. With good geographic coverage, participating field/feeder observers recorded 49 species, down from 59 last year, and 50 in 2023. Variations in count day weather, ice storms, early sleet and snow squall events in recent past years undoubtedly accounted for some of the species' variation.

Some highlights and notables for the count day are: Brown creeper (5), Chipping sparrow (1), Cooper's hawk (2), Merlin (1), Snow bunting (35), Northern shrike (3), Horned lark (3), Golden-crowned kinglet (2), Eastern bluebird (1). Obvious species in absence but expected (called "misses") this year were Tundra swan, Cedar waxwing, American kestrel.

Rough-legged hawk (1) North-west winter migrants from the prairies/boreal, documented count day in East Keswick again returning this year was exceptional, after several years in absence previously to 2024, though as always, in small numbers. Two consistent bird species of interest for bird enthusiasts on the Sutton count, Bald eagle (15) and Snowy owl (1), were seen on count day although fewer in numbers this year. On the 2024 CBC 8 Snowy owls were seen, so variation of these northern migrant irruptions from year to year is expected, and often weather dependant.

Purple finch (2) and House finch (5) in East Gwillimbury west of Mount Albert were good to see. Other finch species irruptions predicted by some birding forecasters did not materialize on count day in the survey area. However, the small winter finch Common redpoll (40) was exciting as they are erratic winter migrants. They search nomadically for heavy seed crops on birch and alder trees and feed in flocks constantly in motion.

Northern harrier (3) hawks soar with a slow, quartering, harrying flight, with wings held in a strong dihedral distinctive position. In winter (only occasional seen) two of the three were spotted on count day east of Baldwin in Georgina. They hunt over the marshes, wet farm fields and hedgerows for prey in our south Lake Simcoe region, commonly in spring to autumn.

The two Golden-crowned kinglet, tiny active birds with small slender bills and bright crown were seen in the extensive flat wetland areas at the bottom of Cook's Bay in East Gwillimbury and west Innisfil near Lefroy, by two separate field birders. Considering the pre- count and continuing winter weather, these birds are indeed extremely resilient animals.

Thanks to all participants on the Christmas Bird Count as field birders or feeder watcher/property observers. South Lake Simcoe Naturalists (SLSN) members' contributions, and local or 'from further afield' birders' efforts always result in documenting birds that would otherwise not be found. Your collective efforts on the CBC day essentially make each annual Sutton count successful.

Paul and Debra Harpley

Paul and Debra Harpley are compilers of the official Sutton CBC.

Contributed Photos



Bald Eagle, photo credit: Sheila Maxwell and Hugh Sibbald, members SLSN