Historical Overview, Seasonal Timing and Abundance of Little Gull at Point Pelee, Ontario

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Introduction

The Little Gull (*Hydrocoloeus minutus*) is a widespread and relatively common species across much of Europe and Asia, but in North America it is generally categorized as rare and local. Large numbers, however, are occasionally reported in Ontario, and the province is often considered to be the epicentre of Little Gull abundance within the continent (*e.g.*, see Hoar and Weseloh 2012).

Following the discovery of the first nests of Little Gull in North America at Oshawa Second Marsh, *Durham,* in 1962 (Scott 1962, 1963; Richards 1973), there have been additional nestings in southern Ontario. With the year of first nesting, these include 1970 at Rondeau Provincial Park, *Chatham-Kent* (Goodwin 1971, Kelley 1978:40), 1971 at Cranberry Marsh, *Durham* (Richards 1973, Tozer and Richards 1974), 1977 at Bassett Island, *Lambton* (Kelley 1983) and 1979 at North Limestone Island, *Parry Sound* (Mills 1981:64, Weseloh 2007). Such nestings indicate that Little Gulls could be found breeding at any suitable location along the Great Lakes — including Point Pelee. However, despite the sporadic nestings in southern Ontario (and elsewhere in the Great Lakes Region), it is generally assumed that within North America most Little Gulls nest in the Hudson Bay Lowlands (McRae 1989, Ewins and Weseloh 1999).

There has been considerable debate over the decades concerning the increase of Little Gull sightings in Ontario (and North America); was this increase the result of a relatively recent colonization from the Old World as suggested by some

Figure 1. Western Lake Erie showing the location of the study area (Point Pelee Birding Area).

authors (Baillie 1963, Hutchinson and Neath 1978, Austen *et al.* 1994), or had the species been present all along but simply overlooked (McRae 1989)? That some birds are derived from the Old World has been proven by banding records, and this even includes a banded bird observed at Point Pelee. On 25 July 2001, the author observed a pair of adult Little Gulls at Sturgeon Creek, one of which was banded. With the aid of a telescope most of the band number was read, enough so that later it was determined the bird had been banded in Finland, almost certainly in the nest (as a chick) in 1998 (Anonymous 2001).

The purpose of this paper is to present a comprehensive account on the status of Little Gull at Point Pelee, to include detailed information on seasonal timing, abundance and the behaviour of the various age classes. In almost all respects, the migration and timing of Little Gull at Point Pelee (and southern Ontario generally) is essentially identical to that of Bonaparte's Gull, with only a few minor differences. These differences are detailed below in the seasonal accounts. "Point Pelee" refers to the official Point Pelee Birding Area, which is a standard Christmas Bird Count circle (24 km/15 mile diameter) centred just north of Point Pelee National Park; the area includes Wheatley and Wheatley Provincial Park to the northeast, and Leamington and Seacliff Beach to the northwest (Figure 1).

Methods and Sources of Information

Information for this paper is derived from multiple sources. Since the late 1970s, the author has consistently compiled seasonal summaries of bird sightings for the Point Pelee Birding Area; these include both personal sightings in addition to those of many visiting birders. For the period prior to the late 1970s, information on Little Gull was gleaned mostly from the published literature, and for both historical and recent records this included a complete review of the journals *Audubon Field Notes* (1947–1970), *American Birds* (1971–1993), *Field Notes* (1994–1998) and *North American Birds* (1999–2014). For Point Pelee specifically, much of the *useable* data for Little Gull pertains to recent times. On an annual basis, consistent and detailed reporting of all bird species at Point Pelee did not begin until the late 1970s, thus most of the data on Little Gull presented in this paper are based on that time period to the present.

The interpretation of records rests largely with the author, who has studied in detail the seasonal status of Little Gull at Point Pelee since the early 1980s. The interpretation of data can occasionally be subjective; however, over the longer term distinctive seasonal patterns have emerged that can support the various viewpoints that have evolved over time. To describe the various ages of Little Gull, for clarity I have elected to use an age-based system rather than a plumage-based system. Thus, various groups are discussed and categorized based on their age, even though plumage descriptors are sometimes added for additional clarity. Especially for gulls, the age-based system was first popularized by Grant (1982).

Historical Overview

The first Little Gull recorded at Point Pelee was on 25 April 1957. On that date an adult bird was seen in flight over Lake Erie opposite Sanctuary Pond (just south of the entrance to Point Pelee National Park); the observers were Robert A. Henry, Peter J. Hamel, Robert W. Stamp and P. Norman Chesterfield (Hamel 1958, Wormington 2007). Also in 1957, on 24 May, a first-summer Little Gull was observed at the Tip by John A. Crosby *et al.* This was the famous "Ross's Gull" as published by some authors (Stirrett 1973a:18, James *et al.* 1976:27, Speirs 1985:365), but the drawings of this bird are so superb, there is no question that they instead portray a Little Gull (James 1984, Wormington 2007). Little Gull was not recorded again at Point Pelee until 18 September 1961 (Stirrett 1973b:20); the species was then found almost annually through to the early 1970s, and then annually thereafter to the present.

The number of reported observations over the decades appears to match closely the increase of birder activity at Point Pelee during the same time period. Certainly in modern times at Point Pelee, it has consistently been noted that the majority of Little Gulls are still found by a minority of birders. This strongly suggests that the species is still overlooked by many birders and, as such, may explain why earlier visits to Point Pelee failed to record the species. Fewer birders, fewer visits, and overlooking the species (all in combination), could easily account for the apparent scarcity of early records.

The regularity of Little Gull today at Point Pelee can be attributed to a number of factors. The waters of the western basin

LITTLE GULL

Uncommon Spring and Fall Transient
Irregular Rare (Usually Absent) Summer Resident (Breeding Suspected)
Uncommon Summer Visitor (Non-Breeding)
Very Rare Winter Visitor

(Winter / February 13, 16, March 15) **March 20 – May 18** (May 30, June 3, 6 / Summer)
(Summer / June 28, July 9, 10) **July 15 – December 24** (January 11, 16, 23 / Winter)

Figure 2. A summary of the status of Little Gull at Point Pelee throughout the year. Dates in bold text indicate "normal" first and last dates for migration (spring and fall); dates not in bold text indicate extreme migration dates. (From Wormington 2015).

of Lake Erie are both shallow and rich in food sources, and this has always attracted huge numbers of various waterbirds. Point Pelee proper hosts a wide range of habitats that specifically attract large numbers of gulls. These include abundant offshore waters, long stretches of accessible shoreline (mostly sand beaches), large marshes (Hillman Marsh and Pelee Marsh), several harbours and marinas (Wheatley, Sturgeon Creek and Leamington), and expansive areas of large and very flat agricultural fields. All of these habitats are compacted into a relatively small area, and apparently provide excellent benefits for Little Gull — namely areas for both feeding and loafing.

Seasonal Status and Timing

The seasonal status of Little Gull at Point Pelee is rather complex. Occurrences at Point Pelee include both spring and fall migrants, in addition to numbers that also summer here (Figure 2). Depending on the time of year, the behaviour of adult and immature birds can be markedly different, and this further adds to the overall complexity. Also, immature birds form the bulk of the summering population, but this age class is essentially unknown during the few winters when the species has been recorded. Almost always, Little Gulls at Point Pelee are found in association with the much more numerous Bonaparte's Gull. The seasonal status and timing of Little Gull at Point Pelee is presented below in separate sections, for both spring and fall migrations, and for summer and winter seasons.

Spring Migration

Previously it was described that Bonaparte's Gulls at Point Pelee during spring (and fall) engage in what has been described as a "two-tier" migration (Wormington 2001a, 2013a; Tozer 2012:150-151), and this applies to Little Gull as well. After departing their wintering grounds, birds initially make a long-distance flight to a specific region, where at that general location they remain for some time while moulting into summer plumage. Later they then make another long-distance flight, this time essentially direct to their boreal breeding grounds.

The earliest three records for spring migrants at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **13 February 2001**: one adult, Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington, Henrietta T. O'Neill). This bird was with a flock of 27 adult Bonaparte's Gulls, which likewise were the earliest spring migrants of the species ever recorded at Point Pelee (Wormington 2013a). Prior to this observation, no wintering Bonaparte's Gulls had been present at Point Pelee, and the last fall migrants were reported in late December of the previous year (Wormington 2001b). Also, that winter it is known that no Bonaparte's Gulls wintered along the Lake Erie shoreline in Ohio, a location where wintering birds are often abundant (Wormington 2013a). The spring migration of 2001 started exceptionally early at Point Pelee, with 13 species (including Little Gull) found on record-early dates up to just 20 February alone (Wormington 2001c).

- **16 February 2006**: two adults, Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington). Despite the fact that numbers of Bonaparte's Gulls were wintering this season at Point Pelee, these Little Gulls are nonetheless considered spring migrants. Not only were the two birds together (suggesting a mated pair), but during the same week there was a major incursion of spring migrants of various species at Point Pelee (Wormington 2006).

- **15 March 1983**: one adult, NE Hillman Marsh (Alan Wormington). This bird was associating with 255 Bonaparte's Gulls, the first influx of that species for the spring (Runtz 1983:9).

The first spring migrants typically arrive at Point Pelee during the general time frame of late March to early April, but the first recorded arrivals tend to be erratic for the simple reason that the species is not overly common. In fact, the first migrants tend to be single birds only. Later, if any concentrations of Little Gulls develop at Point Pelee, it is usually during the period including the middle of April to the middle of May (Figure 3). During this time period the vast majority of birds are adults, since first-summer immatures do not normally put in a first appearance until late April or early May, and even then, single birds only are the norm (Figure 4). It is typical for adult Little Gulls to remain at Point Pelee until the middle of May (or occasionally later), but eventually there will be a quick exodus of adult birds and these departures generally correspond to a sudden increase in temperature (and associated south winds).

Spring migrants at Point Pelee spend a great deal of time foraging, and during this time they are apt to be found at several different locations. These include all shorelines, both inshore and offshore waters of Lake Erie, local harbours, marinas and marshes, and agricultural fields (especially those that are wet or flooded). At this time of year, most Little Gulls are typically found among concentrations of Bonaparte's Gulls.

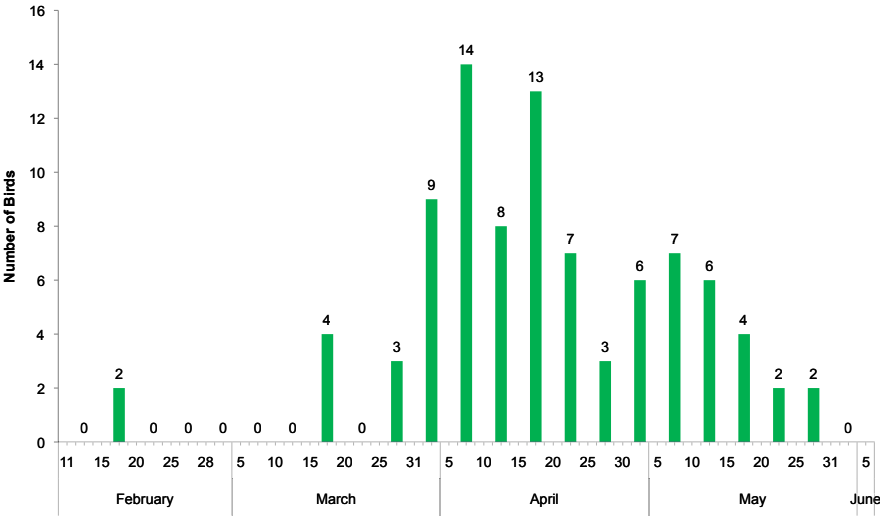

Figure 3. Maximum daily counts (two or more birds) for Little Gull during spring migration at Point Pelee, presented in 5-day intervals. For the period after 10 May, adult birds only are included since after that date it is not possible to determine if observed first-summer immatures are spring migrants or, instead, potential summering birds.

Figure 4. A first-summer (one-year-old) immature Little Gull at the Tip of Point Pelee National Park, on 8 May 2014. *Photo: Alan Wormington.*

The earliest four records for first-summer (one-year-old) immatures at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **25 March 2011**: one, Lake Erie at NE Hillman Marsh (Marianne B. Reid).
- **3 April 1983**: one, Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington).
- **10 April 1984**: one, Tip (Paul D. Pratt, Audrey S. Weir, Esther A. Cusick).
- **14 April 2013**: one, Concession Road E (Jeremy M. Bensette *et al.*).

The highest daily counts for spring migrants at Point Pelee are as follows (with adults-only included after 10 May):

- **14** — 9 April 1983: Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington, Michael J. Oldham); all of these birds were adults. At the same location 13 adults were also present on 18 April (Runtz 1983:9) and 9 birds (mixed ages) were present on 3 April (A. Wormington, unpublished data).
- **7** — 7 May 1971: Hillman Marsh (Joseph P. Kleiman, Jeffrey A. Greenhouse, Dennis F. Rupert).
- **7** — 25 April 1992: 6-Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington), 1-Onion Fields (Karl R. Overman, Warren A. Hall).
- **6** — 11 May 2001: 5-Hillman Marsh, 1-Tip (Dean J. Ware).
- **5** — 7 May 1998: Tip (David Smitley, J. Michael Tate *et al.*).
- **5** — 10 May 2000: 3-Wheatley Harbour (Alfred H. Rider), 2-Tip (Kevin A. McLaughlin)
- **4** — 17 May 1981: Hillman Marsh (Mike Parr *et al.*).
- **4** — 16 March 2002: Wheatley Harbour (Dean J. Ware)
- **4** — 16 May 2008: Wheatley Harbour to NW Hillman Marsh (Alan Wormington *et al.*).

The latest three records for spring migrants (adults) at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **6 June 1978**: one summer-plumaged adult (present since 24 May), Tip (Alan Wormington, Peter Whelan *et al.*).
- **3 June 2012**: one summer-plumaged adult, NW Hillman Marsh (Dean J. Ware).
- **30 May 1969**: one summer-plumaged adult, Tip (James L. Baillie *et al.*).

As I previously described for Bonaparte's Gull (Wormington 2013a), the latest spring migrants (adults) to be recorded at Point Pelee for that species are 26 May (1983), 25 May (1996) and 25 May (2008). In comparison, the latest spring occurrences for Little Gull are all later than those dates, which indicates that the species can be a slightly later spring migrant (on average) than Bonaparte's Gull.

Summer

Summer – Suspected Breeding

During the summer of 2009, there was a series of sightings involving adult birds, which suggested nesting at Point Pelee even though no direct evidence was obtained (Wormington 2009). This was the first time ever that any age-class other than first-summer immature had been recorded at Point Pelee during summer (Wormington 2015). The observation of adults included two at NW Hillman Marsh on 3 June (Marianne B. Reid). This was followed by the observation of single adults on 14 June at East Beach (Blake A. Mann) and 26 June at Concession Road E (Alan Wormington); both of these locations are immediately adjacent to Pelee Marsh. All of these sightings may have pertained to the same pair of adults, and the fact that later sightings were of single birds only suggests that the missing adult could have been attending a nearby nest. Within Pelee Marsh, the species could easily nest in association with the many pairs of Black Terns that are present here, where such a nesting would be very difficult to detect.

In 2013, an adult bird was seen at the Tip on 16 June (Alan Wormington, Stephen T. Pike, Cassandra L. Gagnon, Robert G. Hill) and presumably the same adult was also there on 22 June (Blake A. Mann); both times the bird was associating with summering, immature Bonaparte's Gulls (Wormington 2013b). Presumably this adult was a failed breeder, but its origin is unknown. Likely, however, it was engaged in breeding activity somewhere in the Great Lakes Region, but not necessarily close to Point Pelee.

Summer – Non-Breeding

All Little Gulls found summering at Point Pelee have been first-summer immatures, with the exception of adult birds recorded in 2009 and 2013 as described above. Summering immatures are invariably found associating with flocks of similar-aged Bonaparte's Gulls, which feed or congregate at such locations as the Tip, East Beach, Onion Fields (located directly north of Point Pelee National Park), Hillman Marsh, Seacliff Beach or Leamington Marina. The number of Little Gulls that are present during any single summer seems to be directly correlated to the population size of summering Bonaparte's Gulls.

First-summer (immature) Little Gulls are relatively late arrivals at Point Pelee, and are normally not detected for the first time until late April or early May. Keeping in mind that this age class (and the species as a whole) is not common, nonetheless it appears that first-summer Little Gulls arrive somewhat later (on average) than similar-aged Bonaparte's Gulls (Wormington 2013a). Tabulations for first-summer Little Gulls are presented for the middle of May through to late July (Figure 5), but not all birds during this period necessarily pertain to those that summered at Point Pelee. Numbers are sometimes present in the middle of May or late May, but many of these birds are likely spring migrants that will eventually depart the area. As to when the spring passage of first-summer immatures is over is not precisely known. However, certainly by the first of June all birds present at Point Pelee can be assumed to be

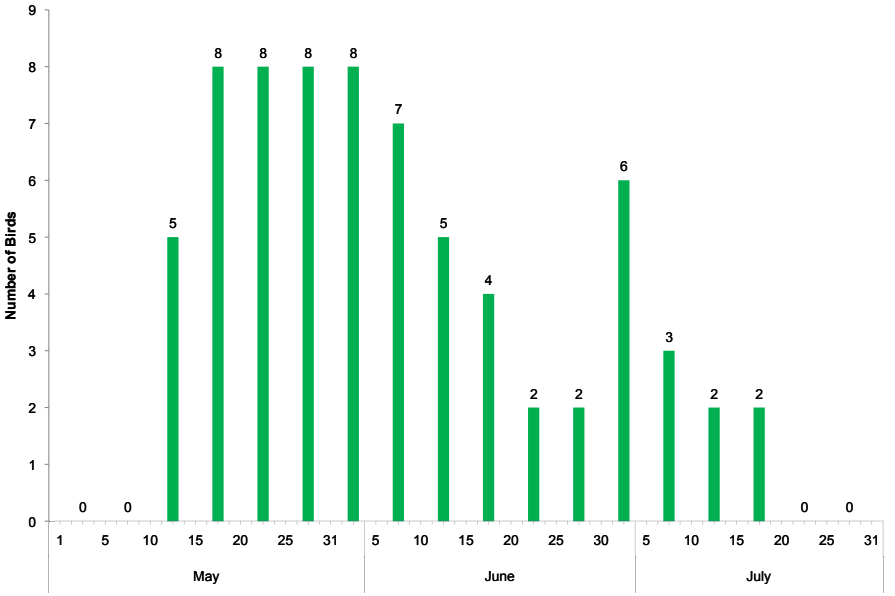

Figure 5. Maximum daily counts (two or more birds) for first-summer (immature) Little Gulls at Point Pelee, presented in 5-day intervals.

summering. Tabulations for first-summer immatures extend to late July only, after which this age class is difficult to find and in fact there are no observations pertaining to more than single birds only.

Although most summering records presumably refer to birds that have remained throughout the season (either at or near Point Pelee), numbers tend to peak in late May through to the middle of June and then gradually decrease thereafter (Figure 5); by July and August, summering birds can be exceedingly difficult to locate. This pattern of declining numbers may indicate that some birds continue to move northwards, perhaps not as true migrants but instead as nomadic wanderers. In any event, they appear to move away from Point Pelee during this time.

The highest daily counts for first-summer immatures at Point Pelee during specific summer seasons (on or after 1 June) are as follows:

- **8** — 5 June 1999: Onion Fields (Alan Wormington *et al.*).
- **7** — 8 June 2007: Hillman Marsh (Alan Wormington).
- **6** — 3 June 2000: Hillman Beach (Dean J. Ware).
- **6** — 1 July 2006: west side of Tip (Alan Wormington).
- **5** — 13 June 1989: 3-Onion Fields, 2-Tip (Alan Wormington).
- **5** — 10 June 1993: Northeast Beach (Alan Wormington).
- **5** — 9 June 1995: SW Hillman Marsh (Alan Wormington).

During some years, significant numbers of first-summer Little Gulls can be found summering at Point Pelee. During the summer of 2006 it was estimated that 15-20 different birds were recorded in the area (Wormington 2007). At least 12 birds were estimated for the summer of 2009 (Wormington 2009), and during the summer of 1992 at least 10 birds were probably present (Wormington 1992). Early in the summer it is not unusual to observe three or more birds per day; however, after the middle of June it becomes progressively more difficult to find summering birds, when a single bird per day, at most, is then the norm.

Fall Migration

Similar to Bonaparte's Gull (see Wormington 2013a), the fall migration of Little Gull at Point Pelee extends over a remarkable length of time, from the middle of July to late December — well over five months of the year (Figure 6). Adult birds initially arrive in breeding plumage, complete with a black hood; while at Point Pelee (or elsewhere) they then undergo a complete wing and body moult before eventually leaving the area in fresh winter plumage. Similar to spring migration, birds during fall again engage in a "two-tier" migration strategy as described previously. In referring to Bonaparte's Gull specifically, Howell and Dunn (2007:302-305) refer to this migration pattern as a "bimodal fall passage." The start of fall migration is very early and involves adult birds in immaculate summer (breeding) plumage. The earliest arrivals are presumably failed breeders. Throughout the entire fall migration of Little Gull at Point Pelee, adult birds are always encountered much more frequently than any other age class.

The earliest four records for fall migrants at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **28 June 2005**: one summer-plumaged adult (present to at least 3 July), NW Hillman Marsh (Dean J. Ware, Alan Wormington *et al.*). On both 29 June and 3 July, a second adult was also present, suggesting a probable pair was involved. In addition to these very early individuals, additional early fall migrants appeared at NW Hillman Marsh including three adults on 7 July (Alan Wormington); subsequently at least eight more adults were recorded at various Point Pelee locations up to 28 July inclusive, indicating that the fall migration of the species during 2005 was unusually early. Also on 28 June of the same year, record-early Bonaparte's Gulls were also observed at NW Hillman Marsh, when four adults were seen (Wormington 2005).

- **9 July 2009**: five summer-plumaged adults, West Cranberry Pond (Alan Wormington). Immediately after this observation, there was a series of additional sightings of adult birds, and by the end of the month at least 30 adults had been recorded (Wormington 2009). Similar to 2005, this indicates that the fall migration of the species in 2009 was unusually early.

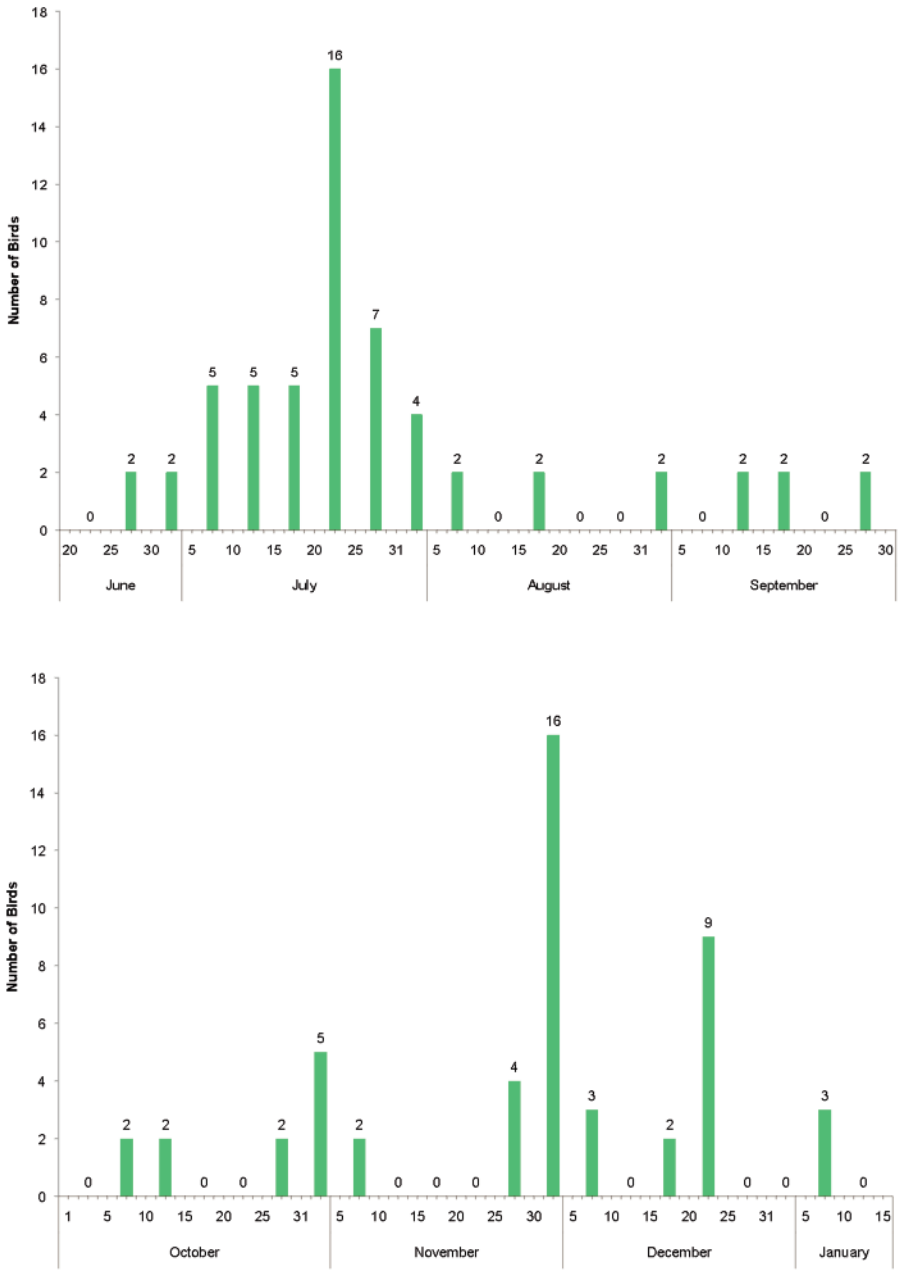

Figure 6. Maximum daily counts for Little Gull during fall migration at Point Pelee, presented in 5-day intervals.

- **10 July 2002**: two summer-plumaged adults (pair?), Lake Erie at Pelee Drive (Alan Wormington). These birds were associating with 14 adult Bonaparte's Gulls, also the first fall migrants of that species to be found at Point Pelee in 2002 (Wormington 2002).
- **10 July 2013**: one second-summer adult, Concession Road C (Alan Wormington).

The behaviour of fall migrants at Point Pelee is variable, depending on the time period involved. During the initial arrival of adult Little Gulls during July, birds will often congregate with similar-aged Bonaparte's Gulls. Huge flocks of Bonaparte's Gulls often congregate at specific sites where they remain for extended periods (Wormington 2013a), and it is here where numbers of Little Gulls can sometimes be found. Favoured sites during this time period may include Seacliff Beach, the Onion Fields, Pelee Marsh and the Tip (Figure 7).

For the remainder of fall migration (through to December), Little Gulls at Point Pelee tend to be highly nomadic. Most observations pertain to birds in transit, and rarely will the same bird be seen on subsequent days. Single birds flying past the Tip of Point Pelee represents a typical sighting of this nature. Here they are apt to be found in association with Bonaparte's Gulls, where large numbers of that species may pass the Tip in a short period of time during any given day.

Figure 7. An adult Little Gull in second-summer plumage at Seacliff Beach, a regular loafing location for this species at Point Pelee. This bird, photographed on 12 July 2008, was the first fall migrant to be recorded at Point Pelee that season. *Photo: Alan Wormington*

Presumably these daily flights are related to feeding, with changing winds and other unknown factors dictating their direction and intensity. Very late in the season, Bonaparte's Gulls may concentrate at various marinas and harbours, particularly Wheatley Harbour which is a favoured location; it is amongst these concentrations where the occasional Little Gull will also be found (Figure 8). During the late-fall time period, Little Gulls are rarely encountered in local marshes or in agricultural fields (in contrast to earlier in the season).

The highest daily counts for fall migrants at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **16** — 4 December 1990: Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington); this total included 13 adults, 2 first-winter birds, and one second-winter bird.
- **16** — 23 July 2009: SE Onion Fields (Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.
- **9** — 22 December 1984: this total was attained during the Christmas Bird Count that was conducted on this date; three birds were at Leamington, three at the Tip and singles at East Beach, Hillman Marsh and Wheatley Harbour (multiple observers).
- **7** — 21 July 2006: Seacliff Beach (Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.
- **7** — 28 July 2014: Seacliff Beach (Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.

Figure 8. An adult Little Gull on 12 December 2014 at Wheatley Harbour, a location where this species may appear during late-fall migration with some regularity. *Photo: Lev A. Frid*

- **5** — 1 November 1992: 3-Tip, 2-Leamington Marina (Alan Wormington, Jon L. Dunn, Sue Tackett); all of these birds were adults.
- **5** — 5 November 2007: 3-Lake Erie at NE Hillman Marsh, 2-Tip (Kevin A. McLaughlin, Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.
- **5** — 9 July 2009: West Cranberry Pond (Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.
- **5** — 15 July 2009: flying south off Tip (Alan Wormington); all of these birds were adults.

Similar to Bonaparte's Gull (see Wormington 2013a), Little Gulls can linger exceptionally late during fall migration in southern Ontario. At Point Pelee, fall migrants have been recorded to the middle and late December with some regularity, with 24 December considered a "normal" last date for fall migration (as shown in Figure 2); the very latest fall migrants have been recorded into January.

The latest three records for fall migrants at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **23 January 2010**: one adult, Tip (Blake A. Mann). Also at the Tip on the same date were an exceptional 900 Bonaparte's Gulls, the last fall migrants of that species to be recorded; in adjacent Ohio waters it is known that most Bonaparte's Gulls had departed by the middle of January, with very few birds present thereafter (Wormington 2010).
- **16 January 1983**: one adult, Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington); this bird was associating with 250 Bonaparte's Gulls, and the last fall migrants of that species were six birds on 22 January at the same location (Wormington 1983).
- **11 January 1985**: one adult, Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington); this bird was associating with 400 Bonaparte's Gulls, and it was just two days later on 13 January when the last fall migrants of that species (3 birds) were recorded (Wormington 1985).

Juvenile Birds

Observations of Little Gull in true juvenile plumage at Point Pelee are relatively few. Most years the first immature birds are not recorded until late September or later, when they have already moulted into first-winter plumage. Thus, the migration of juvenile Little Gulls is distinctly different from those of Bonaparte's Gull, even though fall adults of both species arrive at Point Pelee at essentially the same time (Wormington 2015). Juvenile Bonaparte's Gulls arrive exceptionally early at Point Pelee, where they are recorded annually by late July (Wormington 2013a). Shortly thereafter numbers may build up rapidly, indicating that many birds begin their southward journey immediately upon leaving the nest. An example of an exceptional concentration of early juvenile Bonaparte's Gulls is the 120 birds present on 29 July 2010 (Wormington 2015). In contrast, juvenile Little Gulls arrive considerably later at Point Pelee, and are generally not detected most years until late September or later. The differential between the earliest-ever arrival of a juvenile Bonaparte's

Gull at Point Pelee on 19 July (Wormington 2013a) and the earliest-ever juvenile Little Gull on 20 August (Wormington 2014) is a significant 32 days. Excluding the very early 20 August record of a juvenile Little Gull, the next earliest record is 2 September, which creates a differential arrival (compared to the earliest-ever juvenile Bonaparte's Gull) of 45 days. The pattern of late-arriving juvenile Little Gulls suggests that after leaving the nest they remain relatively close by, rather than quickly migrating south, as is the case with many juvenile Bonaparte's Gulls. At least in Ontario, juvenile Little Gulls are routinely seen during the month of August on James Bay, where nesting is presumed to be widespread within the Hudson Bay Lowlands; an example of this includes the several juveniles that were seen by the author and others at Netitishi Point, southern James Bay, during the period of 13-26 August 2011 inclusive (Wormington 2011).

The earliest four records for juvenile birds at Point Pelee are as follows:

- **20 August 2014**: one, Seacliff Beach (Richard P. Carr).
- **2 September 1981**: one, Tip (Robert G. Finlayson).
- **3 September 1980**: one, Tip (Alan Wormington, Ron Ridout).
- **3 September 2003**: one, Tip (Sarah E. Rupert).

Winter

Similar to Bonaparte's Gull (see Wormington 2013a), true overwintering of Little Gull in Ontario is a relatively rare event. Speirs (1985:336-337) provided a long series of records categorized as "winter" records for multiple locations in southern Ontario, but virtually all of these pertain to late-fall migrants within the time frame of early December to early January inclusive. The only location in the province where Little Gull is somewhat regular as a true overwintering species is the Niagara River, where very small numbers might be present during some winters (Bellerby *et al.* 2000).

At Point Pelee the overwintering of Little Gull is likewise a rare event, even though fall migrants may linger into the middle or late December with some regularity (Figure 6). In total, Little Gull has been recorded as wintering at Point Pelee during only three winter seasons. I previously reported that Bonaparte's Gull had been recorded as wintering at Point Pelee during only eight winter seasons (Wormington 2013a); all wintering records of Little Gull pertain to three of these eight seasons.

The first true winter record of Little Gull for Point Pelee involved a second-winter immature that was present at Wheatley Harbour on 12 February 1991 (Alan Wormington); this bird appeared with a flock of 75 Bonaparte's Gulls (Wormington 1991), an unusual concentration for mid-winter.

In 1998, a single adult was observed at Wheatley Harbour on 26 and 28 February (Alan Wormington *et al.*); on 27 February of the same year, two adults were found at the Tip amongst an exceptional concentration of 550 over-wintering Bonaparte's Gulls (Alan Wormington). Although impossible to determine with certainty, it is assumed that three different Little Gulls were involved in these sightings.

During the winter of 2001-2002, there was a series of Little Gull observations that pertained to birds that were over-wintering at Point Pelee. These included two adults at Wheatley Harbour on 10 February (Blake A. Mann); two adults (perhaps the same) were also at Wheatley Harbour on 28 February–2 March (Alan Wormington *et al.*). Then on 9 March, two separate adults were seen — one at Wheatley Harbour, and another flying over fields just north of Hillman Marsh (Karl R. Overman, James B. Lesser); perhaps these were the same two birds once more. Finally, from 28 February–8 March, a first-winter immature was also present at Wheatley Harbour (Alan Wormington *et al.*).

When describing the status of wintering Bonaparte's Gulls at Point Pelee (Wormington 2013a), I noted that there is often an uptick in numbers very late in the season, namely during the period of late February to the middle of March. Such late-winter increases were documented in four different years (1998, 2002, 2006 and 2012), out of the eight years in total in which wintering of the species has taken place at Point Pelee. Of the three winter seasons in which Little Gull has been recorded at Point Pelee, two have been during the four years thus described for wintering Bonaparte's Gull. These late-winter increases are typically triggered by warm weather and thus melting of ice cover on Lake Erie, and the source of these birds is presumed to be from the Lake Erie shoreline of Ohio, where large numbers are known to be wintering. Thus these late-winter concentrations are derived from birds that are already wintering elsewhere on Lake Erie (predominately in Ohio waters), and they simply shift to Point Pelee when conditions become favourable.

Little Gull concentrations elsewhere on Lake Erie

Point Pelee is a significant location for Little Gull in southern Ontario, but elsewhere on Lake Erie there are several additional locations that are also significant. Below is a tabulation for Little Gull concentrations elsewhere on Lake Erie, at selected Ontario sites. Included are actual record-high counts, in addition to other high counts of note that pertain to various times of the year.

Rondeau Birding Area, Chatham–Kent Regional Municipality

- **56** — 27 March 1983: Erieau to Shrewsbury (Alan Wormington, Keith J. Burk, P. Allen Woodliffe); all of these birds were adults.
- **35** — 6 July 1974: Erieau (Joseph P. Kleiman).
- **17** — 5 July 1975: Erieau (Joseph P. Kleiman).
- **13** — 16 August 1974: Erieau (Keith J. Burk).
- **12** — 8 July 1970: Rondeau Marsh (Robert C. Simpson, John A. Kelley); this total included 4 adults and 8 juveniles (at two nests).
- **12** — 29 November 1985: Rondeau Provincial Park (Joseph L. Bartell, Judy Bartell); all of these birds were adults.
- **12** — 25 July 2009: Rondeau Provincial Park (Blake A. Mann); this total included 11 adults and one first-summer immature.
- **11** — 12 October 2014: Rondeau Provincial Park (Blake A. Mann, James T. Burk); this total included 9 adults and 2 first-summer birds.
- **10** — 3 April 2009: Erieau (James T. Burk); all of these birds were adults.
- **9** — 26 May 2006: Shrewsbury (David A. Martin, Linda Wladarski); all of these birds were first-summer immatures.

Elgin County

- **22** — 5 October 2011: Port Burwell (Kenneth G.D. Burrell); this total included 14 adults, 4 second-winter, and 4 first-winter birds.
- **17** — 28 August 2011: Port Burwell (Kenneth G.D. Burrell).
- **15** — 11 September 2005: Port Burwell (David A. Martin, Linda Wladarski, Ross C. Snider); this total included 8 juveniles and 7 adult birds.
- **15** — 28 March 2007: Port Bruce (Bruce de Boer, Christine de Boer).
- **14** — 19 July 2001: Port Burwell (David A. Martin, Linda Wladarski *et al.*); this total included 11 adults, two first-summer, and one second-summer bird.
- **10** — 4 August 2003: Port Burwell (David A. Martin, Linda Wladarski); this total included 8 adults and 2 first-summer birds.
- **10** — 16 December 2012: Port Burwell (Jeffrey H. Skevington).

Long Point Birding Area, Norfolk County

- **266** — 6 November 1988: Inner Bay at Port Rowan (Ron Ridout, Donald A. Sutherland); these birds were virtually all adults.
- **250** — 25 November 2002: Inner Bay at Port Rowan (Richard Joos).
- **145** — 11 March 2012: Turkey Point (Barbara N. Charlton, Robert Z. Dobos, Ron Ridout) — virtually all of these birds were adults, with the exception of 2 first-summer immatures.
- **130** — 26 October 2013: Inner Bay at Port Rowan and Long Point Causeway (Stuart A. Mackenzie, Ron Ridout); all of these birds were adults, with the exception of 6 first-winter immatures.

- **106** — 14 December 1991: Inner Bay at St. Williams (Alan Wormington, Claudia A. Schaefer, Mark W. Jennings); all of these birds were adults.
- **92** — 31 March 2013: Turkey Point (Ron Ridout).
- **73** — 28 July 1985: Long Point Flats (Alan Wormington, Alan W. McTavish, Tim Sabo); this total included 45 adults, 23 first-summer, and 5 second-summer birds.
- **50** — 21 August 1997: Courtright Ridge (David Geale, Gavin C. Platt) — the majority of these birds were adults.
- **45** — 11 April 1999: Turkey Point (Ron Ridout).
- **40** — 17 July 1976: Long Point Flats (B. Eaton, Rob Copeland).
- **37** — 29 June 1975: Long Point Flats (Alan Wormington); this total included 19 juveniles, 9 adults, and 9 first-summer birds; the presence of so many juveniles on the very early date undoubtedly indicates breeding at this site.

Port Dover, Norfolk County

- **120** — 3 November 1996: Port Dover (Long Point Bird Observatory).
- **30** — 4 April 2009: Port Dover (Philip D. Taylor).

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