



## NEWSLETTER

November/December 2015

### 69th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count

Saturday, December 19, 2015

by Jacco Gelderloos

Well, folks, it's November. The first week of the month did a good job keeping us under the impression that summer might just last a wee bit longer, but this most recent front's passing has provided for a bit of a reality check. Daytime highs in the 50s, rain and wind, and, wouldn't you know it: juncos are here to stay. And, with that, it's time for me (and you) to start thinking about the Christmas Bird Count! I know the event is still a month away, but having a well-prepared team ensures that our count will run smoothly, as it has for so long already.

The past two editions of our count saw rather different weather conditions: 2013 was cold and snowy, whereas 2014 was rather mild and clear. We can only speculate what Mother Nature will bring us (El Niño, anyone?), both on count day and during the weeks/months leading up to the count. Either way, there will be an impact on us, and, more importantly, the birdlife present in our circle. This inherent uncertainty is what makes the CBC such an exciting event, and I, for one, always look forward to the tally at the end of the day! However things turn out, I invite you to join us to survey our circle's birds, and help contribute to the impressive dataset that more than a century of citizen science has helped build for the CBC.

This year's Ann Arbor CBC, the 69<sup>th</sup> edition, will be held on **Saturday, December 19<sup>th</sup>**—sponsored by the Washtenaw Audubon Society, as always. The event brings out advanced, intermediate, and beginning birders, so it is a wonderful occasion for volunteers new to the area, or new to birding itself, to meet the local birding community and become part of the Ann Arbor area's extensive birding network. As a former newbie, I can attest to the warm and knowledgeable welcome WAS birders will give!

*(continued on page 4)*

# President's Letter

Hello Washtenaw Birders,

With winter officially on the way, please indulge me as I take a moment to reminisce about our “leaderless” Fall Migration Walks at Nichols Arboretum. These field trips are my absolute favorites. I know I try to attend every one if I can, each Thursday morning, from late August through the end of October, as well as several weekend walks per season, and there are many regulars like me who do, too. Thanks to Ellie, Bruce, David, Eric, Len, Glen, Hsia-lien, Roger, Dea, Karen, Maryse, Merrily, Norka, Jerry, Cathy, Mike, and many, many others who came out in all weather and helped us spot over 100 species.

This year's walks proved to be some of the best field birding we have had in years. The warblers in August and early September showed up in great numbers and variety. Through the end of October, we saw 22 species, including the elusive Connecticut Warbler, seen by a few sharp-eyed birders on one of our weekend walks. Black-throated Blues and Greens dazzled us. My personal favorite was the long and satisfying looks we all had at a pair of Orange-crowned Warblers catching the morning sun's rays in an autumn-colored oak tree in Dow Prairie. Photos by Bruce Moorman of the birds evoked the “Where's Waldo?” feeling birders sometimes have when searching for a 4- to 5-inch bird in a sea of leaves, and revealed a faint orange crown, which I had never seen on the bird before.

Autumn raptor migration can be witnessed at the Arb as well, and we saw a few really stunning specimens this fall. Osprey were noted, as well as a Bald Eagle spotted by Glenn Shelton soaring near the second Boardwalk. Resident Red-tailed Hawks continued to amuse us, including one young male who caught and ate a chipmunk, tail and all, in front of the whole group of weekend birders on the Ridge Trail. David Amamoto's wonderful photos captured the gritty details of this spectacle. A Merlin, perched on the north side of the Huron River near the Beach, proved that it is great to have a fine photographer along when birding. We thought the bird was a Peregrine Falcon, until David Amamoto came to the rescue with his photo, clearly showing a very large, probable female Merlin, with such a prominent sideburn she fooled even some very experienced birders, who shall remain nameless.

One of the best moments all fall came when Roger Wykes brought the presence of a probable owl to the attention of the group. Sapsuckers, jays, chickadees, titmice and even a red squirrel were putting up a fuss, peering into an obscured cavity in a hickory tree. Eventually the Eastern Screech-Owl emerged for all to see, and even sang for us before descending back into his hidey-hole. We promptly named the Screech-Owl Roger. Len Sander took some incredible photos (see one to the right).

It will be winter soon, but I will never forget our time in the Arb, prowling the trails together in that treasure hunt we call birding.

Check this newsletter and our website, [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org), for more upcoming field trip and program information.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger



Photo Credit: Eastern Screech-Owl (Leonard Sander)

## A Tale of Blue Grosbeaks, Part 2

By Ross Green

*When last we read about the Blue Grosbeaks, it was early August, and Ross Green observed that the three chicks had hatched. Here's the rest of the tale, first introduced in the September/October newsletter. For the first part of the story, you can also check the Washtenaw Audubon Society web site.*

Over the next few days there were reports of possibly more than two adult Blue Grosbeaks in the area. Orchard Orioles were seen and heard which may have caused some of the confusion. Even I, on more than one occasion, thought I heard a male Grosbeak singing out in the field while I was watching the parent Grosbeaks “chink” at me from the same tree.

Somewhere around August 18, the young birds fledged. I visited and took photos of the birds in the nest during the morning on August 17, but when I visited on August 19, the nest was empty. Gary Siegrist of Jackson reported seeing at least one newly fledged bird on August 18 while visiting with his Tuesday morning Dahlem Center nature group.



Over the next 10 days I visited five times, seeing the parents carrying food to one or more spots in the tall grass. On August 27, I finally got a look—and a couple of poor photos—of one of the youngsters. On August 29 I observed the Blue Grosbeaks for what would be the last time. They had moved to the brushy area under two of the power transmission poles, right next to the cornfield. I was able to take several good close-up photos of the adult birds, along with some video. I also managed to get some decent video of one of the youngsters. I eventually watched at least three Grosbeaks fly out into the cornfield, which is when I decided to leave. [[Juvenile Grosbeak waiting to be fed, 8/29/15.]]

Another eBirder reported seeing at least one of the Blue Grosbeaks the next day. I returned just before noon September 1 and the familiar “chinking” had disappeared. An extended walk around the west end of the cornfield produced no results. I decided it was probably time for the Blue Grosbeaks to head south, and for me to head home. One Red-headed Woodpecker bid me farewell as I headed up the hill to the parking lot. [[Below: Female with food (right), male partially hidden (left), 8/29/15.]]

As it turned out, July and August of 2015 at the Sharon Mills County Park had provided for some pretty fascinating birding for a dedicated bunch of Washtenaw birders, quite a few other birders from around our state, and several birders from Jackson County, including me. I am looking forward to next summer to see if the Blue Grosbeaks return.

*About Ross Green:* A graduate of Central Michigan University, Ross has taught residential construction at the Jackson Area Career Center for more than 30 years. He and his wife Lori live in Napoleon, MI. They have a daughter Megan, who is a middle school special education teacher and coach in the southern Houston, Texas area, and a son Nicholas, who is a pilot and spends most of his time in San Jose, CA. His company produces the photos that Apple uses for its iPhone Map App. Ross has had an interest in nature since he was a young boy, and has casually taken pictures of nature and birds for many years. He began listing his bird sightings on eBird in July 2014. All photos copyright and courtesy of Ross Green.



## 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

*Continued from page 1*

Since the CBC is an effort undertaken on a continent-wide scale, our results are a small part of the much larger picture that shows the winter distribution of birds across North and South America (and, increasingly, beyond). Up until recently, a printed report was generated and mailed to participants, but as of the 2012-2013 CBC cycle the National Audubon Society moved to an online format. Doing so has allowed NAS to run the CBC without a participation fee, although donations are definitely still welcome! As I write this, the summary of Michigan's 2014 counts has not yet been posted on the NAS CBC site, but the wide array of information and news on the site is worth checking out anyway: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>.

For those of you unfamiliar with the CBC format, some general information about our count is in order. All CBCs are conducted during a 3-week period from December 14 to January 5, all over the Western (and even a small part of the Eastern) Hemisphere. As a rule, the Ann Arbor count is always held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday in December, to prevent scheduling conflicts with other nearby counts. Each count circle covers an area 15 miles in diameter; the Ann Arbor circle is centered on the Foster Road bridge, near the intersection of Maple Road and Huron River Dr. and extends roughly from Dexter in the west to Dixboro in the east, and Whitmore Lake in the north and the Ann Arbor Airport in the south—[http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/images/CBC/AA-CBC-Map\\_full.pdf](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/images/CBC/AA-CBC-Map_full.pdf) shows the count circle in immaculate detail. The objective is to identify all bird species present in this circle and count the number in which they are present. In addition to the daylight bird census, several observers will conduct a pre-dawn search for owls.

There are a number of ways to participate in this count, the main one of which is field observer. The Ann Arbor CBC circle is comprised of eight areas, each of which is assigned to an area leader who coordinates the census in that region. If you wish to be a field observer, select one of the eight regions (for more information on the specific count areas, please check out the detailed maps on the WAS website) and sign up with the area leader of that region. If you are not sure where to help census, email or call me (CBC Compiler Jacco Gelderloos) at [JJGelderloos@yahoo.com](mailto:JJGelderloos@yahoo.com) or (734) 973-9422 and I will assign you to an area based on need. If you sign up through the NAS web site, please contact me by phone or email me to let me know you have done so, as I will need to place you into an area within the count circle.

If you'd rather not be out and about in the winter weather, you can also be a feeder watcher. If you have a feeder within the count circle, this is a fun and easy way to participate. (**Remember:** The feeder *must* be within the count circle, otherwise the data is invalid for our count—simply type your address into Google Maps to make sure). Like field observers, you may sign up to participate for any length of time—from one hour to all day. Contact feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemeister for more information, to sign up, or to get feeder watch forms.

As I hinted at earlier, the real fun and excitement happens at the end of the day at the potluck supper, when the final results are tallied and announced after dessert. As before, the potluck supper will be held at the meeting room at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens—all participants are invited! If you plan to attend, please contact the potluck coordinator Nicole Sefton to let us know you're coming and to coordinate dishes—please note that alcohol is not permitted on the premises. The MBG are located at 1800 N. Dixboro Rd., about ¼ - ½ mile south of Plymouth Rd in Ann Arbor. Please note that the University of Michigan has recently instituted a \$1.20/hour fee at the Botanical Gardens. Area leaders will have maps/directions if you need them; plan to gather there around 5:30-6:00 p.m.



Enjoying the 2014 CBC potluck (Mike Sefton)

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The Washtenaw Audubon Society is an active chapter of Michigan Audubon formed in the early 1950s. Monthly programs feature guest speakers on a wide variety of natural history and birding topics. We conduct field trips to places in Ann Arbor, Washtenaw County, and beyond.

## 69<sup>th</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

Please remember that the CBC is run entirely by volunteers and can always use your help. Consider helping out with the potluck set-up and cleanup: it is exceedingly helpful to arrive early at the potluck site, lend a hand setting up tables and chairs, and help prepare for the arrival and arrangement of food. This may also entail getting supplies such as tablecloths, plates, etc. (costs will be reimbursed by WAS). After the supper, we will need to clean up as well. Remember: many hands make light work!

Information regarding the count will also be available on the Ann Arbor CBC web page where any updates will be posted as the count day approaches. Please visit <http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/index.php/2014-11-23-17-45-42/christmas-bird-count>.

Area	Leaders	Phone	E-mail
1	Sarah Toner	(734) 973-9422	strix09@gmail.com
2	Rob & Nancy French	(734) 994-8418	rwfrenchjr@comcast.net
3	Matty & Benjamin Hack	(734) 845-8368	mdh98@me.com
4	Cathy Carroll	(313) 595-4562	songsparrow@wowway.com
5	To Be Announced	(734) 973-9422	jjgelderloos@yahoo.com
6	To Be Announced	(734) 973-9422	jjgelderloos@yahoo.com
7	Kurt Hagemester	(734) 663-9746	khagemester@sbcglobal.net
8	Mike Sefton		mseft@yahoo.com

### CBC Compiler:

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(734) 973-9422 jjgelderloos@yahoo.com

### Feeder Watch Coordinator:

Kurt Hagemester  
(734) 663-9746 khagemester@sbcglobal.net

### Potluck Coordinator:

Nicole Sefton  
seftonn1344@yahoo.com

### Ann Arbor CBC Web Site:

<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/annarborcbc.php>

### National Audubon Society:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>

Please volunteer and help us have a record 2015 Christmas Bird Count!

### We want to hear from you!

If you are willing to share your story, please email Cathy Theisen at [cathythetvet@comcast.net](mailto:cathythetvet@comcast.net) and she will send you a questionnaire. We want to meet the whole flock! We would also love it if you wanted to share a milestone, a photo of a Washtenaw County bird, or even a photo of some WAS birders! Please contact [newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org). Thanks!

## Meet the Flock: Brandon Nidiffer

Brandon “Birdfinder” Nidiffer is well known to most avid birders as the guy who came on the scene in 2015—and, as of this writing, is the number one eBird lister in Washtenaw County! This is no small feat when you are surrounded by the kind of talent and perseverance our county holds!

Brandon currently works at Alro Steel in Jackson. He married his wife, Marci, this summer, and will be serving in the U.S. Coast Guard beginning in January 2016. He has a special interest in Marine Environmental Issues, and hopes to make an impact on habitat protection/conservation in coastal areas. Interestingly, Brandon was introduced to birding by his wife Marci, who wanted to do a little bird watching. It wasn't long before he became entranced by the rich variety of sight and sound that birding entails, and he is often found on the trails in the county with binoculars, camera, and field guide in hand. He has been active in WAS since February 2014.



He counts as his mentors all the people in Washtenaw County he has met in 2015 who have helped him learn so quickly. Talking to everyone who has birded in the county for several years or more has given him a great deal of knowledge and encouraged him to learn more.

Brandon's most memorable birding experience occurred when he ignored some large white birds on a local pond, assuming that they were mute swans. After he'd examined all the other bird life, he turned his binoculars to them, only to learn that he had found a number of county rarity American White Pelicans! His most wanted birding experience would be a pelagic birding trip off the northern coast of Australia. His favorite birding park is West Lake Preserve, and his favorite place in Washtenaw County is anywhere there is a rare or interesting bird!

His advice for new birders is to ask questions and don't be afraid to be wrong. The best way to learn is through experience and a large part of learning is being wrong. Accept that you aren't going to ID every bird. It is great practice to speculate about a mystery bird, but sometimes you miss that crucial field mark to make a positive ID.

The best way to get involved is to just grab some binoculars, a field guide, and check out what is around you. There are plenty of volunteer opportunities in Washtenaw County as well: Breeding bird surveys through Ann Arbor Parks and also through Washtenaw County Parks and Preserves, the Big Day on May 9<sup>th</sup>, CBC, etc. Get online and check the WAS website and see what is going on around you and know that most birders have and are willing to share a wealth of knowledge with new birders. Contact Brandon at: [brandonnidiffer1@gmail.com](mailto:brandonnidiffer1@gmail.com).

## Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Dec 2015/Jan 2016)

*Bryn Martin, Field Trip Coordinator (fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org)*

Washtenaw Audubon field trips are free of charge and open to the public unless otherwise indicated. For trips with constraints on the number of participants, WAS members are sometimes given priority in registering (again, as indicated). *For trips that require carpooling, minors attending without a parent must bring a written permission statement signed by a parent.* To receive a standard form for this, contact me at the email address above. Also, if you have a suggestion for a field trip, please send it to me at the email address above.

**Saturday, December 5                    8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.**

### **Gull Trip to Salem Landfill**

Leader: Rob French

This annual trip is a favorite for hard-core WAS members. Because access to the landfill is highly restricted, we rent a van for the trip and have to limit the number of participants. First priority goes to Washtenaw Audubon members who have never been on this trip. Second priority will be given to Washtenaw Audubon members. Non-members may be placed on a wait list on a first come, first served basis and will be admitted three days before the trip to fill any remaining spots. There are 20 spots available.

New this year: Due to the high cost of renting and fueling large passenger vans, we are asking for a minimum donation of \$5 from each participant. This is not required, but it will help us offset some of the costs and allow us to continue to justify this trip into the future. Please give your donation to the trip leader on the day of the trip.

Also new this year: Sign up for the trip on our website. Contact the trip leader if you have any questions or difficulty signing up.

Meet at 8:30 a.m. at the far end of the Park-n-Ride lot at Plymouth Road and US 23. Please do not be late! We want to be in the vans and driving by 8:45. This trip will take about 4 hours. Please note that the weather for this outing tends to be extremely cold and that there is usually wind on the heights of the landfill, where participants will be spending most of the time. Dress warmly!

**Saturday, December 19**

### **69<sup>th</sup> Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count**

See the Ann Arbor CBC web page for all the details!

To become a member of Washtenaw Audubon Society, please complete the form below (or a copy) and mail it with a check or money order payable to **Washtenaw Audubon Society—WAS Membership, P.O. Box 130923, Ann Arbor, MI 48113.**

<input type="checkbox"/> Renewal	<input type="checkbox"/> New Member	<b>Membership Dues</b>	
Additional Donation \$ _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Patron	\$50

We encourage you to join at a lower rate if the suggested rates would otherwise preclude your membership, or at a higher rate if you possess the means. **Note:** WAS will only use your email address to communicate with you about WAS programs, field trips, or matters of interest to you, such as membership renewal and emailed WAS newsletters (in color!). We will not give your email address to anyone else.

## WAS Monthly Programs

WAS monthly events usually are held on the third Wednesday of the month. Programs begin at 7:30 p.m. at the U-M Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 Dixboro Road, Ann Arbor. Free and open to the public. **Please note:** *The Matthaei Botanical Gardens charges for parking at the rate of \$1.20 an hour, enforced 7 days a week from 8am to 8pm. Members of the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum park for free.*

### **December 19 No formal program in December**

Join us on Saturday, December 19, for the Christmas Bird Count! Beginning birders are welcome to participate in the count. The well-attended tally/potluck after the count takes place at Matthaei Botanical Gardens. See the article in this newsletter and visit the Washtenaw Audubon Society web site for more information.

### **January 20 Birding in the Peruvian Andes**

Join Washtenaw Audubon's Andrew Pawuk in an exploration of the diverse species in the heart of the former Incan Empire, including the fabulous Andean Cock-of-the-rock and the endangered Royal Cinclodes. Andrew is an avid county birder and a volunteer for Ann Arbor's Natural Area Preservation breeding bird survey. He lived in Peru for two years as a volunteer English teacher.

### **February 17 Will Weber and World Birding**

See [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org) for more details.

### **March 16 To Be Announced**

See [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org).

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

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