



# WASHTENAW AUDUBON SOCIETY

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## NEWSLETTER

January / February 2019

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## Results of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

### Saturday, December 15, 2018

by Jacco Gelderloos

Logically, as the day of the count approaches, the weather forecast is a rather big concern of mine. Not only is good or bad weather on count day of crucial importance to the birds, but it's also a major factor affecting the (safety of) people trying to find them. After having "enjoyed" a significant cold snap in November, I was fearful of a frigid count in 2018. None of that was to be, as it turned out—this year the forecast looked great: cool, but not too cold, clouds, but no precipitation, and light winds.

The pleasant forecast no doubt played a role in this year's level of participation—59 field observers and seven feeder watchers were out counting, which is slightly above our recent averages. These volunteers encountered completely snow-free roads and trails and partly or completely open waterways and lakes/ponds. This obviously made getting around a lot easier for observers, but, on the flip side, also meant that birds would not be having too much trouble finding food and were going to be spread out. And so they proved to be....

From personal experience and from speaking with folks at the potluck-tally, birds were difficult to find in any concentration. To illustrate the point: in many of the city parks I cover, I had a very hard time getting a species-tally in the double digits! In addition, normally ubiquitous species like the European Starling were very oddly distributed, with one or two (or none!) here and there, and then a flock of close to 1,000 at the Ann Arbor landfill. It seems this strange distribution pattern plagued counters throughout the circle this year.

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# President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon,

We enter into a stretch of Arctic cold weather as I write this letter. Here are a few things we can do for ourselves and the birds.

*For the birds:*

If you feed birds in your yard, keep feeders stocked. Your contribution can be the difference between life and death for birds like Chickadees, in subzero temperatures. Check often to be sure the feeders remain full.

Provide water if you have a water heater that you can put in a bird bath outside.

*For the birders:*

Get out and do some car birding. There are Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, and Horned Larks in places with open fields, like Vreeland and Gotfredson Roads. Maybe you'll spot a Rough-legged Hawk or other raptor winter visitor, such as a Snowy Owl. Make a birding plan with friends to stay connected.

Bundle up and take a walk in the woods, listening and looking for winter birds.

Catch up on reading your *Birding* magazines and other birding publications.

Brush up on your warbler ID, both by song and by sight. Spring will be here soon, and you'll want to be ready for it!!

We have some great programs and field trips coming up this winter and early spring. Check this newsletter, and our website for more details and updates at [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org).

I look forward to seeing many of you at Matthaei Botanical Gardens for Allen Chartier's presentation on Hummingbirds on February 20<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.

As always,

I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger



From the Ann Arbor CBC

Left: *Ruby-crowned Kinglet*, Juliet Berger

Above: *Townsend's Solitaire*, Benjamin Hack

# 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

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That said, we turned up a collective (and frankly surprising) total of 72 species on count day and added an impressive seven more during count week—the combined total of 79 ties the all-time high tallies set in 2008 and 2012! After last year's rather paltry 18,000 or so individual birds, we rebounded very nicely this year with well over 32,000—as I mentioned in last year's results article, these sizeable discrepancies can be largely attributed to the vagaries of the Ann Arbor crow roost. True to form, this held true this year as well: the 14,000 overall bird increase over 2018 very nicely matches the increase in the number of crows tallied, from 3,000 up to 16,000. As always, Mike and Susan Kielb took on the task of counting the crows, but this year they mixed things up and, instead of staking out the evening stream of birds coming in, opted to count them predawn in the roosts near the Power Center and the Museum of Natural History—great to see how well that worked out!

As I mentioned above, November featured a major cold snap that left most bodies of water frozen over by the time December rolled around. This cold period, however, slowly petered out towards the count period and on count day running water was open everywhere, and most still bodies of water had at least some pockets of open water. This caused waterfowl to be spread out rather widely, resulting in our finding a pretty decent array of species, but probably also missing several due to available water outside of the circle. Best in show among swans, geese, and ducks were a total of six Cackling Geese picked out from among their far more numerous cousins, the Canada Goose—this was only the fourth Ann Arbor CBC that this species was found on, but perhaps this bird is sometimes overlooked? Trumpeter Swans must have been able to stay in their nesting locations away from the Huron River, because they were outnumbered 5 to 1 by their imported kin, the Mute Swan. Dabbling ducks were not found in any great variety, but the three species that were turned up were present in average (Am. Black Duck), well above average (Mallard), and record high (Gadwall) numbers, somewhat surprisingly. Six species of diving ducks was respectable, with Ring-necked Duck (second year in a row) and Ruddy Duck (count week) the highlights.

The mixed-bag group of other water-dependent birds also shows that open water was readily available. Both gulls, Belted Kingfisher, and Great Blue Herons were found in good, above-average numbers, and a lone Pied-billed Grebe was a welcome return to our count after a two-year absence. For the fourth year in a row now, Sandhill Cranes were found—a pattern appears to be establishing itself of cranes trying to over-winter in the area. Of the ten total Ann Arbor CBC occurrences of Sandhill Crane, eight are post-2000! The most surprising find in this category was a (somewhat expected?) first record for DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT—Sherri Smith and Ellie Shappirio observed a lone bird flying from the direction of the Huron River towards Whitmore Lake. Surprising though this find may seem to be, there were a number of mid-December inland Michigan records of cormorants, and the Monroe count on the 16<sup>th</sup> turned up a whopping 300+ of them. Clearly then, cormorants stuck around Michigan this winter.

Bald Eagles had another good year, although, in contrast to 2017, this year's birds were reported from the Huron River corridor only. For the first time since 1999, our count turned up all three *accipiters*, although the rarer two of the three were reported only during count week and fewer than half of last year's record count of Cooper's Hawks was found. Other than that, a lone Turkey Vulture was the only other raptor of note. Although taxonomically no longer considered raptors *per se*, all three falcons were located this year. Continuing the recent trend, both Merlin (3) and Peregrine (2) were found on count day, but Kestrels were limited to a count week record only—could the lack of snow cover have kept these once common falcons outside of our count circle, or will they soon no longer be part of our CBC on an annual basis?

Based on the forecast, I had thought that 2018 might end up being a good year for owls. Alas, it was not to be—a slight breeze and, most of all, thicker than expected cloud cover kept owl activity down. As a result, in spite of significant observer effort, both of our regular owls were found in numbers well below the recent 10-year average: Great Horned Owls were down 56%, Screech-Owls a whopping 68%! Providing a bright spot in this rather dismal set of results was a Northern Saw-whet Owl, the second in the past three years (and found in the same general area by the same observer, Jim Law!). The absence of Barred Owl from our count continues to baffle—perhaps one will be found in a future banner year for owling....

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## 73<sup>rd</sup> Annual Christmas Bird Count

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Once quite numerous in our circle (triple-digit tallies in the 1970s!), Ring-necked Pheasant has now settled into “barely there” territory, with only a count week bird this year, following last year’s miss. Ongoing development of once-suitable habitat, forest maturation, and (possibly) increasing numbers of Coyotes are (and have been) pushing this species out of our circle. By contrast, the Wild Turkey population is growing ever-larger, posting a tally of 100+ for the sixth year in a row—mind you, the first record on our CBC was as recent as 1989! I would not at all be surprised to see a) over 200 turkeys on our count, and b) reports from all eight of our count areas (this year 7 of 8 reported them), including from urban areas. Check out eBird records for this rapidly increasing and expanding species to get a good idea of what has been happening in just the past 10 years.

Woodpeckers as a whole continue to post impressive numbers—collectively, they made it the fifth year of over 450 birds since 2010, although numbers dropped off slightly compared to the 2017 count (from 489 to 458). Furthermore, every single species (with the exception of Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, which we missed this year) posted tallies that were slightly or significantly over the recent 10-year average. Providing a very welcome back was a trio of Red-headed Woodpeckers, all coming in to the same feeder near Dexter—this is the highest tally since 1982 (!) for this snazzy woodpecker, and, surprisingly, only the third time it was found since the 1999 CBC. Amazing stuff. Sharing the spotlight, almost expectedly, was that most impressive of Michigan’s woodpeckers, the Pileated. After last year’s staggering obliteration of the high count (from 3 to 11), they put in another strong showing with yet another record tally of 12! Indicative of the geographic range of the Pileated’s increase is the fact that they were reported from five of the eight count areas, with two areas reporting four birds each—that in and of itself would have constituted a record number as recently as 2016! Can they continue this trend to a point where they will be reported from all eight count areas?

As diverse as the passerine category is, one can hardly expect there to be a universal trend. Not surprisingly then, there really wasn’t one. Corvids continue to recover from the ravages of West Nile, whereas Horned Larks were present in below average numbers, and other open country species were absent altogether (Snow Bunting and Longspur). A bright spot was the Northern Shrike that was found in area 7—the last time we turned up one of these unique carnivorous passerines was back in 2011!

The relatively warm weather resulted in good numbers and diversity of small, mostly insectivorous species, although chickadees were moderately (about 16%) below average. White-breasted Nuthatches once again topped the 300-mark, and they missed a third consecutive record high by a mere 6 birds. Their predominantly boreal Red-breasted cousin was present in “sort of” irruptive numbers, with 22 birds—some 72% above the recent average (which includes the monstrous high of 82 from 2012). It seems our base number is somewhere in the range between 1 and 10; anything above that should probably be considered an irruption, given how rare double-digit tallies are: only five times since the 2000 CBC have we managed more than 10 Red-breasted Nuthatches. Matching the nuthatches’ good showing, both Brown Creeper, as well as Winter Wren and Carolina Wren were counted in numbers well above their recent average (84%, 25, and 54%, respectively). Similarly, the two kinglet species both had strong showings this year, with Golden-crowned 50% over average and the much less commonly found Ruby-crowned a whopping 300% above—the last time 3 (or more) of these spiffy little songbirds were recorded was *waaaay* back, in 1974! The fact that Ruby-crowns are found only three out of every ten years further adds to the point that they had a banner year in 2018.

By contrast, species reliant on fruits put in yet another so-so year. American Robin (-70%), European Starling (-11%), and Cedar Waxwing (-37%) all continued last year’s downward trends, and, for the first time since the early 1990s, we missed Hermit Thrush altogether (unexpected, given how these thrushes tend to stay around in milder winters). Luckily, not all was quite so negative: Eastern Bluebird had another great year (+27%) and for the third year in a row we found a Northern Mockingbird, a bird returning to (and dodging a Merlin) in Gallup Park. Most excitingly, the frugivore category features this year’s clear Ann Arbor CBC highlight, a first ever count(y) record TOWNSEND’S SOLITAIRE, found at Independence Lake by young ace birders Ben Hack and Sarah Toner. Thankfully, this bird hung (and continues to hang) around, delighting birders from all over Michigan.

## Board Members

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### Newsletter

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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.

Eight species of sparrow is roughly what we would expect on our count, with all, except Song Sparrow, posting lower than average numbers. Given that essentially all of our winter sparrows are migrants from the boreal zone, the lack of snow cover in the State probably played a role here, allowing birds to pause their journey south in locales farther to our north. As always, some more unusual species were picked out, including a Fox Sparrow, a White-crowned Sparrow, and a count week Field Sparrow.

For four years running now, we have turned up three or more blackbird species. Before as recently as 2013, we were excited to get one species in a given CBC cycle! In contrast to the trend of these birds being found disparately throughout the circle, almost all members of this year's trio of species was found together in a single flock, loosely mixed in with the multitudes of Starlings at the Ann Arbor Landfill's composting windrows. The clear *icterid* highlight were that flock's 15 Rusties, the highest tally after the 24 from the 1984 CBC and making for only the third record of this declining species in the past 30+ years on our count!

Seed eaters painted a rather scattershot picture this year. House Finches had a great year (+49%) and Pine Siskins posted an amazing near-record total of 258 (+196%). On the flipside, American Goldfinch had a bad year (-34%), and Northern Cardinal and House Sparrow put in pretty much average showings. Providing a bit of a highlight was a count week Common Redpoll that set up shop in Gallup Park, close to the Mockingbird—this made for only the fifth Ann Arbor CBC record since 1999.

Breaking the trend of the last two CBCs, the 2018 cycle featured a cold period in November, followed by a warming trend in early December. Although many bodies of water were still partly frozen, there was no snow cover anywhere in the circle, and birding during count day was essentially quite pleasant. That said, these conditions meant that birds were spread out and quite difficult to find. Many observers mentioned that they often went without seeing any birds for considerable amounts of time, even if, in the end, the totals for most species don't necessarily reflect this low density of birds. As always, area species tallies (from 30 to 50) and individual counts (1,600 to 3,400) ranged rather widely, but every one of them found notable birds. Altogether, then, each area and its observers played their integral part for the 2018 and 73<sup>rd</sup> Ann Arbor CBC—the accompanying spreadsheet sums up the end results of our collective efforts.

As is the case with so many aspects of our lives, the CBC has effectively gone digital. On the overall historical side of things at the National Audubon Society, all count circles' data can (and should!) be searched and viewed here: <http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/>. Although a designated page with CBC information and forms has existed for some time, the Washtenaw Audubon Society's site is still in the process of integrating some digital tools, starting with the wonderful sign-up document created and recently updated by WAS webmaster Rob French. As the count's compiler, I can assure you that this sign-up form has facilitated my job of assigning and tracking volunteers immensely. In the next year or so, I hope to put together some sort of digital record of the Ann Arbor circle's historical records—keep an eye on the WAS site for updates!

On an additional administrative note, our CBC potluck coordinator, Nicole Sefton, indicated that she was stepping down after the 2018 count. Thank you for your help these past years, Nicole! For next year, then, we will need someone new to help run the potluck event—please contact me if you're interested in taking on this task.

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Related to the above, I cannot stress enough that our CBC is as successful as it is thanks to a committed corps of volunteers, that is: you. Organizing and compiling the Ann Arbor CBC has been that much easier for me due to your ongoing involvement. *Gracias* to you all, field observers, feeder watchers, area leaders, potluck contributors, and non-birding spouses for all the hours you contributed to yet another successfully completed Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count—please mark your calendars for the 2019 edition on Saturday, December 21, 2019. I look forward to seeing you all out there! *[[And thanks once again to Jacco for all his amazing work on the CBC.]]*

Cackling Goose	6 (US)	Cooper's Hawk	15	Carolina Wren	47
Canada Goose	3,911	Northern Goshawk	CW (US)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	27
Mute Swan	45	Bald Eagle	5	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	3 (US)
Trumpeter Swan	9	Red-tailed Hawk	82	Eastern Bluebird	185
Wood Duck	2	Eastern Screech-Owl	10	TOWNSEND'S SOLITAIRE	1 (NEW)
Gadwall	34 (HC)	Great Horned Owl	5	American Robin	330
Mallard	1,643	Northern Saw-whet Owl	1 (US)	Northern Mockingbird	1 (US)
American Black Duck	9	Belted Kingfisher	9	European Starling	3,074
Ring-necked Duck	2 (US)	Red-headed Woodpecker	3	Cedar Waxwing	111
Bufflehead	3	Red-bellied Woodpecker	171	House Finch	500
Common Goldeneye	33	Downy Woodpecker	194	Common Redpoll	CW (US)
Hooded Merganser	68 (HC)	Hairy Woodpecker	46	Pine Siskin	258
Common Merganser	55	Northern Flicker	32	American Goldfinch	369
Ruddy Duck	CW (US)	Pileated Woodpecker	12 (US,HC)	American Tree Sparrow	84
Ring-necked Pheasant	CW	American Kestrel	CW	Field Sparrow	CW (US)
Wild Turkey	178 (HC)	Merlin	3 (HC)	Fox Sparrow	1 (US)
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Peregrine Falcon	2	Song Sparrow	22
Rock Pigeon	1,118	Northern Shrike	1 (US)	Swamp Sparrow	1
Mourning Dove	613	Blue Jay	431	White-throated Sparrow	44
Sandhill Crane	4 (US)	American Crow	16,000	White-crowned Sparrow	1 (US)
<i>Larus</i> sp.	6	Horned Lark	12	Dark-eyed Junco	420
Ring-billed Gull	96	Black-capped Chickadee	548	Red-winged Blackbird	8
Herring Gull	11	Tufted Titmouse	224	Brown-headed Cowbird	5
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT	1 (NEW)	Red-breasted Nuthatch	22	Rusty Blackbird	15 (US)
Great Blue Heron	12	White-breasted Nuthatch	305	Northern Cardinal	421
Turkey Vulture	1 (US)	Brown Creeper	16	House Sparrow	826
Sharp-shinned Hawk	CW	Winter Wren	1 (US)		
				Total Individuals	32,765
CW = count week only		HC = high count		US = unusual species	

## Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Dec 2018 – Early 2019)

*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 Bryn at the email address above.

**Sunday, February 24, 2019**

**Surprise field trip**

Field trip details will be posted on the web site when the date approaches.

**TBD Saturday, March 9 or Sunday, March 10, 2019**

**One-Road Challenge**

See the WAS web site for details on how to participate in this fun and unique event and for confirmation on the event date.

**Saturday, March 23, 2019**

**Beginning Birdwatching at Kensington Metropark with leader Bryn Martin**

Suitable for all ages and levels, but this is geared toward novice adults and young birders. Minors should be accompanied by an adult. See the WAS web site for more details.

**Thursday, March 28, 2019 and all Thursdays through May, 8:00 a.m.**

**Spring Migration Walks in the Arboretum**

The annual leaderless walks begin on Thursday, March 28, and run through the end of May. For details on how to participate, see the WAS web site.

**Sunday, April 7, 2019, 8:15 a.m.**

**Early Migrants Arb Walk with Karen Markey**

Early springtime walks through the Arb are productive for Yellow-bellied sapsuckers, White-throated sparrows, Winter wrens, Fox sparrows, Ruby- and Golden-crowned kinglets, and Brown creepers, and early warblers. We will meet at the Riverview entrance to the Arb at 8:15am sharp. Dress appropriately for the weather including coat, gloves, scarf, hat, and sensible footwear. No strollers, dogs, or wagons please.

**Saturday, May 11, 2019**

**Washtenaw County May Count**

Compiler: Juliet Berger. Please see the Web site for details on how to participate.

**Saturday, May 18, 2019**

**Hudson Mills Metropark Migrants with Karen Markey**

Meet at the flagpole in front of the Activity Center at 7:45 a.m.

**Sunday, May 19, 2019**

**Magee Marsh and Metzger Marsh with Karen Markey**

Meet at the park-and-ride lot at Plymouth Road and US 23 at 5:50 a.m. to arrange carpools for a 6:00 a.m. sharp departure. Or meet the group at the warbler sign near the boardwalk entrance at Magee Marsh at 7:15 a.m.

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 \$_____		_____ Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: _____		_____ Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		_____ Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	_____ 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.***

### **February 20 Michigan Hummingbirds**

Join Allen Chartier for a program on his study of hummingbirds in Michigan and the Great Lakes area. Allen founded the Great Lakes HummerNet in 2001. Sightings of these birds are reported to Allen by volunteers, and Allen also catches and bands birds. Besides Ruby-throated Hummingbirds, the 15 vagrant hummingbird species are also studied. Learn how you can participate in this study, and how to attract and feed hummingbirds. Allen birds all over the world and conducts seasonal bird banding at various sites in Michigan.

### **March 20 Birding Israel**

Join Len Sander for a program on birdwatching in Israel. Israel is a heavily travelled migration route for birds moving twice a year between Africa and the Eurasian landmass. Len has photographed many interesting species at Eilat, one of the world's busiest migration spots, as well as in other habitats in the country. Len Sander is a retired U-M physics professor, birder, and photographer.

### **April 17 Birding Romania**

Rodolfo Palma shares the wonders of birding Romania. Rodolfo Palma is a native of Chile and settled in the USA after getting his Ph.D. in engineering in the 1980s. In the early 2000s, after borrowing binoculars from a local park ranger and attending a Washtenaw Audubon event, Rodolfo got hooked and has been birding ever since. He has birded in 16 countries and his birds photographed list approaches 2500 species.

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

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