



## NEWSLETTER

March/April 2021

### 75th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Results

In my prologue in the previous newsletter I described how in the weeks leading up to our CBC we were inundated with registrations by (often new) birders. This necessitated quite some effort on my part (and the area leaders'!) to accommodate all these people, which, ultimately, we were successful in doing. How, then, did it all work out?

For starters, we ended up with more than 60 observer groups ("parties" in CBC-speak), each spending roughly 4.5 party hours and some 13 party miles out in the field. To put that in perspective, the prior maximum number of parties was 30, the average since 2011 is about 26. Generally, each of these parties is out birding for more than five hours and covers about 21 miles. The fact that those averages are higher than this year's effort can be readily explained by the fact that there were far more parties out there covering smaller chunks of territory in our count circle. That said, it is safe to assume that the territory counted by each party was covered more in-depth than it would normally be (if at all), thus positively impacting bird numbers and diversity in the circle as a whole.

In addition to the bumper crop of field observers, an absolutely staggering total of 36 feeder watchers signed up - the previous record for feeder watchers, set only last year, was 18! Prior to 2019, we generally had only between 5 and 10 feeder watchers. Each of these feeder watchers spent roughly three hours counting the birds at their feeding stations, which is just about in line with prior years' effort. However, as you will be able to read below, the sheer number of feeder watchers no doubt affected the totals for a variety of "backyard" bird species.

For all intents and purposes, the weather on count day (and leading up to it, for that matter) was not a factor of any importance this year. Temperatures were around the freezing point and there was an inch or so of snow on the ground throughout the count circle. The brief burst of snow (or mixed precipitation) coming down around lunch time was rather inconsequential. Nothing that negatively affected the count effort, in any case. Bodies of moving water were basically open throughout, and even standing water still had plenty of open spots.

>>>*continued on page 3*<<<

# President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon members and friends,

It has been a long, cold winter, but spring is creeping in around the edges. Woodcock are displaying in local parks, Red-winged Blackbirds are singing and ducks are migrating, en masse. After COVID lockdown, and an isolated winter, spring can't come soon enough. There is light at the end of the tunnel, for not only is spring arriving, but many of us are getting vaccinated, so we hope that we'll be able to bird together again soon, and still escape this dreaded pandemic. While we don't have any spring field trips planned yet, we hope to have some modified offerings in April or May, taking precautions and staying safe. Stay tuned to our Washtenaw Audubon FB page and website, for any developments in our Field Trip schedule. Our monthly programs, planned by our inimitable Vice-President and Program Chair, Mike Sefton, and masterfully orchestrated on Zoom by Jessica Adamczyk our Membership Chair, have kept us feeling connected even though we haven't seen each other in person in ages. I miss all of you, terribly!

We have some changes coming up for the Washtenaw Audubon Board, beginning in June, 2021. A huge thank you to Dana Novak, our creative WAS Board Secretary who has dedicated many, many hours to WAS in so many capacities, for the last 14 years. She will be moving to Stewardship Chair, to help us with restoration at WAS's Searles Nature Preserve. She has worked at the City of Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation (NAP), for many years, and is highly skilled in restoration, with experience gleaned from countless hours restoring Ann Arbor's parks, so this is a natural transition for her. Jessica Adamczyk, our Membership Chair, will be moving into the Secretary position on the WAS Board. With her brilliance at running Zoom meetings, multitasking, and attention to detail, she'll be a natural as well. We're looking for help on our Board going forward, so if you are a WAS member, and you have interest in any of our busy committees, send me a message and we'll hope to find a place for you to serve. Please plan to attend our June 16, 2021 program, on Zoom, to affirm Jessica as our new Secretary, a WAS Board Officer position, and wish both Jessica and Dana well in their new roles.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention that NAP's Ann Arbor Breeding Bird Survey Kickoff and Training is coming up on April 15th. Message me at [NAPBirds@a2gov.org](mailto:NAPBirds@a2gov.org) if you are interested in attending and volunteering for the 2021 BBS.

Until we meet in person at the next good bird, I wish you all good health, safe spring birding, and a heartfelt reunion with your loved ones.

As always, I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President

Washtenaw Audubon Society

*Barred Owl (Linda Ar)*



## **75th Ann Arbor CBC – Results**

>>>continued from page 1<<<

So..... Loads of volunteers, good weather, and plenty of open water: the potential for a banner year was clearly in place this year. But what about the nitty-gritty, the details for each species?

Not terribly surprising due to the sheer amount of open water, a very impressive variety of waterfowl was found, with 17 species on count day, plus an additional 5 during count week. For the first time ever, three goose species were present: a lone Snow Goose in the Huron River near Parker Mill Park (the first since 2007), five Cackling Geese at the Ann Arbor Landfill, and a staggering record high of nearly 8,500 Canada Geese – we average about 3,200! Mute Swans once again outnumbered their Trumpeter Swan cousins by a margin of 3 to 1, after matching numbers last year. What exactly causes the wild swings in, particularly, Mute Swan numbers in our circle remains a mystery, at least to me. Two count week observations of fly-over flocks of Tundra Swans meant that for the fourth time in the past five years, all three swan species were observed.

Of note among dabbling ducks were the 26 American Black Ducks, the highest tally since 2001, and well above the recent average of 9.5. Rarer finds in this category were a single Northern Pintail and a count week pair of Green-winged Teals. The last time three “*aythya*” diving ducks were recorded on an Ann Arbor CBC was back in 1997, so it was certainly notable to find multiple Redheads, a drake Ring-necked Duck, and a count week Lesser Scaup. The latter somehow went AWOL on count day, with sightings both before and after the 19<sup>th</sup>.... The clear highlight among ducks and one of the main contenders for ‘bird of the count’, was our first ever SURF SCOTER, a female-type bird that was present in Gallup Park for all of December – the only other scoter record dates back all the way to 1979, when a White-winged Scoter was found. Rounding out the waterfowl category, both a Red-breasted Merganser and a Ruddy Duck were welcome count week additions.

As a species of concern in our circle, it was quite a nice surprise that three Ring-necked Pheasants were turned up. Recently, we've struggled to find more than one of these dapper non-native gamebirds. In past years' CBC write-ups, I have regularly expressed amazement at the population explosion of Wild Turkeys in our area. To give you an idea, over the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century we generally recorded roughly a dozen per count, sometimes more, sometimes none at all. That trend ended in the decade, with an impressive upward trend visible: found in all years, Wild Turkeys hit triple-digits in 2013 and have stayed there ever since. I was under the impression that their numbers had stabilized in the 160 or so range, but this year's total of 395 blew that assumption right out of the water. Had the otherwise reliable flock in Arbor Hills not gone inexplicably missing on count day, all the circle's eight count areas would have reported turkeys!



Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, Gallup Park, December 17 2020 (Maria Dabrowski)



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, W Delhi & Dexter-Ann Arbor Rd, December 20 2020 (Victor Chen)

In the miscellaneous non-passerine category, two Pied-billed Grebes were of note, as were a whopping 58 Sandhill Cranes, the highest ever after the record-setting 320 back in 2015. Both regular gull species were present in numbers roughly 50% above the 10-year average, but unfortunately no rare gulls made the journey into our circle. A recent upward trend for Great Blue Herons in recent years culminated in an all-time high of 17 birds. That impressive tally was matched by a whopping 22 Belted Kingfishers, which was bested only by the 1986 record-high of 38.

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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.

Turkey Vultures have been found on ten of the past 22 CBCs, so the fact that two were reported this year was not terribly unusual (although still of note). What was most definitely notable was the BLACK VULTURE present in the same area, yet another first ever for our count, and the third confirmed record for this mainly southern species in Washtenaw County in 2020! During a subsequent search for this rarity, one of two count week Golden Eagles (an adult) was found; another (an immature) flew over Lodi Twp a day later. The last time this handsome raptor was recorded on our CBC was during count week in 1983! *Accipiters* had a banner year: six Sharp-shinned Hawks was triple the recent average, and the record high of 40 Cooper's Hawks doubled that species's recent average, showing its continued population growth in our area. Similarly, Bald Eagle numbers have been steadily climbing locally as well, which culminated in (yet another) record showing for the country's iconic emblem – with 17 found this year, could we manage to hit 20 someday? One Red-shouldered Hawk was right about average for our CBC, but 116 Red-tailed Hawks beat 1999's 115 record high and was only the fourth-ever time 100 or more Red-tails were reported.

For the sixth year running, all three falcon species were found, with a count week Peregrine Falcon, decent numbers of American Kestrels, and a record high tally of five Merlins. A 50% increase in owling time (29 hours this year) meant that owls had a pretty decent year as well. That said, numbers of Eastern Screech-Owls were merely average; by contrast, Great Horned Owls posted double their average tally. A count week Northern Saw-whet Owl was, as always, a very nice find.

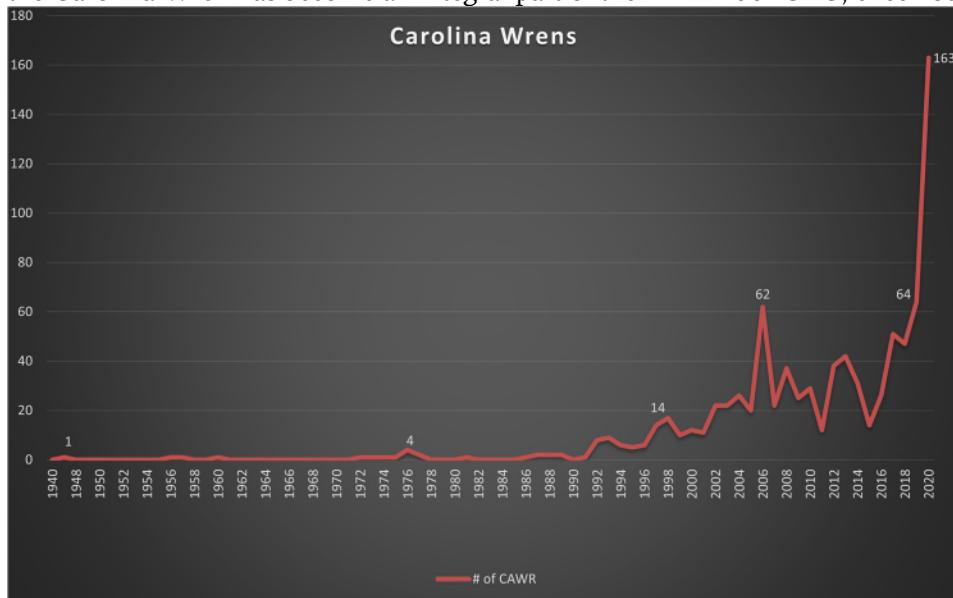
What more can I say about woodpeckers? For the fourth time in the past five years we found six species, courtesy of a count week Yellow-bellied Sapsucker. Of the remaining five species, four posted record high counts, and by significant margins at that. Red-bellied Woodpeckers bested their prior high by some 36% (we saw 239 of them). With 339 observed, Downy Woodpeckers surpassed theirs by 32%, and 76 Hairy Woodpeckers was 36% over their previous record count. Without a doubt, these three species benefited from the increased coverage in the field and the large number of feeder watchers. By contrast, Northern Flickers had a good, but not great, showing, even though 37 of them is the highest since 2005. Last, but certainly not least, Pileated Woodpeckers continued their steady increase and spread. Not only did they break their 2019 record of 12, but they were (finally) found in each of the eight count areas, much like I speculated in last year's CBC write-up.

Two Northern Shrikes were a very pleasant surprise and made for the highest tally since 2010. Much like last year, American Crows and Blue Jays were found in roughly average numbers. Once again, open country passerines were absent: we missed Horned Lark, Snow Bunting, and Lapland Longspurs altogether for the first time in 25 years.

Often associated with backyard feeding stations, small, mostly insectivorous species posted record tallies across the board. Stunningly, Black-capped Chickadees broke through the 1,000-mark, more than a 100 over their prior record. Last year, I speculated that Tufted Titmice might well hit the 300-mark soon and they proved me right, and how. As you can see in the results spreadsheet, we found almost 500 of them! In my CBC announcement last fall, I wondered if the early fall irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches would persist into winter. Well, it turns out that many of them did, in fact, stick around – enough of them, as it turns out, to surpass the 2012 record high. In large part, these cute little birds were tallied at feeders – in many cases, they outnumbered their White-breasted cousins there! Regardless, after a number of years of roughly 300 birds on our count, we turned up over 450 of that feisty species this year. Brown Creepers bested their record tally by 50% as well.

Much like last year, four Winter Wrens tied their high count, but their cousins, the Carolina Wren, provided the real fireworks. After posting an impressive new record high of 64 in 2019, this year that number was blown away when we found a staggering 163 of these little sprites! Feeder watchers clearly

helped bring about this huge increase (20 were reported by them), but that's not the whole story. The vast majority of these wrens, nearly 130 of them, were observed in the three count areas that largely coincide with urban and suburban areas and parks along the Huron River. Clearly, conditions there must have been ideal for a bumper crop of these handsome little birds this year. The other five areas posted tallies much more in line with 'normal' years. To give you an idea of how the Carolina Wren has become an integral part of the Ann Arbor CBC, check out the graph below.



Historical data for Carolina Wren *Thryothorus ludovicianus* on the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count, 1940-2020

By contrast, Golden-crowned Kinglets continued their slump of sorts and were about 30% below the 10-year average, even if that turnout wasn't quite as paltry as 2019's. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet encountered on the Washtenaw Community College grounds provided the fourth record since 2010. No warblers were found this year, although, tantalizingly, a Common Yellowthroat was recorded at the Devine Preserve the day before count week started....

Frugivores had as impressive a year as woodpeckers and chickadees & co did. Not only did Eastern Bluebirds exceed their 10-year average by some 50%, but they also eked out a new record high of 229. After missing the species on the past two CBCs, Hermit Thrushes made an impressive comeback with six birds, just about double the average. A massive roost in northeast Ann Arbor provided us with a bumper crop of both American Robins and European Starlings (thanks again for counting these birds, Karen!). A staggering 7,345 of the former were found, which is over 2.5 times the prior record high count! Though not a record per se, the 11,000+ Starlings were still well over three times the recent 10-year average. Similarly, Cedar Waxwings almost tripled their 10-year average and posted their highest tally since 2010. A count week Northern Mockingbird rounded out this category quite nicely, extending a 4-year run for this species. Unfortunately, the bird that frequented Gallup Park for the past four years did not turn up this year.

After last year's poor showing for finches, I had good hopes that at least some of the species that irrupted during the fall would turn up on our count. As it happened, there was a marked improvement over 2019, but there was only a minor irruptive species component to our results. Lots of feeder watchers clearly benefitted House Finches: they were found at levels twice the average (and at triple last year's). Only a single Purple Finch was observed, but that was right about expected – the large numbers present back in October had clearly moved on beyond our area, unfortunately. Among the last to irrupt into our area this past fall, Common Redpolls were still here, however, and put up their highest numbers since 1985, for only the 6<sup>th</sup> record since 2000. More regularly located, 90 Pine Siskins were just about smack dab on their 10-year average. Lastly, the other bread-and-butter finch species, the American Goldfinch, was some 60% above the recent average. House Sparrows had a similarly good showing at some 30% above average; the same held true for Northern Cardinals, who posted a record tally, some 40% above the recent average. Without a doubt, the size of our feeder watcher cohort played a major role in turning up these very positive numbers.

Seven sparrow species has been the norm over the past few years. With the somewhat odd exception of American Tree Sparrow (-10%), pretty much all had quite a good year. Being seen roughly once every other year, we were due for a Fox Sparrow after missing it last year. Song Sparrows nearly tripled their 10-year average and posted the highest tally since 1983. Outdoing their cousins' showing, eight Swamp Sparrows was four times their recent average, for the highest number since 1997. Although it is by no means a rarity on our count, there were still a surprisingly large number of White-throated Sparrows around. So many, in fact, that they obliterated their all-time high by 44% and more than quadrupled

their recent 10-year average. Two White-crowned Sparrows were great finds. Approaching but not quite breaking their 2007 record-high tally, Dark-eyed Juncos still improved on their recent average by some 54%. Again, feeders hosted quite a few of these birds, particularly the more uncommon ones.

For the fifth time in the past six years, three blackbird species featured on our count. And, in keeping with the recent trend, they were not in a single flock. Half a dozen Red-winged Blackbirds were found in three different count areas; the Brown-headed Cowbird attended a feeder. A count week Common Grackle rounded out the trio of *icterid* species. I think it is safe to say my question from last year ("will they soon be a more or less expected member of our CBC avifauna?") can now be safely answered in the affirmative.

Snow Goose	1 (US)	Ring-billed Gull	165	Red-breasted Nuthatch	86 (HC)
<i>branta</i> sp.	4	Herring Gull	9	White-breasted Nuthatch	454 (HC)
Cackling Goose	5 (US)	Great Blue Heron	17 (tied HC)	Brown Creeper	29 (HC)
Canada Goose	8,482 (HC)	Turkey Vulture	2	Winter Wren	4 (tied HC)
Mute Swan	89	BLACK VULTURE	1 (FIRST RECORD)	Carolina Wren	163 (HC)
Trumpeter Swan	28	Golden Eagle	CW (US)	Golden-crowned Kinglet	14
Tundra Swan	CW (US)	<i>accipiter</i> sp.	2	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1 (US)
Wood Duck	3	Sharp-shinned Hawk	6	Eastern Bluebird	229 (HC)
Gadwall	6	Cooper's Hawk	40 (HC)	Hermit Thrush	6
Mallard	1,905	Bald Eagle	17 (HC)	American Robin	7,345 (HC)
American Black Duck	26	<i>buteo</i> sp.	1	Northern Mockingbird	CW (US)
Am Black Duck x Mallard	1	Red-shouldered Hawk	1	European Starling	11,238
Northern Pintail	2 (US)	Red-tailed Hawk	116 (HC)	Cedar Waxwing	352
Green-winged Teal	CW (US)	Eastern Screech-Owl	26	House Sparrow	1,166
Redhead	5 (US)	Great Horned Owl	21	House Finch	761
Ring-necked Duck	1 (US)	Northern Saw-whet Owl	CW (US)	Purple Finch	1 (US)
Lesser Scaup	CW (US)	Belted Kingfisher	22	Common Redpoll	72 (US)
SURF SCOTER	1 (FIRST RECORD)	Red-bellied Woodpecker	239 (HC)	Pine Siskin	90
Bufflehead	39 (HC)	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	CW (US)	American Goldfinch	797 (HC)
Common Goldeneye	53	Downy Woodpecker	339 (HC)	sparrow sp.	7
Hooded Merganser	73 (HC)	Hairy Woodpecker	76 (HC)	American Tree Sparrow	347
Common Merganser	87	Northern Flicker	37	Fox Sparrow	1 (US)
Red-breasted Merganser	CW (US)	Pileated Woodpecker	17 (HC)	Song Sparrow	52
Ruddy Duck	CW (US)	American Kestrel	4	Swamp Sparrow	8
Ring-necked Pheasant	3	Merlin	5 (HC)	White-throated Sparrow	245 (HC)
Wild Turkey	395 (HC)	Peregrine Falcon	CW (US)	White-crowned Sparrow	2 (US)
Pied-billed Grebe	2	Northern Shrike	2 (US)	Dark-eyed Junco	837
Rock Pigeon	863	Blue Jay	482	Red-winged Blackbird	6
Mourning Dove	721	American Crow	10500	Brown-headed Cowbird	1
Sandhill Crane	58 (US)	Black-capped Chickadee	1,010 (HC)	Common Grackle	CW (US)
<i>larus</i> sp.	7	Tufted Titmouse	474 (HC)	Northern Cardinal	609 (HC)
				Total Individuals	51,408 (HC)
CW = count week only		HC = high count		US = unusual species	

In the grand scheme of things, how did the 75<sup>th</sup> running of the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count compare to the preceding 74 editions? As I mentioned in the teaser in the last newsletter and in the introduction of this article, participation was simply off the charts. We usually have about 60 field observers and half a dozen feeder watchers, so it goes without saying that this year's 107 and 36 for each category far exceed anything we have ever experienced before! As I mentioned, it took some doing to accommodate everyone, but we were successful in the end and I think it really showed in the excellent level of coverage we accomplished. Not surprisingly, this increased rate of coverage had a major impact on the results of our count.

We found a record-setting total of 51,408 individual birds, some 87% (!!) above the 2010-2019 average. This included record high counts for 25 species – clearly, those record (or otherwise impressive) numbers were behind the very high overall total. Just as remarkable, we turned up a record high 76 species (plus a hybrid) on count day, with an additional all-time high 11 species during count week. Logically, this combined total of 87 species is by far the highest tally ever and marks the first time we have collectively broken the 80-species mark. Amazingly, that number is almost 20% above the 2010-2019 average of 73.2! We also found two new species for our count, which puts the cumulative total after 75 years of Ann Arbor CBC at a whopping 150!

As always, area species tallies varied quite a bit (from 41 to 58), but each of the eight areas bested its average species count for the 2007-2019 period, and five of them posted their highest species tallies ever. With high overall tallies like that,

multiple noteworthy birds were found in every part of our circle. Likewise, individual counts ranged quite widely from one area to another (1,700 to 16,100), but those discrepancies were by and large correlated with the presence of large flocks of this or that species in each area (for example, geese, ducks, and robins & starlings).

Earlier in January, I posted our count data on the National Audubon Society's CBC site; we have now collectively added our 75th piece to the massive puzzle of bird distribution that is the Christmas Bird Count. You can take a look at the picture that is emerging on the NAS website: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>. Here, you can search CBC results in a wide range of permutations, such as species, individual count results, etc. As you do so, please remember that this huge set of data points exists only by virtue of citizen science, courtesy of the volunteer work of birders like you. So, as you look through information about winter distribution of Common Redpolls this year or long-term population trends for American Kestrels, pat yourselves on the back for contributing your bit of work!

And, on a personal note, I cannot stress how grateful I am to have such an amazing contingent of birders at "my" disposal – the hard work of area leaders, field observers, feeder watchers, and all other CBC volunteers makes my job much, MUCH easier, not to mention rewarding. This year probably provided the best example of how we all collaborate to make our count work and turn out an amazing effort even under the most challenging of circumstances – thank you all! I owe a special debt of gratitude to long-time area leaders Mike & Susan Kielb and Mike Sefton, who stepped down from that post this year after many, MANY years of diligent work on our count – thank you all SO much! With that, I hope to see you all out there for the 2021 edition, on December 18, 2021 – make sure to mark your calendars, folks!

## Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The birds Washtenaw Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. As we honor and celebrate the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Washtenaw Audubon considers the work of inclusion, diversity, and equity a top priority moving forward. We hope that, in doing so, we can bring creativity and energy to our work in Washtenaw County and beyond for birds and people alike.

[Read our full statement at  
washtenawaudubon.org](#)



## Saturday, May 8, 2021 Washtenaw County May Count **Compiler: Juliet Berger; Area leaders to be announced**

As you think about the ways you will bird in the county this spring, please consider participating in the Washtenaw County May Count, on International Migratory Bird Day. Juliet Berger is the compiler for this countywide count, which uses eBird to benefit bird science with its wide-ranging results. The Compiler divides the county into townships, each of which has an Area Leader. Leaders recruit additional volunteers to count birds throughout their area. For names and contact information for the Compiler and the Area Leaders, visit the WAS website, and please consider volunteering. *Note:* Please contact Juliet Berger if you are interested in helping out as an Area Leader or volunteer observer. We will post detailed instructions on the WAS website on count day logistics. Please check back here for more information about how to participate as the date gets closer. *Note:* Please also see the WAS website for new documents describing the count procedures. Area leaders will be posted closer to the event date. Some COVID safety protocols will be in place, to be announced closer to the count date.

## January-February 2021: Winter Highlights

### **The Highlight**

It was a close contest for the highlight spot this period; in the end, the sole honor ended up being awarded to the ninth finch species identified in Washtenaw County this winter. Tucked in among a near triple-digit flock of Common Redpolls at Domino's Farms, a very pale individual with several features that identified it as a **Hoary Redpoll** was picked out by one very diligent observer. Although perhaps not a super-surprising find in the context of this winter's amazing finch flight, this is much the rarer of the two redpoll species and represents only the fifth Washtenaw County record of this visitor from the high Arctic (prior records are from 1978, 1982, 2008, and 2012). Unfortunately, the bird was hard to pin down and was not relocated on subsequent days.



Hoary Redpoll *Acanthis hornemannii* (center) and cropped, Domino's Farms, January 15 2021 (Brendan Klick)

### **Waterfowl**

Compared to the previous period, rare geese were hard to come by. The only **Snow Geese** observed was a quartet that set up shop in Wilson Park in downtown Milan from 1/23 to 1/27. Benefiting from increased observer scrutiny, a smattering of **Cackling Geese** was found among their ubiquitous larger Canada cousins. One was seen along Vreeland Rd (1/7), and as many as five of these little birds joined the flock of the aforementioned Snow Geese in Milan. On 2/1, two seen in the Vreeland corridor, followed by reports from Gallup Park (2/9) and a longer-staying individual at Waterworks Park from 2/9 – 2/12.



Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Wilson Park, January 27 2021  
(Robert Bochenek)



Cackling Goose *Branta hutchinsii*, Wilson Park,  
January 24 2021 (Norka Saldana)

There were quite a few reports for **Tundra Swans** in the early months of 2020. A group of varying size, with as many as eight birds on 1/13, was present on Portage Lake through 1/23. A very similar scenario played out in the stretch of Huron River between Island Park and Gallup Park. The group of five at Gallup apparently moved upriver as ice cover expanded and was

noticed in the Arb and Island Park in the following weeks. **Wood Ducks** had quite a good winter, with single birds noted in a variety of locations up and down the Huron River valley.

Dabbling ducks were surprisingly well represented among waterfowl reports, even during the cold snap that hit our area during this period. An unexpected **Northern Shoveler** was found among the plethora of waterfowl on Portage Lake on 1/18 but was not seen after that. During the last few days of February, a small number of **American Wigeon** arrived, with five at Superior Rd (2/25 – 2/28), one at nearby Peninsular Park (2/26), and two more at North Bay Park (2/27). Surprisingly widespread, singleton **Northern Pintails** hung around in half a dozen throughout the period, and two of them were seen at Riverside Park from 2/7 – 2/15. The five **Green-winged Teal** reports came from the first couple of weeks only; these birds no doubt moved out of our area with the arrival of the cold snap that set in late January.



Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Waterworks Park, January 2 2021 (Bruce Moorman)



American Wigeon *Mareca americana*, Superior Rd, February 25 2021 (Bill Nolting)

Although they are usually associated with pockets of open water on large lakes, the cold snap sent wintering **Canvasbacks** into open sections of the Huron River, with good numbers among other *Aythya* ducks in the Arb and Island Park. The same phenomenon occurred with **Greater Scaup**, with a few on Portage Lake (1/1 – 1/13) and here and there in the Huron River valley; with water freezing up, these birds all moved into City parks along the river, allowing for great close-up views of this difficult to ID species. There were a few reports of **Red-breasted Mergansers** throughout the period, with as many as four on Portage Lake on 1/17. It won't come as a surprise that the handful of **Ruddy Duck** reports followed this pattern as well; a long-staying bird in Gallup Park delighted many observers with close-up views, as evidenced by the photo below.



Greater Scaup *Aythya marila*, Island Park, February 19 2021 (Jocelyn Anderson)



Ruddy Duck *Oxyura jamaicensis*, Gallup Park, January 28 2021 (Curt Powell)

## Grouse through Gulls

With their preferred habitat becoming more uncommon, six reports for **Ring-necked Pheasant** was quite encouraging. A group of 11 of them along Easudes Rd on 2/13 was particularly positive and may be due to nearby habitat in Sharon Mills County Park. Throughout January-February, **Pied-billed Grebes** were noted in ten locations, but along the Huron River only,

with a maximum of three birds. With the exception of six birds on Portage Lake on 2/23, all other County reports for (single) **American Coots** came from a handful of locales along the Huron River. **Sandhill Cranes** can now safely be considered part of our local winter avifauna; there were numerous reports from all over the County throughout the period, with a whopping 56 over Delhi Overlook on 1/7.

The excellent gulling during November-December fizzled out almost completely in the new year. There was a small group of six **Bonaparte's Gulls** over Portage Lake from 1/1 –1/2, three of which were also seen over the nearby wastewater treatment facility along Stinchfield Woods Rd. Two more Bonies were noted over Gallup on 1/3. The only other unusual gull was a lone **Lesser Black-backed Gull** hanging around North Bay Park and Ford Lake until 1/10.



Ring-necked Pheasant *Phasianus colchicus*, Feldkamp Rd, January 23 2021 (Maggie Jewett)



American Coot *Fulica americana*, Nichols Arboretum, February 18 2021 (Edgar Otto)

## New World Vultures through Falcons

The **Black Vulture** that hung out in the Miller-Pratt Rd area in Scio Twp during November-December stuck around until (at least) 1/27 and continued to be remarkably reliable during that time. We may have become a tad blasé to this species over the past calendar year, but it is important to appreciate how unusual it is to host such a long-staying individual, and well into winter at that – there are a mere handful of other winter records for Black Vulture in Michigan apart from this bird. Much like the above-mentioned Sandhill Cranes, **Turkey Vultures** have become a regular, if uncommon, part of Washtenaw County winter birding. As many as seven birds were reported from 15-20 locations throughout the county during January-February, which is quite a notable shift from the situation at the start of the new millennium.

**Northern Harriers** were well-represented, with up to two birds present in a dozen or so locations – the traditional spot at Vreeland & Gotfredson proved to be among the more reliable of sites to see this handsome raptor. Although they can sometimes present a tricky ID challenge, **Sharp-shinned Hawks** were picked out in more than a dozen spots all over the county, which constitutes a very good winter season for this feisty *accipiter*. Seemingly in the middle of a population increase in our area, **Red-shouldered Hawks** were found in some ten locations throughout January and February. Their cousin from the Arctic, the **Rough-legged Hawk**, was a little more difficult to find, but still put in appearances in about a half dozen locations.



Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*, Vreeland & Gotfredson Rd, January 23 2021 (Keith Dickey)



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, Miller Rd, January 7 2021 (Maggie Jewett)

Reflecting an increase in territorial activity, **Barred Owls** were found in eight places, again with several records away from the species's traditional haunts in the west of the county. After three birds last period, two more '1 were turned up: at Cedar Lake Campground (1/7) and at Tubbs & Huron River Dr (2/27). Throughout the period an impressive six different **Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers** were reported, with four in Ann Arbor and two in the Saline area. After their very impressive showing last period, **Merlins** were still around in good numbers, even if the bulk of reports came from Greater Ann Arbor and the Vreeland Rd corridor, instead of all over the County. **Peregrine Falcons** were still quite wide-spread, with a handful of reports away from the North Quad nesting site – the Vreeland Rd corridor seemed to be quite reliable for the species.



Northern Saw-whet Owl *Aegolius acadicus*, Cedar Lake Campground, January 7 2021 (David Jacobs)



Merlin *Falco columbarius*, Vreeland & Gotfredson Rd, February 7 2021 (Bill VanderMolen)

## **Passerines: Shrikes through Thrushes**

Quite pleasantly, **Northern Shrikes** continued their excellent showing from earlier in the winter. Two of the long-staying birds continued into February: at the DeVine Preserve (through 2/16) and at Delhi Overlook (through 2/7). There were some scattered 1-day wonders here and there, with one along Waters Rd (1/16), at Crooked Lake (1/21), and in Webster Twp (1/28). All in all, quite an impressive winter for this feisty carnivorous songbird. Not surprisingly, only a single **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** was found, and near the end of this period at that: on 2/21, at Waterworks Park. The irruption of **Red-breasted Nuthatch** continued unabatedly, with many locations throughout Washtenaw County reporting them throughout January-February. As was the case before, the largest concentrations occurred in the pine stands at the Cedar Lake Campground and Stinchfield Woods, each of them hosting 30 (or more) of these cute birds. In most other cases, one or two birds were reported, but the sheer number of observations make it abundantly clear that this irruption is one for the record books.

Much like the previous species, **Winter Wrens** continued an already excellent showing, and despite the major cold snap in February they were found in at least 15 locations across the County, with several reports of two birds among them. Four of the seven **Northern Mockingbird** observations came from their Manchester area stronghold, but the other three were in less expected spots. One was observed at Warner & Judd (1/14), two (a pair?) were seen off Warren & Earhart (2/9), and one was along the Arb-Gallup bike path from 2/25 on – this last bird may be the same that spent the previous three winters just to the east, in Gallup Park proper. The good numbers of **Hermit Thrushes** found on the Ann Arbor CBC apparently stuck around, in spite of the



Northern Harrier *Circus hudsonius*, Vreeland & Gotfredson Rd, January 23 2021 (Keith Dickey)



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, Miller Rd, January 7 2021 (Maggie Jewett)

inclement weather later in the winter. They were present in dozens of locations countywide, with as many as three present along Fleming Creek in Parker Mill Park .



Northern Shrike *Lanius borealis*, DeVine Preserve, January 13 2021 (Bill VanderMolen)



Hermit Thrush *Catharus guttatus*, Marshall Nature Area, February 23 2021 (Victor Chen)

## Passerines: Finches through SnowBunting

Winter finches continued to excite local birders, both with species variety and impressive numbers. After they seemed to be on the way out as the new year approached, **Purple Finches** staged something of a comeback with reports coming in from roughly a dozen locations. Still, numbers remained quite low, with lone birds in the majority of case and a maximum of six. Large flocks (and smaller groups) of **Common Redpolls** stuck around the County into February, although the highest numbers were reported in January. For the first two weeks of 2021, the epicenter was a massive flock of up to 91 birds at Domino's Farms, which was enjoyed by many courtesy of its proximity to Ann Arbor; a whopping 80 redpolls at Steinbach & Luckhart was no less impressive. In addition to these two sites, observers noted these small finches hailing from the Arctic tundra in another 25 locations! A group of four birds on 1/4 was the last time the Cedar Lake Campground **Red Crossbills** were observed. **Pine Siskins** remained relatively easy to find, with the largest numbers in the alders along the Huron River in Ann Arbor, where 30 were seen on several occasions. Away from the Arb-Furstenberg-Gallup area, as many as 25-30 locations were home to smaller numbers of these subdued little finches.

As winter progressed, numbers of **Lapland Longspurs** built to impressive levels in several locations. The area around Vreeland & Gotfredson continued to host a sizeable flock of up to 75 birds (on 2/6) throughout the period but was outdone by a whopping 112 birds observed at the intersection of Liberty & Parker on 1/15. A flock present among the Domino's Farms buffalo herd for much of February peaked at 60 on 2/12; flyovers or small groups were noted in a handful of other locations. **Snow Buntings** outnumbered their kin along Vreeland Rd almost 5-1 – on 1/12, numbers there topped out at 350! Some 100 (on 2/12) joining the longspurs at Domino's Farm was quite a sight to behold as well. Away from these two spots, these dapper little birds were noted in roughly a dozen other locations throughout the County.



Purple Finch *Haemorhous purpureus*, South Lake, January 18 2021 (Carol Goodman)



Lapland Longspurs *Calcarius lapponicus* & Snow Bunting *Plectrophenax nivalis*, Domino's Farms, February 9 2021 (Len Sander)

## **Passerines: Sparrows through Cardinals**

Four feeders hosted hardy **Fox Sparrows** through our area, which is quite a good wintertime showing: in Ann Arbor (1/28), near Whitmore Lake (1/31), near Dexter (2/10 – 2/12), and just outside Chelsea (2/12 – 2/15). Although they generally are (and were) outnumbered by their close White-throated relative, **White-crowned Sparrows** were observed in eight different spots, with as many as eight attending a feeder on Park Rd on 1/6. A close contender for bird of the period was a **Lincoln's Sparrow**, photographed at North Hydro Park in Ypsilanti on 2/10. However, this species with precious few winter records for Michigan was not identified for the rarity that it was until early March, when it was relocated by several birders. Although not necessarily a rare winter species, three **Swamp Sparrows** at the Koenn Preserve on 2/12 can definitely be called very unusual. There was a handful of other observations of this handsome little sparrow.



Lincoln's Sparrow *Melospiza lincolni*, North Hydro Park, February 10 2021 (Bill Nolting)



Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*, Guenther Rd, January 1 2021 (Maggie Jewett)

Members of the blackbird family are becoming more regular locally during the winter months and the first warm days in February generally bring in a big push of Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Brown-headed Cowbirds. By and large, smaller numbers of **Rusty Blackbirds** are mixed in with these birds, which was the case during the closing days of February. However, the flock of some 100 Rusties along Guenther Rd on 1/1 was quite extraordinary! A very hardy **Yellow-rumped Warbler** persisted at Waterworks Park throughout the period and was joined by two others on 2/21. Additional yellow-rumps were found at Four Mile Lake (2/6) and on Ann Arbor's north side (2/9).

## In Memoriam – James O. Wilkes (1/24/32 – 12/6/20)



The Washtenaw Audubon family lost one of its longtime members this past December, when Jim Wilkes passed away during recovery from heart surgery at St. Joseph Hospital. Originally from Southampton, England, Jim moved to the Ann Arbor area in 1960, where he served in a variety of posts at the University of Michigan until his retirement in 2000.

Jim and his wife of 64 years, Mary Ann, were fixtures at the monthly WAS meetings at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens, as well as at the recent iterations on Zoom, and they were integral parts of the local birding community. When, back in 2001, a White-winged Crossbill frequented one of the feeders at their Barton Hills yard, the Wilkes' graciously opened their home to numerous local birders, many of whom got to enjoy stunning views of this rarity from the comfort of the Wilkes' living room. Likewise, for a few years before our move to the Botanical Gardens, Jim and Mary Ann hosted the Ann Arbor CBC's potluck-tally event at their home. Jim will be greatly missed by the many birders who were fortunate enough to meet him - donations in Jim's honor may be made to The James O. Wilkes Undergraduate Scholarship at the University of Michigan: <https://leadersandbest.umich.edu/nd/#!/give/basket/fund/570145>. His original obituary was posted [here](#).

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**.

Renewal     New Member  
Additional Donation \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Dues**  
 Individual Household    \$25 (online only \$20)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Student    \$15 (online only \$10)  
 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

Washtenaw Audubon's in-person programs at the Botanical Gardens are on hold until the University allows gatherings to take place. To view our online Zoom programs, you will need access to an internet-capable computer, phone, or similar device. An announcement of the web address to view the program will be on our web site, Facebook page, and on the Birders email list a few days before the program. Please note that due to COVID, all in person field trips are cancelled as well.

We may also add more online programs for April and the future, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

### **April 21, 7:10 p.m.      The Kirtland's Warbler: From the brink of extinction to a new model for endangered species conservation – with Bill Rapai**

Join Bill Rapai, the executive director of the Kirtland's Warbler Alliance, for a discussion about the continuing conservation of the Kirtland's Warbler and the special challenges it faces going forward.

The Zoom link is for this program is listed below:

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/99024353948>

Or dial-in: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 990 2435 3948

No password

### **May 19, 7:10 p.m.      Birding Devon and Beyond - with Ben Lucking**

Via the magic of Zoom, join one of Washtenaw County's young guns, Ben Lucking, as he describes some of his birding adventures in the UK, with a few forays to more exotic locales, such as North Africa.

The Zoom link is for this program is listed below:

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/97522069279>

Or dial-in: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 975 2206 9279

No password

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

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