



January / February 2024

## 78th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count The results are in!

Although there was a brief blip of cold weather in November (complete with a dusting of snow), it is safe to say that the weather leading up to this year's Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count was mild, almost fall-like. By the time count day arrived on the 16<sup>th</sup>, there was no snow cover and little to no ice cover in our circle, or the rest of southern Michigan for that matter. Count day low temperatures dropped to about 30 degrees during the pre-dawn (owling) hours, which caused some of the bodies of still water to freeze over. But during the day things warmed up significantly and maxed out at what can only be called an unseasonable high of 50 degrees. Skies were overcast for much of the day and winds slight from the southeast, which made for an uncharacteristically pleasant day to be out there censusing the Ann Arbor area's birdlife.

Nearly 100 observers enjoyed these balmy conditions out in the field, starting with the intrepid owlers during the (very) early morning darkness and ending with an unsuccessful afternoon search for the crow roost (more about that below).

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The gorgeous sunrise that greeted us on the 16th (Jacco Gelderloos)

# President's Letter

Dear birding members and friends and community,

As you already know, we voted in October to drop the name of Audubon from the name of our organization. We want you all to know that our vote on our new name will take place on March 20, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. at our March Program at Matthaei Botanical Gardens, 1800 North Dixboro Rd., Ann Arbor – please note that only WAS members can cast a vote. It will be an up or down vote on a name developed based upon our survey sent to all members in October 2023 via email, deliberated and discussed by a special subcommittee of WAS Board Members and other interested community members. Thank you all for the great volume of suggestions! Please plan to attend the vote and enjoy refreshments and camaraderie with fellow WAS members afterwards. I'm planning to bake another big cake, and we'll have beverages to share. Our vote in October was such a celebration of our community, and I'm hoping for a repeat of that warm birding community feeling. We would love to see you all there!



Snow Bunting (*Ben Lucking*)

Enjoy the Christmas Bird Count article put together by our Newsletter Editor, Jacco Gelderloos, as well as his bimonthly rarities article (available only in the online edition of this newsletter, unfortunately). If you have a moment to thank Jacco for the many hours he puts into producing this interesting, educational and important content for our community, please do reach out and thank him, at [newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org) - Thanks, JACCO!!!

Stay warm out there. These arctic temps can be dangerous for birds and people alike.

All the best and good birding to all.

As always, I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President



## 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](http://washtenawaudubon.org)

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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.

## Education Chair Update

The final two months of the year brought some great opportunities for our Black Indigenous Peoples of Color (BIPOC) group to gather and enjoy the outdoors. In November, we joined up with Brandan Freeman's Shades of the Outdoors group to do a bird and nature walk at Kensington Metropark, and our BIPOC group took a walk through Barton Nature Area in December. At our Kensington walk, we had the unique opportunity to hand feed the birds of Kensington while getting to know one another in the outdoors. If you are interested in joining Shades of the Outdoors, check out this free and open group on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/668264331392512>



Feeding a male Downy Woodpecker (*Victor Chen*)

Victor and Brandan's partnership continues this upcoming year in a presentation scheduled for February 28, 6pm, at Ann Arbor's Mallet's Creek Library. This joint presentation between the Ann Arbor Natural Area Preservation and the Ann Arbor District Library will discuss the importance of diversity in the outdoors. We will follow up this talk with a nature walk on Sunday, March 3 (location TBD). If you have any ideas for educational opportunities, please e-mail them to Victor at [education@washtenawaudubon.org](mailto:education@washtenawaudubon.org).

Victor Chen

Scenes from a lovely day at Kensington (*Victor Chen*)



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We were also able to add the contributions of over two dozen feeder watchers, so that, once again, our total participation numbers were well over 100 for the fifth year in a row – I dare say this bump in interest and participation in our CBC (and birding in general) is one of the (very) few good things to come out of the Covid pandemic. It goes without saying that the increased participation levels have positively coverage in our count circle: field parties spent about 5 hours out there, traveling roughly 15 miles in the process; each feeder watcher monitored their feeding stations for about 2 ¼ hours.

With open water all around, it is no surprise we found 16 species of waterfowl on count day, plus one more during count week. Extending their high numbers from last year, Mute Swans posted another triple-digit tally and outnumbered Trumpeter Swans by a margin of 7-2, even if that species had a good year again as well. After being more or less absent last year, Wood Ducks made a good comeback with seven seen in all, which is four times the recent 10-year average. We turned up four species of dabbling ducks, which is pretty well the norm. That said, there was no unifying trend discernible between them. Gadwalls were about 20% below average, Mallards, were roughly average, but American Black Ducks were present at three times the recent 10-year average – 42 of them was the highest number in nearly 40 years (56 in 1987). Two Green-winged Teals were found – one along N Zeeb Rd, another one at Mary Beth Doyle Park.

For the second year in a row, two species of *aythya* diving ducks were found on count day. It will not be surprising that Ring-necked Ducks were not able to reach last year's triple-digit heights, but 19 of them was still the second highest number ever. By the same token, 11 Lesser Scaup was that species' second highest tally, second only to a 35-count from 1990. A count week Redhead at Mary Beth Doyle Park could not be relocated on count day.

Buffleheads came close to last year's record high; four Goldeneyes was rather paltry, but many of them had likely stayed farther north. Hooded Mergansers continued their streak of excellent showings and surpassed the 100-mark for the first time ever. Common Mergansers were 50% above the recent average; the count day Red-breasted Merg was the first since 2012 (they had been found a few times during count week, though). We managed a Ruddy Duck for the third year running.

Although the number was rather low compared to the past few years, Wild Turkeys extended their streak of triple-digit tallies to 11 years. By contrast, we completely missed Ring-necked Pheasant for the third time in the past five years. Much like last year, the large amount of open water did not guarantee the presence of waterbirds. Three Pied-billed Grebes was a decent enough number, but no American Coots were found at all. Perhaps there was a reduced need for them to move farther south or concentrate in a few places in our circle. Courtesy of the mild weather, 163 Sandhill Cranes were observed in six of the eight count areas, their third highest count ever and making 2023 the third year running in which more than a hundred were recorded. Killdeer proved to be the toughest of shorebirds by tying their record tally of three (from 2001) – one stalked the shores of Whitmore Lake and a duo shared the mudflats at Mary Beth Doyle Park. Gulls presented a mixed picture: close to 300 Ring-billed Gulls was basically three times the recent average, whereas Herring Gulls were over 50% below their average. The open water clearly benefitted some species: 23 Belted Kingfishers was their highest since 1986 and 28 Great Blue Herons was a record high for that species and represented the third year running with more than 20 observed on our count.

For a CBC that has been running for nearly 80 years, adding a species to the cumulative total is a rare and notable occurrence: since the 2000 CBC, only 11 new species have been found, averaging out to 1 every other year. 2023 was one of the years where we were fortunate enough to encounter a new bird: on 12/14 a juvenile BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON was found at Mary Beth Doyle Park and this youngster stayed around until count day, when it was seen and photographed in gorgeous detail. This marks species # 150 for the Ann Arbor CBC – not at all bad for an inland circle!

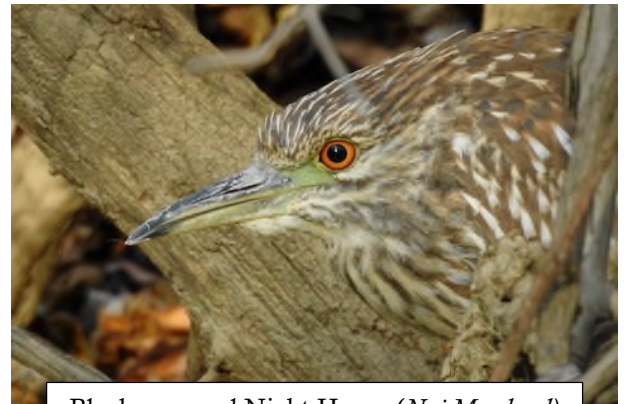
Once again, Turkey Vultures were completely absent from the circle; as was the case last year, a small number of them certainly would have been expected to stick around. Any Northern Harrier remains a good find for our CBC – over the past 15 years we have found them only once every three years. Accipiters were well represented again: 2 Sharp-shinned

Hawks, 32 Cooper's Hawks, and 4 not identified to species made for the highest combined number in many a year. Although the species has been trending upward for the past 15-20 years, the huge jump in the Bald Eagle record high surprised everyone present at the potluck: if last year's total of 19 was impressive, the 2023 number of 27 was simply mind-blowing! Finding a Red-shouldered Hawk near Dexter meant that species has now been found on five consecutive CBCs.

For nearly a decade now, we have been recording all three falcon species. What set this year apart was that we saw the highest number of Kestrels since 2012 (courtesy of the lack of snow cover, most likely) and tied the record highs for both Peregrines and Merlins. This year marked only the second time in the new millennium that fifteen total falcons have been recorded.

The lack of wind to speak of made for good owling conditions for the intrepid volunteers that went out to search for these hunters of the night. Their hard work resulted in a total of 45 owls – 25 Screech-Owls was right about average, but the 17 Great Horned Owls were some 40% above. Most thrilling, though, was the fact that not one, not two, but four Northern Saw-whet Owls were found! Not only did that quartet double the previous record high (from 1968!), but it equaled the total number observed on the previous 14 CBCs! A larger owl not identifiable to species rounded out a pretty good year for these enigmatic birds.

It seems every year woodpeckers set a new benchmark of one kind or another. A new year, a new benchmark – for the first time ever, we managed to record all seven of the woodpecker species on count day (remember, our first Pileated Woodpecker was only as recent as 2008). The total of 695 woodpeckers was only a little shy of their highest tally from 2020 and includes five Yellow-bellied Sap-



Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nui Moreland*)

Canada Goose	4,169	Cooper's Hawk	32	White-breasted Nuthatch	401
Mute Swan	101	accipiter sp.	4	Red-breasted Nuthatch	1
Trumpeter Swan	30	Bald Eagle	27 (HC)	Brown Creeper	15
Wood Duck	7	Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Winter Wren	4 (HC)
Gadwall	10	Red-tailed Hawk	85	Carolina Wren	118
Mallard	1,232	hawk sp.	2	European Starling	16,689
American Black Duck	42	Eastern Screech-Owl	25	Eastern Bluebird	240 (HC)
Mallard x Am Black Duck hybrid	2	Great Horned Owl	17	Hermit Thrush	15
Green-winged Teal	2	Barred Owl	CW (US)	American Robin	3,533
Redhead	CW	Northern Saw-whet Owl	4 (US, HC)	Cedar Waxwing	76
Ring-necked Duck	19	owl sp.	1	House Sparrow	852
Lesser Scaup	11	Belted Kingfisher	23	House Finch	435
Bufflehead	48	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	5	Purple Finch	1
Common Goldeneye	4	Red-headed Woodpecker	1 (US)	Common Redpoll	1 (US)
Hooded Merganser	104 (HC)	Red-bellied Woodpecker	247 (HC)	Pine Siskin	37
Common Merganser	53	Downy Woodpecker	308	American Goldfinch	656
Red-breasted Merganser	1	Hairy Woodpecker	72	Lapland Longspur	1 (US)
Ruddy Duck	1	Pileated Woodpecker	10	American Tree Sparrow	391
duck sp.	5	Northern Flicker	51	Fox Sparrow	CW
Wild Turkey	137	woodpecker sp.	1	Dark-eyed Junco	1,088
Pied-billed Grebe	3	American Kestrel	7	White-crowned Sparrow	7 (HC)
Rock Pigeon	586	Merlin	5 (HC)	White-throated Sparrow	176
Mourning Dove	608	Peregrine Falcon	3 (HC)	Song Sparrow	48
Sandhill Crane	163	Northern Shrike	1 (US)	Swamp Sparrow	5
Killdeer	3 (HC, US)	Blue Jay	893	Eastern Towhee	1 (US)
Ring-billed Gull	290	American Crow	1,360	Red-winged Blackbird	35
Herring Gull	4	Black-capped Chickadee	1,107 (HC)	Brown-headed Cowbird	257
gull sp.	3	Tufted Titmouse	316	Common Grackle	219 (HC)
<b>BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT-HERON</b>	<b>1 (NEW)</b>	Horned Lark	2	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Great Blue Heron	28 (HC)	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	1 (US)	Northern Cardinal	455
Northern Harrier	1	Golden-crowned Kinglet	15	passerine sp.	12
Sharp-shinned Hawk	2				
				<b>Total Individuals</b>	<b>38,067</b>
<b>CW = count week only</b>		<b>HC = high count</b>		<b>US = unusual species</b>	

suckers (the highest since 1967), one Red-headed Woodpecker (only the 4<sup>th</sup> occurrence since 2000), and a record-high 247 Red-bellied Woodpeckers. All seven species were found in numbers well above their recent 10-year averages. What, pray tell, will next year bring for these dapper birds?

After last year's rather low count, Blue Jays rebounded with gusto: by setting a new record high! This constitutes a hopeful sign that this species is overcoming the challenge posed by the West Nile virus. As mentioned above, we failed to locate the Ann Arbor crow roost on count day, despite checking numerous traditional roosting locations all over town. Although that resulted in the lowest American Crow count in some 30 years, the crows were there in the days leading up to the count, so this does not represent a catastrophic drop in their numbers. A Northern Shrike along North Territorial Rd was the fourth time in the past six years we have recorded this winter visitor. Two Horned Larks was rather low; in recent years this species has become quite hard to find on our count. For the first time since 2014, a Lapland Longspur was found, at Independence Lake. This species and Snow Bunting have become harder and harder to find – conceivably, our changing climate is responsible for this.

By and large, count for small, mostly insectivorous species were, yet again, well above average (if not record-breaking). 1,107 Black-capped Chickadees set a new record high (+64%), and Tufted Titmice (+17%), and White-breasted Nuthatches (+33%) seemed to be everywhere. However, only one Red-breasted Nuthatch was found, and both Brown Creepers and Golden-crowned Kinglets were basically right on their averages. After a 2-year absence, finding a Ruby-crowned Kinglet along Parker Rd was a very nice surprise.

Although the four Winter Wrens we found tied the record high, it's the third time in the past five years we have managed to do that! For the third year running, Carolina Wrens surpassed the 100-mark, which makes it seem that this is the new normal for this species. The reasonably mild winters of recent years and the increased number of feeders are clearly benefiting these feisty little birds. Once again, two Yellow-rumped Warblers were turned up – perhaps a warming climate will make these tough little warblers will a more regular part of our winter avifauna.

Once again, most of the frugivore species had another good year, with Eastern Bluebirds setting a new record high count (53% above average). American Robin (+108%) and European Starling (+187%) again boasted very high numbers, the vast majority of them at the M-City roost on Ann Arbor's north side. Fifteen Hermit Thrushes constituted the second-highest tally ever, bested only by the record of 16 from back in 2000. Although 76 Cedar Waxwings was not as abysmally low as last year's 19 birds, it was still close to 30% below the recent 10-year average. The mild weather would have raised expectations that at least one, possibly more of the *mimid* species

would be found, but that turned out to not be the case, unfortunately.

Compared to last year's rather low numbers, both House Finches (+12%) and American Goldfinches (+29%) had a much better year. This was clearly not an irruption year for winter finches, even if our counters found three different species, with one Purple Finch, 37 Pine Siskins, and one Common Redpoll – the latter still made for a very nice find, though. House Sparrow numbers were some 13% below average.

Taking the count week trio of Fox Sparrows into account, we found eight sparrow species on our count yet again, matching the recent norm. Other than in 2022, all seven count day species were observed in above average numbers: American Tree Sparrow (+21%), Dark-eyed Junco (+68%), White-throated Sparrow (+98%), Song Sparrow (+75%), and Swamp Sparrow (+79%) were all significantly up, with Juncos setting a new high mark just eking out the prior record. After some 15 years of either zero, one, or two birds, seven White-crowned Sparrows set a new record high count, which rather makes sense in light of this year's high numbers of White-throats they tend to associate with. An Eastern Towhee at the Cherry Hill Nature Preserve was a great – the most recent prior record was back in 2014.

Moderate weather conditions meant that once again three blackbird species were found. That fact is not terribly unusual these days, but numbers for all three of them were simple off the charts. Both Red-winged Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird hit their second highest number ever, while Common Grackles obliterated the previous record high from 1976, which was 66.

Despite missing the crow roost, the cumulative total of 38,067 individual birds was still 32% above the 2013-2022 average and was among the Ann Arbor CBCs five highest tallies ever. The fact that eleven species hit record high tallies and four more tied previous high marks is quite obviously tied to the moderate weather leading up to our CBC, as well as the once again stellar coverage level. For the first time ever, we found more than 80 species on count day (83); with three more species observed during count week we almost managed to set a new species count and extended our count's streak of 80 species or more to four years. I dare say it would not be inconceivable for the Ann Arbor CBC to break the 90-species barrier one of these years.

Finding all these birds does not happen in a vacuum, of course. Sure, the weather always plays a role, but far and away the biggest contributing factor is the large cohort of dedicated volunteers that helps make our count such a success. There are not many, if any, Christmas Bird Counts in Michigan that can boast nearly 100 field observers and an additional 25 feeder watchers! To put that in perspective, for my first year as compiler, 2007, we had 60 observers in the field and four feeder watchers – basically, our participation levels have doubled. That, in turn, has translated into an increased number of birding parties in the field, which has allowed us to cover more ground and visit sites that would either be under-birded or not birded at all.

It behooves me, then, to thank all of you for playing your part in making and maintaining the Ann Arbor CBC as a wonderful community event that contributes valuable citizen science data to boot. Pat yourselves on your backs field observers, feeder watchers, the eight area leaders, feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemeyer, and potluck coordinator Nancy (and Rob) French! If you had a chance to attend the potluck at the end of the day, you would have been amazed at the size of our group – well over 40 people attended and enjoyed a lovely meal from a wide variety of dishes people brought along. And to think we used to have the potluck in the living room of local CBC legend Maxine Miles's residence....

Over the past few years, there has been an effort to automate some aspects of our count and the driving force behind that, WAS web guru Rob French, deserves much of the credit for guiding that process along. He ensures that information makes its way onto the WAS CBC page, creates and updates the online sign-up form (which is incredibly helpful for me, the compiler), and continues to offer suggestions to streamline our event. Thank you very much, Rob! Since the 2023 CBC's conclusion, he has also reached out to me about creating a new edition of the Ann Arbor CBC's "Fifty Years & Counting" booklet, suggesting we update it to include the data of nearly 30 more years of our count – to be continued, no doubt!



Cooper's Hawk (*Dennis Pozega*)

Part of his automation effort is a transition to using eBird as a more central way to collect and compile our data. This year being the first we tried that approach, there was certainly some room for improvement, which I hope we are going to be able to build into next year's event. So please bear with us; if you were (or are) new to eBird, check it out at [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org) and/or download the app (and the identification app Merlin) onto your smartphone and play around with it. This will help you prepare for the upcoming 2024 Ann Arbor CBC, on Saturday December 21, 2024.

As mentioned, our data contributes valuable data to the longest-running citizen science project and helps track the winter distribution for birds in the (mostly) Western Hemisphere. This wealth of information helps scientists tease out trends and patterns and, in turn, advise on measures to help protect the birds we all love. To find out more about the CBC and its history, visit <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>. For a summary of the past CBC season, click here: [Summary of the 123rd Christmas Bird Count, 2022-2023 | Audubon](#).

The search for my replacement as compiler has been rather low-key over the past year or so, but I would like to take this opportunity to once again ask you to consider taking over the role of compiler. If you are interested in taking on this highly rewarding position, please reach out to me at [jigelderloos@yahoo.com](mailto:jigelderloos@yahoo.com) to get an idea of what is involved and to explore transitioning responsibilities in the year to come.

With that, I hope to see you all out there for the 2024 edition, on December 21, 2024 – make sure to mark your calendars, folks!

## November-December 2023: Early Winter Highlights

### Waterfowl

A white phase **Snow Goose** was found among the multitudes of Canada Geese in the Watkins Lake area on 11/16, where it was seen through 12/11. Another white morph adult was at the Squiers Preserve on 12/16. An adult blue morph **Snow Goose** was at the S Parker Rd marsh on 12/31; that same day a juvenile white morph was at Monroe Park in Milan, where it divided its time between Washtenaw and Monroe counties. A **Ross's Goose** joined the Watkins Lake Snow Goose on 11/15 – likely the same bird was seen nearby at Kuhl & Herman the next day. In light of the relative proximity to these locations, odds are that the **Ross's Goose** at Iron Creek Mill Pond (12/9 – 12/10) was the same bird as well. During November a scattering of **Cackling Geese** appeared around the county: two at Domino's Farms (11/5), one at Hewen's Creek Park (11/11), three more at Domino's Farms (11/24), and one in Lodi Township (11/26 – 11/30). There were no reports throughout December, until one was found at S Parker Rd marsh on 12/30, which was followed by a group of up to 11 at Monroe Park in Milan the next day. Migrating flocks and small numbers of passing **Tundra Swans** were reported from some 15 sites throughout the period – the largest flock was one of 46 birds over Stinchfield Woods & Toma on 11/27.



Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*, Iron Creek Mill Pond, December 9 2023 (Diana Cook)



Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*, Iron Creek Mill Pond, December 9 2023 (Ross Green)

(Very) small numbers of **Northern Pintails** stuck around at half a dozen sites throughout November and December – all involved one or two birds. Much like was the case in the previous two months, **Canvasbacks** were not easy to come by: up to three were at Four Mile Lake (11/1 – 11/7), one (11/1) and four (11/18) were at Independence Lake, and one straggler was Barton Pond (12/28 – 12/29). **Greater Scaup** were even scarcer, with single birds on Whitmore Lake (12/14) and at S Parker Rd marsh (12/27). Another **Surf Scoter** was found from Loonfeather Pont Park along Ford Lake on 11/4. That same day, three **Black Scoters** were also discovered on Ford Lake; they stuck around for a few days but were not seen after 11/6. Whitmore Lake hosted a few more **Long-tailed Ducks** – three of them spent the day there on 11/17. **Red-breasted Mergansers** moved through quickly and were unlikely to dally in any one place. Not only did most reports involve single birds, but they also tended to be one-day wonders. The one exception was the “group” of up to three birds on Ford Lake that was present from 11/22 – 12/23.



Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Pierce Lake, November 20 2023, (Michael Bowen)



Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator*, Ford Lake, November 22 2023 (Bill Nolting)

## Grebes through Herons

Five of the larger lakes hosted up to four **Horned Grebes** throughout November – the last one was reported on 12/1. Mild weather allowed a handful of **Killdeer** to hang on well into December this year: one was along Vreeland Rd (12/6), another one at Whitmore Lake (12/16), and a duo were at Mary Beth Doyle Park through at least 12/24. A **Wilson's Snipe** was at Trinkle Marsh from 11/15 – 11/17), but that bird's presence was overshadowed by the (relative) multitudes of snipes at Domino's Farms - as many as 22 were there through 11/27. A few **Greater Yellowlegs** dallied into the first week of November, with one at Four Mile Lake (11/4) and another at Domino's Farms (11/6). Rounding out the shorebird category, the toughest of the *Calidris* sandpipers, the **Dunlin**, graced up to seven locations through 11/15. The maximum was a flock of 20 birds at the West Lake Preserve on 11/4.

With the arrival of December, larophiles' heart rates increase and the search is on for rare winter gulls. Even if public access is no longer available, the piles of trash at the Salem landfill can still be viewed from a few vantage points right outside the facility. That resulted in observers finding both black-backed and both white-winged gull species. An adult **Great Black-backed Gull** was present from 12/6 – 12/19, an immature **Glaucous Gull** could be seen from 12/11 – 12/19, as many as a whopping 11 (on 12/11) **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** were there 12/6 – 12/22, and up to three **Iceland Gulls** were from 12/6 – 12/12, with both the Kumlien's and Thayer's subspecies represented. These represented new Washtenaw high counts for the latter two species.



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Domino's Farms, November 8 2023 (Rita Laurance)



Iceland Gull *Larus glaucooides*, Salem Landfill, December 6 2023 (Andy Dettling)

Although not unprecedented for Michigan, an injured **Common Tern** found on the shore of Whitmore Lake on 11/9 was a first record for the month of November. A young **Double-crested Cormorant** dallied at Mary Beth Doyle Park through 12/6. On 12/14, an immature **Black-crowned Night-Heron** was found at the same park, where it stuck around through at least 12/28, providing many local birders with their first ever Washtenaw record for that species. By the end of the first week of November, **Great Egrets** had left our county for warmer locales. However, one bird clearly did not get the memo and was photographed at North Hydro Park on 12/20.



Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auritus*, Mary Beth Doyle Park, December 6 2023 (Bill Nolting)



Great Egret *Ardea alba*, North Hydro Park December 20 2023 (Bruce Moorman)



## Vultures through Falcons

Despite the mild conditions appearing conducive to their sticking around, the last **Turkey Vulture** left Washtenaw County by 12/15. The last of our **Ospreys** was seen at Loonfeather Point Park on 11/4. November is clearly the best month for seeing **Golden Eagles** locally, and this November proved to be no exception. Between 11/8 and 11/20, the Torrey Rd hawk watch site was quite productive with one or two eagles on a number of days. One of these birds ended up roosting for the night in a woodlot nearby, at Tuttle Hill & Torrey, from 11/12 - 11/13. Other than that, single birds were seen over I-94 in Chelsea (11/16), over Avondale Ave in Ann Arbor (11/16), and over Manchester (11/22), making for a very successful fall migration window for this impressive species. **Northern Harriers** were quite widespread, with one or two birds reported from about ten different locations throughout November-December. The same was true for **Red-shouldered Hawks** – likely a mix of migrants and some locals, one or two birds were observed at nearly a dozen sites throughout the period. By contrast, only two **Rough-legged Hawks** were seen: on 11/8 over the Torrey Rd hawk watch and on 11/18 over Warren & Earhart.



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Torrey Rd Hawk Watch, November 8 2023 (Bill Nolting)



Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*, Torrey Rd Hawk Watch, November 8 2023 (Isaac Smith)

**Barred Owls** appeared to have vanished from the county's eBird map – none were reported, with the exception of one resident at the Cedar Lake Campground (11/24 – 12/18) and one calling from a woodlot at Waters & Trillium Ln on 12/15. A couple of **Short-eared Owls** were hunting over the sedge meadow to the west of Four Mile Lake on 11/7; on 12/26 two more were over a field along the Watkins Lake County Preserve's bike trail between Sharon Hollow and Noggles roads. **Northern Saw-whet Owls** put in an excellent showing this period, not just because they were found in four different spots, but also because there were two of them in two of those spots, setting a new local high count. A duo in Lodi Twp on 11/24 set off the bonanza and were followed by one in the Hickory Woods subdivision on 12/15. Then, on 12/16, there were two at Independence Lake, one in Lodi Twp, and one more in Marshall park!

The relatively balmy conditions during much of November and December likely kept tree sap flowing, which must have benefitted Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, as evidenced by the fact that one or two were present at over 20 different locations throughout the period. Somewhat more surprising was the fact that quite a few **Red-headed Woodpeckers** stuck around as well – one or two were reported from at least seven sites. It may go a little far to call this the fall-winter of the **Merlin**, by these feisty little falcons seemed to be everywhere, terrorizing songbirds in nearly two dozen different spots! **Peregrine Falcons** were also relatively well-represented with birds at or over six locations.

## Passerines

Unsurprisingly, the only flycatchers seen into November were a handful of sturdy **Eastern Phoebes**, but they, too, had left by the time the second week of the month rolled around. A shock find on 11/11 at an Ann Arbor feeder set-up, a **White-eyed Vireo** gorged on some berries before moving on. Although not unprecedented in Michigan, this was only the second ever record for Washtenaw County during November-December, the other being a bird photographed during the Clinton CBC on 12/21/14. By and large, **Northern Shrikes** are not an easy-to-come-by bird under the best of circumstances, but this period seemed to put that truism on its head. Throughout the period, a staggering 11 different individuals were present in the county, which is more than triple the number turned up during 2021 and 2022 combined!

Migrating **Ruby-crowned Kinglets** had all left by 11/11, but on 12/16 the efforts of our area's CBCs turned up a couple of stragglers: one was at the Eddy Discovery Center (on the Waterloo CBC) and another was at Parker & Pinecross (on the Ann Arbor CBC). A single **Marsh Wren** persisted at Four Mile Lake through 11/9. An oddball **Gray Catbird** report came in from Nichols Arboretum on 12/9, but that bird could not be relocated. A singleton **Brown Thrasher** at Hewen's Creek Park on 11/11 was the last of that species for the year. A **Northern Mockingbird** put in a brief showing at a feeder on Loyola in Ann Arbor on 11/9, but other than that birders had to make the trek to the Manchester area to see one of these songsters. **American Pipit** migra-

tion extended through 12/5, with up to five birds reported from up to seven different locations..



White-eyed Vireo *Vireo griseus*, Crestland Dr, November 11 2023 (Wendy Conrad)



Northern Shrike *Lanius borealis*, LeFurge Woods, December 6 2023 (David Wilson)

A single **Common Redpoll** was found on the Ann Arbor CBC on 12/16; on the same day, another two were found at the Cedar Lake Campground on the Waterloo CBC. A **Red Crossbill** was reported from Nichols Arboretum on 11/20 but apparently moved right on through. Another **Red Crossbill** was observed starting on 12/16 and was joined by a second bird not long thereafter – sound recording analysis showed that these birds were of the Type 2 Ponderosa Pine variety. A flock of 30 **Lapland Longspurs** passed over Four Mile Lake on 12/11; the only other longspur was the one seen at Independence Lake during the Ann Arbor CBC. During the first two weeks of November scattered reports of up to four **Snow Buntings** were eBirded. After that, there was a duo at Loonfeather Point Park on 12/8 and a flock of 40 or so along Vreeland Rd on 12/10.

A very impressive flock of some 250 **American Tree Sparrows** in Manchester Twp set a new county high mark on 12/26. **Chipping Sparrow** reports were rather widely spread in time and place: there was one at Delhi Metropark (11/1), a group of six at County Farm Park (11/5), and three at Wagner & Huron River Dr (12/6). By and large, **Field Sparrows** vacated Washtenaw County by the first week of November, but a few hung around well past that – one was at Gotfredson & Cherry Hill (12/6) and another was at a private property on Stark Strasse (12/11). **Fox Sparrows** seemed to be everywhere, particularly in November – as many as four individuals were at over 20 locations! Not surprisingly, those numbers dropped off in December, but still, half a dozen sites hosted between one and four of these dapper sparrows. Repeating the pattern of the first two species in this paragraph, **Eastern Towhees** had pretty much all headed south by 11/11. However, the spike in birders in the field during the CBC season turned up a couple of late birds, at the Cherry Hill Nature Preserve (12/16) and at Watkins Lake County Preserve (12/17).



Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra*, Cedar Lake Campground, December 17 2023 (Bill Nolting)



Chipping Sparrow *Spizella passerina*, Delhi Metropark, November 1 2023 (Chase Masters)

During the first 2-3 weeks of November, **Rusty Blackbirds** moved through in pretty good numbers, with a maximum flock size of 20 birds. A much rarer **Brewer's Blackbird** graced a feeder station at Vorhies & Joy on 11/8. A pair of **Nashville Warblers** at Eberwhite Woods on 11/3 constituted only the second ever November record for that species. Maybe not quite as outlandish, a **Common Yellowthroat** at Four Mile Lake was pushing the boundaries in its own right and made for the fourth ever during November-December. Much more in line with the expected, small numbers of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** stuck around at five locations, (well) into December.

## Field Trip Calendar

### **Restoration Workday at Searles Nature Preserve**

**Saturday, January 27, 2:00 pm - 5:00 pm**

We will continue the good work of creating habitat and food resources for our beloved birds at Searles Nature Preserve, a 50-acre natural area that hosts the headwaters of Stony Creek. Tools and know-how will be provided. Please bring leather work gloves, wear long pants, tall socks, and closed-toe shoes or boots.

**Directions:** Meet at the entrance to the preserve on Bolla Road between Crane and Stony Creek Roads.

### **Weekend Walk for Birds at Nichols Arboretum**

**Saturday, February 3, 9:00 am - 11:00 am**

The Arb, with 165 species reported to eBird, is the number one hotspot for birds in the county. The diversity of habitat provides opportunities to discover a wide variety of species. Join us as we explore this local gem.

**Directions:** Meet at the east end of the arboretum at the Dow Prairie entrance. From Geddes Ave., turn north onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac. Check the website for a link to the map if you have never been there.

**Leader:** Matthew Spoor

### **Nature Walk at LeFurge Woods Nature Preserve**

**Sunday, February 4, 11:00 am - 1:00 pm**

Join naturalists George Hammond and Matt Spoor as we explore this 325-acre nature preserve owned and managed by [Southeast Michigan Land Conservancy](#). Bring your curiosity and questions as we investigate this wonderful cross section of southern Michigan habitat types. Trails wind throughout wetlands, meadows, agricultural lands, and, of course, wonderfully preserved LeFurge Woods.

**Directions:** Meet at the parking lot at 2384 N. Prospect Rd. Map: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/2UaYxTjCkrkEu6Pf9>.

**Leaders:** George Hammond & Matt Spoor

### **Tour: Museum of Zoology Bird Collection**

**Thursday, February 8, 7:00 pm**

Join us for a presentation and tour of the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology's Bird Collection. The collection, comprising 210,000 specimens, is the 5th largest in North America and the 2nd largest at a university. We are fortunate to have Dr. Ben Winger as our host for the evening. Dr. Winger is the Curator of Birds & Assistant Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. He will give a presentation followed by a tour. Due to the nature of the space, we will be limiting the tour to 30 people and to WAS members only. If there is space available the week prior to the event, we will open up this outing to non-members.

**Directions:** Registered attendees will meet at University of Michigan Research Museums Center at 3600 Varsity Drive. Map: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/iVWWdZN77x5vgsgbA>.

### **Trumpeter Swan Walk at Gallup Park with Detroit Bird Alliance**

**Saturday, February 10, 8:30 - 10:30 am**

Join Washtenaw Audubon and Detroit Audubon (soon to be Detroit Bird Alliance) as we partner to find and learn about Trumpeter Swans. We will explore other waterfowl on and around Geddes Pond at Gallup Park. This is always a fun event where we get to meet up with our fellow birders from Detroit to see and learn about this amazing species.

**Directions:** We will meet in the parking lot south of the wooden bridge.

**Leader:** Matthew Spoor

### **BIPOC Bird Walk at DeVine Preserve**

**Saturday, February 17, 9:30 am - 11:30 am**

We invite all people from the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) community and our white allies to join us on this walk to look for waterfowl and winter birds. All ages and skill levels are invited. We will have extra binoculars if you do not have any.

**Directions:** Meet in the parking lot at DeVine Preserve, 6110 W Liberty Rd.

**Leader:** Victor Chen

### **Birding the Upper Peninsula**

**Saturday, February 24 - Sunday, February 25**

We will travel to Sault Ste. Marie on Friday, February 16th, and bird all day Saturday and Sunday morning with a goal of departing Sault Ste. Marie around noon on Sunday. Target birds include: Snowy Owl, Bohemian Waxwing, Pine Grosbeak, Red and White-winged Crossbills, Evening Grosbeak, Ruffed and Sharp-tailed Grouse, Purple Finch, Snow Bunting, and more! Maybe the heavens will align for a Spruce Grouse lifer for your trip leader this year finally? Space is limited to 20 and membership is required. More trip details and membership information available at [www.washtenawaudubon.org](http://www.washtenawaudubon.org).

**Weekend Waterfowl Walk at Ford Lake**

**Sunday, February 25, 9:00 am - 11:00 am**

Ford Lake and its boardwalk provide one of the best winter birding opportunities in Washtenaw County. There have been 76 species seen at Ford Lake in February. We look forward to seeing a variety of waterfowl, gulls and local winter birds.

**Directions:** Meet at the parking lot off South Grove Street. Lot is located south of I-94 at the northeast corner of Ford Lake, across from the Citgo Station at the intersection of Service Drive and South Grove St. **Leader:** Matthew Spoor

**Restoration Workday at Searles Nature Preserve**

**Sunday, February 25, 2:00 pm - 4:00 pm**

Did you know Washtenaw Audubon owns a nature preserve? We do! Searles Nature Preserve is a 50-acre natural area that hosts the headwaters of Stony Creek. Did you also know that Ninety-seven percent of North American landbirds require animal, primarily insect, protein to raise their young? Most insects require specific, native, host plants for successful reproduction and this is why supporting a biodiverse ecosystem of native plants is so important. More on this here: <https://tinyl.io/93Ka> Join us as we work to remove invasive species and improve biodiversity to support the birds we love. Tools and know how will be provided. Please bring leather work gloves, wear long pants, tall socks, and closed-toe shoes or boots.

**Directions:** Meet at the entrance to the preserve on Bolla Road between Crane and Stony Creek Roads.

**Diversity in the Outdoors: Presentation at Mallet’s Creek Library**

**Wednesday, February 28, 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm**

Joint presentation between Natural Area Preservation and Ann Arbor District Library. Victor Chen (Education Chair for Washtenaw Audubon) and Brandan Freeman (founder of the Shades of the Outdoors BIPOC group) discuss their experiences of being a person of color in the outdoors and how we can all make the outdoors more welcoming for everybody.

**Directions:** 3090 E. Eisenhower Parkway (east of Stone School Road).

**Weekend Waterfowl Walk at Barton Pond**

**Sunday, March 3, 9:00 am - 11:00 am**

We will be searching for winter waterfowl on the pond. This is one of the top birding locations for March in Washtenaw County. See November Barton Pond eBird Sightings for a list of what has been seen and this eBird bar chart of what can be expected when. We may also search the surrounding nature area for overwintering birds.

Dress warm as it can be windy near the pond. Bring a scope if you have one. Most people don’t, so don’t worry, we share.

**Directions:** Meet at the Barton Nature Area (map) parking lot off Huron River Drive, 250 ft north of Bird Rd, near Barton Dam.

**Leaders:** Juliet Berger & Matthew Spoor

**Tour: University of Michigan Herbarium**

**Thursday, March 7, 7:00 - 9:00 pm**

Join us for a presentation and tour of the [University of Michigan Herbarium](https://umich.edu/herbarium) hosted by [Aly Baumgartner](https://umich.edu/herbarium/people/aly-baumgartner), applied paleobotanist and vascular plants collection manager. The collections consist of 1.7 million irreplaceable specimens of vascular plants, algae, bryophytes, fungi, and lichens originating from places and habitats that are now prohibitively expensive or dangerous to visit or that have been drastically altered by human activity. They include representatives of extinct species and populations, providing a portion of the only record available for studying effects of environmental change on the distribution, appearances, and genetic features of the world’s plants and fungi. Please know that a herbarium houses dried, pressed plants, so there will be no live plants there. The tour will be informal and participants are highly encouraged to bring curiosity and questions!

Due to the nature of the space, we will be limiting the tour to 30 people and to WAS members only. If there is space available the week prior to the event, we will open them to non-members.

**Directions:** Registered attendees will meet at University of Michigan Research Museums Center at 3600 Varsity Drive. Map: <https://maps.app.goo.gl/iVWWdZN77x5vgsgbA>.

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="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
Name: <input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: <input type="text"/>		<input type="checkbox"/> Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: <input type="text"/>	Email: <input type="text"/>	<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

Washtenaw Audubon has resumed in-person programs, although some of them will also be viewable on Zoom as hybrid programs, as well. Please check the website or Facebook before you come to Matthaei Botanical Gardens for a program, as occasionally a program will be moved from in-person to Zoom only, for various reasons.

**February 21, 7:30 p.m.**

### **Great Lakes Piping Plovers, with Joan Kellenberg**

Washtenaw Audubon Society and the Sierra Club Huron Valley Group have partnered to bring you this special presentation. After discovering the Great Lakes Piping Plover Recovery Team at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore in 2020, Joan joined them as a volunteer in 2021. She enjoys traveling north to spend hours on the beach educating park visitors about piping plovers and doing safety checks on nesting adults and new chicks. Last summer, she went to North Manitou Island, the largest Great Lakes piping plover breeding area, to track a new plover pair.

Joan lives in Ann Arbor and is a public health professional by training. She was an informal bird enthusiast until she discovered the Great Lakes piping plover. Now her family says it has become an obsession. She hopes to convince others to join the piping plover recovery effort! This will be a hybrid in-person (at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens) and virtual meeting. To connect by Zoom please use the following link: <https://us05web.zoom.us/j/3288051893?pwd=ZHdIdS9KMW5hdG9FK20wWWZPL0EzOT09>

**March 20, 7:30 p.m.**

### **Special Member Meeting to Vote on our new Name**

**Notice to all current members of Washtenaw Audubon:** At our October meeting, members voted in favor of dropping “Audubon” from our group’s name. At this meeting active members will be able to cast a ballot in an up or down vote on a name developed based upon the survey sent to all members in October 2023. As mentioned in the President’s Letter in this newsletter, the selected name was the result of the deliberations of a special subcommittee of WAS Board Members and other interested community members - full details on the process and expectations will be shared with members via email and our website.

Voting will be via anonymous paper ballot. Only in-person voting is permitted. Only current members as of March 1, 2024 are eligible to vote.

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

P.O. Box 130923

Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923