



NEWSLETTER

January/February 2015

Results from the 68th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count

by Jacco Gelderloos

In the weeks leading up to Christmas Bird Count (CBC) season we experienced what appears to be the “new normal.” After some average late fall weather in October and early November our area was hit with an impressive cold snap in the middle of that month—at this time of year lows in the single digits are not quite something we are accustomed to (yet), not even in our hardy neck of the woods. Then milder fall-like weather returned and all ice on ponds and lakes thawed out to reveal an abundance of open water.

Obviously, such a meteorological see-saw must have an impact on our bird life, and I for one was curious to see just what that might end up being by the time our count day rolled around. Would all of the semi-hardy birds have been pushed further south? Would any northern invasive species have made it down to Ann Arbor by the time we had our count? Would we continue to have any open water?

As count day approached it became clear that the mild weather was here to stay; temperatures would be hovering around freezing and no significant precipitation was in the forecast. For our observers this would mean almost pleasant counting circumstances, a welcome change from the frosty and snowbound 2013 count. When it became clear that winds were going to be light as well (good for owling), we looked all set for a promising CBC on December 20, 2014.

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President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon Members,

Welcome to the January/February 2015 edition of your Washtenaw Audubon Society Newsletter. I am pleased to introduce this issue, courtesy of the hard work of Nancy Davis, our fabulous newsletter editor. This is her third issue, and I am certain you will enjoy it!

The life of a birder in mid-winter Michigan isn't always easy. You may drive around the county looking for interesting birds from your vehicle, and step outside for a brisk moment to get a clearer view with your binoculars or scope. Dressing in layers is mandatory. Drive by local rivers and lakes looking for open water for waterfowl. Cruise around our agricultural areas looking for field birds and raptors. Hardier folk are trekking our trails in tall boots, snowshoes, or skis. I had a relatively easy stroll in the snow recently to see a large group of waterfowl at the Beach in the Arb, where dozens of Trumpeter Swans sounded their trumpets, and Goldeneye and Redhead dove for aquatic plants and invertebrates. Dan Sparks-Jackson led folks on a Washtenaw Audubon-sponsored winter field trip in January, with many stops to observe feeders and bushes, to check out raptors, to search for the elusive Northern Shrike, with an occasional stop to look for "Snow Larkspurs" on freshly manured fields. A surprise Northern Mockingbird on Burmeister Road was a real treat. Thanks, Dan! It was a terrific winter birding adventure.

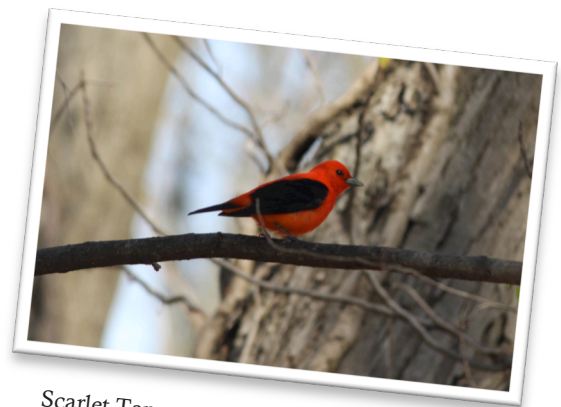
I have spent more time tending my feeders this winter, and the birds really appreciate what I am offering, since snow cover has been obscuring much of their food. A Hairy Woodpecker and Northern Flicker visit daily, to chow down at my suet feeders, and a Brown Creeper showed up recently to investigate the bark of our Elm tree. Winter can be a great time to bird, from your home or car window, or to enjoy the peace of a snow-covered forest walk. Check out this Newsletter or our website: www.washtenawaudubon.org for articles about the 2014 CBC, past field trip write-ups, more information on winter and spring field trips coming up soon, program information, and more.

The next time I write this letter, spring will be upon us. I am holding that beautiful idea in my thoughts.

In the meanwhile, as always,

I am for the birds.

Juliet Berger



Scarlet Tanager (Matty Hack)

Christmas Bird Count Results *(continued from page 1)*

The pre-dawn coverage by our owling crews amounted to a little more than 25 hours in the field, which resulted not only in good numbers of Eastern Screech-Owls and Great Horned Owls (both of them present in numbers well above the recent 10-year average), but also, finally, in the location of a pair of Barred Owls—the first of the species since 1987! I can only imagine that as the woods in our count circle continue to mature, this species will be found more regularly, much like with Pileated Woodpecker, which was first found in 2008.

Most of the other volunteers (68 field observers and 3 feeder watchers) were unaware of this auspicious start to our count, but as is the case just about every year, pretty much every observer group in our circle encountered some notable species. At the end of the day, we tallied a total of 73 species (marginally above the recent 10-year average of 72.1 species), as well as 1 hybrid, 3 sp.'s, and 3 distinct domesticated varieties. No additional species were found during count week. Last year, the exact location of the Ann Arbor crow roost was a mystery, which caused not only a relatively low crow count but a correspondingly low overall count as well. Luckily, this year was a different story and we ended with a grand total of just over 36,000 birds, roughly 3,000 over the 10-year average.

The mild spell during December turned out to be a rather mixed blessing—essentially all bodies of water were open, meaning that waterfowl and other water-dependent birds had many options for feeding and roosting (both inside and outside the count circle). This meant they were not concentrated in a handful of unfrozen spots on the Huron River or otherwise icy lakes, as is more often the case during our CBC. As a result, we found a significant array of water bird species, but with unexpectedly low numbers for some. In the dabbling duck category, the most notable finds were three Northern Pintails and lone Northern Shovelers and Green-winged Teals; oddly, we missed expected birds like Wood Duck, Gadwall, and American Wigeon, although a dozen and a half American Black Ducks were a decent tally for recent years. We located a half dozen species of diving ducks, with a Lesser Scaup the main highlight. As a good illustration of the mixed bag phenomenon I mentioned, the two “goldeneye” species were found in below average numbers, whereas the two merganser species were present in significantly above average numbers. One Pied-billed Grebe (average) and only two American Coots (well below the 10-year average) rounded out the waterfowl category. Similarly, an average eight Great Blue Herons were found in scattered locations, but only three Belted Kingfishers turned up, which is only 50% of the average!

In the raptor category, all the usuals were found, with Cooper's Hawk tying the all-time high of 23 for the second year in a row. Other notable finds were five Turkey Vultures, an immature Bald Eagle, and a Peregrine Falcon at the UM hospital. This species has been found annually since 2005, which for now is also still true of its open country congener, the American Kestrel. Only two were found on count day, in spite of the complete lack of snow cover.

In line with the continuing struggles of field birds in our circle, a measly two Ring-necked Pheasants were found, although that was still an improvement over last year's loner. On the flip side, the Wild Turkey continued its upward trend, with triple-digit numbers tallied for the second year in a row; five areas reported this conservation success story in 2014.

Woodpeckers continue to put on a strong showing—both Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers were present in numbers some 30% above the 10-year average. As a result, the overall tally of 464 woodpeckers was also about one-third over that average. Furthermore, for the fourth year in a row, Pileated Woodpeckers were located, so it appears that this recent addition to our count's list (the first record was in 2008!) may have become a regular fixture for the Ann Arbor CBC—continuing woodlot maturation will continue to aid this species in its spread out of its western Washtenaw stronghold.

Lack of snow cover and mild temperatures could be expected to be beneficial to passerines as well, but, as was the case with waterfowl, it turned out to be a mixed blessing. Many observers commented on the scattershot nature of the day's birding: small pockets of lots of activity, followed by large areas devoid of birds. Some resident species such as Black-capped Chickadee and White-breasted Nuthatch were found in record numbers, but frugivores such as American Robin, Hermit Thrush, and Cedar Waxwing were, for all intents and purposes, all but absent. The two thrushes were found in numbers more than 60% below the recent average and Cedar Waxwings posted their lowest numbers since 1958, no doubt due to the limited fruit crop in the area.

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Christmas Bird Count Results *(continued from page 3)*

Away from the traditional spots in the Observatory area, the crow roost was located on the south side of town, along Eisenhower Blvd, specifically near the South Industrial intersection. With the “regular” crow counter (Mike Kielb) out of town for the holidays, Dea Armstrong and I cooperated closely to tally the roost. Starting around 4:00 p.m., Dea observed the crows flying in from the west over Briarwood Mall and was able to direct me to the roosting site off Eisenhower. Counting the crows that were already at the roost turned out to be nearly impossible and only an estimate of the constantly moving birds was an option. However, Dea had a good handle on the birds coming in from the west and I was able to get on the stream coming up from the south. After darkness set in we conferred and agreed that between us we had (conservatively) counted a total of some 17,000 crows, almost half of the total birds found on our CBC!

More or less expected, we turned up a good variety of sparrows, with eight species tallied by count day’s end. Impressively, three of the four unusual species among them (Eastern Towhee, White-crowned Sparrow, and Lapland Longspur) were all found by a single observer, Chris McCreedy in area G—kudos to Chris! In spite of, or, more likely, because of the lack of snow cover, individual numbers of all four of our “bread and butter” sparrows (American Tree, Song, White-throated, and Junco) were down considerably as compared to the 10-year average. More than likely, most of these birds were still to the north or more widely scattered in surrounding areas. The latter scenario probably also applies to Horned Lark, which was missed for the first time since 1996!

Because they are found uncommonly on our count, reports of any blackbird species are notable. A Rusty Blackbird observed by Maggie Jewett was the first for our count since 1988 and one of very few winter records for Washtenaw County generally speaking. After last year’s cowbird bonanza (180 of them), Chris McCreedy turned up an even larger flock in the same location this year—after going over his photos, he estimates that there were at least 300 birds present!

In contrast to the depressed sparrow numbers, finches were present in good variety and numbers. Twelve Common Redpolls and two Purple Finches were the clear highlights, but the other three species were found in numbers well above average, as were House Sparrows.



CBC participants at the potluck dinner at Matthaei Botanical Gardens.
(Mike Sefton)

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president@washtenawaudubon.org

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programs@washtenawaudubon.org

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membership@washtenawaudubon.org

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Bryn Martin
fieldtrips@washtenawaudubon.org

Education

Dea Armstrong
ddarm@umich.edu

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grackle@umich.edu

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masrep@washtenawaudubon.org

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Nancy Davis
newsletter@washtenawaudubon.org

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.

In retrospect, the 2014 Ann Arbor CBC was essentially an “average” count, much like the 2013 edition was, but for entirely different reasons. As I wrote last year, “that is not to imply that the 2013 edition was a bad count—I think it is safe to say that, yes, average means just that, average, but that average can still have some goodies on offer.” That statement very much holds true for us in 2014: there were a few high counts (four in all), several low/lowish counts (field birds and a handful of passerines), unusual species (Barred Owl, Pileated Woodpecker, Rusty Blackbird, to name a few), and some interesting overall/long term trends (think woodpeckers). From the pre-dawn Great Horned Owl hooting contest until the sky filled with crows at dusk, I know I had a great day out in the field, and I can only imagine that most of you share that sentiment.

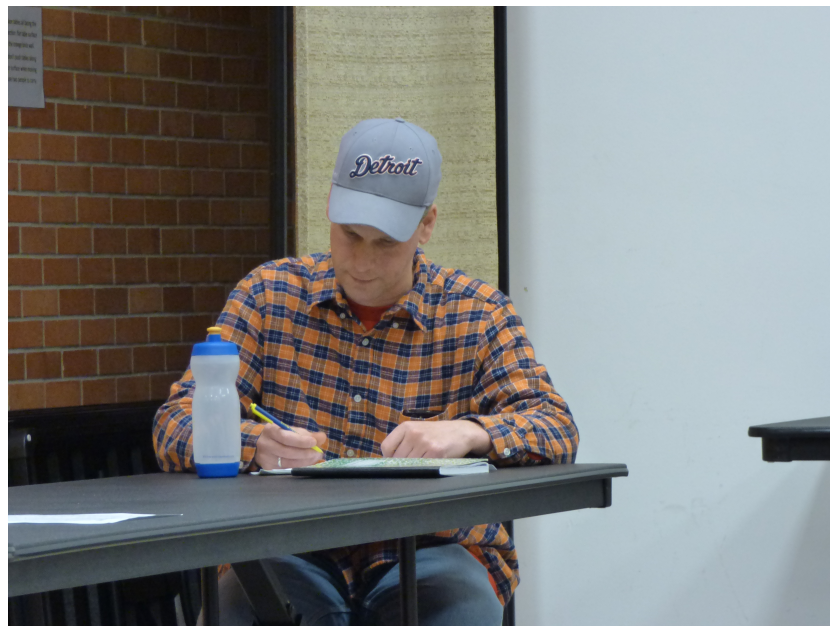
If the spreadsheet with our results whets your appetite for more, take a look at National Audubon’s summary of last season’s results:

http://birds.audubon.org/summary-114th-christmas-bird-count-2013-2014?utm_source=science&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=2014-11-13_americanbirds

The amount of information available through NAS’s website is simply staggering, and allows you to manipulate and review data with a few clicks—amazing stuff!

Last and most definitely not least, I have to express my heart-felt gratitude to all of you, volunteers; you helped make this year’s count a smoothly-run event once again—without you, counters, area leaders, and potluck/feeder watch coordinators, our count would not be as well-oiled a machine as it is. A special “thank you” is in order to Artemis and Harold Eyster, who were kind enough to fill in as area 5 leaders in Mike Kielb’s absence. They did so admirably and capably, so muchas gracias! See you all next year! [Editor’s Note: We are grateful to Jacco for his tremendous efforts on the CBC. Thank you, Jacco. We learn so much from you each year.]

See the full count results in the March/April WAS Newsletter!



Ann Arbor CBC’s fearless leader, Jacco Gelderloos. (Mike Sefton)

Letter from a Tufted Titmouse

by John M. Swales

Between you and me,
 I'm not exactly enamoured
 Of the name you know me by.
 This 'tufted' moniker invokes,
 I fear, a possible lack of grooming,
 While the noun only brings to mind
 Some silent furry denizen
 Of the dark and dreary underworld.
 So when, on my branch, you see me
 All dressed up in orange, white and gray,
 Returning your look with my
 Black penetrating eye,
 And when, in the distance, you hear me
 Petering away with my pure whistles
 Cascading through the winterscape,
 And when, somewhat closer, you note
 My rich underscore of sibilants and nasals,
 You may understand that I
 Would prefer to be known as
 The *Orange-flanked Crested Whistler*.
 So, when you next revise
 The bird names on the official list,
 Please remember this.
 Thank you for your support.



Rusty Blackbird Spring Migration Blitz 2015!

Rusty Blackbirds are one of the fastest declining birds in North America and conservationists are looking for birders like you to help understand this commonly overlooked species. Anyone can participate and it's easy to get involved; *just go birding!* From March through April look and listen for these "squeaky-hinge" birds and report your sightings on eBird. For more information on Rusties and The Blitz, please visit www.rustyblackbird.org. Michigan Audubon will be sponsoring contests for both solo birders and teams so stay tuned for even more Rusty goodness! Contact Rachelle Roake at RRoake@michiganaudubon.org to learn more. Get ready to get Rusty!

Ornithology: An in-depth look at bird life, anatomy, and identification

Beginning Thursday, March 5, 2015, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
 Adults, \$295/person

Join Dea Armstrong, City of Ann Arbor Ornithologist and expert birder, and Francie Krawcke, Leslie Science & Nature Center Raptor Program Director, for this eight-week ornithology class. Perfect for the beginner or intermediate birder, sessions will delve into anatomy and physiology, behavior, taxonomy, reproduction, vocalizations, and identification. Class consists of Thursday evening lectures from 7:00-9:00 p.m. and Saturday morning field trips; field trip start times vary due to sunrise time and field trip destination. Sessions are 3/5, 3/7, 3/12, 3/14, 3/19, 3/21, 3/26, 3/28, 4/2, 4/11, 4/16, 4/18, 4/23, 4/25, 4/30, & 5/2. Space is limited, and preregistration is required. Call to register for this event at 734-997-1553 or register online at <http://www.lesliesnc.org/events/raptors>.

December 2014 Gull Trip by Rob French

On Saturday, December 6, Washtenaw Audubon escorted more than 20 enthusiastic birders to the largest landfill facility in the county, and one of the largest in southeast Michigan. Now owned by Advanced Disposal and occupying most of a square mile tucked into the extreme northeast corner of the county, this landfill is a magnet for gulls patrolling the region for some calories.

As the group arrived at the landfill and was led to our viewing position by the staff, it was clear that there was an abundance of gulls. However, we only had a brief period of decent viewing early, but then the local Red-tailed Hawks awoke and began cruising the skies around the landfill. The raptors made the gulls skittish and kept them high in the air for most of the morning. Although this made gull-watching very difficult, a bonus was that one of the 8-10 raptors was a dark morph Red-tailed Hawk. An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull was found during this time, but not much else that could be confidently identified.

Finally in the last 30-40 minutes of our available time the gulls came down low and started feeding. As they were sifting through the trash, we were sifting through them. We eventually found a fairly cooperative first-winter Thayer's Gull that allowed multiple people in the party to get photos. The ID was debated, but photos that clearly showed dark tertials ultimately ruled out Iceland Gull and clinched the field ID. With minutes remaining in our time there, another pale gull caught our attention and was also photographed. The identity of this gull (which we knew to be a second-winter plumage) was debated. But further study of photos and consultation with others led to its ID also as a Thayer's Gull, with reviewers noting that the tail and wingtips were too dark for an Iceland gull. (For a more detailed report about the Gull Trip, go to www.washtenawaudubon.org.)

Upcoming WAS Field Trips (Feb 2015 to March 2015)

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

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

Saturday/Sunday, February 21/22 (TBD)

This field trip's final itinerary will be determined the week prior to the event based on what is being seen and where. Possibilities include any winter specialties, congregations of waterfowl or bald eagles, owls, etc. The time and place will be posted to the web site and on the list serve birders@great-lakes.net exactly one week prior.

March (Specific date TBD)

Kensington Birdwatching for Beginners

This will be a great opportunity for kids, as well as adults of all levels. Highlights will potentially include close looks at Sandhill Cranes, the Heron rookery, nesting Osprey, migrating waterfowl, and extremely bold and friendly Chickadees.

Saturday, April 4, 2015

One-Road Challenge

Please participate in this fun and friendly competition sponsored by Washtenaw Audubon.

—Form a team of at least three people and select a public road in Washtenaw County that is likely to yield a wide variety of species in early April. The following roads will *not* be eligible: Huron River Drive, Michigan Avenue, North Territorial. All other roads will be allowed, but **please use good judgment in considering safety** in addition to bird-related considerations.

—You will not “own” your road; more than one team is allowed to use a road. If your road extends out of the county, only the portion *in* the county is usable.

—Start searching this road as early as you like on the morning of the event (i.e., any time after midnight). Look and listen for as many bird species as possible, stopping no later than 11:00 a.m. Note: Only species observed by 11:00 a.m. will count.

—Species count if they are identified positively by either sound or sight. At least half of your team has to see or hear that species for it to count.

—Many more details (and a few more rules) can be found on the Events page at www.washtenawaudubon.org.

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	Membership Dues	
Additional Donation \$ _____		_____ Individual Household	\$25
		(online only \$20)	
Name: _____		_____ Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
Address: _____		_____ Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
Phone: _____	Email: _____	_____ Patron	\$50

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

WAS Monthly Programs

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

February 18 Birding the Great Migration in Kenya

Jerry Jourdan will lead us on a photographic tour through the Masai Mara National Park following the Zebra and Wildebeest migration from Tanzania into Kenya. Jerry is an avid birder and photographer, who has presented his programs to many Audubon groups and at a number of birding festivals.

March 18 Birding, Bonding, and Big Days: Notes from Camp Colorado 2014

In July 2014, Washtenaw Audubon young birders Matty and Benjamin Hack attended the ABA's Camp Colorado. Join them as they recount some of their memories, birding moments, and learning experiences from their week in the West. Matty is a junior at Community High, and Benjamin is an eighth grader at Slauson Middle School. They are both co-founders of the Michigan Young Birders Club.

April 15 My Really Big Year

Join popular Washtenaw Audubon speaker Michael Kielb for an account of his Big Year that goes beyond only seeing birds. Michael cataloged every living thing he could find during 2014, which included butterflies, moths, dragonflies, plants, fungi and the Goddess only knows what else. For the total number of species seen in his Really Big Year, and photos of some of them, don't miss this intriguing talk.

Washtenaw Audubon Society

P.O. Box 130923
Ann Arbor, MI 48113-0923