



NEWSLETTER

November /December 2020

75th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count Saturday, December 19, 2020*

In my CBC announcements, I usually make comparisons to prior years – it will not come as a surprise to any of you that 2020 will be an exception to that rule. For the past seven months birding as a social activity has been severely curtailed by Covid restrictions and precautions, and at present there is no end in sight to these limits on group birding. Directly tied to the wider Covid-related restrictions, the National Audubon Society issued a bulletin in which they set several strict guidelines for holding a Christmas Bird Count, *if* one can be held at all under local government regulations:

1. Wait until November 15 at the earliest to confirm CBC will take place, if local regulations allow.
2. Cancel all in-person compilation gatherings.
3. Social distancing and/or masking are required at all times in the field.
4. Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social “pod” groups.
5. Activities must comply with all current state and municipal COVID-19 guidelines.

Keeping these five guidelines in mind, I think we should still be able to run our CBC this year. *However*, I cannot yet say with certainty that we will be allowed to – the local and State health authorities can at any time institute another lock-down, which will mean that NAS will not allow us to run a CBC at all. Therefore, I can only tentatively say that this year’s Ann Arbor CBC will take place on **Saturday, December 19th**. Keep a close eye on the WAS CBC page (<https://washtenawaudubon.org/events-top/christmas-bird-count>) for updates!

For now, I can tell you that some things will stay the same, and that others will change. The circle will still be divided in eight parts, each coordinated by an area leader (see the listing below). You can sign up for a given area by registering on the WAS CBC page, by contacting the area leader by phone, or by contacting me - I can assign you to an area where volunteers are needed most. >>>continued on page 3<<<

President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon and friends,

By now, we all know the results of the election, and our President-Elect is Joe Biden. Future President Biden won with more votes than any President in US history. While he hasn't explicitly addressed some of the environmental issues many of us are concerned about, yet, we know he will make some of the changes that are necessary to focus on existential threats like mitigating Climate Change. He has pledged to rejoin the Paris Climate Accords. That is such good news for the birds we all love!

While I can't top that good news, I'm excited to let you all know that this is an irruptive year for Finches, and several species will be spending the fall and winter in our area, making the prospects of interesting winter bird feeding and watching really good. We now have Pine Siskins, Purple Finches, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Evening Grosbeaks, and Red and White-winged Crossbills in Washtenaw County. Most of us with bird feeders, have seen Red-breasted Nuthatches, already. I had a flock of Evening Grosbeaks at my feeder, which my husband photographed, below. In case you are wondering how to attract them, they prefer platform feeders with sunflower seeds. Some of us have seen Red and White-winged Crossbills at Cedar Lake Campground off Pierce Rd. near Chelsea. It's a beautiful place for a walk, and maybe you'll see some of these incredibly cool finches, with crossed bills adapted for prying open the scales of pinecones to extract the nutritious pine nuts within.

This month's edition of the newsletter contains vital information about our Christmas Bird Count. Look for details from our indefatigable coordinator and compiler, Jacco Gelderloos, in this newsletter, on FB and on our website. As always, there will be opportunities to count birds at your feeder if you live within the count circle. There is a registration form on our website, if you wish to participate.

Please stay safe this holiday season. Like many others in our community, my family will be sticking close to home and celebrating with our children. We'll hope to Zoom with family members, so we can share our love, and all remain as protected as possible during the Pandemic. We are lucky, as birders, that our community can still practice our hobby. However, remember to mask if you will be in a busier outdoor space. I've found the Arb to be too busy for my comfort on the weekends, unless I am masked.

I'm looking forward to Keith Dickey's upcoming program on Birding Oahu, November 18th at 7:30. The Zoom link is on FB and our Website, as well as in this newsletter. I hope to see many of you there!

As always, I am for the birds!

All the best, stay safe, stay well and good birding—

Juliet Berger, President

Washtenaw Audubon Society



Evening Grosbeaks (Scott Huizenga)

75th Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count

>>>continued from page 1<<<

Social distancing and wearing a mask will be required of all participants, and carpooling can only be done within the confines of the rules set by NAS. These guidelines may prompt us to set a limit on the number of counters per area, so as to maintain social distancing more readily while out in the field.

The biggest change will be the cancellation of the potluck-tally event. Even if the University of Michigan were to allow it, the NAS guidelines do not. Instead, we will hold the tally remotely at 6:30 p.m., via Zoom:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/98850893544>

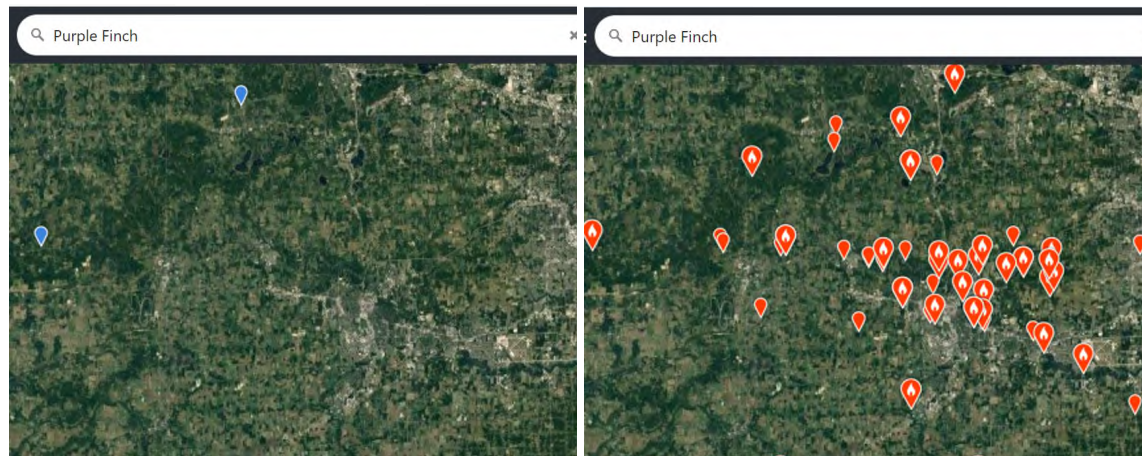
Or Dial: +1 312 626 6799

Meeting ID: 988 5089 3544

No passcode

Tune in to hear about all the avian goodies that were turned up by our counters. Personally, I thoroughly enjoy the “oohs” and “aahs” associated with a rare species or with an impressive tally for a given species!

As I write this, our area is in the middle of a major irruption of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches, Pine Siskins, and even Evening Grosbeaks (!) – this newsletter’s rarity article has tried to put the magnitude of the irruption in context. For now, check out the contrast between the October 2019 and 2020 eBird range maps for Purple Finch below!



Purple Finch, Oct. 2019

Purple Finch, Oct. 2020

Certainly, it would be great if these visitors from the north were to hang around until count day. But their presence this early in the season also begs the question what other species will find their way down to our neck of the woods. For example, will we experience a White-winged Crossbill irruption like we did in 2008-2009? Or will (a few) Pine Grosbeaks turn up locally, for the first time since the 1980s? Time will tell – no matter what, our count will continue to contribute its piece to the overall picture of winter bird distribution in the western hemisphere. To check out historical CBC results for yourself, visit The National Audubon Society’s website (<http://netapp.audubon.org/cbcobservation/>). Here you can not only find overall trends, but also take a look at historical results for every count circle!

If you’re unfamiliar with the CBC format, a quick reminder of the nature of our count is in order. All CBCs are conducted during a 3-week period from December 14 to January 5, all over the western (and even a small and growing part of the eastern) hemisphere. Historically, the Ann Arbor count always takes place on the 3rd Saturday in December, to prevent scheduling conflicts with other nearby counts. Each count circle covers an area 15 miles in diameter; the Ann Arbor circle is centered on the Foster Road bridge, near the intersection of Maple Road and Huron River Drive and extends roughly from Dexter in the west to Dixboro in the east, and from Whitmore Lake in the north to the Ann Arbor Airport in the south – the [map](#) on the WAS CBC pages shows the count circle in immaculate detail. Our objective is to identify all bird species present in this circle and count how many individuals of each species are present. In addition to the daylight bird census, several hardy observers will conduct a pre-dawn search for owls.

To participate in our count, please use the online sign-up form on the WAS CBC page. This way, you can designate the area in which you’d like to count, or, by not selecting a specific area, allow me to assign you to where you are needed most. After you’ve signed up, an alert is sent to me, which I will then forward to the area leader of your preferred count area. Of course, you can also still email or call me (CBC Compiler Jacco Gelderloos) or your preferred area’s leader - check out the detailed maps on the [WAS website](#) to see which of the eight count areas suits you best.

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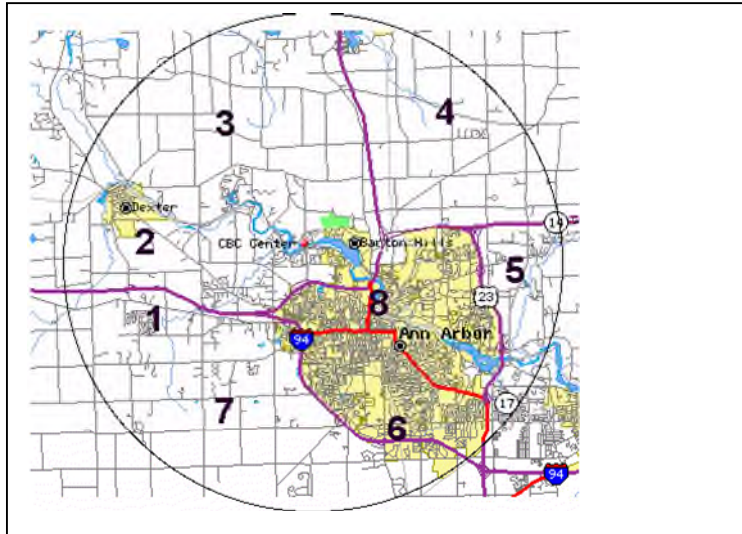
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Newsletter

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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.

If you'd rather not brave the weather (whatever it may be like on count day), or if you would prefer to not take any chances with Covid, you can stay indoors and pitch in as a feeder watcher. If you have a feeder within the count circle, this is a fun and easy way to participate. (**Remember:** the feeder MUST be within the count circle, otherwise the data is invalid for our count – simply type your address into Google Maps to make sure, or check with me). Like field observers, you may sign up to participate for any length of time – from one hour to all day. Contact feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemester for more information, to sign up, or to get feeder watch forms.



Information regarding the count will be updated immediately if anything new becomes available – please make sure to check the WAS CBC page where any updates will be posted as count day approaches. Given the volatile situation surrounding our CBC this year, please keep an eye on <http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/> for news and updates.

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Potluck Coordinator: Nancy French nfrench@umich.edu
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Ann Arbor CBC Web Site:
<http://www.washtenawaudubon.org/annarborcbc.php>

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

September-October 2020: Fall Highlights

The Highlight(s)

In the previous rarity article, I mentioned that this fall looked like it might shape up to be an irruption year for **Red-breasted Nuthatches**. As it happened, the movement that started in early August continued into the September-October timeframe, with reports of these cute, yet hardy songbirds coming in from all over the County, with an astonishing 30 noted at Stinchfield Woods on 9/12. Less expected, though not unheard of, was the southbound irruptive movement of both **Pine Siskins** and **Purple Finches** that kicked off in early October. Of the northern finch species, **Pine Siskins** are generally the more common, but not often this early in the season. Several locations featured double-digit-sized flocks, and a whopping 100 gathered in a neighborhood on Ann Arbor's east side on 10/12. As far as **Purple Finches** go, they have been uncommon, almost rare in recent years. Only 11 out of the past 20 CBCs have turned them up, with a maximum tally of 16. Needless to say, the county-wide surge in mid-October was definitely extraordinary – flocks of 20+ birds were noted at Four Mile Lake (24, on 10/14), the Cherry Hill Preserve (37, on 10/12), and Nichols Arboretum (44, on 10/14). Smaller number of these understated finches were generally anywhere there were berries to feed on. Most exciting though, was the influx of **Evening Grosbeaks** (apparently from breeding areas in Quebec), which started with the arrival of eight of these northern finches at the Matthaie Botanical Gardens on 10/25. In the week that followed a flurry of observations came in from around the County, but frustratingly often these nomads were there one minute, gone the next. Luckily, feeders proved to be a reasonably good bet for catching a glimpse of these birds, and at least five spots ended up hosting flocks of 10 or more birds. Just outside the county, a yard in eastern Jackson County was visited by a whopping 68 of these beautiful finches!



Purple Finch *Haemorrhous purpureus*, Draper-Houston Meadow Preserve, October 17 2020 (Karen Markey)



Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus*, Spring Hollow Ct, October 27 2020 (George Case)



Red-breasted Nuthatch *Sitta canadensis* & Pine Siskin *Spinus pinus*, Chelsea, October 20 2020 (Michael Bowen)

Waterfowl through Rails

As summer turns to fall the variety of waterfowl in our area steadily increases, especially so as September turns to October. That said, the short stay of a pair of **Ross's Geese** just north of Saline on 10/7 caused quite a stir. Similarly, a group of up to eight **Cackling Geese** at the Milan Nature Area drew in many observers from 10/16 – 10/19. Though not terribly uncommon in late October, two **Tundra Swans** at Gallup (10/1) and a single bird at Four Mile Lake (10/6 – 10/13) were certainly on the early end of migration.

Small groups of **Northern Pintails** moved through starting with three at Four Mile Lake from 9/17 – 9/30, three at Sharon Mills County Park (10/1), six at Trinkle Marsh (10/10 – 10/21), and four more at Four Mile Lake on 10/28. Among diving ducks, the clear highlight came at the very tail end of October when on 10/30 two **Long-tailed Ducks** were found on Barton Pond, followed by another on Independence Lake the next day – possibly one of the Barton Pond birds made the short flight between these two lakes. Single **Red-breasted Mergansers** were observed on Whitmore Lake (10/25), in Chelsea (10/26), and on Ford Lake (10/31).



Ross's Goose *Anser rossii*, Woodland Dr E, October 7 2020 (Cynthia Weber)



Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, Barton Pond, October 30 2020 (Juliet Berger)

Generally more of a spring-summer bird, single **Eastern Whip-poor-wills** were encountered on two separate occasions: near Zeeb & Joy on 9/2 and along Stinchfield Woods Rd on 9/19. After September, any hummingbird in our area deserves close scrutiny, but no unusual species were found among the eight hummers observed at seven locations during the first half of October. Still, two **Ruby-throated Hummingbirds** persisting near North Bay Park until 10/10, and another near Saline on 10/15 were certainly pushing the envelope as far as departure dates go! Similarly, rails tend to have departed by the start of October, so two separate **Virginia Rail** reports on 10/1 were definitely notable. One was found by a group of birders in the wetlands in the northwest corner of Vreeland & Prospect, the other in the Pinckney SRA. Likewise, five **Soras** at four locations certainly stands out, with one hanging out at North Bay Park until 10/28! The Trinkle Marsh **Common Gallinules** did not tarry anywhere near this late into the season – they were last seen on 9/15.



Ruby-throated Hummingbird *Archilochus colubris*, near North Bay Park, October 10 2020 (Bruce Moorman)

Shorebirds through Loons

Adding to this year's shorebird bonanza, a **Black-bellied Plover** spent over a week (10/22 – 10/30) in an agricultural field along Joy Rd, near Jennings Rd. A lone **Semipalmated Plover** was found at Four Mile Lake on 9/6 and opted not to stick around. **Stilt Sandpipers** extended this fall's superb showing well into October, with three different set of two turning up in our County: at Four Mile Lake from 9/1 – 9/7, at Sharon Mills County Park from 9/14 – 10/10, and again at Four Mile Lake from 10/1 – 10/7. The group of small *calidris* sandpipers was well represented this fall. A **Sanderling** made a very brief stop at the Reno & Hieber field of last period fame on 9/8; a more obliging **Baird's Sandpiper** spent three days in the same location from 9/8 – 9/10, delighting many local birders. Unbelievably, a second 2020 **Buff-breasted Sandpiper** was picked out in a huge gathering of some 150 Killdeer in a meadow at the corner of Arkona & Jordan from 9/3 – 9/4 – although it was (very) hard to find at times, this dapper bird often approached the road quite closely to show off its subtle beauty. Small groups of **Semipalmated Sandpipers** were present in three locations through 9/9. Due to their rather secretive nature, **American Woodcocks** are not often reported during times when they are not calling, but individual birds were seen in at least seven locations through the end of October. Most notably, a whopping four were observed at Hudson Mills Metropark.



Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*, Joy & Jennigs Rd, October 29 2020 (Bill Nolting)



Buff-breasted Sandpiper *Calidris subruficollis*, Arkona & Jordan Rd, September 3 2020 (Brendan Klick)

Bonaparte's Gulls turned up in a couple of locations: 1 at North Bay Park (9/5) and as many as 15 at Four Mile Lake (9/16 – 10/20). The North Bay Park **Caspian Terns** (up to 7 birds) persisted until 9/22; a lone bird circling over Ann Arbor's east side on 9/22 was decidedly more unexpected! Pretty much right on schedule, Common Loons arrived in the middle of October, at Independence Lake on 10/14 and Whitmore Lake on 10/21.



Caspian Tern *Hydroprogone caspia*, North Bay Park, September 16 2020 (Bill Nolting)

Herons through Falcons

A very late **Least Bittern** was found at the Jack Smiley Nature Preserve on 9/19 – apart from the frankly ridiculous bird on the 1999 CBC, this is most likely the latest fall record in Washtenaw County for this species. Four different **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were present during September, with at least two of them extending their stays into October, up until 10/12 at Oakwoods Nature Area. Even more unusually, a single bird was spotted at Four Mile Lake on 10/23, one of very few local records that late in the year. After the adult bird in June-July, a very confiding juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** spent the first week of October (through 10/6) in a subdivision off Lohr Rd, feeding on crawfish in its favored pond. According to the locals, this youngster had been around for two months before its presence was revealed to the birding community.



Black Vulture *Coragyps atratus*, Creature Conservancy, October 1 2020 (Geoff Malosh)



Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *Nyctanassa nyctanassa*, Lohr Lake subdivision, October 3 2020 (Darlene Friedman)

In yet another case of “I can’t believe another one of these showed up”, a second, and provably different, **Black Vulture** was found in the same location at Ann Arbor-Saline & Pleasant Lake Rd, and appeared there off and on from 9/30 – 10/4. The first of the fall’s **Golden Eagles** soared over the Torrey Rd hawk watch site on 10/31, being harassed by a pair of Bald Eagles. The period’s only **Red-shouldered Hawk** was over the Jack Smiley Nature Preserve on 10/3; **Rough-legged Hawks** were limited to one over Jennings Rd on 10/25 and another in the Vreeland Rd corridor from 10/29 – 10/30. **Barred Owls** put in a good show, with single birds in five separate, well-spaced locations throughout the period, and a pair at Silver Lake on 10/13. Always a treat, a **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was vocal in the east woodlot at the LeFurge Woods from 9/29 – 10/24. Down-town Ann Arbor was the only place to find **Peregrine Falcons** this fall, with observations through the end of October.



Rough-legged Hawk *Buteo lagopus*, Vreeland & Gotfredson Rd, October 29 2020 (Dominick Fenech)



Barred Owl *Strix varia*, Miller Nature Area, October 17 2020 (Juliet Berger)

Passerines: Flycatchers through Pipits

Southbound migration for flycatchers stretched into the third week of September, with seven widely scattered reports for **Olive-sided Flycatchers** and, similarly, nine nicely spread-out observations of **Yellow-bellied Flycatchers**. The majority of these involved single birds, but two Olive-sideds were at the Arb on 9/9, and two Yellow-bellies were near Whitmore Lake on 9/13. A **Philadelphia Vireo** at Saginaw Forest on 10/3 was hitting the tail end of that species’s fall migration window. By the same token, a **Cliff Swallow** at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens on 9/2 was rather late, as well.



Olive-sided Flycatcher *Contopus cooperi*, Nichols Arboretum, September 10 2020 (Dan McGee)



Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*, Clark & Avis Spike Preserve, September 16 2020 (Karen Markey)

Marsh Wrens continued their good showing from late summer; single birds were seen at Trinkle Marsh (9/2 – 10/5), Independence Lake (9/10), and the Koenn Preserve (9/26). A pretty surprising high count of four of these feisty birds were encountered at the water conservation property at the northwest corner of Vreeland and Prospect on 10/1 and continued to be reported from there through 10/9. As usual, **Northern Mockingbirds** were mostly reported from the Manchester area, with as many as four at the Watkins Lake County Preserve on 9/12. Away from the southwestern corner of the county, a pair was found at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens on 10/1; possibly one of these birds was (re)located at Marshall Park on 10/30. Single **American Pipits** were reported from three locations, all during the 10/3 – 10/9 timeframe: at the Conservancy Farm (10/3), at Independence Lake (10/8), and along Vreeland Rd (10/9).

Passerines: Sparrows through Warblers

Starting in late September, **Fox Sparrows** showed off their subtle beauty in half a dozen locations across the county. Reports of **Vesper Sparrows** were limited to the southeastern corner of the county, with two at the Torrey Road Hawk Watch site on 10/6, and one at Arkona & Ridge Rd on 10/7. The most exciting find in the sparrow family was a gorgeous **Nelson's Sparrow** that scurried around the edge of a small pond on the water conservation property in the northwest corner of Vreeland & Prospect from 9/30 – 10/2. Generally gone by the start of September, a group of seven **Bobolinks** at the Ann Arbor Airport was notable. Almost three weeks later, three very late birds were still hanging around the Conservancy Farm (9/19) and one was seen along Vreeland on 9/21.



Nelson's Sparrow *Ammodramus nelsoni*, Vreeland & Prospect Rd, October 2 2020 (Juliet Berger)



Golden-winged Warbler *Vermivora chrysoptera*, Hudson Mills Metropark, September 1 2020 (Michael Bowen)

Warblers put in a great showing this fall, with southbound migration extending well into the fall period. All in all, an impressive twenty species were reported at some point in October! Three individual **Northern Waterthrushes** were found this fall: at Burns-Stokes Preserve (9/10), at Greenview-Pioneer (9/11), and at Thurston Pond – this last bird persisted from 9/10 – 9/29. During the first two weeks of September, **Golden-winged Warblers** moved through our area, with a male at Hudson Mills (9/1), a female at Nichols Arboretum (9/2), a male at the same location (9/10 – 9/12), and a bird on private property in Lodi Twp (9/15). That latter spot also hosted a **Brewster's Warbler** on 9/11. A very impressive three **Connecticut Warblers** stopped in locally on their way south: at the Matthaeci Botanical Gardens (9/3 – 9/4), at the Sharon Hills Preserve (9/14), and at Thurston Pond (9/27), adding to that location's impressive 2020 rarities tally. Four **Mourning Warblers** were noted as they passed through, all in the first week of September: at Black Pond Woods (9/2), at Furstenberg Park (9/4), and at South Lake and Four Mile Lake (both on 9/6). Late for that species, a male **Hooded Warbler** thrilled a lucky birder at Nichols Arboretum on 9/12. **Canada Warblers** had an excellent fall migration this year, with about a dozen reports county-wide. Of note among those, were three birds at Four Mile Lake on 9/3, and a late bird at Independence Lake on 9/29. Much the same was true for **Wilson's Warblers** – among the 15 or so reports of one or two birds, the duo at Nichols Arboretum on 10/4 was certainly on the tardy end of things.



Connecticut Warbler *Oporornis agilis*, Matthaeci Botanical Gardens, September 4 2020 (Ben Lucking)



Wilson's Warbler *Cardellina pusilla*, County Farm Park, September 7 2020 (Victor Chen)



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



Did you know you can save dozens of birds every year by fixing windows around your house or office?

Visit birdsmartglass.org to see how!

Evening Grosbeak (Jacco Gelderloos)

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)
____ Student	\$15 (online only \$10)
____ Senior	\$15 (online only \$10)
____ Patron	\$50

Name: _____
 Address: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

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 November and the future, which will be announced on the same internet platforms.

November 18, 7:30 p.m. Birding Oahu, with Keith Dickey (an online Zoom program)

WAS board member Keith Dickey shares his recent birding ventures on the island of Oahu, including colorful urban birds, endangered endemics, three species of Boobies, 2 species of Francolins, and nesting Laysan Albatross. Please join us for this pictorial jaunt through the cityscapes, forests, wetlands and coastal preserves of this Hawaiian island and its birdlife.

The Zoom link is for this program is listed below:

<https://umich.zoom.us/j/92875124630>

Or dial in:

Call (646) 876-9923

Meeting ID: 928 7512 4630

December	No program – join us December 19th for the Christmas Bird Count!
January 20, 7:30 p.m.	The Natural History of Darien, Panama, with Michael Kielb
February 17, 7:30 p.m.	Demystifying Waterfowl in Flight, with Alison Világ
March 17, 7:30 p.m.	Delisting of Gray Wolves, with Cathy Theisen

Washtenaw Audubon Society

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