



January / February 2023

## The 77<sup>th</sup> Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count: The Results are in!

After last year's abysmal weather, this year's Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count saw conditions that could almost be called pleasant. Throughout the day, temperatures hovered around 28 degrees, winds were light(ish) from the southwest, and there was no precipitation to speak of. Since the weeks leading up to the count had also been rather moderate, there was no snow cover and pretty much all bodies of water were ice-free.

In spite of these seemingly inviting conditions, participation levels were slightly down from the past couple of years. That said, there were still some 90 field observers out there, as well as nearly 30 feeder watchers. Having well over 100 total participants appears to have settled in as the new normal, courtesy of the additional interest in birdwatching caused by the Covid pandemic. And, clearly, coverage levels all over our circle were excellent once again: every field party spent some 5.5 hours out there, traveling some 18 miles in the process; feeder watchers spent an average of just over two hours monitoring their feeding stations.

Wood Ducks went AWOL on count day, but luckily a drake was found in the Huron River during count week. Not surprisingly considering the mild conditions, all species of dabbling ducks were present in numbers significantly above average.

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CBC compiler Jacco Gelderloos hard at work processing the day's data (*Mike Kielb*)

# President's Letter

Dear Washtenaw Audubon,

This is the time of year when I usually write about the joys of winter birding. I'd love to see more folks out and about looking at birds in the winter because we do get a good deal of special birds, both in our region, and in the Upper Peninsula. Washtenaw Audubon society took a trip to the UP between January 6th and 8th, staying in Sault Ste. Marie. We were treated to some of the most beautiful bird sightings I have ever experienced. At one location, a bog south of Paradise, Michigan, flocks of hundreds of Bohemian Waxwings graced the trees and flew in a murmuration, like starlings, only more intensely beautiful. At one point they formed a ball of birds in the sky, like a ball of bait fish in the ocean. The sight was astounding.



Bohemian Waxwings at Tahquamenon Falls State Park (*Jennifer Speth*)

Both Pine Grosbeaks and Evening Grosbeaks were highlights of the trip. Pine Grosbeaks were almost everywhere. We heard their chirpy songs and cheerful chips in Dafter and Paradise and various places along our route north, south, east and west of Sault Ste. Marie. The males were especially gorgeous. Their pinky red heads and wings shone out against the snow. There was quite a bit of snow, with big drifts of the pillowy stuff. We stumbled upon a large flock of Evening Grosbeaks south of Paradise; their white wing patches shone out as they flew across the road, alerting us to the fact that here was something special. A flock of 50 Evening Grosbeaks then emerged and treated us to their beautiful, bright, yellow and black plumage with huge chunky beaks, and their inviting interaction calls. Jeer jeer!!



Male Pine Grosbeak in Dafter (*Jennifer Speth*)

On the second day of our trip, we ventured south of Sault Ste. Marie into areas known for grouse, particularly Sharp-tailed Grouse, which we saw in abundance, both in-flight and perched in deciduous trees, especially poplars, eating buds. Along the way here and there, we found a shrike or two, Northern Shrike being the species present this time of year. At the traditional spot at the south end of Hantz Road in the Rudyard loop area we were treated to flocks of Snow Buntings, surely a most welcome site. And of course, in the flats surrounding, Rudyard, many many many Snowy Owls—at least a dozen. Snowy Owls come in a beautiful variety of plumages from stark white to black-and-white prison stripe with little black beanies on their heads. We saw them perched and flying across the road and in the fields, which is a truly awesome sight.

We saw both perched and flying Rough-legged Hawks, Bald Eagles, and many, many other birds. I would encourage folks who are so inclined to make the journey to Sault Ste. Marie this winter—it will be worth it! The birds are so spectacular, with smaller numbers of species and yet such interesting, special and unique species that we don't often see in southeast Michigan. One of our highlights was a visit to a feeder with three Boreal Chickadees, a life bird for almost all of us! There are exquisite photos of Boreal Chickadee in our trip report – check it out here, <https://ebird.org/tripreport/99165>, for all of the beautiful photographs that were taken during the trip.



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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.

Snowy Owl near Rudyard (*Nui Moreland*)



We have a nice slate of field trips for the winter—Matt Spoor will be leading quite a few through February and into March. We have both field trips and our One Road Challenge, which is always fun! Victor Chen leads BIPOC bird walks, at least one every month. We should have two listed in this newsletter, both in February, and in March. I'll be birding with WAS in Ecuador for 2 weeks, beginning Jan 22, so stay tuned for that report. Stay warm, dress in layers, and good birding!

As always, I am for the birds,

Juliet Berger, President, Washtenaw Audubon Society



Boreal Chickadee, just north of Paradise (*Ziting Chen*)

<Continued from Page 1>

Gadwalls posted their second highest ever total, and American Black Duck numbers were the third highest since 2000. Most notable was the lone Green-winged Teal that was found in the Huron River. Quite unusually, two species of *aythya* diving ducks were turned up on count day. Four Lesser Scaup was notable enough (the highest since 1991), but the real head-turner was the whopping 310 Ring-necked Ducks, which obliterated the previous record tally of 3 – stunning stuff! Roughly 300 of these birds were at Independence Lake, with just under a dozen more at the Ann Arbor Landfill's main pond. Both Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers were found in all-time high numbers, whereas two Ruddy Ducks were also a pretty good find for our count.

The contrasting stories of Ring-necked Pheasant and Wild Turkey continued this year. We completely missed the former for the third time in the past ten years, whereas the latter hit the triple-digit mark for the tenth year in a row. Somewhat oddly, given the large amount of open water, only a single Pied-billed Grebe was found. Similarly, more American Coots might have been expected, but only a small group of five American Coots was found at the Ann Arbor Landfill – a nice find regardless. As was the case last year, Sandhill Cranes were once again seen in half of the count areas, for a total of 186 birds, the second highest ever. One of the two Killdeer that had been hanging around at Thurston Pond stayed long enough to be tallied on the CBC, despite the mudflats slowly but steadily freezing up – this made for only the fifth time since 2000 we recorded this species on our count. Both gull species were present in slightly below average numbers; perhaps the mild weather allowed them to stay farther north. By contrast, both Belted Kingfishers and Great Blue Herons posted numbers roughly double their recent 10-year average.

Canada Goose	3,848	accipiter sp.	1	Winter Wren	2
Mute Swan	136 (HC)	Sharp-shinned Hawk	2	Carolina Wren	100
Trumpeter Swan	29	Cooper's Hawk	24	Golden-crowned Kinglet	14
Tundra Swan	CW	Bald Eagle	19 (HC)	Eastern Bluebird	222
Wood Duck	CW	Red-shouldered Hawk	1	Hermit Thrush	3
Gadwall	27	Red-tailed Hawk	94	American Robin	4,916
Mallard	1407	Rough-legged Hawk	1	Gray Catbird	2 (HC)
American Black Duck	23	Eastern Screech-Owl	22	European Starling	15,150
MALL x AMBD	2	Great Horned Owl	11	Cedar Waxwing	19
Green-winged Teal	1	Belted Kingfisher	17	House Sparrow	1,130
Ring-necked Duck	310 (HC)	Red-bellied Woodpecker	210	House Finch	380
Lesser Scaup	4	Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	CW	Purple Finch	CW
Bufflehead	55 (HC)	Downy Woodpecker	293	American Goldfinch	471
Common Goldeneye	11	Hairy Woodpecker	72	American Tree Sparrow	329
Hooded Merganser	73 (HC)	Northern Flicker	26	Field Sparrow	1 (US)
Common Merganser	40	Pileated Woodpecker	15	Fox Sparrow	3 (HC)
Ruddy Duck	2	American Kestrel	3	Song Sparrow	20
Wild Turkey	217	Merlin	3	Swamp Sparrow	CW
Pied-billed Grebe	1	Peregrine Falcon	1	White-throated Sparrow	129
Rock Pigeon	1074	Blue Jay	247	White-crowned Sparrow	2
Mourning Dove	642	American Crow	8500	Dark-eyed Junco	827
American Coot	5	Horned Lark	14	Red-winged Blackbird	1
Sandhill Crane	186 (US)	Black-capped Chickadee	727	Brown-headed Cowbird	21
Killdeer	1 (US)	Tufted Titmouse	338	Rusty Blackbird	2
Ring-billed Gull	118	Red-breasted Nuthatch	45	Common Grackle	2
Herring Gull	7	White-breasted Nuthatch	370	Yellow-rumped Warbler	2
Great Blue Heron	21	Brown Creeper	17	Northern Cardinal	500
Northern Harrier	3				
				<b>Total Individuals</b>	<b>43,564</b>
CW = count week only		HC = high count		US = unusual species	

With conditions much more appealing to them, both daytime and nocturnal raptors were much more observable that they were in last year's rainy weather. That said, Turkey Vultures were completely absent from the circle, despite conditions having been quite conducive for them to linger in the weeks leading up to the count. Three Northern Harriers was the highest number in nearly fifty years. Sharp-shinned Hawks extended their streak of being recorded on our count to thirty years, which is quite impressive for a species that can be hard to come by in southern Michigan during the winter months. Cooper's Hawk numbers slowly ticked up again after the paltry showing in 2021 but were still nowhere near the record high count from 2020. In line with their recent upward trend, 19 Bald Eagles was their top count on our CBC and was the third time in the last four years when we found more than 10 of them. We managed the *buteo* trifecta this year: a Red-shouldered Hawk was at the Ann Arbor Landfill, 94 Red-tailed Hawks was nearly 12% over the recent average, and a Rough-legged Hawk along Scully Rd nicely fit into its tendency to be seen once out of every three CBCs.



Even though owling conditions were much improved over last year's, we recorded no unusual species and numbers for our two bread-and-butter species were some 10% below their recent 10-year average. We managed the falcon trifecta once again – this was the eighth year in a row, even if numbers for each species remained low as before (3 Kestrels, 3 Merlins, and 1 Peregrine).

A total of 616 woodpeckers bested the second highest tally ever from last year and was second only to the 700+ tally from 2020, so it is safe to say this group continues its streak of outrageous numbers and diversity. Finding six species is now the norm, not the exception, and many of these species regularly approach record numbers, if they don't break them outright. No Red-headed Woodpeckers were tallied and Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were limited to a few count week birds found in Ann Arbor area parks. Even if they were not found in all eight count areas (only 6 observed them), Pileated Woodpeckers once again hit double digits (for the sixth consecutive year). It's safe to say that regenerating and maturing woodlands and large numbers of dead trees have benefitted all species in this family.



The Thurston Pond  
Killdeer (*Sandra Bouma*)

It's unclear where the Blue Jays were: 247 birds was the lowest since 2009 and more than 45% below the recent average. The relatively low number for American Crow is at least partly due to the fact that they opted to roost in a location that was best observed from the shoulder of eastbound I-94. The spot we had to settle for did not provide for comprehensive views of the incoming birds, which depressed the overall total. Two small groups of Horned Larks represented the only observations of open country passerines – presumably, mild weather allowed Snow Buntings and Lapland Longspurs to stay farther to our north. These two species have only been found on two and one of our most recent ten CBCs.

Small, mostly insectivorous species were, once again, well above average (if not record-breaking). Black-capped Chickadees (+9%), Tufted Titmice (+29%), and White-breasted Nuthatches (+27%) seemed to be everywhere. Possibly continuing the echo of the 2020 irruption, 45 Red-breasted Nuthatches was nearly double the recent average. By the same token, Brown Creepers were also 19% above average; we can now almost expect to record this cryptic species in double-digit numbers. Two Winter Wrens was very respectable, and it was good to see Carolina Wrens rebound after the rather depressed showing last year (even if that was the second highest number ever), with 100 of them making themselves known to field observers and feeder watchers. Golden-crowned Kinglet numbers were in line with the past couple of years but were still some 19% below the recent 10-year average. For the third time since 2013, two Yellow-rumped Warblers were located – it seems we find these hardy *parulids* roughly every other year on our count.



Gray Catbird during Count Week  
(*Nui Moreland*)

Most of the frugivore species had another good year, with Eastern Bluebirds (+43%), American Robin (+264%!), and European Starling (+220%) all well to way above average. The latter two species once again roosted in a location on Ann Arbor's north side, where impressive numbers of both species were observed coming in at the end of the day. Three Hermit Thrushes was right on average, but two Gray Catbirds matched the record for that species and was the first time ever we observed this species two years running (out of ten occurrences over our CBC's 75+ editions). Notably, another bird came to a feeder during count week, making for an unprecedented three individuals of this *mimid* in our circle over the count period. By contrast, Cedar Waxwings were all but absent – 19 birds was the second-lowest total since 1958.

Both House Finches (-5%) and American Goldfinches (-10%) had a decidedly ho-hum year in 2022. No winter finches were found on count day, with only a single count week observation of a Purple Finch. By contrast, House Sparrow numbers were some 21% above average.

As was the case in 2021, we found eight sparrow species on our count, which is pretty much the recent norm. It was hard to discern any common thread or trend between them, though. Among the annually occurring species, American Tree Sparrow (-5%) and Song Sparrow (-26%) were both down, but White-throated Sparrow (+61%) and Dark-eyed Junco (+37%) were both up significantly. The only Swamp Sparrow was located during count week. In the unusual species category, three Fox Sparrows tied its record tally, a Field Sparrow on private property near Parker Mill Park was only the fifth since 2000, and for at least the third year in a row, a White-crowned Sparrows attended a feeder off Waters Rd with a second bird in Area 4.

A family of birds that appears to be more and more regular on our CBC as the climate continues to change, it is no longer a major surprise to find three blackbird species in any given year. Nonetheless, four of them is still a highly unusual event. Interestingly, both Red-winged Blackbird and Brown-headed Cowbird numbers were quite a bit below average (-52% and -59%,

respectively), while Common Grackle (+186%) was way above. Two Rusty Blackbirds were turned up, with one in Area 3 and one in Area 7. With five records since 2014, this increasingly uncommon species is now found roughly once every two years.

The cumulative total of 43,564 individual birds was still 32% above the 2012-2021 average and ranked in the top five highest tallies ever. Three species hit record high tallies and three more tied previous high marks is quite impressive for a CBC with as long of a run as Ann Arbor's. 75 species on count day is very respectable and adding five more species during count week extended our count's streak of 80 species or more to three years. Needless to say, the coverage density is a major contributing factor to these statistics.

As I mentioned in the opening paragraph, the 77<sup>th</sup> edition of the Ann Arbor Christmas Bird Count benefitted from stellar participation levels, with some 90 field observers, and more than two dozen feeder watchers. Without a doubt, there are many count compilers out there that would love to have this wealth of coverage on their count! These slightly lower levels (compared to the past two years, that is) made it a bit easier to slot all of our volunteers into the eight count areas. The online sign-up option on the Washtenaw Audubon CBC has been really helpful for this, as well, so please continue using that for the next edition(s). And, now that gatherings are permitted again, this sign-up form also did a really nice job of aiding the potluck coordinator in figuring out how the menu for the potluck was filling in. It was SO wonderful to be able to gather in person once again and share our finds and experiences of the day with fellow birders!



Scenes from the potluck-tally event (Mike Kielb)

As always, a big "thank you" is in order to the nearly 120 volunteers that helped make yet another edition of the Ann Arbor CBC into a great success. I would like to extend a special thanks to WAS web guru Rob French for keeping the CBC page in good working order, to potluck coordinator Nancy French for putting together a top class meal at the tally event, to feeder watch coordinator Kurt Hagemester for streamlining that process, and to the eight area leaders who made sure that all volunteers were accommodated, that all data was collected well, and that this data made its way to me in a timely fashion, allowing me to submit our data to NAS and to write this article so soon after count day!

Submitting all this data to the National Audubon's CBC data ensures that our CBC effort continues to add to an ever-expanding database of the winter distribution for birds in the (mostly) Western Hemisphere and helps scientists tease out trends and patterns, and aides policy-makers devise measures to help protect them. Check it out on the NAS website: <https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count> - it makes for a great way to spend a rainy afternoon! For a very nice summary of the past CBC season, click here: <https://www.audubon.org/summary-122nd-christmas-bird-count-2021-2022>.

In the coming year, we will continue to make changes to our CBC, both cosmetic and "under the hood". The main aim will be to continue to improve how our count is run, determine exactly where the borders of the count areas and the circle at large are, and streamline how all of the data points are collected and collated. Stay tuned!



Field Sparrow, Stark Strasse  
(Mike O'Leary)

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to express my desire to pass on the torch of Ann Arbor CBC compiler to someone new. I have served as compiler for over 15 years now, and I think it is time to bring in some fresh blood to help guide our count into the next phase of its long run. Although I have often remarked that our count largely runs itself, there are some aspects that require a compiler, both leading up to and following up after the count, which make it essential to have a fully committed compiler at the helm. If you're interested in taking on this highly rewarding position, please reach out to me at [jjgelderloos@yahoo.com](mailto:jjgelderloos@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 2023 edition, on December 16, 2023 – make sure to mark your calendars, folks!

Jacco Gelderloos  
Ann Arbor CBC Compiler



## Field Trip Calendar

### **Weekend Walk for Birds at Matthaei Botanical Gardens**

**Sunday, January 22, 9:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Exploring the winter woods, water, and prairie of Matthaei is always a rewarding experience. Please join us as we search for everything from bluebirds to buteos along Fleming Creek. We will have extra binoculars if you do not have any. Directions: meet at the steps to the conservatory. Matthaei members park for free with metered parking for everyone else. Free to park a bike there and it's a beautiful ride along the bike path from Geddes to the gardens. Leader: Matthew Spoor

### **Duck Walk at Ford Lake**

**Sunday, January 29, 9:00 am**

Ford Lake and its boardwalk provide one of the best winter birding opportunities in Washtenaw County. There have been 76 species seen in February at Ford Lake and we look forward to seeing a variety of waterfowl, gulls, and local winter birds. Directions: meet at the parking lot off South Grove Street. This lot is located south of I-94 at the northeast corner of Ford Lake, across from the Citgo gas station at the intersection of Service Dr and South Grove St. Leader: Matthew Spoor

### **Nature Walk – Winter Wonderland at Black Pond Woods Nature Area**

**Saturday, February 4, 1:00 pm – 2:30 pm**

We will break from birds and turn our focus to all the other wonders of nature as we stroll through these beautiful winter woods to explore and learn together. This event is limited to 15 to improve everyone's experience. If the walk is full, we will schedule a second one for 3:00 p.m.

**\*\*Please Register on the WAS Website\*\*** Directions: meet at the Leslie Science and Nature Center parking lot. Leader: Matthew Spoor

### **BIPOC Bird Walk at Parker Mill Park and Forest Area**

**Saturday, February 11, 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 to borrow for anyone who needs them. Directions: meet at the parking lot at Parker Mill Park, 4650 Geddes Rd, Ann Arbor. If there is snow and ice on the ground, bring ice grippers and/or trekking poles if you have them. Leader: Victor Chen

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

**Sunday, February 19, 9:00 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 onto Riverview Dr. and stay right until it terminates at the Riverview Ct. cul-de-sac. Check our website for a link to the map if you have never been there. Leader: Matt Spoor

### **Trumpeter Swans at Gallup Park**

**Saturday, March 4, 8:30 am – 10:30 am**

Join Washtenaw and Detroit Audubon as we partner for a look at the Trumpeter Swans and other waterfowl on and around Geddes Pond at Gallup Park. Directions: meet at the parking lot south of the wooden bridge. Leaders: Juliet Berger & Matthew Spoor

### **BIPOC Bird Walk at North Hydro Park**

**Saturday, March 11, 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 at the entrance by Ambassador Drive and Woodale Ave. If there is snow on the ground, be sure to wear boots. Leader: Victor Chen

### **Nature Walk at Kuebler Langford Nature Area**

**Sunday, March 12, 1:00 - 2:30 pm**

Join us as we explore this high-quality woodland natural area. Each walk through the woods yields new and exciting finds and interesting things to discuss. Event is limited to 15 to improve everyone's experience. If the walk is full, we will schedule a second one for 3pm. **\*\*Please Register on the WAS Website\*\*** Directions: Meet at the Beechwood Dr. entrance to Kuebler Langford nature area here:

<https://goo.gl/maps/tmMFouxBWTfp91r16>. Leader: Matthew Spoor

### **One Road Challenge**

**Saturday, March 18, 0:00 – 11:00am**

This is a friendly team birding competition where teams pick one road in the county to see how many birds they can see in a morning along that road. If you have a team, great. If not, that's OK too; just head on over to the Washtenaw Audubon Society website events page to sign up and we will help set you up with a team. Everyone is welcome to join the teams for lunch and tally rally at the Alpha Diner at 11:30 a.m.. No need to participate in the event to join us for lunch.

### **NE Argentina with Washtenaw Audubon Society**

**August 2023 - CANCELLED**

### **Washtenaw Audubon Society International Field Trip: Oaxaca, Mexico**

**Friday, August 11 - Monday, August 21**

Please consider joining fellow members of Washtenaw Audubon Society in an international birding trip to Oaxaca, Mexico. With close to 50 birds endemic to Mexico to be seen in Oaxaca, it is not only one of the safest destinations in the country, but one of the best areas for birding. We will be birding at an easy pace the valley and mountains surrounding Oaxaca, the southern mountains and the Pacific coastline. We will visit a variety of habitats from hot cactus desert to chilly conifer mountaintops and will even do a mini-pelagic.

We will not just experience the wonderful birds. This region has amazing landscapes, a rich archaeological and cultural heritage, friendly people and their famously delicious local cuisine which has made it a top foodie destination.

If you have any questions, would like more information (detailed itinerary, costs, list of birds we hope to see) or would like to sign up for the trip, please contact Bryn Martin at [brynmartin446@gmail.com](mailto:brynmartin446@gmail.com). We need a minimum of 4 more participants for the trip to run. The trip is limited on a first come basis, so please let me know ASAP if you are interested in signing up.

## November-December 2022: Late Fall – Early Winter Highlights

### The Highlights

We all know waterfowl is a family of birds in which various species readily interbreed with one another. The most common example is that of Mallard and American Black Duck, in which case, unfortunately, Mallard genetic material is slowly but steadily swamping out pure American Black Duck genetic material. Another example recently (re-)appeared locally when a so-called **Brewer's Duck** (a Gadwall x Mallard hybrid) spent 11/6 among the multitudes of waterfowl at Ford Lake. Interestingly, there was a Brewer's Duck at nearby Riverside Park in early 2021, which, given the paucity of Michigan records for this hybrid, likely pertains to the same bird.

For the third year in a row, a very late **Northern Parula** was found in Washtenaw County during the November-December period. This time, two lucky birders hit the jackpot when they found one feeding in the leaf litter at North Hydro Park near the Bridge Rd dam in Ypsilanti on 11/25.



Brewer's Duck *Mareca strepera* x *Anas platyrhynchos*, Ford Lake Park, November 6 2022 (Bill Nolting)



Northern Parula *Setophaga americana*, North Hydro Park, November 25 2022 (Bill Nolting)

### Waterfowl

An adult white morph **Snow Geese** was seen in the M-52 & Lehman area on 11/13; what may well have been the same bird appeared at Pierce Lake on 12/15 and was seen there through 12/17. Accompanying a large flock of Canada Geese, an immature white morph roamed the fields in the corridor between Geddes and Vreeland during the mid-November through mid-December time frame. A small flock of six **Cackling Geese** also joined up with a large flock of their congeners on the north side of Ann Arbor on 11/5, when they were first seen over Nixon & Pontiac Trail and subsequently relocated at Oakwoods Nature Area. Unfortunately, they could not be located after that. **Tundra Swans** were relatively widespread this period, with several large flocks noted overhead and a few individuals observed on the ground here and there. The maximum was a flock of 45 over Independence Lake on 11/7.



Snow Goose *Anser caerulescens*, Geddes & Brookside, December 6 2022 (Bonnie Penet)



Tundra Swan *Cygnus columbianus*, Gallup Park, November 8 2022 (Paul Dannels)



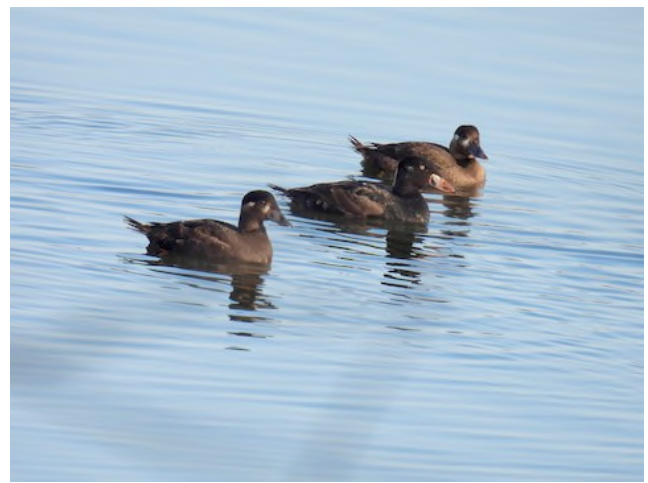
The small group of **Northern Shovelers** vacated North Bay Park after 11/10, but a few individuals started trickling back into Washtenaw County in mid-December, culminating in a group of 11 birds on 12/21. On that same date, North Bay Park's **Gadwall** numbers peaked at a staggering 250 birds! **Northern Pintails** were scattered at several sites in the Ann Arbor-Ypsilanti area, but with a maximum of five they were not numerous in any one of those locales. During November, **Green-winged Teal** were quite widespread throughout the county (at seven locations), with as many as 20 present at the pond at State & Textile. When December rolled around, all of these birds had departed, with the exception of a single female at Zeeb & Merkel on 12/17.

Only a single **Canvasback** was seen, on Barton Pond on 11/20. The only **Greater Scaup** spent a few days on Independence Lake from 12/6 – 12/11. **Lesser Scaup** were by no means numerous either: one was at North Hydro Park (11/22), there was a group of four on Independence Lake (12/17), and one more was on Barton Pond on 12/30.

**Surf Scoters** continued their strong fall showing, with two female-type birds on Portage Lake on 11/6 and a trio on Ford Lake from 12/18 – 12/22. The latter group provided for an interesting ID challenge, in that one of these birds appeared to have Black Scoter characteristics on the initial photos. In any case, they made for a nice plumage study group during their stay. Much less cooperative was a one-day wonder **White-winged Scoter** on Whitmore Lake on 12/21 – not only did it stay for one day only, but it also stayed very far out in the lake, further complicating the identification (a convenient wing flap did the trick in the end). Likewise, a group of six **Long-tailed Ducks** on Portage Lake on 11/7 was a one-day, single-observer wonder, but established a new County high count for that species. This northern waterfowl hotspot was the only place for **Red-breasted Mergansers**: two were there from 11/7 – 11/9, and another (the same?) two were seen on 12/3.



Green-winged Teal *Anas crecca*, Hewen's Creek Park, November 10 2022 (Bill Nolting)



Surf Scoter *Melanitta perspicillata*, Lakeside Park, December 21 2022 (Bonnie Penet)

### Grouse through Falcons

The depressing news for Washtenaw County's ever-shrinking population of **Ring-necked Pheasants** continued into November-December, when there was only a single observation yet again: a bird was seen on 11/8 at the Torrey Rd Hawkwatch. Small groups of **Horned Grebes** continued to move through during the first three weeks of November, topping out at 8 birds on Portage Lake on 11/7. One very hardy **Virginia Rail** hung on into November, when it was photographed at Wildwood Lake on 11/7 and made for one of very few local records during the last two months of the year.



Virginia Rail *Rallus limicola*, Wildwood Lake, November 7 2022 (Jocelyn Anderson)



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Four Mile Lake, November 2 2022 (Ben Lucking)

This time of year is not generally associated with shorebirds, but as many as seven species were recorded during November and even into December! That honor goes to a hardy duo of **Killdeer** that hung around at Thurston Pond until at least 12/17. Though their presence is not unprecedented, it's certainly not an everyday occurrence in our inland southeastern Michigan home county. A single **Dunlin** stayed just into November (11/2), when one was photographed at Four Mile Lake. Similarly, two sets of two **Pectoral Sandpipers** were at the Grass Lake Marsh (11/1) and Wildwood Lake (11/3).

Due to its cryptic ways, an **American Woodcock** must have been a very pleasant surprise on private property in Lodi Township on 11/6. More often encountered in open habitats, **Wilson's Snipes** were relatively common during November – there were up to six birds in as many as seven locations during November. There were as many as four **Greater Yellowlegs** at Four Mile Lake through 11/4. Additional individuals were long-staying at both State & Textile (11/2 – 11/14) and Thurston Pond (11/2 – 11/19). Their cousin, the **Lesser Yellowlegs**, was less hard: the handful of birds at four sites were all gone by the end of the first week of November.



Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca*, Thurston Pond, November 3 2022 (Karen Markey)



Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, North Bay Park, December 11 2022 (Jane Huggins)

November is peak migration for **Bonaparte's Gulls**, so it was not surprising that there were as many as 119 in a single flock and that they were observed at seven or more sites. There was still up to 38 of them at Portage Lake as late as 12/5, and a flock of 13 was reported from the Waterloo State Rec Area on 12/17. Now that the gulling mecca of the Salem Township landfill is no longer readily accessible to the public, it's become rather difficult to find uncommon gulls locally - a solitary adult **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at North Bay Park on 12/11 was the only unusual species of the period.

Contrary to my prediction that "numbers will continue to build during November", there were only small numbers of **Common Loons** during that month, with a maximum of two birds at a mere five locations through 12/2. Although they were recently reported on the Ann Arbor CBC (in 2018), **Double-crested Cormorants** are not commonly considered part of the December avifauna in Washtenaw County. But there they were, a flock of 24 birds heading south over North Bay Park on 12/7! The last **Great Egrets** were seen on 11/4.



Common Loon *Gavia immer*, Ford Lake Park, December 2 2022 (Bill Nolting)



Double-crested Cormorant *Nannopterum auratus*, North Bay Park, December 7 2022 (PJ M)

Despite the mild weather during the fall period, there was only a single **Turkey Vulture** report during December: two birds at the Sharon Hills Preserve on 12/11. Multiple **Golden Eagles** were observed during November-December: an immature over the Torrey Rd Hawkwatch (11/8), one over the Burns-Stokes Preserve (11/9), and an adult over Tubbs and Huron River Dr (12/24).



Likely a mix of migrants and residents, **Red-shouldered Hawks** were seen at eight locations in November and at six during December. December 17 was clearly the day to be out looking for **Rough-legged Hawks**: one was at the Waterloo State Rec area, another was along Scully Rd, and a third was seen along Vreeland Rd. The latter bird hung around until at least the day after Christmas.

It appears **Barred Owls** continue to slowly but steadily expand their home range in Washtenaw County. An 11/2 report from Hewen's Creek Park in Ypsilanti Township established a new data point in that process and additional birds were heard in the Huron Parkway & Hubbard area (through 12/3) and along Waters just west of Wagner (into December). The bird at the B2B trailhead in Lyndon Township on 12/16 represents the more traditional core range in Washtenaw. Close to the latter location, there was a **Long-eared Owl** at Park Lyndon County Park on 12/15. Somewhat surprisingly, only a single Short-eared Owl graced the field in the Gotfredson Rd corridor throughout November and December – usually there are multiple birds there.



Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Torrey Rd Hawkwatch, November 8 2022 (Bill VanderMolen)



Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*, Gotfredson & Cherry Hill, December 25 2022 (Russell Ryan)

The mild fall weather encouraged quite a few **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** to stay around – up to two were observed at as many as six sites during November and that number did not noticeably drop off into and during December. By contrast, **Red-headed Woodpeckers** were all gone by the end of October; the sole exception was a juvenile bird at Tubbs & Huron River Dr that was photographed on 11/1, but not seen thereafter. Good numbers of **Merlins** harassed the local songbird population during November (six locations) and things got worse into December, when ten (or more) of these speedy little falcons made Washtenaw County their home. Away from the UM campus nest site, **Peregrine Falcons** were seen at Tuttle Hill & Martz (11/10), at the Argo Nature Area (2 birds on 12/1), and at Vreeland & Gotfredson (12/14).



Red-headed Woodpecker *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*, Tubbs & Huron River Dr, November 1 2022 (Maggie Jewett)



Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, Vreeland & Gotfredson, December 14 2022 (Martha Hitchiner)

## Passerines

Not surprisingly given the recent winter records, the only tyrant flycatcher to stay into November was **Eastern Phoebe** – there was one at Tubbs & Huron River Dr on 11/2 and another at Gallup Park on 11/26. The only **Northern Shrike** of the period was at Hewen's Creek Park on 11/30. **Winter Wrens** remained surprisingly widespread throughout the period, with one or two birds scattered at ten or more locations throughout. With the exception of a straggler at the Whitmore Lake High School marsh on 11/13, **Marsh Wrens** had all but left our neck of the woods by the end of October.

After being absent during all of November, four different **Gray Catbirds** were found during December: one at Barton Pond, another one just west of Ann Arbor (both on 12/17), one on the east side of Ann Arbor (12/20), and a fourth at Sharon Mills County Park (12/28). Single **Northern Mockingbirds** remained at Watkins Lake County Park (11/23 – 11/25) and at Goose Lake State Game Area (12/17). A very late **Wood Thrush** at the Leslie Niethammer Saline River Preserve on 11/7 was the first November record for Washtenaw County and one very few for Michigan at large. Small numbers of **American Pipits** trickled through our area during November; they were very hard to pin down, except for the quartet that was present along Vreeland Rd for a few days from 11/18 - 11/21.



Northern Mockingbird *Mimus polyglottos*, Goose Lake SGA, December 17 2022 (Michael Bowen)



Evening Grosbeak *Coccothraustes vespertinus*, Chelsea, November 9 2022 (Michael Bowen)

Over the month following their initial appearance on 10/28, small numbers of **Evening Grosbeaks** roamed Washtenaw County. Typically, though, encounters were frustratingly fleeting, and these birds only visited three of the eleven locations on more than one occasion. The other two winter finch species that reached the county, **Purple Finch** and **Pine Siskin**, were just as widespread and often just as hard to pin down. **Purple Finches** stuck around into December, with singletons at five locations, but all **Pine Siskins** had moved on by 11/17. As before, to see **Lapland Longspurs** it was imperative to go to the Vreeland & Gotfredson area, where a pretty good-sized flock was seen from mid-November through the end of the year. Although **Snow Buntings** were seen elsewhere (one at Park Lyndon County Park on 11/22 and five at the Salem Township Landfill on 12/22), by far the best place was Vreeland & Gotfredson, where a flock of as many as 120 birds made the rounds from mid-December on.

The last **Chipping Sparrow** of the year was seen at Nichols Arboretum on 11/9. **Field Sparrows** stayed around longer and in higher numbers: there were as many as two at Rolling Hills County Park (through 11/23), one at the Koenn Preserve (11/2), one at Draper-Houston Meadows Preserve (11/3), and one along a private road off Geddes (12/17). During November, **Fox Sparrows** seemed to be just about everywhere - reports came in from nearly twenty sites! A feeder set-up at Dixboro & Ford hosted a staggering 11 of these snazzy sparrows on 12/1 and was one of half a dozen locations that continued to host them into December. Small numbers of **White-crowned Sparrows** continued to move through during November and December, but they were not common, nor numerous anywhere. As was the case for Chipping Sparrows, the last of our **Savannah Sparrows** was seen on 11/9, when it was photographed along Vreeland. An **Eastern Towhee** at the Barton Nature Area was enjoyed by a WAS field on 11/5 and was the only one that stayed around into the November-December time period.



Fox Sparrow *Passerella iliaca*, Dixboro & Ford, November 30 2022 (Laura Welcher)



Rusty Blackbird *Euphagus carolinus*, Vreeland Rd, December 24 2022 (Todd Palgut)



The **Rusty Blackbird** has become the posterchild for a species in (very) rapid decline, so it was good to see decent numbers moving through during November. They were seen at some ten locations and several of these observations recorded double-digit numbers, with a maximum of 46 at the Koenn Preserve on 11/2. There was a late straggler along Vreeland Rd on 12/24, which was the only one seen in December. An **American Redstart** at the Barton Nature Area on 11/1 was only the second ever November record for Washtenaw County. More expected were the good numbers of **Yellow-rumped Warblers** that moved through during November. A few of these hardy parulids continued into December, but numbers had dwindled to one or two of them at only three spots.



**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)

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.**

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____ Individual Household	\$25 (online only \$20)
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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 most 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 15, 7:30 p.m.                      Four Seasons of Natural History in Michigan, with Michael Kielb**

Join Michael Kielb for an informative program on where and when in each season to look for various birds, animals, flowers and plants, and other bits of nature in Michigan. Michael is a retired university biology teacher, a former Washtenaw Audubon president, and a popular field trip leader and speaker on natural history. He and his wife Susan divide their time between Ann Arbor and Whitefish Point.

This will be a hybrid presentation, both in-person at the Matthaei Botanical Gardens and online via Zoom

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://umich.zoom.us/j/93611857032>

Meeting ID: 936 1185 7032

Passcode: 551598

Or dial-in: 312-626-6799

**March 15, 7:30 p.m.                      Program to be announced. Watch our web site and Facebook page!**

## Washtenaw Audubon Society

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