

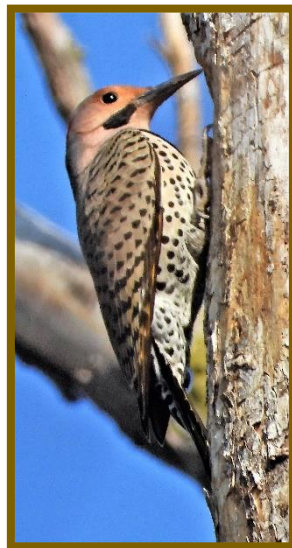
# Oakland Owlets & the Owl Fest at Lake St. Clair Metropark



April is always an exciting month for birders. Waves of migrating birds are making their way north and everyone wants to see their favorite birds returning. Oakland Owlets families and friends gathered this month at Lake St. Clair Metropark on Saturday April 15<sup>th</sup> to explore the park. The Nature Center was hosting its annual Owl Fest that day which was an added educational bonus. The weather was fantastic with summer-like temperatures. A small group started

at the feeding station outside the nature center. Numerous Red-winged Blackbirds were observed along with typical feeder birds.

After a time, the group meandered to the trails leading to the boardwalk near Lake St. Clair. Along the swamp path we saw Wood Ducks actively surveying nesting cavities in the large Cottonwood trees. One odd duck slipped into a cavity and occasionally peeked out. Everyone was fascinated to see the face of a Mallard hen. Thanks to Ray for providing this great photo to document this behavior.



Further along the trail, the group encountered the famous owl bucket which is often used by Great-horned Owls. However, this year the bucket is occupied by a Red-tailed Hawk which was on the nest. Northern Flickers and Red-bellied Woodpeckers watched as we walked.

The trails to Lake St. Clair and the channel of water provided opportunities to see Mallards, Canada Geese, Mute Swans, Song Sparrows, and several species of turtles sunning on the fallen logs at the water's edge. Tree Swallows chased each other in the sky above.

Red-winged Blackbirds were just about everywhere in the park. Reaching the boardwalk through the marsh, the dried cattails provided perches for

birds to stake out breeding territories. Deeper pools of water in the marsh were prime spots to see Green-winged teals, Gadwalls and Mallards. Everyone took time to observe these ducks from a distance. Mute swans and Canada geese were on nests in the marsh.



We continued birding along the path back to the Nature Center and added Carolina Wren and Dark-eyed Junco to our checklist. Upon arriving at the Nature Center, everyone was



invited to drive to the boat launch parking lot to explore the Cormorant colony. This journey is a short drive within the park. By this time, the park was bustling with visitors. Boaters and anglers filled the parking lot. This activity did not bother the cormorants, however. The birds were diligently foraging the channels and ponds nearby along with gathering nesting materials and attending to mates on the nests.

A few people set up spotting scopes to view the cormorants closely. Our goal was to find the rare Neotropic Cormorant reported in this colony. The group spent some time watching



the cormorants along with the other birds in this area. It was remarkable to see the attention and care the cormorants exhibited to



each other. This cormorant colony is extensive. Some trees had multiple nests. Ultimately, we found a Neotropic Cormorant. Smaller than the Double-crested Cormorant, with white under its bill

Thirty-seven species were reported to eBird for the two site during this field trip. A few new birds were seen at the boat launch site.

**The Checklist for the Nature Center Area is as follows:**

- Canada Goose
- Mute Swan
- Wood Duck
- Gadwall
- Mallard

**Green-winged Teal**

- Mourning Dove
- Killdeer
- Ring-billed Gull

**Double-crested Cormorant**

- Great Blue Heron
- Great Egret
- Red-tailed Hawk
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Downy Woodpecker

**Northern Flicker**

- Blue Jay

**Black-capped Chickadee**

- Tufted Titmouse
- Tree Swallow
- White-breasted Nuthatch
- Carolina Wren
- European Starling
- American Robin
- House Sparrow
- American Tree Sparrow
- Dark-eyed Junco
- White-throated Sparrow

**Song Sparrow**

- Red-winged Blackbird
- Brown-headed Cowbird
- Common Grackle
- Northern Cardinal



**The Checklist for the Cormorant Colony is as follows:**

Canada Goose  
Mute Swan  
Mallard  
Mourning Dove  
American Coot  
Bonaparte's Gull

Forster's Tern  
Double-crested Cormorant  
**Neotropic Cormorant**  
Northern Flicker  
American Robin  
Red-winged Blackbird

The field trip took longer than expected, but the birds and the weather were fabulous. A special thanks to Ray Bosshard for sharing his excellent photos. Thank you as well to Kayla Niner for the group photo and checklist from the Cormorant Colony. Thank you to everyone in attendance.

**Photo Credits;** Kathleen Dougherty, Ray Bosshard, Kayla. & Photo Gallery

