

Discovering Vernal Pools & Signs of Spring



Young Birders' Club Families and Friends attended the April 9th field trip at the Davis Lake Overlook in Davisburg. The Overlook is a Conservation Easement held by the Blue Heron Headwaters Conservancy (BHHC) within the Shiawassee Basin Preserve. The Shiawassee Preserve is a unique park owned and managed by Springfield Township Parks and Recreation. The Preserve is home to endangered species and protects one of the highest quality examples of Prairie Fens in Michigan. The upland Oak Forests surrounding the watershed also supports Vernal Pools. These pocket wetlands occur in forested areas in the spring. By summer vernal pools may vanish, but in the spring, these

Vernal Pools provide habitat for amphibians, insects, and other invertebrates. Frogs and salamanders use vernal pools for breeding. Their tadpoles develop in a predator free environment until they metamorphose into adults.

Lynn Simmons, Vernal Pool specialist for the BHHC joined the field trip to share Vernal Pool information. After demonstrating equipment used for Vernal Pool exploration, Lynn led the group to a nearby vernal pool to search for pool creatures, waters were free of ice even though air temperatures were near freezing. The cold temperature silenced frogs and limited activity in the vernal pool. The group had hoped to see fairy shrimp, one of the vernal pool indicator species. After dipping for vernal pool creatures for a time, the group moved down the trail to look for birds.



Hiking about a mile to the Shiawassee River Basin to the end of Long Lake, the trail winds through a mature hardwood forest and glacial depressions. The large trees provided habitat for woodland birds which flitted overhead. Woodpeckers were obvious and vocal. However, one woodpecker seen was unusual. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker was migrating north and one of the early migrants moving through the area. The Yellow-bellied Sapsucker looks like a Downy or Hairy

Woodpecker but is distinguished by long white stripe on its wings. Songbirds were singing vigorously along the pathway. Some of the loudest vocalists were Tufted Titmice,

Northern Cardinals, and Blue Jays. Knowing the songs of these birds made identification easier. Smaller round birds darted about high on the bare branches. These tiny vocalists were almost impossible to see even with field glasses. Golden-crowned Kinglets were on their way to the breeding grounds in the boreal forests of northern Michigan and Canada. These kinglets are associated with mixed coniferous, and spruce forests.



Near the waters of Shiawassee Basin, the ever-present songs of Red-winged Blackbirds and the occasional calls of Sandhill Cranes filled the air.



Sandhill Cranes were so loud and could be heard from afar. Eventually the group reached the outlet of Long Lake, this spot offered a scenic view of the Basin's wetlands. The wetlands have some unusual carnivorous plants including Pitcher Plant and Sundew. These plants dine on insects and other animals. Springfield Township Parks and Recreation offers tours to explore this remarkable park. Here is a link to learn more about these events.

[Springfield Rec Guide Spring and Summer 2022_DRAFT 5.pdf \(revize.com\)](#)

eBird checklists for this location noted **twenty-one species** as follows:

Canada Goose
 Mourning Dove
 Sandhill Crane
 Great Blue Heron
 hawk sp.
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
 Red-bellied Woodpecker
 Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker

Blue Jay
 American Crow
 Black-capped Chickadee
 Tufted Titmouse
Golden-crowned Kinglet
 White-breasted Nuthatch
 Brown Creeper
 American Goldfinch
 Song Sparrow

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



Thank you to Lynn Simmons from BHHC and Mike Losey from the Springfield Township Parks and Recreation Department for their assistance with this field trip.

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