

THE NUTHATCH

Volume 67, Issue 4

Winter 2025

Membership Meeting Information

“Caught in the SNOWstorm” (Scott Weidensaul)

— January 13, 2026

The winter of 2013–14 saw the largest invasion of Snowy Owls into the eastern United States in perhaps a century—and marked an unprecedented opportunity to learn more about these mysterious Arctic hunters. Author and researcher Scott Weidensaul will share the story of Project SNOWstorm: how a huge, collaborative research effort focused on Snowy Owls came together in a few frantic weeks, funded with the help of people from around the world, and has grown into the largest and most comprehensive study of this huge raptor in the world. *On Zoom only.*



Photo: Scott Weidensaul

“The Kirtland’s Warbler on The Bahamas Wintering Grounds” (Dave Ewart) — February 10, 2026

The Kirtland’s Warbler breeds almost exclusively in Michigan and winters almost exclusively in The Bahamas. In this presentation, Senior Conservation Scientist Dave Ewart of the American Bird Conservancy, will review the winter ecology of the Kirtland’s Warbler and research, outreach, and conservation activities focused on this species in The Bahamas. *On Zoom only.*



Photo: Dave Ewart

“Remote West Papuan Islands” (Don Burlett)

— March 10, 2026

Off the west coast of New Guinea, Indonesia has many small islands that have become favorite birding destinations. Their attraction is due, in part, to the fact that individual islands have endemic species that are only found on each one of these. Tonight, join Don Burlett on a cruise to visit these islands and see the fabulous birds that reside there. *In person & on Zoom.*



Photo: Don Burlett

Meeting Information

We meet on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (except in December, July, and August). The May meeting is often an evening hike or a special program. Winter 2026 meetings will be at the Auburn Hills Community Center (Seyburn A Room) at [3350 E. Seyburn Drive, Auburn Hills, MI 48326](https://www.auburnhills.org/3350-E-Seyburn-Drive-Auburn-Hills-MI-48326).

Some meetings are in-person and also offered online via Zoom; others are on Zoom only. Meetings open at 6:30 PM, and talks begin at 7:00 PM.

Instructions, Zoom links, and updates are posted on our website and social media prior to each meeting.

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THE NUTHATCH



P.O. Box 796
Birmingham, MI 48012-0796

www.oaklandbirdalliance.org

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Board Members

President – George Harris
admin@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Secretary – Gavin Awerbuch
awerbuchgavin@gmail.com

Treasurer – Jenifer Benke
treasurer@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Membership – Robert Moll
membership@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Field Trips – Kayla Niner
fieldtrips@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Programs – Don Burlett
baikalteal13@netzero.net

Young Birders Club – Kathleen Dougherty
kad8186@msn.com

Hospitality – Julie Bolcato & Laurie Schubert
juliemk82@aol.com
laschuby@aol.com

Publicity/Fundraising – Karen Kessler
fundraising@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Website – Vacant

Social Media – Dan Gertiser
media@oaklandbirdalliance.org

Newsletter – Tiffany Vojnovski
tiffany.vojnovski@gmail.com

Seven Ponds Representative – Greg Gossick
ggossickdds@sbcglobal.net

Conservation & Environment –
Carolyn Stickney and Katri Studmann
cstick01@gmail.com
kcstudtm@mtu.edu

Advocacy – Vacant

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S PERCH: *A SEASON TO CELEBRATE*

Dear OBA Friends,

As winter settles over Oakland County and chickadees call through the quiet woods, I find myself filled with deep gratitude and pride for what our community has accomplished together in the past year.

This fall, the Oakland Bird Alliance was honored to receive the 2025 Michigan Audubon Chapter of the Year Award, the very first ever presented! Receiving the news from Kathleen Mennillo, CEO of Michigan Audubon Society, was a moment I'll never forget. The recognition celebrated our leadership, innovation, and above all, our heart. As Michigan Audubon so beautifully put it, "Oakland Bird Alliance embodies what it means to lead with heart—uniting enthusiasm, transparency, and purpose to create lasting impact for both birds and people."

This award belongs to every single one of you! Our members, volunteers, and partners give so much of their time, their energy, and their care about making a difference for birds and for the people who love them. Whether you led a field trip, mentored a young birder, planted native habitat, joined us for a membership meeting, or took the time to share this newsletter, you've been part of something extraordinary.

I'm especially proud of how OBA has continued to grow and innovate, strengthening our partnerships with schools, nonprofits, and local governments; collaborating with companies like Stellantis and Waste Management; and representing Audubon Great Lakes at events like the MDNR Nature Center Summit and the Kirtland's Warbler Festival. We've maintained strong governance through leadership transitions, engaged new members, and kept our financial footing steady, all while keeping joy and curiosity at the heart of everything we do.

We're carrying our momentum into the new year with a focus on connection and innovation. OBA is embracing new technology tools, like Google Workspace for Nonprofits, to streamline our operations, improve communication, and help our volunteer leaders spend less time on logistics and more time doing what they love: protecting birds and connecting people with nature.

We're also expanding our community outreach, deepening partnerships with local organizations to bring people of all ages and backgrounds into the joy of birding. Whether it's a neighborhood bird walk, a citizen science project, or a new community event, we're excited to keep building bridges between people and the natural world right here in Oakland County.

And speaking of community, mark your calendars for Birds and Brews this spring! It's the perfect way to gear up for migration season, test your bird trivia knowledge, and enjoy a fun evening with fellow bird lovers. Expect good conversation, great prizes, and a few special surprises with our friends from MI Birds. Stay tuned for more details soon; we promise, it's going to be a hoot!

Here's to another year of learning, growing, and leading with heart. Thank you for being part of the OBA family, and for helping us lead with heart.

Warmly,
George Harris
President, Oakland Bird Alliance

FIELD TRIP SCHEDULE

Field trips are free and open to the public (depending on the destination, entry fees may be required). We welcome all levels of birdwatchers. Full details, including any updates to the schedule, are posted on our [website](#) and social media.

Registration is required for most trips—contact trip leader for details.

Date	Event	Leader(s)
December 6 (Saturday) 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Belle Isle State Park (joint trip with Washtenaw Bird and Nature Alliance)	Kayla Niner & Jeff Stacey fieldtrips@oaklandbirdalliance.org
December 20 (Saturday) 12:00 AM – 4:00 PM	126 th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) Independence Oaks County Park	Kayla Niner (OBA organizer) fieldtrips@oaklandbirdalliance.org
December 20 (Saturday) 8:00 AM – 10:00 AM	Orion Oaks County Park “ <i>Young Birders CBC</i> ” (Young Birders)	Kathleen Dougherty kad8186@msn.com
January 11 (Sunday) 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Beaudette Park and Dodge Bros. #4	Kayla Niner fieldtrips@oaklandbirdalliance.org
January 17 (Saturday) 8:00 AM – 1:00 PM	St. Clair River Trip	Jennifer Benke treasurer@oaklandbirdalliance.org
January 17 (Saturday) 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM	Winter Walk / Exploring Corvids Environmental Interpretive Center, Dearborn (Young Birders)	Kathleen Dougherty kad8186@msn.com
February 1 (Sunday) 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Downriver Ducks Tour	Kayla Niner fieldtrips@oaklandbirdalliance.org
February 13 – 15 (Friday – Sunday)	Upper Peninsula Weekend Trip	Don Burlett baikalteal13@netzero.net
February 14 (Saturday) 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM	Great Backyard Bird Count Johnson Nature Center, Bloomfield Hills (Young Birders)	Kathleen Dougherty kad8186@msn.com
March 8 (Sunday) 8:00 AM – 12:00 PM	Belleville Gulls / Ducks	Don Burlett baikalteal13@netzero.net
March 28 (Saturday) 6:00 PM – 8:15 PM	Seeking Signs of Spring Bald Mountain Recreation Area, Lake Orion (Young Birders)	Kathleen Dougherty kad8186@msn.com

Join us for the **2025 Christmas Bird Count (CBC)**, on **Saturday, December 20, 2025!**

We'll gather at the **Wint Nature Center at Independence Oaks County Park** for an in-person species tally at **4:30 PM** (Please arrive no later than 5:00 PM).

Contact **Kayla Niner** for details.



The Michigan Audubon Chapter Leader's Meeting

by Kathleen Dougherty



Michigan Audubon Society (MAS) held a Chapter Leadership meeting at their headquarters in Okemos on Saturday, September 20, 2025. Robert Moll and Kathleen Dougherty attended on behalf of the Oakland Bird Alliance. This meeting marked the first in several years during which MAS gathered chapters together to discuss challenges and solutions.

During this day of learning and sharing, MAS staff provided vital information for chapters to use to recruit new members and improve membership services to benefit bird conservation. In addition, MAS research staff discussed their current projects and work. Linda Smith shared one of MAS's new initiatives: the [Bird City Program](#). Linda is currently working throughout the state to support this program.



Chapter representatives also had an opportunity to discuss their issues. MAS staff had planned activities to elicit discussion on topics including chapter challenges and ideas for new birding initiatives. Everyone had a chance to share their ideas on sticky notes, which were then categorized into groups. The whole group then decided to brainstorm the top two issues: recruiting young members and increasing volunteering among members. Teams generated a



lengthy list of ideas. (The OBA board members received copies of the documents and presentations shared at this meeting.)

In the afternoon, MAS presented its Chapter Awards and recognitions. Two chapters were recognized: Kalamazoo Audubon Society was named Chapter of the Year Honoree and Oakland Bird Alliance was the recipient of the Chapter of the Year Award. It was a privilege to represent OBA at the event and accept this award on its behalf.

The 2025 MAS Chapter Award was on display at the October OBA Membership Meeting. Further plans to display the award will be shared soon.

A special thanks to all the OBA members working on the application for this award, and



thanks to Michigan Audubon Society staff for presenting this honor to OBA. The Oakland Bird Alliance, formerly the Oakland Audubon Society, has a membership comprised of kind and knowledgeable people who are always willing to help the community by sharing our joy of birding and protecting the natural world.

Thank you also to the staff at Michigan Audubon for creating this gathering to improve and advance birding across the state and region. Many chapters share the same challenges, and are all working hard to promote bird conservation and birding in their areas. If you have questions or would like more information about this meeting, please reach out to an OBA board member.

All photos: Michigan Audubon Society

Nuthatch Open Recap

by Kayla Niner

The 14th annual Nuthatch Open was held on Sunday, September 14, 2025. It was a swinging success, with six teams competing in the Open category and one team in the Youth Division. The most-discussed birds of the day included a Virginia Rail, a Sora, and an American Pipit.

The reigning champions, *Three Balding Eagles and a Harpy*, once again took home the trophy with a whopping 84 species. The Youth division was won by *Team Heron* with an impressive 54 species. Everyone had a great time, and the following cookout offered a great time for the teams to come together and swap bird stories. The complete results are listed below.



Above: Virginia Rail; Below: Sora
(Audrey Klish)

OPEN DIVISION

1ST PLACE

3 Balding Eagles and a Harpy

Mike Mencotti
Scott Jennex
Lyle Hamilton
Mary Trombley

TOTAL: 84

2ND PLACE

Leddy Limpkins

Brendan Leddy
Joanne Leddy

TOTAL: 74

3RD PLACE

Nighthawks

Karen Kessler
Malissa Bossardet
Meredith Meyer
Nancy Bogart

TOTAL: 73

4TH PLACE

Inglorious Blackbirds

Bill Johnson
Nate Spala
Amber Piotter
Stephanie Galasso

TOTAL: 69

5TH PLACE

Last Place Heroes

Don Burlett
Carolyn Stickney

TOTAL: 48

6TH PLACE

The RABid Coots

Alyssia McGee
Rebekah Seitz
Barb Olsen

TOTAL: 43



Above: Red-Tailed Hawk;
Below: Blue-Headed Vireo
(Audrey Klish)

YOUTH DIVISION

1ST PLACE

Team Heron

Audrey Klish
Heather Klish

TOTAL: 54



Reigning Open Division Champions:
Three Balding Eagles and a Harpy

Left to right: Kayla Niner, Scott Jennex, Lyle Hamilton, Mike Mencotti, and Mary Trombley (Dan Gertiser)



Reigning Youth Division Champions:
Team Heron

Left to right: Heather and Audrey Klish (Dan Gertiser)

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

August 22–24, 2025 — Summer Upper Peninsula Trip

Leader: Don Burlett

A summer trip to the UP is always a joy, especially late in the summer when migrants are headed south but it's (generally) still warm. This trip had an added factor in that we were doing a joint field trip with the [Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance](#) on Saturday, August 23rd, at [Seney National Wildlife Refuge](#). As with many trips of this type, there was a focus on a specific species that participants were interested in: the Black-Backed Woodpecker.

The plan was an early start on Friday to get to the UP to search for our target bird on Friday. To find these woodpeckers, it is typically a good idea to find recent burned areas of pine, which these woodpeckers like for feeding. I obtained a 2024 prescribed burn map from Elliott Melson and used this to identify several areas to visit. Unfortunately, the map provided was for planning and most of the spots shown did not have burns. The first few spots were west of Racoon (north and south of M28) and were not helpful. We then went west of Seney and found some small patches of burns but nothing solid. The result of the first day was utter frustration—and no woodpecker.

On Saturday, we began by meeting the Laughing Whitefish Bird Alliance group at Seney National Wildlife Reserve. The group included 15 people from Laughing Whitefish and five from Oakland Bird Alliance. Together, we drove the Marshland Wildlife Drive, including the Fishing Loop. While waiting to get cars and carpooling sorted out, we heard a Black-Backed Woodpecker calling nearby. It never showed but was a pleasant surprise for those who heard it. As usual, Common Loons were soon found and even gave a few calls to excite the group. A few groups of warblers mixed with Red-Breasted Nuthatches were always a great moment. (Of course, fall warblers are always fun to sort out.) We also added a Red-Necked Grebe and some other marsh and lake birds.

By mid-afternoon, our group headed to Grand Marais to see if anything interesting was present on the shores of Lake Superior. We were pleasantly surprised to find a Buff-Breasted Sandpiper and Baird's Sandpiper mixed in with the Semipalmated Plovers and sandpipers. It was quite windy on Saturday, and Lake Superior was doing its best to let us know how rough it can get.



Birders at Seney National Wildlife Refuge
(Above: Karen Kessler; Below: Don Burlett)



Left: Grand Marais Beach (Don Burlett); Center: Baird's Sandpiper (Melaine Mitchell); Right: Buff-Breasted Sandpiper (Karen Kessler).

On Sunday, we rose early and headed to Whitefish Point to see if anything exciting was happening. When we arrived, the mosquitoes were out in full force, but nature was still active. We observed several Merlins working along the shore and watched one capture a bat as it was arriving over the shore—bad for the bat but good for the Merlin! Things were a little quiet, so we checked the harbor area. A few swallows were working the area and pestering the Merlins as they flew around. An American White Pelican was resting on the break wall, and a Hooded Merganser lolled in the water.



Whitefish Point (Don Burlett)



American White Pelican (Melaine Mitchell)

Finally, we drove to the [Munuscong Wildlife Management Area](#) (aka “Potholes”) in search of a LeConte’s Sparrow, but there were none to be seen or heard. We did get a handful of nice birds, including warblers. Overall, the entire weekend was fun and exciting with new birds spotted. It was a fun group, and we enjoyed seeing or hearing 78 species on this trip. Everyone had a great time and enjoyed adding new birds to their life lists.



The group enjoying dinner (Don Burlett)

August 30, 2025 — Heritage Park

Leader: Jeff Stacey



Birders on a chilly day in late August (Kayla Niner)

Late August is usually when warblers start migrating through southeast Michigan, so we decided to try and find some at [Heritage Park](#). The weather was surprisingly cold, but the warblers were still there—albeit starting a bit late. In typical fall migration style, we would find a small flock and watch them flit about like mad for a few minutes until they abruptly disappeared. Then, we would walk a short distance and repeat the process.



Cape May Warbler (Kayla Niner)

In total, the 12 of us managed to come up with 48 bird species during an almost-four-hour trip around the park. Though that time wouldn’t win any races, it was the perfect speed for birding.

The most common species were unsurprisingly Blackburnian, Bay-Breasted, Magnolia, Black-and-White, and American Redstart. There were some surprises too, like Blue-Winged and Wilson’s. Not everything sighted was a warbler—we also had Least and Great Crested Flycatchers as well as some Red-Eyed Vireos that probably weren’t migrants. A complete list of birds sighted by the group is available [here](#):



Left: Chestnut-Sided Warbler; Center: Tennessee Warbler; Right: Wilson’s Warbler (Kayla Niner)

September 27, 2025 — Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge

Leader: Don Burlett

A group of seven birders began the day at [Shiawassee National Wildlife Refuge](#) (NWR) in early morning. It was still foggy when we arrived, but the fog began to lift just after the sun rose. Our goal was to drive the “auto drive” around the refuge and then come back for a short hike on the Ferguson Bayou trail.



While at the parking lot, we spotted a few different sparrows (Song, Savannah) and a young Northern Harrier sitting on a post in the field. We started the drive, stopped at the facilities, and observed a Black-Crowned Night Heron, a Green Heron, and some Eastern Phoebe. As we drove along further, we observed Canada Geese, lots of Red-Winged Blackbirds, a Hooded Merganser and several more harriers.

A field on the west side of the refuge had enormous numbers of ducks and geese. Most of the ducks were Green-Winged Teal, along with some Northern Shovelers and American Wigeon, plus a Killdeer. There were several Bald Eagles seen in the area, including several near a nest in the refuge. We also stopped along the way and found Lincoln’s Sparrow hiding in some bushes along with Swamp, Song, and Savannah Sparrows.

As we reached the Shiawassee River, a large contingent of ducks was noted. These included American Wigeon, Mallard, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, and Wood Duck, along with Pied-Billed Grebe. There were also large numbers of Great Egret and geese. Ring-Billed Gulls were numerous, and just a couple of Herring Gulls were present.

We continued further around the auto drive and found a number of Trumpeter Swans, more Great Blue Herons, and Great Egret. There were good numbers of Common Gallinule around, but no shorebirds beyond the Killdeer. This time of year is a transitional period between the large migration of species south and the arrival of many more ducks and winter species.

After the auto drive, we walked a portion of the Ferguson Bayou trail and added our only warbler, a Yellow-Rumped Warbler along with some Black-Capped Chickadees. Overall, it was an enjoyable day to be outside, despite the relatively low numbers of birds. Our total number of species was 41, which was not bad for a sunny—and eventually warm—day.



Photos: Don Burlett

September 28, 2025 — Heritage Park

Leaders: Jeff Stacey and Mike Mencotti



Barred Owl (Kayla Niner)

Jeff Stacey and I led 11 birders on a beautiful late September Sunday morning at [Heritage Park](#). The birds delighted all of us, including many of the attendees who were on their first field trip. Several of our birders even reported lifers! We saw a lot of warblers, vireos, woodpeckers, and raptors, among others. Of course, the warblers proved challenging with their “now-you-see-me-now-you-don’t” routine, but most of us were able to get decent views of them as well as the vireos. Among the most-satisfying birds that we crossed paths with were a pair of Barred Owls, which were whooping it up near the Rouge Bridge. One was even (barely) in view! All in all, we tallied 47 species.



Song Sparrow (Kayla Niner)

Young Birders Club

FIELD TRIP REPORTS

August 16, 2025—Huron River Twilight Walk at Proud Lake Recreation Area

A group of 12 Oakland Owlets, family members, and friends gathered for a twilight hike at [Proud Lake State Recreation Area](#) on the Huron River in Commerce Township. The park is over 4,700 acres and has multiple recreation opportunities, including river canoeing, hiking, fishing and more. The grounds feature a modern campground, conference center, and cabin.

The Owlets met at the trail head parking lot near the park headquarters as the sun was setting. The trees filtered the sunlight, and an earlier rain made the air feel damp and moist even though the rain had stopped. Tim Nowicki, a fellow birder, Christmas Count Compiler for the Detroit Bird Alliance, and a wonderful naturalist, joined the hike as a co-leader.

The group set out towards the Marsh Trail, initially trekking through a mature and dense forest. The leaves on the tall trees protected the ground from earlier rain and limited our view of the marsh until we came to the pond and the tree canopy opened. We enjoyed some splendid views of the wetlands surrounding the pond, and observed many interesting plants growing there, such as Michigan Holly with its bright red berries, Jewelweed, and Joe-Pye Weed. In the stillness, few bird songs could be heard, with the exceptions of some active cawing by American Crows and the ever-present Blue Jays.

The Marsh Trail offers boardwalks across the wetlands, and everyone was hopeful of catching a glimpse of ducks despite the tall plants in the marshy areas that made it hard to see open water. Soon everyone again could hear the familiar “quack, quack” of Mallards at the pond edge. The group also heard the call of a Wood Duck as it was leaving the area. The Wood Duck’s call and flight silhouettes are distinctive: Male Wood Ducks are so colorful! Unlike most ducks, Wood Ducks build their nests in tree cavities.

Further along the trail, we had another chance to view the pond from a platform. Everyone stepped onto the deck to look for birds along the water’s edge. We discovered a family of Mute Swans, with six cygnets, concealed by wetland vegetation. The cygnets were nearly adult-sized. The group also spotted a Great Egret perched in a tree overlooking the water.

In total, the group observed 18 species of birds along our hike. Our eBird checklist included many typical woodland birds, such as the Hairy Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Red-Bellied Woodpecker, and smaller birds like Black-Capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, and White-Breasted Nuthatches. The abundance of berry-producing plants along the trail also attracted birds like the Cedar Waxwing, American Robin, and Gray Catbird, which we also saw and heard.

The hike concluded when it was nearly dark. Although overall bird activity was low, it was a lovely evening to hike and enjoy nature. The eBird checklist is available upon request. A special thank you to Tim Nowicki for co-leading this hike and sharing his expertise.



Birding the boardwalks at Proud Lake
(Kathleen Dougherty)



Left: Cedar Waxwing; Center: Hairy Woodpecker; Right: Mute Swans (OBA photo gallery)

September 13, 2025—Hawk Watching at Lake Erie Metropark (in cooperation with Michigan Audubon's Young Birders' Network)

Leader: Kathleen Dougherty



Erika Van Kirk, USFWS
(Kathleen Dougherty)

Every fall, from September through November, Detroit River Hawk Watch volunteers count raptors moving through Lake Erie Metropark, the official location of the Detroit River Hawk Watch Count. As part of the Hawk Migration Association (HMA) database, the Count supports scientific knowledge of raptor migration and populations and promotes conservation of these birds. The Count is conducted by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, and its Friends group.



On the warm, pleasant morning of the Count, the Oakland Owlets families and friends gathered near the river next to the official count site. Erika Van Kirk, of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's (FWS) Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge, discussed hawk identification and migration with the group, explaining how hawks are grouped by their silhouettes and sharing tips about the field marks of commonly sighted hawks. Erika also provided everyone with a copy of the HMA's *Junior Hawkwatcher Guide* and explained how official counters have named the tree line across the river to pinpoint where they are looking.



Great Egret (Kathleen Dougherty)

The official counters were close by and facing northeast with their scopes and binoculars. When one of the counters called out a hawk flying overhead, everyone stopped to look at the bird. As the morning progressed, more spectators arrived, complete with lawn chairs.

Other birds were active along the river near the boat launch. Our group was entertained by a Great Egret standing on some floating vegetation that looked as if it was levitating on the water's surface. Several times, the egret located something to eat.

Meanwhile, Ring-Billed Gulls, Herring Gulls, and occasional terns patrolled back and forth along the river. Everyone had a good look at a Caspian Tern. In the distance, a flock of White Pelicans landed on the shore across the river. The spotting scope provided a better look at these spectacular birds. Mallards, Pied-Billed Grebes, and Double-Crested Cormorants were also common sights.

The official counters occasionally called out the raptors they observed, including "Sharpies," or Sharp-Shinned Hawks. Looking up, we could see the shape of an accipiter. With a total of 161 Sharp-Shinned Hawks, this day marked was one of the highest counts ever for this species. However, overall hawk migration was low: The warm temperature and the winds from the south are unfavorable for hawk migration.

The official hawk watch count for September 13 was a total of 169 individuals. Other raptors included the American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Northern Harrier, and Bald Eagle. The Owlets were able to see the American Kestrel and Bald Eagle in addition to the numerous Sharp-Shinned Hawks.



Above left: Sharp-Shinned Hawk (OBA photo gallery); Above right: Young Birder Cam (Melaine Mitchell); Below: Owlets and friends at the park (Kathleen Dougherty)



Rusty Blackbird (Mike Dougherty)

Near noon, the larger group began to disperse, with a small group deciding to walk the trail south to get a better view of Lake Erie. We were rewarded with some songbirds as well as wetland birds, including the American Coot, Common Gallinule, and a family of Pied-billed Grebes. The group's eBird list included 29 species and 243 individuals.

Thank you to everyone attending, and a special thank you to Erika Van Kirk from FWS. An eBird checklist for this field trip is available upon request.



Pied-Billed Grebe (OBA photo gallery)

October 11, 2025 — Rose Oaks County Park World Migratory Bird Day

Leader: Kathleen Dougherty



[Rose Oaks County Park](#) is a quiet, rustic park near Holly, located in the headwaters of the Shiawassee River Watershed with multiple wetlands and kettle lakes. With one-third of the park property classified as wetlands, Rose Oaks is a good place to spot birds.

The Oakland Owlets and crew kicked off the celebration of World Migratory Bird Day's fall migration with a tour beginning at the Buckhorn Lake Road parking lot. This dirt road cuts through the east entrance to the park and divides two of the park's lakes: Mallet Lake and Cogger Lake. OBA member and wildlife photographer Mike Dougherty, who has extensive knowledge of Rose Oaks, volunteered as co-leader of the hike.



On the boardwalks at
Rose Oaks
(Kathleen Dougherty)

Our bird sightings started in the parking lot, with an abundance of Red-Winged Blackbirds singing in a mixed flock that included Rusty Blackbirds and Common Grackles. From a distance, we spotted large flocks of blackbirds and European Starlings flying up from the wetlands. Meanwhile, White-Throated Sparrows foraged on the ground near the parking lot.

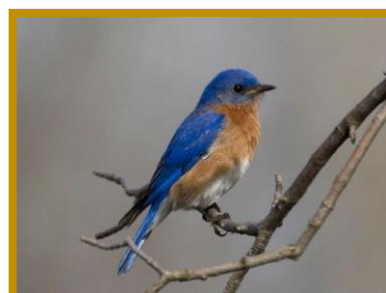
As the group crossed the boardwalk from the parking lot to the Forestview Trail, we paused and listened. A lone Swamp Sparrow lingered in the wetlands: a straggler from the rest of the flock already on its way south.

The forest was buzzing with birds! Melaine called out a Brown Creeper, and everyone stopped to find it, binoculars zooming in on the nearby tree trunks. Several of us got a good look at

it. A large tree with cavities attracted several bird species; likely because they were home to insect prey. In addition to the Brown Creeper, we also observed the Black-Capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-Breasted Nuthatch, Downy Woodpecker at this stop. As we continued along the trail, we also heard the cawing of Red-Bellied Woodpeckers and the frantic, laughing call of the Northern Flicker.

When the group reached Richardson Lake, the view opened on more blackbirds and a Pileated Woodpecker. Dead standing trees surrounded part of the lake and provided a buffet for the woodpeckers. The Belted Kingfisher's rattle-like call vibrated in our ears by the water. This stocky, crested bird with a long, thick bill often patrols lakes and rivers.

As the group continued around Richardson Lake, we heard the soft song of the Eastern Bluebird, a resident to medium-distance migrant. The open fields north of the lake are ideal bluebird habitat. In this area, Eastern Bluebirds may migrate to the southeast United States, or some may linger here into the winter.



Above: Yellow-Rumped Warbler
Below: Eastern Bluebird (Cornell
Lab of Ornithology)



Brown Creeper (Heather Klish)

The group also heard a Killdeer, which was hunting along the exposed mudflats at the lake's edge. We continued along but stopped to see the trail that extended across another boardwalk into a meadow. The group decided to return instead of walking an additional mile. From the boardwalk, we observed a Sandhill Crane flying into the marsh. Its loud calls were answered by other Sandhill Cranes already feeding in the wetland.

After circling Richardson Lake, the group followed the trail back to the parking lot. We surprised a pair of perfectly camouflaged father and son archers tucked away in the forest. Though most warblers had migrated by this time, we did observe a few late warblers on our walk through the forest, including the Black-Throated Blue Warbler and the Yellow-Rumped Warbler. A small group checked the lakes near the parking lot, adding Wood Ducks and a Great Blue Heron to our eBird checklist. The group eBird checklist tallied 30 species and 242 individuals and is available upon request.

We concluded the hike with snacks and drinks. A special thank you to Mike Dougherty for sharing information about Rose Oaks with the Oakland Owlets, their families, and their friends.

BIRD QUIZ—WINTER 2025

from Don Burlett



A) _____



B) _____



C) _____

*For answers and explanations,
see Page 20.*

No Peeking!

Young Birders Club

Field Trip Details – January to March

Winter Walk / Exploring Corvids—January 17 (Saturday), 8:30 AM – 11:30 AM Environmental Interpretive Center, Dearborn

Take a winter hike along the trails at the Environmental Interpretive Center at the University of Michigan's Dearborn Campus. The Environmental Study Area is a 120-acre natural area at the Center known as a living laboratory for students and the community. It is a great place for birding and seeing wildlife. Trails wind through several natural habitats, including a floodplain forest bordered by the Rouge River. We will be exploring Corvids, members of the crow family. These birds are known for their intelligence. We will be joined by Environmental Interpretive Center Naturalist Dorothy McLeer, who is known for her Crow connections.



Great Backyard Bird Count—February 14 (Saturday), 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM Johnson Nature Center, Bloomfield Hills



Celebrate Valentine's Day and the joy of birding during the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC). This year, this global birding event takes place over four days on Valentine's Day weekend. Young birders' families and friends will be counting birds during a hike on the trails and at the Johnson Nature Center's feeding station. The Johnson Nature Center is an oasis for birds, including Wild Turkeys and Great Horned Owls. Dress for the weather and bring your binoculars. There will be a special bird feeder activity during this program.

Seeking Signs of Spring—March 28 (Saturday), 6:00 PM – 8:15 PM Bald Mountain Recreation Area, Lake Orion

Spring is a time to focus, pause and listen to the sounds of nature. Take an earlier hike near sunset and seek signs of spring, including returning birds, singing frogs, and more. Bird migration is underway at this time of year, with several species migrating at night and overall activity increasing as the sun sets. Special thanks to Jessica Ableson, Michigan Department of Natural Resources Interpreter, who works at Bald Mountain and has extensive knowledge of the park's wildlife. Plan to hike: Dress for the weather and bring your binoculars. A state parks passport is required for park entry. Buy in advance and support Michigan State Parks when you renew your vehicle registration.



Photo credits: *Above:* American Crow; *Center:* Red-Breasted Nuthatch; *Below:* American Bittern (OBA photo gallery)



Bird Briefs (Items to look at online)

from Don Burlett

Preview of Winter Finch Forecast 2025–2026, published September 28, 2025, by the Finch Research Network



Redpoll (Matt Young)

This year's [Winter Finch Forecast](#) anticipates this year's potential to be the biggest flight year since 2020–2021. Due to poor crops in the boreal forest from central Quebec westward to Manitoba, we may see modest numbers of Redpolls, Red Crossbills, White-Winged Crossbills, and Pine Siskins, among others, in the Great Lakes area.

Follow finch wanderings this fall and winter on [eBird](#), the [Finch Research Network](#), and the [Finches, Irruptions and Mast Crops Facebook group](#) for updates and more information.

Kirtland Warbler Population Trend and Future Issues, published July 28, 2025, by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) issued a [report](#) on the population of Kirtland's Warbler in Michigan and elsewhere. In 2021, the global population of these warblers was pegged at 2245 pairs. Another survey was conducted between June 6 and 26 this year, finding 1477 breeding pairs in Michigan (which is home to 98% of the population).

These data included the following sets:

- 814 pairs on DNR-managed land in the northern Lower Peninsula
- 597 pairs on Forest Service land in the northern Lower Peninsula
- 49 pairs on DNR-managed land in the Upper Peninsula
- 17 pairs in Forest Service land in the Upper Peninsula
- 22 pairs in Ontario and 12 pairs in Wisconsin



Kirtland's Warbler (MIDNR)

This decline in the population is projected to continue for a few years as the [Kirtland's Warbler Conservation Team](#) makes efforts to stabilize the population through innovative strategies. One reason for this decline is decreased acreage of suitable breeding habitat. One problem that has appeared is the issue with the rotation of acreage and dealing with the jack pine harvesting. Until recently, the harvesting of these jack pines occurred at ages between 30 and 40 years. However, typical use of pines requires them to be 50 years old. Ideas to handle this issue are being considered, but the Kirtland's Warbler population will continue to decline until the issue is resolved and adequate acreage is available to sustain the desired breeding population.

Visit the MIDNR website to view the [full bulletin](#).



LISTERS: A Glimpse into Extreme Birdwatching, premiered August 19, 2025, on YouTube

This documentary about birding was created by a couple of brothers, Owen and Quentin Reiser, who started as non-birders. It is both interesting, seeing the ins and outs of Big Years, and funny, as these two brothers really put effort into their yearlong birding trip through the lower 48 states despite not knowing what they were doing. Well worth a look.

View LISTERS free online [here](#).

Oakland Bird Alliance Around Town: Fall 2025

by Kathleen Dougherty

Rouge River Water Festival—September 16–19



The Rouge River Water Festival is coordinated by the Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner's Office and the Cranbrook Institute of Science. Hosted at Cranbrook, the Rouge River Water Festival featured educational presentations and activities for 4th- and 5th-grade classes. Students learned about all things water and the importance of stewardship to protect the watershed.

The Oakland Bird Alliance, represented by members Don Burlett and Kathleen Dougherty, presented an educational program about birds and creating bird-friendly communities. Teachers learned about OBA and about World Migratory Bird Day and its 2025 theme: Shared Spaces. Don and Kathleen spoke to six classes over two days, reaching approximately 165 students, teachers, and parents.

Friends of Highland Recreation Area Festival—September 27



The Friends of Highland Recreation Area (FOHRA) is a nonprofit group of volunteers dedicated to enhancing visitor experiences at the Highland Recreation Area. This group focuses on the unique historical character of Highland Recreation as the former estate of Edsel and Eleanor Ford. The estate known as Haven Hill is a National Natural Area Landmark designated by the National Parks Service.

This year, the Oakland Bird Alliance, along with MI Birds and FOHRA, sponsored a Birds of Haven Hill Presentation at this year's festival. Kathleen Dougherty presented this talk, which was prepared by Don Burlett, to between 35 and 40 people in the outdoor pavilion. In addition, OBA hosted a display at the festival in partnership with Huron Valley Audubon. Fifty-eight guests stopped by the OBA display to learn about birds and OBA programs. Audubon Great Lakes provided field guides as prizes for this event through the MI Birds program in partnership with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. Kathleen was joined by fellow OBA member Laurie Schubert in volunteering at this festival. Both enjoyed the beautiful day and the chance to connect with the community.



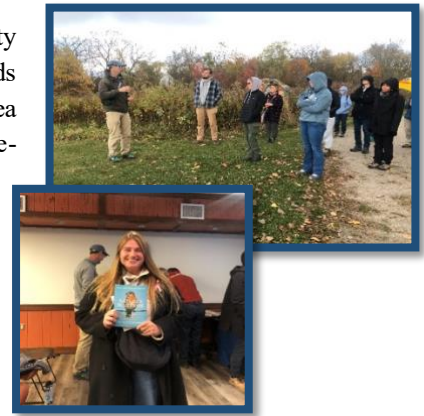
Michigan State University Extension's Conservation Stewards Program



The Oakland Bird Alliance co-sponsored the Oakland County Michigan State University Extension Conservation Stewards Program (MSUE CSP) this fall, along with several other area conservation organizations. The MSUE CSP is a science-based, eight-week-long educational program designed for people interested in ecosystem management principles and restoring native habitats throughout Michigan. Students in the program commit to supporting conservation work in Oakland County by volunteering for local organizations as part of a class requirement.

On October 23rd, OBA members Don Burlett and Kathleen

Dougherty visited the Oakland Township Parks office to deliver a presentation about grassland birds and the 2025 State of the Birds Report to the CSP class. Audubon Great Lakes, through the MI Birds program, provided educational materials for the class and some books as prizes. Dr. Ben VanderWeide hosted the class, which toured the grassland habitat at Bear Creek Nature Park in Rochester and enjoyed interactive presentations by Dr. VanderWeide, Don Burlett, and Kathleen Dougherty. Approximately 30 students attended the Oakland CSP class this fall.



All photos: Kathleen Dougherty



Volunteer with the Oakland Bird Alliance

Apprentices for Climate Watch Squares

Oakland Bird Alliance conducts semiannual surveys as part of the National Audubon Climate Watch project. Each individual surveys a 10 km X 10 km square, with 12 locations within the square. The surveys occur between January 15th and February 15th in the winter and May 15th and June 15th in the summer. The surveys focus on the White-Breasted Nuthatch but also collect data on all species observed. These surveys take 3 to 4 hours each time. We are looking for individuals who would like to learn the ropes and possibly take over existing squares or begin new squares as part of this project. Contact Kathleen Dougherty or Don Burlett if you are interested.

Volunteers for Outreach Activities

Each year, Oakland Bird Alliance attends a variety of events, including the Clinton River Water Festival, Hawkfest, and Earth Day events where we table a booth, offer presentations, or both. Typically, at least one board member is in attendance; however, without volunteers to help with the tables and display, we get stretched beyond our capabilities. We are looking for members and any individuals willing to dedicate part or all of a day to help man our table at these events. As Outreach events get scheduled, we will contact volunteers to make sure we can do the events. Please contact George Harris or Kathleen Dougherty if you are willing to help at outreach events.

OBA Web Coordinator

Do you love birds and websites? We're looking for a Volunteer Web Coordinator to help keep the Oakland Bird Alliance's online nest looking sharp and welcoming! This is an appointed board position, which means you'll get a front-row seat to the behind-the-scenes magic that keeps our bird-loving community soaring. You'll also have a real voice in shaping how we connect with members, partners, and the public through our website.

What you'll do:

- Update and polish our website using a drag-and-drop platform (like Wix or WordPress).
- Keep events, news, and programs fresh and up to date.
- Collaborate with our small but mighty team to make sure our online presence reflects our mission and joy for birds!

What we're looking for:

- Experience with website editing tools (Wix, WordPress, or similar).
- A creative eye and an enthusiasm for communicating with style.
- Someone who can commit about **5 hours a month** and attend **monthly board meetings (virtual options available)**.

What's in it for you:

- A chance to make a tangible impact on local bird conservation and community engagement.
- Connect with a passionate, friendly flock of fellow bird enthusiasts.
- Get an insider's look at how a nonprofit organization runs—and help it take flight!

Interested? Send us a note at admin@oaklandbirdalliance.org telling us a bit about your background and why you'd like to join the team. Let's make our website sing! 🐦🎵



PEOPLE, PLACES, BIRDS. — Winter

Guest Column by Daniel Bernard

Back in my Spring *Nuthatch* entry, I introduced my “People, Places, Birds” adventure—a year-long quest to travel the country with the goals of seeing 100 species in each of the Lower 48 states, meeting and birding with hundreds of local birders, and getting to know the birds we don’t often see in Michigan. Since that first entry, I’ve crisscrossed the country from Arizona to Florida, California, and back to New England before returning home briefly and setting out to finish the remainder of the Midwest. Today, we pick up where I left off as I headed into the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes to see the journey through to what is, for all intents and purposes, its finale.



Lazuli
Bunting
*Passerina
amoena*

North
Dakota

When it comes to those in the birding world, it is likely that, when Minnesota is brought up, one location in particular comes to mind: Sax-Zim Bog. “The Bog,” which sits in northeast Minnesota an hour northwest of Duluth, is perhaps the most infamous birding location in the entire Great Lakes region and is famed as the best place in the country for birders to track down an assortment of boreal birds, most notably the northern owls: Boreal Owl, Northern Hawk-Owl, and the legendary Great Gray Owl, for which hundreds of birders flock to The Bog every winter, especially on good irruption years.

Unfortunately for me, however, these birds were all long gone by my midsummer visit in early August, but I beelined it for The Bog after crossing over from Iowa anyway, my sights set on another legendary bird: Connecticut Warbler. The Holy Grail of eastern American warblers, Connecticut Warblers are just as elusive and rare as Sax-Zim’s winter residents—but with a few hours of careful effort I had success in locating this local breeding species as well as a myriad of other birds including Black-Backed Woodpecker, Yellow-Bellied Flycatcher, Canada Jay, Black-Billed Magpie, Winter Wren, and Mourning Warbler.

From Minnesota I moved on westward to North Dakota, entering the state around Grand Forks and kicking off the day at Kellys Slough National Wildlife Refuge before reaching the farthest north I’ve ever been, just a few miles south of the Canadian

border at the Pembina Gorge Recreation Area. The Roughrider State was kind to me as I made my way west across the plains, producing my first-of-year Sharp-Tailed Grouse, Swainson’s Hawk, Western Kingbird, and Hudsonian Godwit.

When I reached the western edges of the state, I tracked down my lifer, Baird’s Sparrow, before heading into Theodore Roosevelt National Park, which produced more lifers in Western Wood-Pewee and Lazuli Bunting, as well as my first-of-year Black-Headed Grosbeak. The string of lifers continued when I crossed into South Dakota where, in the Black Hills, I picked up Dusky Flycatcher and MacGillivray’s Warbler and unintentionally stumbled upon Mount Rushmore.



Dusky
Grouse
*Dendragapus
obscurus*

Wyoming

From the Black Hills, I made my last significant eastward drive of the journey as I crossed the state from southwest to northeast, meeting up with Aberdeen-area birder Barry Parkin before moving on to Nebraska. I crossed the 100 mark with ease in the Cornhusker state. As you may recall from my Summer *Nuthatch* article, I paid a visit to the Kearney area back in March to witness the spectacle of Sandhill Crane migration, leaving the state after just two days tantalizingly close to the century mark at 97 species.

During this second visit, I met and birded with Lincoln local Tobin Brown, with whom I picked up my only Buff-Breasted Sandpiper of the year, as well as an incredibly rare-for-Nebraska Swallow-Tailed Kite. I also paid another visit to Kearney, where I stayed at the house of local UNK Professor of Ornithology Jacob Cooper and his wife Caroline, birding and dining with the Coopers and their friends Cody, Letty, and Peggy.

On my way to Wyoming, I witnessed the awesome phenomenon of a massive flock of phalaropes—Wilson’s Phalarope, in this case—spinning in circles when I spotted over a thousand of them in a nondescript highwayside pond.

Another memorable moment came when my dad posted about my trip on a Facebook page and was reached out to by another birder

PEOPLE, PLACES, BIRDS. — Winter

(continued)

traveling the country, inquiring about meeting up. It seemed our paths were crossing as he headed from Wyoming into Nebraska. Amusingly, though, he composed his message to my dad with talk-to-text, which interpreted his “I am an avid birder” as “I am an avid murderer”—and of course, being reached out to by a murderer who wanted to meet his son at a remote location in southern Wyoming, my dad handed over my contact information so he could give me a call.

Daniel Smith and I met at the Hereford Ranch in southern Wyoming, where I snagged my lifer Broad-Tailed Hummingbird.



Great Gray Owl
Strix nebulosa

Montana

The Broad-Tailed wouldn't be my last lifer in Wyoming, though, as I added Common Poorwill on my way north towards Sheridan to meet up with Dalton Spencer, as well as the recently split Western Warbling Vireo and a Calliope Hummingbird while birding with Dalton.

From Sheridan, I moved westwards to perhaps the most incredibly scenic place I've ever been: Yellowstone National Park. My time in the park was more focused on enjoying the place of legend rather than birding, but there was still fantastic birding to be done as I picked up my first Harlequin Ducks and Northern Goshawk of the year and a lifer Dusky Grouse. After a couple days in Yellowstone, I moved northwards to Montana, which would produce one of the best days of the year as well as one of the worst.

For the past couple months, I'd been putting off some auto maintenance due to my rapidly constricting budget but, at the end of August, I finally bit the bullet and dropped my car off for the inevitable. The repair list was far longer (and pricier) than expected but, thanks to the generosity of others, it proved manageable, and I was sidelined only for a few days instead of indefinitely.

Morale picked up the night of September 1st in the Pioneer Mountains when I managed to track down not one, not two, but *five* different Great Gray Owls. The second proved to be an even better day, as following just a couple hours of sleep and a long

drive from the spot where I picked up the owls, I found myself at Logan Pass in Glacier National Park at dawn, where I eventually managed to spot a distant White-Tailed Ptarmigan.

Glacier proved to be very fruitful, producing my lifer Cassin's Vireo and Black Swift in the coming hours. I closed out the day with a lifer Vaux's Swift a couple hours later as I made my way south—five lifers in a 24-hour window.

Eventually I moved on from Montana and entered Idaho, where I picked up 100 species on my first day in a state for the first time since Delaware back in May. On the second day, I tracked down lifer Cassia Crossbill and Flammulated Owl in the South Hills, from which I rather quickly moved on to Oregon: my second-to-last remaining state.

I'd planned to spend my first few days in Oregon solo, but plans changed when, on my first night, I discovered while texting my dad that the field tour he was leading was staying at a hotel just a few miles from where I was parked—and I moved over to stay on the couch in his hotel room.

Over the next few days, I tagged along with the Seven Ponds birding tour crew and, while with them, connected with an adult Sabine's Gull.

After the tour was over, my dad and I embarked on a couple days along the Oregon coast, working our way south from Portland to northern California before turning inland and heading back so I could pick up my car and he could catch a flight back home. During these couple days, Marbled Murrelet, Pacific Golden-Plover, Pigeon Guillemot, and Elegant Tern joined my life list. It was great to see my dad for the last time until I come home next April for a speaking tour of sorts.



Sooty Grouse
Dendragapus fuliginosus

Washington

Finally, on the 20th of September, I crossed into Washington, my 48th of the Lower 48 states and, after a rainy day in the southwest corner of the state, I made my way into the Olympic Peninsula.

PEOPLE, PLACES, BIRDS. — Winter

(continued)

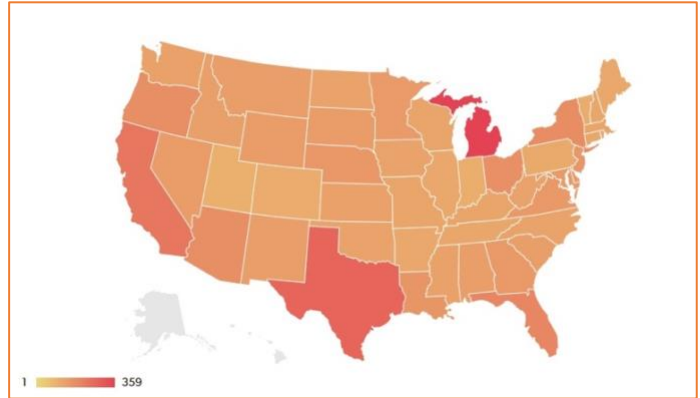
After a few days birding around the Dungeness area and Olympic National Park, during which I spent an extensive amount of time trying to track down—and eventually succeeding in finding—a lifer Sooty Grouse, I made my way to the coast and a spot called Ediz Hook.

A small peninsula jutting into the water, Ediz was loaded with all sorts of ducks, gulls, shorebirds, and more. The most notable of the birds there, though, was Rhinoceros Auklet. Being a lifer was perhaps the least exciting thing about the Auklet, though, as it was the 100th bird for Washington and marked the completion of the largest aspect of my “People, Places, Birds” adventure: I’d now crossed the century mark in every single state in the contiguous United States. Just like that, the quest which had defined not only the past ten months of my life as I traveled the country, but also the prior year in which I spent an incredible amount of time preparing, came to a close.

Over the course of the year, I’ve birded with over 300 people and seen over 600 species, but the year has been so much more than anything that can be defined by a simple number. In so many ways, I feel like I am a totally different person than I was a year ago, something which I find hard to put into words.

And while the year’s climax has now passed, the story of this year is not yet over. The epilogue, if you will, will see me embark on my first-ever pelagic out of Half Moon Bay, California, before heading east through Las Vegas to end the journey where it began—in southeast Arizona—before settling into my new home in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I plan to start up a guiding operation once I’m settled in.

All photos: Daniel Bernard



Daniel’s map of states birded this year

Thank you to everyone who has followed along on this journey. I look forward to telling the story when I am back home in April and giving a series of presentations, including one at the Oakland Bird Alliance. I look forward to seeing you all there and sharing with you all what I learned as I spent a year traveling the country to get to know the People, Places, and Birds of the American Birding World.

*Revisit Daniel’s 2025 journey
on his blog:*

PeoplePlacesBirds.net



BIRD QUIZ ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS

- a) **Sharp-Tailed Grouse:** Medium-sized with short crest. Intricately barred/spotted plumage. Colors can be grayish brown, reddish brown, or an intermediate tawny brown
- b) **Spruce Grouse:** To throw a wrench in the works, I have presented a female Spruce Grouse. Plump, this bird comes in two color morphs: gray and chestnut. Chestnut mottling overall with horizontal barred underparts. The male would have a red eyebrow and be slate gray on head and neck.
- c) **Ruffed Grouse:** Round and chickenlike, with long and pointed central tail feathers. Small, slightly crested head. Barred in brown, black, and buff. Note V-shaped marks on belly.

How did you do? Keep score throughout the year to track your bird identification skills!

Conservation & Environment Corner

by Katri Studtmann

Reducing Waste During the Holidays



Above: Early winter snow; *Right:* Chickadee enjoying a perch (Katri Studtmann).

The holidays are a magical time for many people and a time to visit with friends and family you might not see frequently. Unfortunately, the holidays can also be very wasteful. Americans generate about 25% more trash between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day. So how can we be more conscious of our environmental footprint during the holidays without sacrificing the traditions we have around the holidays? Here are a few ideas to minimize your waste this holiday season.

For families who celebrate Christmas, a Christmas tree is an important part of the holiday, which leads to the commonly asked question: *Should I get a fake or a real [Christmas tree](#)?* If you already have a fake Christmas tree, keep it! Use it for as many years as you can, and if your family decides they want to part with it before its life is done, donate it to friends or an organization that can continue to use it. The short answer is that real Christmas trees are better for the environment. Although a tree must be chopped down to become decor in your home, the overall environmental waste is less because a real tree can have a second life, while a fake one made of plastic will outlive us all in the landfill. Additionally, after the holidays, a real Christmas tree can become bird habitat in your yard! Once all the lights and decorations are removed, throw the tree outside next to your bird feeders and see what birds use it for shelter while foraging for food. A real tree can also be composted or used for firewood or mulch in your yard. For the most environmentally friendly Christmas tree, buy a potted live tree and plant it in the spring.

Another important tradition for many people during the holidays is gift-giving, which can generate a ton of waste between the wrapping of the gift and sometimes the gift itself. Although the flashy, glittery, shiny paper might look fun, it often cannot be recycled and ultimately ends up as trash. Look for wrapping paper made with recycled materials or states that it is recyclable (available at Target!). Or get creative with your wrapping and use scraps of fabric, newspaper, or reused

wrapping paper. Wrapping gifts in bags is even better than paper because the bag can be reused for many seasons. Using natural decorations on gifts like pine cones or dried flowers can add a fun touch as well.



Up to 32% of Americans return or exchange gifts they receive during the holidays—and that's not counting the people who keep the gift they don't really want! In an era where we can buy something with a click and it shows up on our doorstep the next day, we end up with a lot of stuff that we don't really want or need. An important first step is to

shop local! A locally crafted gift often means a lot more, and you are supporting your local economy. The gift of an experience (e.g., concert tickets, dinner, a trip) is also a great option and creates memories that last a lifetime. One last idea is to gift a consumable: something homemade or made locally (e.g., drinks, food, sweets).

Some other common waste created during the holidays includes cardboard boxes, broken Christmas lights, and food waste. Recycling will take cardboard boxes, but they need to be broken down flat and plastic tape or labels need to be removed insofar as possible. Many people think that the only place broken Christmas lights can go is the trash, but some places do accept them for recycling! Broken Christmas lights are accepted at the annual [Detroit Zoo Wild Lights event](#), even if you don't attend the event itself.

Food waste is also a big issue during the holidays because we make a lot of excess food for gatherings. One way to not waste it is by making sure people leave with leftovers, taking excess food to local food banks, or sharing with neighbors or other people in need. Many communities now offer food composting, so composting food that goes bad is also a better option than it ending up in the landfill!

I hope you have a few ideas on how to lessen your environmental impact during the holidays and that you have fun doing it! Remember, no one is perfect, and just by making an effort, you are making a difference! Enjoy your time with family and friends and, if you are available, get involved in OBA's [Christmas Bird Count](#), which is a great [citizen science project](#)!

MEMBERSHIP MESSAGES



Welcome, New Members!

Rosemarie Attilio, Lisa Bachman, Ian Baron, Lise Cragen, Mary Creager, Debra Davis, Stephanie Galasso, Judy Gamache-Krustch, Dan and Jeanne Granger, Patty Hassett, Samantha Lawrence, Alexandria Maye-Bloom, Robert Stecker, and R. Douglas Wetzel

The 2026 Membership Drive is underway. You can renew in one of two ways:

- 1) Use the “*Renew OBA Membership*” link on the Membership tab on our website (<http://www.oaklandbirdalliance.org>), to pay online using PayPal. **CLICK HERE** *or*
- 2) Mail a check along with a membership form (page 24)

Mail renewal forms to:

Oakland Bird Alliance
c/o Robert Moll
PO Box 796
Birmingham, MI 48012-0796

To check the status of your membership or if you have questions, contact OBA Membership Officer Robert Moll at: membership@oaklandbirdalliance.org.

**Thank you for helping us sustain OBA with your membership contributions.
We would be nowhere without you!**

Oakland Bird Alliance Online Store

We have an online store!
Your generous support helps us offer field trips,
organize monthly programs, engage young
birders, and support bird conservation.

Thank you!



Contact Karen Kessler
at Karenmk@live.com
with questions or
feedback.



2026 Spring Bluebird Festival

The Michigan Bluebird Society invites you to attend its FREE 2026 Spring Bluebird Festival at the Morris Lawrence Building at Washtenaw Community College, 4800 E. Huron River Drive in Ann Arbor, on Saturday, March 28, from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM. Enjoy a full day of bluebird-related exhibits, supplies, and speakers.

For more information, visit www.MichiganBluebirds.org.

Share With Us!

Do you have a story, article, or photos to share with our members?

Send your submissions to:
admin@oaklandbirdalliance.org

The Nuthatch is published in March, June, September, and December.
We reserve the right to edit.



BOARD MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

September 21, 2025

President: Announced OBA's receipt of Chapter of the Year Award and thanked longtime newsletter editor Guadalupe Cummins for her years of service.

Treasurer: The bank balance is \$29,598. YTD income is \$4,717 (\$1,925 dues, \$2,011 donations, \$780 merchandise). YTD expenses total \$6,039.

Membership Officer: There are 136 active members current with 2025 dues (excludes 6 life members), a 33% increase over April 2025 (last report). A considerable number of 2024 active members has not renewed during the current 2025 membership year. The membership calendar runs from Jan. 1 to Dec. 31—collection of 2026 dues will begin in September.

Program Officer: Programs are set through May 2026. The May meeting will be a nature hike.

Newsletter Editor: Tiffany Vojnovski joins the Board as the new *Nuthatch* editor.

Social Media Administrator: OBA's Instagram account is live; need additional photos to post, as these generate interest.

Website Editor: No report; this position is currently vacant.

Field Trip Officer: Seven teams participated in the Nuthatch Open: a great turnout. Reigning champion team "Three Balding

Eagles and a Harpy" remain undefeated, with the "Leddy Limpkins," "Nighthawks," and "Inglorious Blackbirds" taking 2nd, 3rd, and 4th places, respectively.

Field trips have been well attended; Spring 2026 field trips will be arranged in October.

Seven Ponds Representative: The Holiday Auction and Christmas Party will take place on December 6, and field tours are scheduled for late spring of 2026, including Southwest Colorado and the Adirondacks.

Publicity/Fundraising: The book sale went well and raised \$150.

Old/New Business:

"Bird City" designation for Oakland County: The committee meets monthly; OBA (Don) is in contact with them.

Incumbents Jenifer Benke, Robert Moll, and Gavin Awerbuch were re-elected Treasurer, Membership Officer, and Secretary, respectively, at the October membership meeting.

The board discussed the need for a checkout process for binoculars at outreach events and the possibility of using Eventbrite to manage field trip enrollments.

Highlights are compiled by the Newsletter Editor from meeting minutes submitted by Secretary Gavin Awerbuch.

Member Q&A: Migration

Does daylight length in the far north drive migration south to the northern US in winter?

It's well known from many research studies that daylight is the "ultimate factor" to trigger the drive for birds to migrate from regions like the far north to lower latitudes. Most migratory species use day length as a cue to move seasonally. But the whole scenario is complicated because a variety of other factors are linked to the decrease in day length.

When daylight hours are reduced, that means less time for many diurnal species to search for and find food. That, in turn, means it is more difficult to build fat reserves that are used for survival. This is compounded by the fact that food sources have already been utilized during the breeding season and are diminished during the fall and winter. Without the opportunity to renew these resources, the habitat doesn't provide as many opportunities to find food. This is common with conifer cone feeding species that will move to new locations in search of food because they have depleted the stock in their northernmost summer locations. Additionally, water availability is also a factor that becomes important as water sources become ice sources. Without an adaptation to use snow and ice for moisture or getting moisture through the food sources, this poses a further threat to survival. As always, there are exceptions to these "trends". The Common Raven is still active in areas where total darkness occurs. And there are species adapted to eating snow in the winter and are non-migratory, such as the Canada Jay and some finches.

Temperatures are also related to the decrease in daylight hours, and this poses a risk for many species that lack the adaptation to survive in extreme conditions in the far north. Without adaptation to extreme temperatures, the combination of less readily available energy sources and extreme cold poses a major threat to survival.

This combination of daylight hours being reduced, extreme cold and lack of food availability all contribute to the migration of species from the far north to our region. It is a complicated situation, beyond what the space for this article would allow.

—Don Burlett and Allen Chartier



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