

# Great Backyard Bird Count at the



The Oakland Owlets families and friends gathered at the Johnson Nature Center in Bloomfield Hills for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) on February 17<sup>th</sup>. This four-day global birding event started in 1997 and has grown over the years. The Oakland Owlets have participated in the GBBC since 2018, It was a chilly, sunny morning. The group met just outside of the Nature Center before hiking the trails. A special thank you to Blanche Wicke for leading this field trip. Several Oakland Audubon board members attended including Jen Benke, Don Burlett and George Harris. The Johnson Nature Center is owned and operated by the Bloomfield Hills School District. The forty-acre natural area serves an outdoor classroom and hosts many community events. Two miles of trails are open to the public and provide a natural retreat for the public.



One of the first stops on the hike was to search for a Great Horned Owl (GHO) known to reside on the property. Luckily, the group found the GHO. The bird was perfectly camouflaged and hard to see as it perched motionless like a statue on a branch. Seeing this bird in the wild was a treat for everyone. The GHO is one of the top predators of the forest. Owls are early nesters with many GHOs incubating eggs in February. Once one egg is laid incubation starts. This results in owlets hatching at separate times. The first hatchling is stronger and bigger than its siblings which hatch later. Here is a link to live bird cams through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. [Great Horned Owls | Cornell Lab Bird Cams Cornell Lab Bird Cams \(allaboutbirds.org\)](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/great-horned-owls-cornell-lab-bird-cams)



The Nature Center cares for a few injured animals that are used for educational purposes. The next stop on the hike was to visit the outdoor shelters to see injured Animal Ambassadors, a Peregrine Falcon and a deer. Afterwards, the group hiked along the trails towards a tributary of the Rouge River and the pond. The group was hoping to spot an Eastern Screech Owl seen in the area, however only a few Mallards and Canada Geese were present. Circling the pond the group headed into the hardwood forest, and found three species of woodpeckers, White-breasted Nuthatch, Dark-eyed Juncos, and Northern Cardinals. Along the trail, young birders took advantage of trail amenities like the raised platform to see the property at a distance. There are several unique stops along the trail where visitors can rest and reflect.





Eventually the group ended the hike at the nature center. Inside the building the group continued birding at the nature center's feeding station. The birds visiting the feeders were unexpected and amazing. Everyone was delighted to see a male Purple Finch on one of the tube feeders as well as a Brown Creeper on one of the tree trunks nearby. Brown Creepers



blend into the bark and use their stiff tails for support as they spiral upwards on the tree looking for insects and spiders.



After viewing the feeders, the group explored the nature center exhibits and interactive learning displays. The building is open to the public on weekend afternoons.

An eBird checklist was submitted for the Owlets by the trail leader which included 21 species and over 50 individuals. The final GBBC report documented the global results for this year which was recording breaking. Birders reported 7,920 species of birds identified in 384,416 eBird checklists submitted. Several countries and regions participated with the United States submitting the highest number of checklists followed by India and Canada. To read the full report visit- [2024 Final Results – Great Backyard Bird Count](#). For a copy of the eBird checklist for the Owlet's field trip- contact Kathleen

**Thank you** to Oakland Audubon volunteers including Blanche Wicke for leading this field trip and Heather Klish for the photos and help with this field trip report.



Photo Credit: Heather Klish & Audubon Gallery