



## The Great Backyard Bird Count 2025

Oakland Owlets' families and friends gathered on February 15<sup>th</sup> for the 28<sup>th</sup> annual Great Backyard Count. This four-day event is sponsored globally by the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada. The Owlets met at Johnson Nature Center in Bloomfield Hills. The weather was extremely wintry, and more than half of our group stayed home. For the Owlets attending, this snowy walk provided some interesting wildlife encounters.

The Johnson Nature Center is owned and operated by Bloomfield Hills Schools and is a wonderful resource for outdoor exploration not only for the students, but also the community. The Johnson Nature Center has an endangered species permit through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to shelter and rehabilitate three amazing Wildlife Ambassadors. These wildlife ambassadors offer visitors a chance to see native Michigan species up close. Wildlife Ambassadors cannot be released into the wild.

Cass Arsenault, the lead naturalist at the Johnson Nature Center, greeted everyone before our hike. Cass shared some information about the property and the Wildlife Ambassadors. The Great Horned Owl ambassador draws wild Great Horned Owls onto the property. This was one of the first birds that we spotted. Blanche Wicke was the group's owl whisperer. Blanche has X-ray vision and spotted a wild Great Horned Owl perched



high in a Pine near the nature center entrance. Further along the trail, we were introduced to the **Peregrine Falcon Ambassador**. Cass shared the history of the Peregrine Falcon. Wildlife Ambassadors are housed in open air shelters throughout the property and cared for by Nature Center Staff.



The weather forecast for the morning predicted that snowfall would end, however light snow continued all along our hike. We walked along a tributary to the Rouge River, hoping to find some open water and ducks. We were rewarded with a small flock of Mallards. Further along the trail we discovered a small flock of Wild Turkeys with one member inside a fenced area. The other birds in the flock were at the fence communicating with the one inside. Our group was able to open the fencing for the one turkey separated from the flock. Once released all the turkeys ran off quickly.



The continued snowfall viewing through our binoculars incredibly challenging. The group decided to return to the Nature Center building to watch birds from the inside at the bird feeders. Along the pathway, we stopped to see another Wild Ambassador, the Great Horned Owl.



Inside the nature center, the group continued birding. The Nature Center feeders were active, and everyone had a chance to observe several of the birds we had seen along the hike. Two species of woodpeckers visited the feeders the Downy and Red-bellied along with White-breasted Nuthatch Tufted Titmice, Black-capped Chickadee, Northern Cardinal, **Dark-eyed Junco**, and **Blue Jay**. A **White-throated Sparrow** was a new bird that we only found at the Nature Center's feeding station.



The group also made a suet log to take home from this field trip along with some homemade suet recipes. Despite the weather and less than ideal birding conditions, the group saw 17 species of birds not including the Wild Ambassadors and 108 individuals. The eBird checklist is available upon request from the young birders' club coordinator. Everyone thanked Cass for her time and hospitality.



Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty & Audubon Gallery