



Backyard Birds Count – GBBC

The Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) has been an annual field trip for Oakland Owlets' families and friends for nine years. This year the Great Backyard Count celebrated its 29th anniversary. This birding event is sponsored by the National Audubon Society, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Birds Canada. It is a global activity with participants all over the world.

The Johnson Nature Center in Bloomfield Hills has become the home base for the Oakland Owlets birdwatching during the Great Backyard Bird Count for several years. Nestled close to businesses and bustling commerce, the Johnson Nature Center offers a quiet retreat and remarkable educational opportunities for the community. Cass Arsenault, educational specialist at the Center spent the morning with our group on the trail and shared insights and history about the property with the group. Blanche Wicke, a birding expert and longtime nature center guide assisted.



Dressed for the weather our group headed onto the trails. It was a wintry morning, and the trails were covered with snow. Our first stop was the Peregrine Falcon enclosure. The



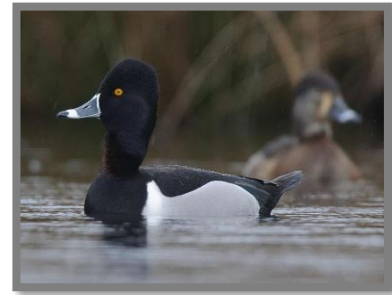
Johnson Nature Center has an endangered species permit through the Michigan Department of Natural Resources to shelter and rehabilitate Wildlife Ambassadors including the Peregrine Falcon. The wildlife ambassadors offer visitors a chance to see native Michigan species up close. Wildlife Ambassadors cannot be released into the wild.

Cass shared the story about Peregrine Falcon, while the group noticed a Red-tailed Hawk perched on a tree nearby. Cass noted that the Hawk was eating left-over meals offered to the falcon. The Red-tailed Hawk did not move from its perch. The group then walked toward the Rouge River. The water was frozen but there were hopes of finding some ducks and woodpeckers. We heard and saw both the Red-bellied and Downy Woodpeckers along with most of the forest regulars including the Black-capped Chickadees, Titmice and White-breasted Nuthatches.

We meandered to the Pond in the center of the property. A small aerator in the pond created an open patch of water



where two Ring-necked Ducks were feeding. Seeing these ducks was an unexpected treat but they flew away as we approached.

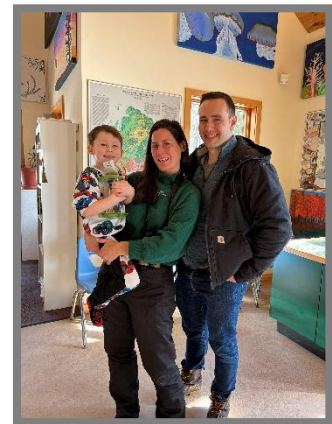


On the trails and we listened intently for new birds. Eventually we heard the nasally “yank, yank” call of the Red-breasted Nuthatch. Three birds moved up and down the utility pole near the Nature Center Parking Lot. We all stopped and watched these little upside-down cousins of the White-breasted Nuthatch communicate to each other for several minutes.



The Red-breasted Nuthatch is smaller than the White-breasted Nuthatch and have a blush of red on their chest and white stripes above their eye. Closer to the parking lot we stopped to see the Great-horned Owl Ambassador, another bird unable to survive in the wild. Nearby the loud and clear song of the Carolina Wren caused us to pause and listen. Everyone enjoyed seeing this bird that has become a more familiar bird because of climate change.

As we returned to the Nature Center entrance, we were greeted by a large flock of Wild Turkeys. Several turkeys were attempting to dine at the nature centers’ feeders but were just too large for the tube and platform feeders. The Wild Turkeys were loudly calling to each other. One was separated from the group on the outside of the fence to the property. We tried to reunite the lost member of the flock without success. Our group then moved inside the nature center for hot cocoa and tea. Everyone had a chance to look at the nature center’s feeding station while watching Cornell Lab of Ornithology videos. Homemade heart-shaped suet treats were distributed to all their home feeders to celebrate Valentine’s Day.



An eBird checklist was reported for the group with 14 species. It was a fun hike to be outdoors and see the antics of the Red-breasted Nuthatches and the Wild Turkeys. Everyone thanked Cass for her hospitality along with Blanche for sharing her knowledge of the property.



Owlets were part of a community of **1,146,284** participants and one of **435** public events that identified **8,257** species of bird around the world. [2026 Final Results – Great Backyard Bird Count](#)

Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty & Audubon Gallery

