

# Owlets Hawk Watching at Lake Erie Metropark

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Lake Erie Metropark is the official location of the Detroit River Hawk Watch Count. Every fall from September – November, Detroit River Hawk Watch volunteers count raptors moving through this point. This count is part of the Hawk Migration Association (HMA) database. A Hawk Migration count has been kept at this location for decades. This information supports scientific knowledge of raptor migration and populations while promoting conservation of these birds. The Detroit River Hawk Watch Count is done by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and its friends' group.



Oakland Owlets' families and friends met at the count site near the boat launch in the park on Saturday September 13 to see hawks migrating. It was a warm and pleasant morning with a dull haze in the air. The group gathered at picnic tables near the river next to the official count site. This field trip was in cooperation with Michigan Audubon's Young Birders' Network.

Erika Van Kirk from the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge staff greeted our group.



Arrangements had been made in advance to meet Erika. Once everyone arrived, Erika talked about hawk identification and migration. Showing flight silhouettes of different hawks, Erika explained how hawks are grouped by their silhouettes. Erika also shared pictures of hawks commonly seen at the Detroit Hawk Watch and then shared tips about each hawk's field marks. Erika also explained how the official counters have named the tree line across the river to pinpoint where they are looking. Erika provided everyone with a copy of Junior Hawkwatchers Guide.

Occasionally, one of the hawk counters would call out a hawk flying overhead. Everyone would stop and look at the bird. The official counters were close by facing northeast with spotting scopes and binoculars. As the morning progressed more people arrived at the area and hauled out lawn chairs to sit and watch.

Erika gave a great presentation, and everyone thanked her for sharing her time and expertise. Afterwards, the group informally chatted waiting for the hawks to fly over the river. Snacks were available to the owlets as we waited.



Other birds were active along the river near the boat launch. Our group was entertained watching a Great Egret standing on floating vegetation in the water. It appeared as if the Egret was standing on the water. The Egret was successful finding something to eat at times. Ring-billed Gulls, Herring Gulls and occasionally Terns patrolled back and forth over the Egret along the river. Everyone had a good look at the Caspian Tern. In the distance, a flock of White Pelicans landed along the shoreline 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 in the water. Birds were abundant but migrating hawks were absent.



Sharp-shinned Hawk

The official counters would occasionally call out a raptor they were recording. We heard counters yell out “Sharpie” several times. Looking up we could see the shape of an accipiter. It was a good day for **Sharp-shinned Hawks**. The counters reported 161 Sharp-shinned hawks that day. It was one of the highest counts for Sharp-shinned hawks ever. However, overall hawk migration was low. The warm temperature and the winds from the south are not favorable for hawk migration.

The official hawk watch count for September 13 was a total of 169 species. Other raptors included 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 Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Near noon the group began to disperse, Lindsay from Michigan Audubon had a long drive back home and others in the group



Pied-billed Grebe

became restless. A small group decided to see some of the other birds at the park. We waked the trail south for a better view of Lake Erie and were rewarded by seeing some of the songbirds along with great views of wetland birds including the American Coot, Common Gallinule, and a family of **Pied-billed Grebes**. The group eBird list included twenty-nine species and 243 individuals.



Thank you to everyone attending. A special thank you to **Erika Van Kirk** from the U.S.F&W Service. An eBird checklist for this field trip is available upon request.

**Photo credits:** Kathleen Dougherty, Melaine Mitchell, and Oakland Bird Alliance.