

Great Backyard Bird Count at the Johnson Nature Center

The Oakland Owlets families and friends gathered at the Johnson Nature Center in Bloomfield Hills for the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) on February 18th. This year was the 26th year of this four-day global birding event. It was a chilly, but sunny morning with temperatures rising as the day progressed. Birds were singing in response to the increased daylight. We started our hike from the parking lot led by Johnson Nature Center lead naturalist, Cass Arsenault.



One of the first stops along the trail was at the shelter of an animal ambassador at the nature center, a Great Horned Owl. The Nature Center cares for a few injured animals that are used for educational purposes. Everyone was able to see the owl, Beyond the shelter, we encountered a wild **Great Horned Owl**. The bird swooped overhead silently. Silent flight is one of the superpowers of owls.



Bird calls and songs filled the air approaching the big pond. The loudest call was the honking of Canada Geese. It sounded like an entire flock of geese. However, only one pair was making all the noise. Smaller birds were harder to spot. The repeated “yank yank” of the White-breasted Nuthatch was unmistakable. The White-breasted Nuthatch is a must-see bird on all Oakland Audubon field trips. Along the Pond shoreline the group discovered a pair of Mallards. Young birders paused on the dock to look at the water.



The group eventually reached a tributary of the Rouge River near the northern property border. A Northern Cardinal was singing. One young birder shared a mnemonic for the Cardinal’s song he created, saying the Cardinal was singing “Sweetheart.”

Cass pointed out the prairie opening along the trail. This grassland is maintained for pollinators and grassland birds. Cass noted Eastern Bluebirds are commonly seen in this habitat during warmer months. Instead of Eastern Bluebirds, the group saw a Bluebird cousin, the American Robin. Several Robins were dining on berries in the shrubs.

Returning to the nature center, we stopped to see another Animal Ambassador, a Peregrine Falcon. Everyone could see the falcon’s key identification features. Peregrine Falcons have been re-introduced into this area but are rarely seen.

The group returned to the nature center for snacks and to view the feeding station. Three new species were observed at the nature center's feeders including the **Hairy Woodpecker**, the White-throated Sparrow, and a Red-winged Blackbird. Young birders also had a chance to match bird bills to bird diets during a fun activity.



Greg Petrosky, OAS Conservation Chair helped participants make suet log feeders while OAS President, Don Burlett led public hikes for the GBBC. The Johnson Nature Center is owned and operated by the Bloomfield Hills School District. It is open to the public during weekends.

An eBird checklist was reported to the GBBC included 22 species listed below.

Canada Goose

Mallard

Mourning Dove

Great Horned Owl

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

Blue Jay

American Crow

Black-capped Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

White-breasted Nuthatch

Carolina Wren

European Starling

American Robin

House Sparrow

House Finch

American Goldfinch

Dark-eyed Junco

White-throated Sparrow

Red-winged Blackbird

Northern Cardinal

In 2023, Oakland County eBirders reported 70 species during the GBBC count. One of the top listers was Blanche Wicke! For the results of the GBBC 2023, visit this link. [Top subregions - World - Great Backyard Bird Count \(ebird.org\)](https://ebird.org/subregions-world-great-backyard-bird-count)

Thank you to Cass Arsenault and the staff at the Johnson Nature Center for their help. Also, thank you to OAS volunteers, Don Burlett and Greg Petrosky for supporting the public event at the Johnson Nature Center for the GBBC.



Photo Credit: Kathleen Dougherty & Audubon Gallery