

Oakland Owlets' August Field Trip to Shiawassee Basin Preserve

Butterflies and Birds were the target species of the August Oakland Owlets field trip on Saturday, August 17 to the Shiawassee Basin Preserve in Davisburg. The group was lucky to have two butterfly experts lead the hike. Doris Applebaum, Oakland Audubon Secretary, has been involved in numerous butterfly counts and leads a butterfly hike for members annually. Sue Greenlee, a property steward for Six Rivers Land Conservancy, has conducted a butterfly count for more than 15 years at the Golden Preserve. Sue is also an Orthoptera expert studying grasshoppers and their relatives in the Midwest as part of her post graduate degree. Doris and Sue were excellent guides and able to identify the insects the group encountered. Everyone enjoyed their knowledge and patience.

A group of 14 young birders, family and friends gathered to learn about butterfly biology and identification near the trail head. Sue Greenlee shared lots of information with participants and provided nets for catching and releasing insects. After a wonderful introduction to the hike, the group hit the trail. Within minutes of leaving the parking lot, we saw a pair of Trumpeter Swans in the open water on the pathway. Trumpeter Swans are the largest waterfowl species in North America. In the 1930, these birds were near extinction, but conservation efforts have been successful and now their numbers are rebounding. These majestic birds are still uncommon.



The Shiawassee Basin Preserve is owned and managed by Springfield Township Parks and Recreation. The property encompasses 514 acres which includes one of Michigan's largest high-quality prairie fen. This wetland is globally significant and provides habitat for rare and endangered species like the Poweshiek Slipperling and the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake. The group hiked along an upland trail and were able to view this protected habitat.

Ten species of butterflies and numerous individuals were seen on the hike including the Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Cabbage White, Clouded Sulphur, Pearl Crescent, Red-spotted Purple, Viceroy, Northern Pearly-eye, Appalachian Brown, Monarch and Least Skipper. Doris and Sue shared facts and natural history information with the group as each butterfly was encountered. Doris mentioned that this is one of the best years for the Red-spotted Purple. Six individuals were seen along the pathway during the trail preview. Monarch caterpillars were also abundant.



Sue caught and released several species of insects along the hike. The group was able to see tree crickets, field crickets, grasshoppers, katydids, bees, dragonflies, damselflies and more. Everyone was amazed to see these tiny creatures with the aid of magnifiers and hand lens. Insects have some intriguing stories like the temperature cricket. By counting the number of chirps the cricket makes in 15 seconds and then adding 40, this number is equivalent to the air temperature. Everyone had a better understanding of insects after the hike.



Although the primary focus of the hike was insect discovery, the group managed to record 26 bird species along the way. Turkey Vultures, Tree Swallows, Barn Swallows and Chimney Swifts soared overhead as we hiked. The complete bird checklist below was reported to eBird. With so many keen eyes looking into the vegetation, there were other interesting sightings. A Gray Treefrog was spotted resting on a leaf near the trail. The amphibian posed long enough to several of the photographers in the group to capture its image. The scientific name of this small treefrog, *Hyla versicolor*, reveals its ability to camouflage itself on the substrate. This treefrog is also called the weather frog and because it calls when there is an approaching low-pressure cell associated with impending rain. This frog was not calling, and the weather was warm and sunny for the hike.



A special thank you to Doris Applebaum and Sue Greenlee for sharing their expertise. In addition, thanks to Stevie for the wonderful frog and butterfly photos. The Shiawassee Basin is a great place to hike. Photo credits - Kathleen Dougherty and Stevie.

The bird checklist is as follows:

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| Trumpeter Swan | Tree Swallow | Chipping Sparrow |
| Mallard | Barn Swallow | Field Sparrow |
| Mourning Dove | White-breasted | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Chimney Swift | Nuthatch | Common Grackle |
| Turkey Vulture | European Starling | Common Yellowthroat |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Gray Catbird | Northern Cardinal |
| Downy Woodpecker | Eastern Bluebird | Indigo Bunting |
| Eastern Wood-Pewee | American Robin | House Sparrow |
| Eastern Kingbird | American Goldfinch | |
| Blue Jay | | |