

# Evening Adventures at Highland Recreation Area



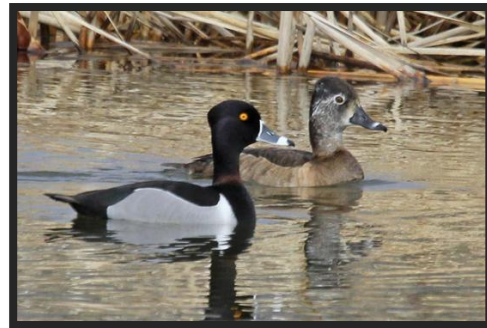
The Oakland Audubon Young Birders' Club Families and Friends met on a cold and windy evening on March 26<sup>th</sup>. Weather conditions were difficult, but the hardy group of birders were ready to explore the Haven Hill Natural Area at Highland Recreation Area. Highland Recreation Area is managed by Michigan State Parks. This 5,900-acre property protects natural communities in Oakland County. The Haven Hill is a 721-acre National Natural Area within the park. It was the estate of Edsel and Eleanor Ford who donated the property to Michigan State Parks.

Highland Recreation Area has an active Friends Group that helps with education and restoration projects at the park. **Lar Falardeau**, a member of the Friends Group greeted the group prior to the hike to share the work of FOHRA



(Friends of Highland Recreation Area). **Mr. Falardeau** explained the history of the property related to the Ford family and the importance of the National Natural Area designation of Haven Hill. The group was invited to return to the park for the various events hosted by FOHRA.

After the presentation, the group headed to Haven Hill Lake. Several species of ducks were on the lake with **Ring-necked Ducks** representing the largest group. Other species included Canada Geese, Mute Swan, Bufflehead, Lesser Scaup and Mallard. The group noticed a Bald Eagle at a nest across the lake which was an unexpected discovery. Sandhill Cranes were calling loudly, but the noise did not disturb the Eagle.



Walking along the edge of the lake, the group entered the shelter of the Oak-hickory Forest. The tall trees blocked the winds and hiking helped everyone warmed up a bit. Young birders explored the woodland pathways with energy and enthusiasm. Toppled



giant trees littered the forest floor from wind throws and uprooted trees towered over us along the path. Everyone scrambled over a fallen tree blocking the trail at one point. Gray skies muted colors making bird identification harder. Nevertheless, sharp-eyed birders persisted and found interesting woodland birds including a very camouflaged **Brown Creeper** inching along a branch high in the canopy.

The hike was challenging but rewarding. The group trekked about 1.5-miles and returned to the parking lot near twilight in anticipation of seeing the **American Woodcock**.



This unique shorebird was the reason for the field trip. Male American Woodcocks perform an aerial display in the spring at sunset. Everyone wondered if the Woodcock would be affected by the wind and



chilly weather. After a quick explanation of the aerial display, the group waited for the right amount of twilight. Standing at the edge of the parking lot, looking across the open field, the first Woodcock sounded its “*peent*” call. The light levels were too low for binoculars. Everyone stood quietly, listened, and watched. The American Woodcock did not disappoint the group. For 20 minutes, we watched and heard several male Woodcocks perform their Sky Dance.

**The following 18 species were reported to eBird for this hike:**

Canada Goose  
Mute Swan  
Mallard  
**Ring-necked Duck**  
Lesser Scaup  
Bufflehead  
Sandhill Crane  
**American Woodcock**

Bald Eagle  
Red-tailed Hawk  
Downy Woodpecker  
Black-capped Chickadee  
Red-breasted Nuthatch  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
**Brown Creeper**  
Eastern Bluebird

American Robin  
Song Sparrow



**Thank you** to Lar Falardeau and the Friends of Highland Recreation Area for spending time with the Young Birders’ Club along with the cooperation of Park management. Here is a link for the FOHRA – [The Friends of Highland Recreation Area \(fohravolunteers.org\)](http://fohravolunteers.org)



Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty & Audubon Gallery