

# Oakland Owlets Count Birds for Science

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The Oakland Owlets families and friends participated in the Oakland Audubon Christmas Bird Count on December 18<sup>th</sup> at Orion Oaks County Park. Orion Oaks is within the count circle of Oakland Audubon established in 1971. The history of the National Audubon Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is much older, however. This is the 122<sup>nd</sup> year of the CBC and National Audubon notes that the CBC is the longest running community science study in the country starting in 1899 as an alternative to side hunts held then.



This year the CBC was snowy and cold. As the group gathered at Orion Oaks, the heavy snowfall prevented us from using paper to gather participants addresses. Travel to Orion Oaks was hampered by road conditions and part of the group stayed home. Nonetheless, a group of **twelve participants** braved the elements to attend.

Greg Petrosky, Oakland Audubon's Conservation Chairperson, co-led the hike at Orion Oaks. Greg is an Oakland County Parks volunteer park ambassador at Orion Oaks and has extensive knowledge of the park. The group headed south into the park onto the trails from Clarkston Road. The snow continued to fall making it hard to use binoculars, cell phones and cameras.

Birds were sheltering due to the weather, and it was some time and distance before the group saw a bird. Along the forest edge of the trail, a familiar shape and call captured everyone's attention. Focusing high on a large tree near its crown, a Hairy Woodpecker was spotted. Bird sightings improved as the group ventured into a forested habitat where tree branches accumulated the falling snow. The fluttering of small songbirds low in the forest floor caught our eyes. A family group of Eastern Bluebirds were foraging near the ground. Orion Oaks has an extensive Bluebird Trail and Eastern Bluebirds are known to use the nest boxes for roosting during the winter. Further into the forest, the group was treated to a pair of **Pileated Woodpeckers** following each other through the forest



After two miles of hiking, the group arrived at Lake Sixteen. Fortunately, the water on the lake was open. Mallards flew overhead and, in the distance, we could hear Canada Geese. Our destination was a dock on the lake for a better view the lake. Recent eBird reports sighted a Snowy Owl at the lake edge. However, on the day of the CBC, the Snowy Owl was absent. Small flocks of waterfowl were seen on Lake Sixteen including Common Goldeneye.



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The overall list of species seen at Orion Oaks was lower than expected, but the weather influenced the bird activity. The group returned to the parking lot. Many were wet from the snow. By the time the hike ended, the snow had stopped. Everyone was happy to help in this national effort to conserve and count birds for science. Other groups were birding in the Oakland Audubon CBC circle. Oakland Audubon volunteers recorded 65 species during the CBC This record is on file at National Audubon CBC website.

An eBird checklist submitted for the Oakland Owlets hike at Orion Oaks and noted **nineteen species**. The checklist included the following species.

Canada Goose

Mallard

Bufflehead

Common Goldeneye

Ring-billed Gull

Red-tailed Hawk

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Hairy Woodpecker

**Pileated Woodpecker**

Blue Jay

American Crow

Black-capped Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

White-breasted Nuthatch

Eastern Bluebird

American Goldfinch

**American Tree Sparrow**

Dark-eyed Junco

Northern Cardinal

**A special thank you to Greg Petrosky and the families who braved travelling to this field trip.** A party of six continued the CBC surveying nearby upon the conclusion of the hike at Orion Oaks. Thanks to Debbie Culloty, Kathleen Klein, Anand Krishnasarma and Griffin Bray for their extra time.

**Photo Credit, Sean McElmurry, and OAS Gallery.**

