

November 7, 2020 – Muskegon

Leader: Don Burlett

An unseasonably warm spell descended on Michigan this fall and we headed to Muskegon with temperatures ranging from the 50's to almost 70 degrees. After meeting near Lansing, a group of 10 birders first stopped in Coopersville to find a disappointing "goose field" with just a few Canada Geese. Next stop was the Coopersville Wastewater Treatment facility where not much was happening. Flyover Horned Larks, a few geese and a calling Red-tailed Hawk were about it. This was the usual "no pain, no gain" fall day unfolding.

Our next stop was the Muskegon Wastewater Treatment facility. The impoundments north of the big water areas were amazingly dry and empty of birds. One impoundment had water but it was mallard country. We came upon a Northern Harrier, patrolling the these impound, looking for a meal. Suddenly, a light-morph Rough-legged Hawk appeared hovering over the fields and looking for breakfast. And some Horned Larks flew through this area.

We headed up to the water and it was quieter than usual, but the warm weather may have had a role in that. We circled clockwise around the impoundments and saw lots of Ruddy Ducks, Mallards, Buffleheads and Northern Shovelers. Near the landfills in the southeast corner, a Peregrine Falcon swooped over the hill and across the water having a quick spin. Soon we discovered both a Ross's Goose and a Snow Goose amid the Canada Goose crowd.



Nice looks showed the specific differences between the two. A couple of funky domestic or hybrids also entertained. As we proceeded along, an Eared Grebe was found, showing the basic plumage nicely. As we cut across the dike between the two ponds, we stumbled on a flock of Snow Buntings. Carefully approaching them, we got excellent looks at this winter visitors.



We finally toured the settling/aeration ponds on top and found a few more duck species before we headed out. We did see an immature Bald Eagle fly by and two more Rough-legged Hawks, including a dark morph bird.

After lunch, we headed to Muskegon State Park. First, we took a hike through the woods and found it extremely quiet. We did get looks at a couple of Golden-crowned Kinglets, some chickadees and head a White-breasted Nuthatch. But the quiet allowed for a soothing stroll.

Finally, we walked out the pier to look over the break wall for friends. A Common Loon was spotted outside the break wall but not too much else. One mystery bird was seen crouching on the break wall and we spent a few minutes looking it over. Even with pictures, it was not easy to call it a specific species. So, it remains a mystery.

All-in-all, it was a fun day with a handful of good birds. We will have to go back when it is 10 degrees, windy and snowy and see how that compares!!

A complete list of birds seen is provided below. (44 species)

Snow Goose
Ross's Goose
Canada Goose
Mute Swan
Gadwall
American Black Duck
Mallard
Northern Shoveler
Lesser Scaup
Bufflehead
Common Goldeneye
Ruddy Duck
Common Loon
Eared Grebe

Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Turkey Vulture
Bald eagle
Northern Harrier
Red-tailed Hawk
Rough-legged Hawk
Sandhill Crane
Dunlin
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Rock Pigeon
Mourning Dove
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Peregrine Falcon
Blue Jay
American Crow
Horned Lark
Black-capped Chickadee
White-breasted Nuthatch
Brown Creeper
Golden-crowned Kinglet
European Starling
Snow Bunting
Northern Cardinal
Red-winged Blackbird
American Goldfinch
House Sparrow