

Oakland Owlets Winter Birding @ Kensington Metropark

The Oakland Owlets' families and friends visited Kensington Metropark on January 28th. A midweek snowstorm added a half foot of fresh snow onto the trails. The weather was average for a late January day. We met at the West Boat Launch Parking lot.

We started our birding adventure by setting up a spotting scope to view birds on Kent Lake. A long ice floe served as a night rest for twenty-one Sandhill Cranes. The cranes were beginning to stir and moved onto land as we watched. Several species of waterfowl were observed in the open water including Mute Swan, Trumpeter Swan, as well as diving ducks at a distance and dabbling ducks near the shoreline. Everyone took turns using the spotting scope to see the various water birds. One birder mentioned seeing a Great Blue Heron in the park, but our group did not.



The group moved along the trails from the parking lot towards the Nature Center in search of more birds. Along the boardwalk at the edge of Wildwing Lake, songbirds sheltered in the brush darted into the open for everyone to see. Kensington is noted for songbird handfeeding. Black-capped Chickadees, Song Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows, and even the larger Northern Cardinals approached the group seeking seed handouts. Slowly moving along the boardwalk towards the Nature Center, we saw some ducks in the sliver of open water on Wildwing Lake, but the lake was completely frozen. The empty heron nests prominent in the trees on the islands were waiting for occupants to return in the spring.



Near the Nature Center parking lot, the group stopped to try handfeeding birds. This activity brought smiles to everyone. Some birders wanted a special bird to land on their hands like a Red-bellied Woodpecker. This shier bird required more patience and time for success. Many birders brought their own special seed mixes. Valerie advocated the Cosco brand which was packed with peanuts. Valerie was in fact successful. Everyone was focused on watching and waiting for birds to land in their hands. Some other birds like Wild Turkeys trampled by the group without much notice.



Most of the group walked to the Nature Center which by late morning was now open.



Sandhill Crane greeters were stationed near the Nature Center entrance. Undeterred by people, the Sandhill Cranes waited for fallen seeds. Signs clearly stated, “**not to feed the Sandhill Cranes.**” Stopping at the building was an opportunity to warm up and view the exhibits briefly along with a group photo opportunity.

The group decided to venture to a bridge east of the Nature Center for a chance to see a Brown Creeper reported there. A short walk to this point proved successful and added another new bird to the checklist as well, a Red-tailed Hawk.

An eBird checklist **of twenty- nine species** was reported for this field trip as follows:

Mute Swan

Trumpeter Swan

Gadwall

Mallard

American Black Duck

Common Goldeneye

Common Merganser

Wild Turkey

Mourning Dove

Sandhill Crane

Ring-billed Gull

Herring Gull

Bald Eagle

Red-tailed Hawk

Red-bellied Woodpecker

Downy Woodpecker

Northern Flicker

Blue Jay

American Crow

Black-capped Chickadee

Tufted Titmouse

White-breasted Nuthatch

Brown Creeper

American Robin

House Sparrow

American Tree Sparrow

Dark-eyed Junco

Song Sparrow

Northern Cardinal

Several photographers attended this field trip. Nathan Stouffer offered to share some of his terrific bird photographs. Kensington Metropark is a unique park with amazing birding opportunities. Birds are accustomed to people. This close contact with birds allows birders to discern important identification features that are challenging to see in other situations.

A special thank you to Nathan Stouffer and Mary Korde for sharing their photographs. Also, a thank you to Justin Smith from Kensington for helping schedule this field trip. Thanks for all in attendance including our new young birder, Henry.





Photo Credits, Kathleen Dougherty, Mary Korde, and Nathan Stouffer.