

Oakland Owlets at Orion Oaks ~ December 19, 2020

The Oakland Owlets participated in the **Oakland Audubon Christmas Bird Count** on December 19th. A special hike was held within the Christmas Bird Count Circle surveyed by Oakland Audubon so young birders could participate. This year was the 121st year of the CBC. This count is one of the oldest conservation activities in North America. Started in 1900 by Frank Chapman, an ornithologist and curator at the Museum of Natural History, Chapman proposed a Christmas Bird Census as an alternative activity to traditional Christmas side hunts. At the turn of the 20th century, side hunts involved groups of hunters competing to shoot as many animals as possible. The team with the biggest take won everything. Chapman suggested an activity that was less consumptive, a census to count rather than take birds. Over the years the CBC has grown from a humble start of 27 people and now the count involves thousands of people at thousands of count locations throughout North America.

Young birders throughout the country participate in the CBC. At Orion Oaks, **a group of 10** young birders' families and friends hiked about 2.5 miles on the trails in search of birds. The hike was led by volunteers Dr. Pete Blank and Erin Parker. Pete is a trained ornithologist at the Nature Conservancy and Erin is the educational manager at the Belle Isle Nature Center. Pete and Erin are keen birders. Erin is also the OAS board member.



The group gathered at the Baldwin Road parking lot and hiked to Lake Sixteen crossing open fields and woodlands.



The trails were snow covered, but walkable. There were a number of other outdoor enthusiasts using the park that morning. Along the pathway the group stopped to observe and listen. Pete occasionally ventured off trail to flush birds feeding or resting in the fields.

Orion Oaks has numerous nest boxes making it a great place to see Eastern Bluebirds. A small flock of Bluebirds appeared near the edge of the field. The flock was eating berries growing in low wetlands pockets throughout the park. As the group

walked to Lake Sixteen, two swans flew overhead. We were startled to hear the swooshing sound of their wings. When the group reached the lakeshore, most of the water was frozen, but small openings attracted birds like Mute Swans and numerous gulls most too distant to identify.

Seventeen bird species and two taxa were observed during the two-hour hike with a total of 648 individuals. The most abundant species seen was Ring-billed Gull. Everyone

attending the program was included on the official OAS CBC field observer list. **The YBC hike bird checklist is listed below:**

Mute Swan
swan sp.
Mourning Dove
Sandhill Crane
Ring-billed Gull
gull sp.
Red-tailed Hawk
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Blue Jay
American Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Tufted Titmouse
White-breasted Nuthatch
European Starling
Eastern Bluebird
American Robin
American Goldfinch
Northern Cardinal



Female Eastern Bluebird

A special thank you to volunteers Erin Parker and Pete Blank for leading this hike. It was a great day to be outdoors.

For information about the National Audubon Society CBC - Watch an NAS video about "*Kids Who Bird*". - [Kids who bird on Audubon's Christmas Bird Count on Vimeo](#)



Tufted Titmouse

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