

# Oakland Owlets' Sept. 19, 2020 Field Trip @ Drayton Plains NC

---

On a cool, clear late September evening six families and friends of the Oakland Audubon Young Birders' Club gathered for a twilight hike at the Drayton Plains Nature Center in Waterford. Terri Chapdelaine, director of bird studies at the center greeted everyone.

Terri led the hike and has extraordinary knowledge of the site. The Drayton Plains Nature Center is a 138-acre property situated along the Clinton River. It is owned and operated by Waterford Township. Ian Ableson, Stewardship Manager at Six Rivers Land Conservancy joined the hike to share his expertise of Michigan Bats. Six Rivers Land Conservancy holds a conservation easement on this property.



The group immediately encountered the large flocks of waterfowl that reside at the property. The property, a former fish hatchery, has multiple ponds for fish rearing that now provides ideal habitat for many water birds. A young Great Blue Heron was disturbed from hunting along the river and flew overhead to a tree. While watching the Great Blue Heron, a Belted Kingfisher speeded by in full view sounding its distinctive rattling call. **Thirty species of birds** were seen during the hike plus one unspecified warbler. See the complete checklist below.



The Drayton Plains Nature Center has spots along the trails where visitors can stop and view the ponds. During the fall, the wetlands offer great stopover habitat for migrating birds where they can rest and refuel. At one point during the hike, the group stopped to listen to the multiple songs of blackbirds roosting at sunset. Red-winged Blackbirds, Common Grackles, and other blackbirds roost in huge flocks at night after their breeding seasons. These roosts can contain hundreds or even millions of birds.



Ian periodically tracked bat activity during the hike. As the light faded, he detected more bats. Ian has been involved with bat monitoring in Southeast Michigan. The project assesses bat species and their presence. Ian used a bat locator on his cell phone. The device detects bat echolocations as they are flying. These sounds are beyond the range of human hearing. Based on the pattern of the call, Ian was able to identify the bat species. Near the end of the hike, Ian tracked two

species of bats, the Hoary Bat, and the Big Brown Bat. Ian shared the biology and natural history of these bats, plus information about white-nose syndrome which is a disease that impacts bats. The device was very impressive. Everyone was amazed by the technology. All of the participants received a Bat poster from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources at the conclusion of the hike.



**A special thank you to Terri Chapdelaine and Ian Ableson** for sharing their time and expertise with the young birders club.

Along with the birds and bats, the group also witnessed a wonderful night sky. The constellations, planets and the moon added to the ambience of the hike. It was dark when the group returned to the parking lot. Terri attempted to call owls. The few remaining birders who lingered were treated to the call of the Eastern Screech Owl. A great ending for all.

The OAS field trip committee has instituted some health guidelines during the pandemic visit [Oaklandadubuo.org](http://Oaklandadubuo.org) for more information.

**Drayton Plains Nature Center Bird checklist:**

Canada Goose  
Mute Swan  
Wood Duck  
Mallard  
Mourning Dove  
Chimney Swift  
Ring-billed Gull  
Double-crested Cormorant  
Great Blue Heron  
Great Egret  
Cooper's Hawk  
Eastern Screech-Owl  
Belted Kingfisher  
Red-bellied Woodpecker  
Northern Flicker  
Blue Jay

American Crow  
Black-capped Chickadee  
White-breasted Nuthatch  
European Starling  
Gray Catbird  
American Robin  
Cedar Waxwing  
House Sparrow  
American Goldfinch  
White-throated Sparrow  
Song Sparrow  
Red-winged Blackbird  
Common Grackle  
warbler sp.  
Northern Cardinal

Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty, Drayton Plains Nature Center and Animal Diversity Web at the University of Michigan

