

Global Migratory Bird Day @ International Wildlife Refuge

The Oakland Owlets Families and Friends traveled to Trenton Michigan on October 8 to celebrate Global Migratory Bird Day. We visited the Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge which includes Humbug Marsh. The weather was brisk, but mostly sunny with low wind. Todd Weston, refuge ranger, joined the group and provided excellent information about the refuge. We met at the John Dingell Visitor Center. Todd explained the reclamation work conducted by the refuge to open the unit to the public. Surrounded by industry, the Refuge was once the location of a factory and brownfields, but now offers a place for recreation along with habitat for wildlife.



After introductions, the group immediately headed to an extensive boardwalk that crosses retention ponds near the Visitor Center. The grasslands surrounding the ponds were alive with birds feasting on the seeds and insects. It was not long before we spotted Yellow-rumped Warblers. Birds popped up, barely staying long enough for us to see them. Yellow-rumped Warblers were everywhere along with a few migrating sparrows.

Approaching the ponds, the group was greeted by several Killdeers scurrying along the shoreline. At the far water's edge, a Great Blue Heron and a Great Egret were stalking prey. A Double-crested Cormorant was drying its feathers on an exposed rock above the waterline. Everyone stopped and enjoyed the view of these big, spectacular birds. Todd led the group away from the ponds towards the Detroit River. Along the way, we stopped to see a Great Blue Heron perched in a tree. The view was remarkable, but not an uncommon sight at the refuge. Later, the group saw three Great Egrets resting in one tree.



The shrubs along the trail were loaded with berries and birds were taking advantage of the abundant supply. Kinglets and Chickadees along with more Yellow-rumped Warblers darted in and out of the shrubs just long enough to see them.



At the River, boardwalks provided viewing points to see activity on the water and in nearby wetlands. Numerous swallows soared above the water, feeding on insects, preparing for their journey to Central & South America. Additionally, ducks and swans were dining on aquatic vegetation. Shorebirds foraged in the muddy edges of wetlands. Todd pointed out the Eagle Nesting Platform on Humbug Island. Bald Eagles are now commonly seen at the refuge, but none were observed on the hike.

Dead trees along the path offered habitat to view woodpeckers and Oakland Audubon's mascot, the White-breasted Nuthatch. After time near the river, the group walked deeper into the Refuge for a different view of the Monguagon Delta, an extensive wetland connected to the Detroit River. The trail, usually wet was dry and hardpacked due to the drought. As the temperatures warmed, we saw more bird activity overhead, Ring-billed Gull flocks streamed by along with Turkey Vultures. The Oakland Owlets recorded thirty-three species of birds on the hike. The eBird checklist is listed below:



Young Birders' Club field trip checklist reported to eBird:

Canada Goose
Mute Swan
Mallard
Green-winged Teal
Mourning Dove
Killdeer
Lesser Yellowlegs
Ring-billed Gull
Herring Gull
Double-crested Cormorant
Great Blue Heron
Great Egret
Turkey Vulture
Red-bellied Woodpecker
Downy Woodpecker
Northern Flicker
Blue Jay

American Crow
Black-capped Chickadee
Tree Swallow
swallow sp.
Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Golden-crowned Kinglet
White-breasted Nuthatch
Carolina Wren
European Starling
American Robin
House Finch
American Goldfinch
Red-winged Blackbird
Rusty Blackbird
Common Grackle
Palm Warbler
Yellow-rumped Warbler

Along the trail, the group saw numerous Wooly Bear caterpillars, a sign of fall. After the hike, the group visited the Visitor's Center. As the program concluded, over one hundred

Turkey Vultures streamed south overhead. Some of the group visited the Hawk Watch at Lake Erie Metropark afterwards.



Thanks to Ranger Todd Weston for his time & to Ray Bosshard for sharing his fabulous photos.

Photo Credits – Ray Bosshard & Kathleen Dougherty