

Oakland Owlets' July 18, 2020 Field Trip at Bear Creek

After a four-month hiatus, the Young Birders' Club hosted Oakland Audubon's first in person field trip since the pandemic outbreak. Twelve masked participants met at Bear Creek Nature Park, near Rochester. The hike started in socially distanced circle to learn about the unique natural features. Ben VanderWeide, Natural Resources Stewardship Manager for Oakland Township graciously shared his time and expertise with participants during a brief introduction. Oakland Township Parks are one of the few park systems in Oakland County that has a millage dedicated to land preservation. Ben explained that the parks system has allocated resources to restore grassland habitat at Bear Creek which is an imperiled ecosystem.



Oakland Township has restored grasslands at Bear Creek through prescribed fire, invasive species control including removal of woody shrubs, native seed application and planting native prairie plants. In the township blog, grassland restoration is described like planting a tree and giving it time to grow. This work has resulted in an extensive bird checklist of 122 species. The park a good place to see some grassland birds.

The group ventured onto the trail and stopped at a duckweed covered pond just beyond the parking lot. A number of turtles were basking on the logs in the pond, including a Blanding's turtle which was easily identified by the long yellow neck and dome-shaped carapace. An eagle-eyed observer caught a glimpse of a mother Wood Duck and her ducklings scurrying into the brush which was a great start for the hike.



Oakland Township also has a nest box monitoring program. At Bear Creek there are six nest boxes designated for cavity nesters like Eastern Bluebirds. The hike was entitled searching for birds red, white and bluebirds which are descriptors of Eastern Bluebirds. Eastern Bluebirds are smaller members of the thrush family and includes some of the best-known birds like the American Robin, and beautiful songsters such as the Wood Thrush. Male and female Eastern Bluebirds were observed on the hike near the nest boxes. Parent birds quietly guarded the nest boxes holding their nestlings.





The group eventually reached a large marsh bordered by a hardwood forest near Gunn Road. Wandering about 2 miles through fields, around ponds, wetlands and forest the group tallied 29 species of birds. Some birds were only heard and not seen, but others perched for a while so everyone could see their stunning field marks and plumage. Turkey Vultures circled high above as a Red-tailed Hawk was positioned in a sentinel pose on a distant utility structure.

A complete checklist of the birds is listed below. **A special thank you to Ben VanderWeide** for generously giving his time so everyone could learn about Bear Creek. Ben accompanied the group for a time along with his son in a stroller who may be youngest birder to ever attend a young birders' club hike. There was a lot to discovery on the hike. Wyatt found a micro snail and wondered what it was. It was a beautiful day and terrific hike.



The OAS field trip committee has instituted some health guidelines during the pandemic which includes socially distancing on the trail, wearing face masks and pre-registering in advance to limit the group size.

The bird checklist from Bear Creek:

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| Wood Duck | Gray Catbird |
| Mourning Dove | Eastern Bluebird |
| Chimney Swift | American Robin |
| Turkey Vulture | American Goldfinch |
| Red-tailed Hawk | Field Sparrow |
| Red-bellied Woodpecker | Savannah Sparrow |
| Downy Woodpecker | Song Sparrow |
| Northern Flicker | Swamp Sparrow |
| Eastern Wood-Pewee | Eastern Towhee |
| Eastern Kingbird | Red-winged Blackbird |
| American Crow | Common Yellowthroat |
| Black-capped Chickadee | Northern Cardinal |
| Tufted Titmouse | Rose-breasted Grosbeak |
| Barn Swallow | Indigo Bunting |
| White-breasted Nuthatch | |

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