



capitalareaaudubon.org

The Call Note

February 2017

Dedicated to creating a greater awareness, appreciation, and understanding of the interrelatedness of all Michigan's wild places and wildlife and the need for stewardship.

President's Corner

eBird your way into the new year

Welcome to 2017! A year ago, I wrote about my resolve to spend more time birding. This time around, my New Year's resolution is to be a more active eBirder. I have to confess that I have been more on the receiving end of eBird than the giving end – I use eBird to find birds I want to see without always entering a checklist of my own.

If you're not already familiar with eBird, you may be wondering whether this is just a weird typo. But eBird is an online tool, not only for birders, but also for professional ornithologists and other scientists to mine the data that we birders generate just by going outside and doing our thing. Hence my vow to contribute more to this immense body of knowledge.

To that end, our program this month is well timed to help me keep my resolution from going the way that diets and gym memberships seem to go in February. Whether you're already an avid eBirder or just getting started, this program will have something for everyone to up your eBird game. I hope you'll be able to join us!

Good (e)birding,
Barb Hosler



February 2 meeting & program

eBird – what's it all about?

Join us on Thursday, February 2 as **Caleb Putnam of the National Audubon Society** explains the latest citizen-science tool for expanding our knowledge of the bird world.



eBird enables you to:

- record the birds you see
- keep track of your bird lists
- explore dynamic maps and graphs
- share your sightings and join the eBird community
- contribute to science and conservation

Caleb will explain how this all works, and more. As the coordinator of Michigan's Important Bird Areas (IBA) for the National Audubon Society and member of Team eBird Michigan, Caleb is one of the most knowledgeable birders in the state. Whether you're a non-eBirder, a novice, or a veteran, you're sure to learn more about all things eBird.

Come early to Fenner and enjoy snacks and social time, which begins at 7:00 p.m. A brief business meeting starts at 7:30, with program immediately following.

You won't want to miss this presentation. Why not bring a friend?

Thank you to **Zsa Mahon** and **Louise Wescott-Hewitt** for the delicious snacks at the January meeting.

2016 East Lansing Christmas Bird Count results

by Tom Wheeler, CBC Coordinator

On December 17, 2016, the Capital Area Audubon Society conducted its 71st East Lansing Christmas Bird Count. Conditions were quite different from last year, which featured no precipitation and no snow cover. This year several inches of snow fell on the night of the count to add to an existing snow cover. The weather bureau claimed that the snow depth was seven inches, but it was clearly more in some areas. Roads were snow-covered and treacherous. There was no significant precipitation during the count itself, but visibility in the morning was not good. Still water was frozen, but most moving water was open.

Forty-six stalwart birders were in the field on a very challenging day. There were two additional feeder watchers who contributed their sightings. There were 57 species discovered, slightly below our ten-year average of 59 species. However, there were 20,299 birds counted, which was well above our ten-year average of 16,235. The 6800 Canada geese counted, which was our second highest total ever, accounted for pretty much all of the difference between the average total and this year's total.

Photo Dick Daniels, Wikimedia Commons



Unquestionably the bird of the count was the ovenbird (left) discovered by **Clara Bratton, Jennifer Good, and Kristy Tealer**. Not surprisingly, that was the first record of that species

on the East Lansing CBC. Other notable birds included a gray catbird found by **Steve Roels** and two ruddy ducks found by **Barb Hosler, Lise Schools and Ed Schools**. This was only the fourth occurrence of those two species on this count.

Two new high counts were established: pileated woodpecker and ruddy duck. On the other hand, the cedar waxwing total was the lowest in at least 35 years. Maybe a better fruit crop elsewhere this year?

Finally, one species noted on the Count was eliminated from the totals. The sighting was not confirmed on eBird, which means that it would not be confirmed in the Christmas Count review process either. Ebird has slowly been creeping into the Christmas Count process and I would expect its presence will only increase as the years go on.

Thanks to all of the participants. And special thanks to **Lee and Roger Laylin** for once again hosting the compilation dinner. This was the Laylins' final time hosting the dinner after more than 40 years.

The next E.L. Christmas Bird Count will be held on December 16, 2017.

East Lansing CBC species list

6800u	Canada Goose (3240/3084)
2u	Wood Duck (1/irreg)
7u	American Black Duck (5/7)
1074d	Mallard (1406/1176)
31u	Ring-necked Duck (irreg/irreg)
4d	Hooded Merganser (31/17)
6u	Common Merganser (4/5)
2uR	Ruddy Duck (irreg/irreg)
198u	Wild Turkey (57/81)
4u	Great Blue Heron (1/3)
3u	Sharp-shinned Hawk (2/2)
14u	Cooper's Hawk (9/11)
1s	Accipiter species
3d	Bald Eagle (2/irreg)
39u	Red-tailed Hawk (25/29)
2u	Rough-legged Hawk (1/1)
1u	Buteo species
989u	Rock Pigeon (924/836)
434u	Mourning Dove 196/280)
3s	Eastern Screech Owl (4/4)
1u	Great Horned Owl (1/1)
4u	Belted Kingfisher (3/3)
84u	Red-bellied Woodpecker (73/70)
159u	Downy Woodpecker (128/130)
34u	Hairy Woodpecker (19/20)
3u	Northern Flicker (16/13)
10uR	Pileated Woodpecker (4/3)
3s	American Kestrel 4/4)
2s	Peregrine Falcon (1/2)
1u	Northern Shrike (irreg/irreg)
263u	Blue Jay (228/235)
4846u	American Crow (4565/3747)
651u	Black-capped Chickadee (466/539)
111u	Tufted Titmouse (66/83)
8u	Red-breasted Nuthatch (10/12)
179u	White-breasted Nuthatch (140/135)
12d	Brown Creeper (13/17)
1u	Winter Wren (1/irreg)
7u	Carolina Wren (9/8)
2s	Golden-crowned Kinglet (8/6)
107u	Eastern Bluebird (60/57)
2u	Hermit Thrush (1/1)
66d	American Robin (75/56)
1u	Gray Catbird (irreg/irreg)
1554u	European Starling (1824/2060)
97d	Cedar Waxwing (276/385)
52u	Snow Bunting (irreg/136)
1u	Ovenbird (----/-----)
214d	American Tree Sparrow (158/170)
1d	Fox Sparrow (irreg/irreg)
424u	Dark-eyed Junco (387/389)
13d	White-throated Sparrow (18/12)
8d	Song Sparrow (8/8)
411u	Northern Cardinal (339/381)
2u	Common Grackle (irreg/irreg)
173d	House Finch (215/236)
1d	Pine Siskin (14/18)
368u	American Goldfinch (389/395)
775d	House Sparrow (741/957)

KEY: The number in front of the species name is the 2016 total. **R**=record total. **T**=tied old record. **u**=up from 2015. **d**=down from 2015. **s**=same as 2015. **Irreg**=not seen in at least 3 of the last 5 years or 6 of the last 10 years. **----** = not seen in the five- or ten-year period. Following the species name is the average for the species for the preceding 5 and 10 years, respectively.

SEEN IN 2016 BUT NOT IN 2015: Ruddy Duck, Rough-legged Hawk, Great Horned Owl, Northern Shrike, Gray Catbird, Ovenbird, Common Grackle
(cont on page 3)

E.L. CBC species list (cont from page 2)

SEEN IN 2015 BUT NOT IN 2016: Mute Swan, Northern Shoveler, Bufflehead, Horned Grebe, Sandhill Crane, American Coot, Bonaparte’s Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Red-headed Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Merlin, Horned Lark, Eastern Towhee*, Purple Finch

* one Eastern Towhee reported in 2016 but not confirmed on eBird; not included in official results

2016 Eaton Rapids Christmas Bird Count results

by Tom Wheeler, CBC Coordinator

On December 28, 2016, 16 intrepid birders participated in the Eaton Rapids Christmas Bird Count. This is the ninth year that the Eaton Rapids Count has been conducted as a “national” count, with the results reported to National Audubon Society and included in the Christmas Count database.

The weather was mild and partly to mostly sunny with no precipitation. The heavy snow cover that existed for the East Lansing Count eleven days earlier was gone.

Forty-one species were tallied on the count, which exceeded the historical average of 38 species. A total of 5,837 birds were counted; the average for the count is 5,233.

Since this is a fairly new count, new high totals for a species are relatively common. Species with new high totals this year were: Wood Duck, American Kestrel, Sandhill Crane (tied), Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Pileated Woodpecker, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Carolina Wren, American Robin (tied), and White-throated Sparrow (tied).

There was one new species for the count: Ring-necked Pheasant.

Four species were seen on the Eaton Rapids Count that were not seen on the East Lansing Count: Wood Duck, Ring-necked Pheasant, Horned Lark, and Yellow-rumped Warbler.

Eaton Rapids CBC species list

Species	Total	Range*
Canada Goose	480	222-3430
Wood Duck	5	0-5
Mallard	522	106-1195
Ring-necked Pheasant	2	-----
Great Blue Heron	1	0-3
Cooper’s Hawk	5	2-6
Bald Eagle	1	0-3
Red-tailed Hawk	17	4-33
Buteo species	1	-----
Sandhill Crane	2	0-2
Rock Pigeon	380	126-485

Eaton Rapids CBC species list (cont)

Mourning Dove	162	36-343
Eastern Screech-Owl	3	0-7
Great Horned Owl	1	0-3
Belted Kingfisher	1	0-3
Red-bellied Woodpecker	39	4-39
Downy Woodpecker	49	13-53
Hairy Woodpecker	10	1-10
Northern Flicker	8	2-11
Pileated Woodpecker	8	0-8
American Kestrel	9	4-9
Blue Jay	76	11-105
American Crow	2239	492-3127
Horned Lark	2	0-25
Black-capped Chickadee	241	36-241
Tufted Titmouse	92	17-92
Red-breasted Nuthatch	3	0-7
White-breasted Nuthatch	73	15-73
Brown Creeper	6	0-9
Carolina Wren	6	0-6
Eastern Bluebird	29	9-47
American Robin	4	0-4
European Starling	573	242-1028
Yellow-rumped Warbler	2	0-3
American Tree Sparrow	56	3-179
Dark-eyed Junco	92	12-322
White-throated Sparrow	1	0-1
Song Sparrow	3	0-7
Northern Cardinal	92	27-166
House Finch	78	15-97
American Goldfinch	183	63-202
House Sparrow	300	92-439

*Range = numbers (lows to highs) of that species on previous ERCBCs

Take-aways from Project Feeder Watch

Cornell Lab of Ornithology and Bird Studies Canada have partnered on Project FeederWatch since 1987, mobilizing thousands to submit their backyard birding observations over the winter. Three decades of data show some definite trends:

Northern Cardinals are expanding their range northward

Evening Grosbeaks have disappeared as a wintering bird in much of the Eastern U.S., Upper Midwest, and the Western U.S.

Cooper’s Hawk sightings at backyard feeders have increased across the U.S. and Canada

Eurasian Collared-Doves have expanded their range from Florida (exclusively, in 1987) across the continent, consistently moving northwest all the way to British Columbia

Anna’s Hummingbirds have dramatically expanded their winter range along the Pacific Coast

Redpoll irruptions are shifting from an every-other-year pattern to a less consistent one

A related analysis by Project FeederWatch leader Emma Greig, *Do Bird Feeders Help or Hurt Birds?* is worth a read: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/analysis-do-bird-feeders-help-or-hurt-birds/>

CAAS membership roster for 2016-17

Thank you to all who have renewed their membership for 2016-17, and a very warm welcome to all new members (in **boldface**).

Membership dues were due in the fall of 2016 for the 2016-17 year. If you renewed your membership and your name is not on the list below, please contact our membership chair, **Ed Merz**, at edmerz7@yahoo.com (phone 230-7527).

Abosamra, Gamal
Alderman, Tom
Allen, Jane

Baumgartner, John
Belyea, Maryanne/Glenn
Best, Dave/Therese
Bieler, Stacey/Tom
Bjornson, Vee
Bollinger, Stewart
Boyce, Nancy/Mike
Bratton, Clara
Brown/Sonea, Chris/Ioana
Burgis, Kathy

Caterino, Martha/Michael
Charles, Leslie
Cheney, Peggy
Christopherson, Deborah
Clark, Susan
Cohen, Bruce
Curry, Georgia

Danek, Michael/Gloria
Davis, Susan
Debar, Sharon
Deventer, Patricia
Dunn, Judy

Eggleston, Ron

Febba, Liz/Sam
Fischoff, Elaine/Molly
Fox, Dan

Hancock, Ann/Jim
Harvey, Joanne/Ken
Hewitt, Jim
Hosler, Barb
Howe/Ording, Chris/Mary
Houston, Eileen
Hupp, Julie

Jolin, Norm

Kacos, Jeff
Kendall, Susan
Kindel, Judith/Paul
Kingsbury, Bob

Laylin, Roger/Lee
Laurence, Richard/Patricia
Less, Sharon/Dave

McCombs/Menzel, J.B./Grace
McWhirter, Marianne/Doug
Merz, Ed/Madeline
Moquin/Spalding, Michael/Julia
Mortimer/Parnell, Bruce/Kris
Murphy, Peggy

Nott, Sherrill/Judy

Page, Connie
Plotkin/Schuur, Jacob/Susan

Rabidoux, Karlene
Rhodes, Mary
Roth, Patricia

Sage, Steve
Saheli, Joan/Habib
Schools, Ed/Lise
Schmidt, Barbara
Seagull, Art/Betty
Seebeck, Charles/Nancy
Skole/Teachout, Janet/Bob
Skriba, Dennis
Smith/Benedict, Horace/Deborah
Snow, Loudell F.

Tatar, Wendy
Taylor, Kristy/Brent
Taylor, Gordon/Sheila
Tropp, Carolyn

Waiess, Elizabeth
Ward, Susan
Wasserman, Gene
Weaver, Betty/Harold
Wheeker, Tom
Wild, Barbara
Winter, Mary/David
Witcombe/Marion, Alexia/Parks
Wolf, Roger/Debbie

Fenner offers winter hiking opportunities



Snowshoe Hike (All Ages):
Feb. 10 & 24, Mar. 10
(Fridays), 6-8 p.m.

Join the naturalists for a lantern-guided walk through the snow. Snowshoes are the perfect way to travel through Fenner's snow-laden trails while learning about winter ecology. No experience is

necessary. The program has a maximum of 10 participants, so call early to reserve your spot. If there is not enough snow to snowshoe, naturalists will still lead a winter night hike on the trails.

Cost: \$8, \$3 for Fenner Conservancy members.

Research in Michigan prompts changes in cellphone towers to protect birds

Federal agencies are now actively working to prevent cellphone tower hazards after a study in Michigan found that they were dangerous to birds.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has changed its lighting standards for new communication towers, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) recently began working to persuade owners and operators of existing towers across Michigan to turn off burning lights or switch to flashing lights.

The recent moves were prompted by research that began more than a decade ago when hundreds of researchers across Michigan made counts of injured and dead songbirds at the base of 24 communications towers during the peak of the birds' spring and fall migrations.

Researchers discovered that towers with steadily burning lights were more harmful to birds than towers with flashing lights. By simply turning off the steady lights they could reduce deadly bird-tower collisions by 70 percent.



There are thousands of towers across the country that are used by broadcasters, and communications and telecommunication providers. Only newly built towers are affected by the new standards. Replacing or turning off the burning lights is not mandatory for existing tower owners, but experts point to the savings on maintenance and power costs that could be realized by turning off the steady lights in favor of flashing ones.

The changes to lighting standards on these towers will have nationwide implications for migratory birds. Currently, an estimated 7 million birds are killed annually in tower collisions in the U.S. – and most are songbirds that migrate at night.

Practical resolutions for 2017

First, take the time to enjoy birds this year. This is a good idea whether you expect to spend time in your back yard, on local or national trips, or even abroad. Simply relax, enjoy yourself, and relish the wonder of birds. This is potentially the easiest part of our suggested three-part resolution.

Second, resolve to share the wonder of birds with others. Take others out and help them discover the amazing world of birds that has already inspired you. Introduce birds to your neighbor, co-worker, a local teacher, a local office-holder, or a group of kids.

Michigan birding trail network workshop is Feb. 24

by *Elliot Nelson*

Did you know that Michigan has six incredible birding trails, with many more currently in development?

Birding trails are an excellent way to promote birding opportunities within a region and can bring awareness to conservation efforts and tap into the \$40 billion per year in economic activity generated by birding trips and equipment expenditures in the United States.

With this in mind, Michigan Audubon and Michigan Sea Grant are partnering to host a workshop to help those seeking to create a birding trail in their region and to promote networking between Michigan's established birding trails.

This workshop is free and open to the general public. The workshop will cover topics such as how to create and sustain a birding trail, as well as how Michigan's amazing grassroots-driven birding trails can work together.

The workshop will take place in Traverse City on February 24 from 9:30-4:00 at the Boardman River Nature Center. You can register for the workshop at <http://bit.ly/2ijwR0K>.

Please join us for this engaging day-long workshop. Feel free to email me with comments or questions at elliottne@msu.edu, or on the web at miseagrant.umich.edu or msue.msu.edu. My mailing address is Crawford Hall, Room 212, 650 W Easterday Ave, Sault Ste Marie MI 49783.

You are also welcome to share this event with your friends and social media contacts.

Hope to see you soon, and bird on!

Elliot Nelson is a Michigan Sea Grant Extension Educator with Michigan State University Extension.

Finally, and this is particularly important, do something to secure the future for birds. It doesn't have to be a huge endeavor, but it should be directed at whatever local, regional, or international effort fits you best. You can help make a difference to protect birds, but it only happens if you make that initial deliberate effort.

Enjoy, share, protect. This is a winning formula for a successful resolution in 2017. Best of luck to you!

This bird-oriented resolution for 2017 appeared in the January 2017 edition of the Birding Community E-Bulletin, Paul J. Baicich and Wayne R. Petersen, eds. Archives at <http://refugeassociation.org/news/birding-bulletin>

Native Plants for Wildlife

Little Bluestem a gorgeous and beneficial addition to any landscape

by Ann Hancock

This month's native plant is a grass called little bluestem, *Schizachrium scoparium*. Whether or not you realize it, you know this grass. It is found almost everywhere in the U.S., except Nevada and Washington. It can be seen growing along many of our major interstates where its distinctive color makes it recognizable even at 70 mph.

Known by many names, such as poverty grass, prairie beardgrass, broomgrass, and small feathergrass, little bluestem was a major component of the tallgrass prairie that once covered vast swaths of the upper Midwest and West.

Since it is found across such a wide area, it exhibits a lot of ecotype variation in its leaf length, height color, flowering, and size of the clump diameter. It normally grows to about three feet tall when in flower, but this can vary with some plants reaching greater heights in favorable situations.

Found mostly in dry or upland sites and on steep slopes, it can also be found growing in prairie fens. Interestingly, when it grows in wetter areas it will sometimes spread by short rhizomes, which it does not normally do in drier sites. Its normal growth habit is clumping, and it is characterized as a bunchgrass. It is a warm-season grass, which means it does not start growth early in the spring, but noticeably later after the soil temperature has warmed up. Its ability to thrive in dry, sandy, steep sites explains why one can see it growing along freeway margins so often. This toughness and adaptability make it the go-to grass for prairie restoration projects. It does well in clay loam as well as sandy soil and is hardy from zone 3 to zone 9. Full sun is best for full, lush growth.

Little bluestem is a valuable plant for wildlife. The seeds are eaten by many rodents as well as game birds such as sharp-tailed grouse (which Michigan still has) and prairie chickens (which we no longer do). The seeds are also valuable food for cardinals, juncos, rosy finches (in the West), as well as tree, chipping, field, and song sparrows. Birds such as meadowlarks utilize areas of little bluestem for nesting. In fact, the National Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) calls little bluestem "one of the best [grasses] for nesting and roosting habitat" because of the thick basal clumps of its leaves. Importantly, several species of skipper butterflies use little bluestem as a host plant: dusky skipper, Dixie skipper, crossline skipper, and cobweb skipper.

According to the literature, deer do not seem to favor little bluestem, and I have not noted any browsing damage to those plants growing near our home, despite heavy deer pressure here.

Straight species little bluestem showing fall color
(photo ©Ann Hancock 2017)



In my opinion, little bluestem is one of the most beautiful grasses for landscaping year round. In spring and summer the leaves and stems are bright bluish green; some newer cultivated varieties are a very bright steel-blue color. This is ornamental enough, but in autumn the plant morphs into an even greater beauty: the foliage becomes bright reddish gold, the stems turn a deeper chestnut, and its bright fluffy flowers fade to pale gold or white, providing striking contrast. Here in Maine we have many fields of almost pure little bluestem that are beautiful in autumn. At a nearby land trust preserve in York, the field of little bluestem is punctuated with small stands of staghorn sumac, a stunning sight with the scarlet foliage of the sumac set against the russet grasses. In winter little bluestem clumps remain strong and upright, unbent by snowfalls.

Add to this list of accolades the fact that little bluestem is also tolerant of both black walnut and air pollution, and you have a "plant for all seasons." Little bluestem would look handsome combined with purple coneflower, any of the rudbeckias, sunflowers, asters, or salvias.

If you have been wanting to try ornamental grass in your garden but have been put off by their size, division challenges, or propensity to spread, give little bluestem a try in your landscape.