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*Black duck, pintail, mallards and trumpeter swan in the Au Sable River in Oscoda.*

*Photo courtesy of Matt Hegwood.*

## Christmas Bird Count

Fourteen Au Sable Valley Audubon members cruised the neighborhood streets or country roads in the Tawas area in cars in search of birds and eight counted the birds that come to their feeders inside the same designated fifteen mile diameter circle.

In Oscoda eight members patrolled while only four observed from their windows inside the similar Oscoda circle. This year, **forty-four bird species** were observed in the Tawas circle. **Thirty-eight species** were seen in the Oscoda circle.

Unusual sightings for Christmas bird counts in our area were three snowy owls, a common loon and two pintail ducks. Unusual in their absence or low numbers were European starlings, dark-eyed juncos, pine siskins. This may be due to the apparent lack of backyard feeders being maintained regularly.

## Great Backyard Bird Count

In February each year the big international birding event is the Great Backyard Bird Count. This year it will be held from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup>. It differs from the Christmas Bird Count in that it is not restricted to one day within fifteen mile diameter circles. Participants can cover unlimited areas and the event goes on for four days. It is a joint project by Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology and Audubon and Canadian partner, Bird Studies Canada. The great thing about it is that the information that is submitted is displayed almost immediately graphically online for everyone to see. Everyone who is interested can see where each species is reported and in what numbers. Anyone, any age, anywhere in North America can participate. Count from your kitchen window or count from your car.

Go to: [www.birdcount.org](http://www.birdcount.org) for all the particulars. There is even a photo contest and great prizes.

## Trumpeters

This fall mild weather conditions have allowed much of the Au Sable River to be open for trumpeter swans to forage over an area that extended from Alcona Dam Pond to Foote Dam Pond.

On January 6 Roger Erikson and Wayne Shawl counted 102 from the Westgate overlook and 42 more at Iargo Springs. Then they found 56 in Cooke Dam Pond above the dam and 13 more in the river below Cooke Dam.

That same day Maggie Berch counted 70 at Alcona Dam Pond for a grand total of 283 trumpeter swans on the Au Sable River between Alcona Pond and Cooke.

Peggy Ridgway says, "The past month or so has really helped us get a handle on the population along this stretch of the river. We don't know what's upstream above Alcona!"

That will probably be her next project.

Are there Volunteers?

# National Weather Service Trip

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Twelve Au Sable Valley Audubon members traveled to the Northern Michigan National Weather Service Headquarters near Gaylord on Wednesday January 25 after the event was postponed one week by - What else? - The weather. On the rescheduled day the weather was about as good as one can expect in Northern Michigan in January and everyone arrived safely by several routes at eleven o'clock.

The purpose of the expedition was to learn how information gathered in Gaylord and displayed on their website could help to us follow on our computer screens the spring migration of birds into northern Michigan. Jim Key-sor, the meteorologist who guided the Audubon members skillfully through the intricacies of a maize-like array of equipment, including weather balloons, Doppler radar mechanisms and computer displays, to aid them in acquiring some understanding of how things work at a NOAA weather station. After an introductory Power Point presentation providing an overall view of the National Weather Service activities, Jim demonstrated many features in the operations room where all the observation, analysis or broadcasting takes place.

After almost two hours most members had absorbed as much as they could and were happy to go to Gaylord for lunch at The Sugar Bowl Restaurant. However, several enthused participants indicated they were ready to go again to learn more.

# Michigan's Birding Capital

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The Iosco County Birding Capital of Michigan initiative is coming along well. In his speech during the annual Au Sable/Oscoda Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet on Jan. 21, State Senator John Moolenaar indicated that this effort is proceeding. He plans to introduce a bill pertaining to this yet this winter.



*NOAA Weather Station with Doppler Radar Tower, Gaylord, Michigan*

*Photo courtesy of Ed Cole*

**Peggy Ridgway will present a public information session in preparation for the Great Backward Bird Count at the Robert J. Parks Library in Oscoda on February 7, from 4 to 5 p.m.**

**Tawas Point  
Birding Festival  
May 17 through  
May 20, 2012**