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## Tawas CBC Was Special

The 113<sup>th</sup> National Audubon Christmas Bird Count has come and gone. The air temperature was great; although there was very little sunshine on either census day, the roads were clear and we got out to all the limits of our seven mile radius circles. Some years we can't do that.

So, what especially showed up this year? How about Bohemian waxwings in the Tawas area circle? In several previous CBC's we have recorded lots of European starlings. We are accustomed to seeing the starlings swoop around the city in big swarms at farms or in Oscoda and Tawas. Against the gray sky background Bohemian waxwings look dark like starlings. Ah, but these guys feed on fruit trees and cedars. Starlings don't do that. We had something special going on.

Perhaps in previous years we missed the waxwings. If you look back in the records you will find European starlings were recorded as the most common species in the Tawas bird counts. Not this year; Bohemian waxwings get top billing. There were starlings too but this year they were outnumbered. And maybe we are getting better at identification.

Bohemian waxwings weren't the only exciting species. In the Tawas and Oscoda area counts combined there were 20 common redpolls, a number of evening grosbeaks, trumpeter swans, a northern harrier, 312 common mergansers, 627 Redheads, a red-shouldered hawk, a rough-legged hawk, four great black-backed gulls, 48 Bonaparte's gulls and a brown thrasher.

As usual, both were fun days in which we not only learned about the birds, we also learned to know our fellow Audubon members better. That is one of the goals of the CBC. It is also a social event.



Evening Grosbeak

Courtesy of Larry Van Wagoner

## The Next Big Thing

In February, from the 15<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> to be exact, we can take part in the Great Backyard Bird Count, a joint project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. It is similar to the Christmas Bird Count only in the fact that people are out counting birds. There are no seven mile radius circles. It is not just a one day event. Participants can spend as much or as little time within the four day as they choose and count birds any place they choose. The results are almost immediately visible online once you submit them. Some of us like to make it a competition between cities or states as to who sees the most species and who has the most exotics. It's as different from the CBC as a newspaper is different from Facebook or Twitter. It's almost instantaneous. It makes it exciting.

This bird count is not a community organized event. You will be on your own but we do hope you will take part in it. Get together with friends and make a day of it; or, perhaps two or three days. Try different spots; places you've wanted to explore but just haven't. Look for snowy owls and bald eagles along Lake Huron shores; find out where the waxwings have gone. See if there are any swans or geese at Alcona Pond. Make it an adventure.

## Farther Down the Line

Looking ahead to May and the Tawas Birding Festival, about all we know now is that the featured bird this year will be the piping plover.

In March some of us will be going to the Michigan Bird Conservation Workshop at the Kettunen Center near Tustin, Michigan, twenty miles south of Cadillac. This is an annual three-day event that brings together people from all corners of the state to share information on current research and conservation of birds in Michigan. Governmental agencies and universities will be represented. The featured speaker will be Dave Evers, Executive Director and Chief Scientist for the Biodiversity Research Institute. There will be activists from all around the state who will tell us about what they are doing to save and create habitat for birds.

If this sounds like something you would like to take part in, contact Ed Cole at: [cole.edwardhcole1@gmail.com](mailto:cole.edwardhcole1@gmail.com) and he'll forward information on the event.

## Bird Shelter Workshops

Friday and Saturday, the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of January this year, fourteen AVA members who ordered bird house/shelter/feeder kits met at Larry Van Wagoner's house in Sand Lake to learn how to build the structures which Larry and Bob had not only designed but bought the wood, sawed and drilled the resulting parts and sorted them into kits. The kits included chickadee roost boxes, pileated (large) woodpecker suet feeders and nesting boxes. Both morning sessions were productive and everyone went home with a product he or she could proudly put out in the yard.



Saturday Workshop

Staff Photo

## Next Meeting

On Tuesday February 12, we will be meeting for the third winter month at 1:00 p.m. at Parks Public Library on Skeel Avenue of the former Air Base to hear from Paul Thompson, our local USFS botanist about "Butterflies and Insects."

## Current Events

On Thursday, January 24 of this year a presentation in Oscoda by members of several branches of the State and Federal Governments made members of the community aware of an ongoing attempt to control and mitigate an environmental hazard caused by the introduction of chemicals in fire-fighting products used by the Air Force thirty years ago. They are called polyflourinated chemicals, or PFCs. They have recently been detected in the flesh of pan fish from Clark's Marsh. They have been found to accumulate in fish and any species whose diet includes fish. Thus fish, humans and many birds whose diet includes fish are susceptible to liver, kidney or serum damage. The Air Force is investigating ways to prevent further spread of PFCs in the groundwater. The Au Sable River may also be contaminated below the Whirlpool River Access point.

## Swans at Westgate

With the mild weather this winter there has been an unusual amount of open water in the Au Sable River and over two hundred trumpeter swans have taken advantage of the condition to continue feeding in the area of Westgate. The two overlook platforms four miles west of the junction of River Road and M-65 offers an especially picturesque view of the Au Sable River and if the swans are there it is perfect.



Westgate USFS Overlook

Staff photo

## Hawks at Feeders

One problem for the birds that arises when we attract a lot of them to our yards full of feeding stations is that it is easier for accipiters and falcons, which feed largely on other birds, to get an easy meal. But it is also an opportunity for birders to see and identify these elusive hawks.

Gary Spiekerman took advantage of one such situation recently and recorded for us some great photos of a sharp-shinned hawk attracted to his yard in Tawas. How did Gary and Donette decide it was a sharp-shin and not a very similar Cooper's hawk? Look at the squared off tail in the accompanying photo. A Cooper's tail would have been rounded at the corners.



Sharp-shinned Hawk

Courtesy of Gary Spiekerman