

Oakland Owlets' Christmas Bird Count at Eagle Valley 2024

The Oakland Owlets families and friends were invited to Eagle Valley Landfill in Orion Township to help the Oakland Bird Alliance with the 125th Christmas Bird Count (CBC) on



December 14, 2024. This was the fifth year that the young birders' club joined this historical bird count. Eagle Valley is owned and operated by WM and maintains a wildlife habitat area. Eagle Valley agreed to host the young birders' club's December field trip. The site attracts a large concentration of birds. Birds flock to the site to feed, including birds of prey. Bald Eagles can be seen often.

Eagle Valley is a restricted area serving the community with recycling and waste disposal services. Arrangements were made in advance to tour Eagle Valley with Community Representative Kathleen Klein. Ms. Klein is a wonderful educator and works tirelessly to share the story of Eagle Valley with the community. Eagle Valley is a certified Wildlife Habitat recognized through the Wildlife Habitat Council. A designation for businesses that develop areas specifically to support wildlife.



Before birding at Eagle Valley, the group gathered for a brief orientation about the site.



Ms. Klein showed the wildlife habitat areas and discussed some habitat management that WM conducts on the site. Afterwards, we carpoled to key points to view birds. Just before we arrived, Ms. Klein had seen a gang of Wild Turkeys roosting in the trees on the west near the entrance.

The eastern boundary of Eagle Valley is composed of mixed habitats including wetland pockets, a hardwood forest edge, and some open hill sides. The group occasionally walked along the road to hear and see the small birds moving in the trees. Along this part of the property, songbirds seen included Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay, House Finch, and Mourning Doves. American Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos moved along the road, flitting in and out of sight.



Moving deeper into the property near the active landfill cells larger flocks of birds were observed. Along the open hillsides of the landfill, a flock of Snow Buntings moved in and out of view. The car caravan traveled to the top of the landfill where European Starlings, gulls and American Crows were foraging. Alongside these active flocks of birds, Red-

tailed Hawks posed like statues. Several Red-tailed Hawks were seen during the tour. Although Eagle Valley is aptly named, this year was one of the first years that the Bald Eagles were not observed during this CBC visit.

Although this year the bird concentration was lower than in past years, there were still thousands of birds at Eagle Valley. The most numerous were the



European Starlings. Everyone had a chance to witness the European Starling phenomenon known as “**murmuration**.” A murmuration happens when a flock of starlings takes flight all at once and appears as a dense pulsing mass of birds swirling into the air. The birds seem to move in unison. This behavior helps starlings avoid predation since it is hard to single out

one bird from the whirling black mass.



After reaching the top of the landfill, the group returned to lower elevations and the office building and concluding the CBC count at Eagle Valley. The most abundant species seen at Eagle Valley were European Starlings, American Crows and Snow Buntings. The total species seen during the tour was lower than in 2023 with 16 species and 2,199 individuals. A special thank you to the Oakland Owlet’s Families and Friends helping with this count and to Kathleen Klein **along with the WM staff at Eagle Valley for making this tour possible**. CBC observers for this area continued to bird nearby the rest of the day.

To see the complete Oakland Audubon CBC report, visit the Oakland Audubon field trip webpage.

Photo Credits: Kathleen Dougherty & All About Birds CLO.