

Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter - January 2016

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Cayuga Bird Club

January 2016

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Calendar

Jan. 11 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting

Lab of O, 7:30 pm

Host: Kevin McGowan

Share Your Photos Night

Jan. 16 Field Trip to Sodus Bay

Cayuga Bird Club Meeting, January 11



Share Your Photos Night!

Hosted by Kevin McGowan

Club members can share a maximum of **five** photos and have three minutes to take the stage to show them. Send your photos by January 8 to Kevin at kjm2@cornell.edu. The Subject Line on the email MUST BE "**Bird club photo submission Jan2016.**" Kevin will send an acknowledgement when he receives them. IF you do not get an acknowledgement, contact Kevin again WELL before the meeting date. Remember, you must attend the meeting to show your photos. Don't be shy! Share! Although photo submission is limited to club members, the meeting is open to all!

The meeting will be held at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The evening will begin with cookies and conversation at 7:15 pm. Cayuga Bird Club business begins at 7:30 pm, followed by the photo sharing presentation. All are welcome.

From the President

Happy New Year!

The calendar has turned over to 2016, bringing with it the promise of new and exciting things in our lives. Your Club

Meet at Lab of O, 8:00 am
Leader: Gladys Birdsall

Feb. 8 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting

Lab of O, 7:30 pm

Speaker: Eduardo Iñigo-Elias,
Birds and birding in Cuba: from Zuzuncito to Guantanamo

See our [Web Calendar](#) for more events and field trips.

December Cayuga Bird Club Meeting Minutes recorded by Becky Hansen are available at the CBC [website](#).

First-of-Year Birds Reported during December 2015 for the Cayuga Lake Basin

12/12 Pacific Loon
12/26 Western Grebe

2015 Total Count:
283 species

Thanks to Dave Nutter for compiling these records for the club. Details are available on the [CBC website](#).

From [Audubon](#):

Noah Stryker finishes his 2015 worldwide year of *Birding Without Borders* with [6042 species!](#)



just completed its 53rd consecutive year of participating in the Christmas Bird Count. Thanks to all of you who counted birds and joined in the joy of birding. Even the weather cooperated a little bit in terms of bringing some winter-like weather our way to at least make it feel like the right time of year.

Your Club did some wonderful things in 2015, including facilitating some incredible field trips, giving a podium to some of the most engaging presenters around, and helping the Lab of Ornithology celebrate its centennial. Just wait for what is to come in 2016! We'll continue doing the kinds of things you've come to love and cherish. And, we'll do some new things, too. In the spring, we'll host a showing of an important film about birds at the Cornell Cinema (look for details in late winter). We'll get together with local birders young and old to enjoy birds in the many different ways that make us all birders. If you have an idea for something you'd like your Club to do, please drop me a line at jwe4@cornell.edu.

I had a pretty fun birding year in 2015. Work travel allowed me to visit California in February, where I got to see free-flying California Condors, notch my 500th bird species in the U.S. (Surfbird), and find and identify a bird that was not even on my radar screen (Wandering Tattler). I also traveled to Illinois in June where I got to go birding with kids at a 4-H camp, and to Louisiana in July where I tripled the number of Prothonotary Warblers I had ever seen in my life. Then in August my two boys and I traveled all around northern California and southern Oregon on vacation. We saw lots of birds, and submitted 56 eBird checklists for our trip. But, perhaps my most enjoyable birding experiences in 2015 were when my kids would excitedly pull me to the window in my house to see the neat birds in our backyard. It's fun to see them enjoy birds and it's fun to know that they point out birds to me because they know I enjoy birds so much.

Sometimes we parents think we are mentoring our kids and supporting their interests in life so they can feel empowered to have enriching experiences. It really warms my heart

Ithaca Native Landscape
Symposium
March 4-5, 2016
Cinemapolis Theatre,
Ithaca

**Ideas to Reality: True
Stories and Real Models
for Regional Success in the
Native Plant Industry**

**For Registration and
Information, go to
ithacanativelandscape.com**

Stay in touch through our
[Facebook](#) page and [Cayuga Bird
Club Website!](#)



Facebook CBC Website

when I realize my kids are supporting my interests and empowering me. May you all feel empowered as birders in 2016.

Happy new birding year!



Niagara Falls Trip Report

by Diane Morton, photos by Jay McGowan

Jay McGowan led seven Cayuga Bird members (including a second expert, Kevin McGowan) on an overnight trip to Niagara Falls on December 5-6, with a focus on Gull identification. The Niagara River corridor, connecting Lake Ontario to Lake Erie, draws hundreds of thousands of migrating gulls every winter and is a great place to study a variety of gull plumages and to look for unusual vagrants.

Our first stop was Unity Island, Buffalo, where we had excellent looks at the many graceful **Bonaparte's Gulls** foraging over the water. A Black-headed Gull, a common gull in Europe, but rare here, had been reported that day and became one of our target birds for the weekend. In its winter plumage, it is very similar to Bonaparte's Gulls, so this would be a challenge. While we did not find it this first day, we became more familiar with the Bonaparte's Gulls, which would help us to distinguish something that was different.



After crossing the border into Canada, we stopped at the Adam Beck overlook to watch a variety of gulls swirl above the river and loaf on the rocks. We had good looks at **Iceland Gulls** including adult and second and third cycle birds. These looked icily gray compared to

the **Herring Gulls** with their darker-tipped wings. We also watched **Lesser Black-backed**, **Great Black-backed** and **Ring-billed Gulls** here. Along the edge of the fast water to the north, an immature male **Harlequin Duck** was actively diving. At later stops on the trip we would see 3 more Harlequin Ducks—a female, an immature male, and an adult male!



As the day grew later, Jay took us to a spot at Niagara-on-the-Lake to watch the “fly-out” as the gulls return north to Lake Ontario for the night. We especially wanted to see if we could spot a **Little Gull** that had been reported along the river. We scanned each flock of gulls as it passed by us, looking for one with dark under wings-- and then we saw it! A small gull, very dark under the wing, was in with a group of about 40 Bonaparte’s Gulls. We continued to watch the passing birds until dark, also enjoying the “Alouette” calls of **Long-tailed Ducks** that came by. Jay estimated a total of 8000 Bonaparte’s Gulls from this location!



We got longer looks at a Little Gull the next morning from the Queenston boat launch.

A Little Gull circled cooperatively for quite some time, letting us follow it with our scopes.



Returning to the Adam Beck overlook, we were treated to a leucistic (white) Bonaparte's Gull, in addition to more opportunities to practice identifying other gull species.

Crossing back into New York, we stopped at Goat Island, Niagara Falls State Park, and watched a beautifully patterned adult male Harlequin Duck as well as other waterfowl, including **Gadwall**, **Hooded Merganser**, **Bufflehead**, **Green-winged Teal** and **Common Goldeneye**.

We then returned to Unity Island and spent a couple of hours looking among the many gulls for the reported **Black-headed Gull**. Finally, a group of gulls rose up off the water, revealing their underwings and Dave Nutter called out, "There it is!" when he spotted a bird with dark primaries. Jay saw it instantly as well, and helped each of us to get it in our scopes. Once we could study it, we were able to see that this gull was a bit heftier and had a whiter neck, red legs and a red base to the bill, but was quite similar overall to the Bonaparte's Gulls.



Black-headed Gull among Bonaparte's Gulls, photos by Jay McGowan



Black-headed Gull
Jay McGowan

The Black-headed Gull stayed close in, and we were able to watch it for some time and to hear its harsh squawk. Watching this bird (a life bird for several of us) was a very satisfying way to end our birding adventure.

We saw 50 species of birds on this trip, including 8 gulls and 19 different waterfowl. We were lucky with the weather - temperatures were in the 30's but it was not terribly windy and the light was good. Jay offered many helpful tips for gull identification and was a very patient guide. The trip was a wonderful birding experience!



Short-eared Owls Trip Report

by Ann Mitchell

Seven "fair weather" enthusiastic birders joined me for a trip to Long Point Road on a quest for Short-eared Owls on December 12th. We parked at the winery (with the owner's permission) and scanned the area for a couple hours. We had good looks at an **American Kestrel**, **Eastern Bluebirds**, a **House Finch**, **Northern Harrier**, and a **Red-tailed Hawk**. Finally, at dusk, the first **Short-eared Owl** was spotted, then two. A total of three owls were seen. There could have been more, but it became dark so quickly, it was hard to tell. It was a life bird for one participant. We watched a male and female owl chasing each other and "barking", their vocalizing being a first for some folks. The trip was a total success!

Thanks to all who joined me and for making it such a fun trip. Of note, I have led many Short-eared Owl trips this time of year, and the temperature has never been this warm.

Christmas Bird Count Results

The Ithaca Christmas Bird Count, organized by the Cayuga Bird Club, was held on January 1. We had 142 participants out in the field counting birds, and another 13 reporting from their feeders at home. Within our 15-mile count circle, a total of 89 species were found. Two additional species (Tundra Swan and White-crowned Sparrow) were found during count week, to bring our total to 91 species. The total species number may change, as additional species seen by

January 4 are added to the count.

At the Compilation dinner at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Paul Anderson tabulated numbers of individuals for each species as the area coordinators read off their numbers. Waterfowl numbers were down from previous years, likely because the north end of Cayuga Lake is not frozen, however Hooded Mergansers and Long-tailed Ducks had high counts this year. A record high number of Snow Geese (>30,000) and Dark-eyed Juncos (1,185) were also found. 60,718 individual birds were counted this January 1, a new CBC record for our area. However, this total may change, as some birds, particularly flyover Snow Geese, may have been counted more than once.

The species recorded on the January 1 Christmas Bird Count are listed below with rough count numbers, provided by Dave Nutter. Some numbers (especially those marked *) may later be refined if it seems birds were counted by multiple parties of observers. "High" means that this is the highest number Ithaca has ever recorded on a Christmas Bird Count. Details for some of the more unusual sightings will be posted on the Cayuga Bird Club yearly first records [web page](#).

SNOW GOOSE - 30,867* High

CANADA GOOSE - 9,266

GADWALL - 6

AMERICAN BLACK DUCK - 37

MALLARD - 763

GREEN-WINGED TEAL - 3 High

REDHEAD - 27

RING-NECKED DUCK - 3

GREATER SCAUP - 1

LESSER SCAUP - 5

LONG-TAILED DUCK - 18 High

BUFFLEHEAD - 16

COMMON GOLDENEYE - 63

HOODED MERGANSER - 52 High

COMMON MERGANSER - 58

RED-BREASTED MERGANSER - 1
RING-NECKED PHEASANT - 2
RUFFED GROUSE - 5
WILD TURKEY - 150
RED-THROATED LOON - 1

COMMON LOON - 9 Tied High
PIED-BILLED GREBE - 1
HORNED GREBE - 3
DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANT - 2
GREAT BLUE HERON - 1

TURKEY VULTURE - 59 High
BALD EAGLE - 9* High
NORTHERN HARRIER - 2
SHARP-SHINNED HAWK - 6
COOPER'S HAWK - 15

RED-TAILED HAWK - 149
ROUGH-LEGGED HAWK - 1
AMERICAN KESTREL - 2
MERLIN - 1
PEREGRINE FALCON - 3 High

AMERICAN COOT - 54 Low
RING-BILLED GULL - 2,019
HERRING GULL - 155
GREAT BLACK-BACKED GULL - 30
ROCK PIGEON - 992

MOURNING DOVE - 563
EASTERN SCREECH-OWL - 18
GREAT HORNED OWL - 12
BARRED OWL - 6 Tied High
SHORT-EARED OWL - 1

BELTED KINGFISHER - 6
RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER - 238
YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER - 2
DOWNY WOODPECKER - 397

HAIRY WOODPECKER - 159

NORTHERN FLICKER - 10

PILEATED WOODPECKER - 54

NORTHERN SHRIKE - 1

BLUE JAY - 985

AMERICAN CROW - 1,706

FISH CROW - 14

COMMON RAVEN - 28

HORNED LARK - 113

BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE - 2,728

TUFTED TITMOUSE - 521

RED-BREASTED NUTHATCH - 28

WHITE-BREASTED NUTHATCH - 479

BROWN CREEPER - 23

CAROLINA WREN - 30

WINTER WREN - 1

GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET - 45

RUBY-CROWNED KINGLET - 1

EASTERN BLUEBIRD - 126

HERMIT THRUSH - 1

AMERICAN ROBIN - 45

NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD - 11

EUROPEAN STARLING - 2,864

CEDAR WAXWING - 330

YELLOW-RUMPED WARBLER - 1

AMERICAN TREE SPARROW - 476

FIELD SPARROW - 1

FOX SPARROW - 1

SONG SPARROW - 60

SWAMP SPARROW - 12

WHITE-THROATED SPARROW - 114

DARK-EYED JUNCO - 1,185 High

NORTHERN CARDINAL - 372

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD - 3

COMMON GRACKLE - 1

BROWN-HEADED COWBIRD - 29

PURPLE FINCH - 15

HOUSE FINCH - 525

AMERICAN GOLDFINCH - 944

HOUSE SPARROW - 376

Also noted during the compilation:

SWAN, Sp. (presumed TUNDRA?) already reported for Count Week

2 Accipiter Sp.

120 gull Sp.

WHITE-CROWNED SPARROW, 29 Dec (Count Week)

The Ithaca Christmas Bird Count numbers will be reported to Audubon as part of the larger national Christmas Bird Count. You can explore results from other areas, view photos, and get more information about the Audubon Christmas Bird Count [here](#).

Field Trip to Sodus Bay- January 16

There will be a Cayuga Bird Club field trip to Sodus Bay on Lake Ontario on Saturday, **January 16**. (If there is bad weather on Saturday, the trip will be Sunday January 17). Gladys Birdsall will lead this full day trip. Meet at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology parking lot at 8:00 am; we plan to return at around 4:00 pm.

What we will see depends on the weather conditions. In the past, all three species of scoters have been observed in the same scope view, as if depicting the plate in the Peterson guide! Long-tailed Ducks and other waterfowl, a variety of gulls, including Glaucous and Iceland Gulls, can be seen at Sodus Point. Gyrfalcon and Snowy Owls have also been seen here. Along the way, we may see winter field birds like Snow Buntings, Lapland Longspurs, and Horned Larks.

Please dress warmly, in layers, for cold and windy weather along the lake shore. Bring lunch, snack, and beverages. There will be some stops at a couple of gas stations where

you can buy some food and coffee.

For more details, contact Gladys at gjb5@cornell.edu or Meena at mmh3@cornell.edu.

Digital Bird Song Hearing Aids

Can you still hear Cedar Waxwings? Brown Creepers?

The October 2015 issue of the American Birding Association *Birding* magazine features an article by Laura Erickson on a topic of interest to many birders who find that they can no longer hear the calls and songs of some birds as well as they used to. Erickson reports her findings from experimenting with hearing aids for birding and also with the [SongFinder](#), invented by Ithaca's Lang Elliott. Erickson's detailed [article](#) is available at no cost on the ABA website.

Cayuga Bird Club

The Cayuga Bird Club meets on the second Monday of each month, September through June, beginning with refreshments at 7:15 p.m. in the Auditorium of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's Johnson Center on Sapsucker Woods Road. All meetings and most field trips are free and open to the public. Membership costs \$15 annually per household, \$10 for students. To join, send a check (made out to "Cayuga Bird Club") to Cayuga Bird Club Treasurer, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca, NY 14850. [Online payment option](#) is available at the Cayuga Bird Club website.

Members receive via email the monthly Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter, from September through June. Newsletter submissions may be sent to Diane Morton, cbceditor1@gmail.com. Of particular interest are articles about local bird sightings, bird behavior, or birding hot spots, as well as book reviews, original poetry, art, and photos.

Cayuga Bird Club Officer Contact Information is available on the [Cayuga Bird Club website](#).

Chickadee illustration in masthead by Karen Allaben-Confer



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