

Cayuga Bird Club Newsletter - January 2019

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Cayuga Bird Club

January 2019

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Calendar

Jan. 13 Field Trip Around the Lake

Leader: Bob McGuire

8:00am – 4:30pm

Jan. 14 Cayuga Bird Club Meeting, 7:30pm

Share Your Photos

Host: Kevin McGowan

Jan. 20 Field Trip Winter Birds

Leaders: Diane Morton and Ken Kempfues

8:00am – 12:30pm

Cayuga Bird Club Meeting January 14, 2019

Title: Share Your Photos Night!

Host: Kevin McGowan, Cornell Lab of Ornithology



Roseate Spoonbill by Kevin McGowan

Club members can share a maximum of five photos during the 3 minutes you will have to take the stage. Send them by January 11 to Kevin at kjm2@cornell.edu. The Subject Line on the email MUST BE "Bird club photo submission Jan2019." 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 submission is limited to club members, the meeting is open to all.

Cayuga Bird Club meetings start at 7:30pm, the second

**Feb. 11, Cayuga Bird Club Meeting,
7:30pm**

NY Breeding Bird Atlas III
Speaker: Ian Davies

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

Upcoming Field Trips**Sun, January 13, 8:00am**

Around the Lake, led by Bob McGuire
Meet at Stewart Park, east end

Join Bob McGuire on a full day trip around Cayuga Lake, with a focus on waterfowl. Meet at the east end of Stewart Park at 8:00am for carpooling. Dress very warmly and bring a scope if you have one. Bring a lunch and/or snacks and a beverage. We'll make a stop to purchase food as well. We plan to be back 4-5 pm.

Sun, January 20, 8:00am – 12:30pm

Winter Birds, led by Diane Morton and Ken Kemphues
Meet at Stewart Park, east end

Diane Morton and Ken Kemphues will lead a half-day trip to look for winter birds. This will include waterfowl at the lake as well as field birds such as Horned Larks and Snow Buntings. We plan to return at 12:30 pm.

These field trips are open to all.

Bald Eagle Killing

Bob McGuire

An adult bald Eagle was killed in Caroline on December 15th. Mr. Donald Mix told police that he was shooting at what he thought was a Turkey Vulture. He could have been charged under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 and the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, but the DEC and US Fish and Wildlife law enforcement officials decided to prosecute under NYS environmental conservation law: two violations and a misdemeanor. He

Monday of every month September - June. Doors open at 7:00pm and all meetings are open to the public.

From the President

Diane Morton

Many of us started our New Year off by participating in the January 1 Christmas Bird Count. We had 159 people counting birds this year, one of our highest numbers of count participants. It was a great collaborative effort.

The Christmas Bird Count experience is different every year, and weather has a lot to do with it. This January 1 began with temperatures in the 40's, but the strong winds and dark gray skies created very challenging conditions for bird finding and identification. Many people at the compilation dinner spoke of seeing much lower numbers of birds than in previous years. Tallies of the species counts during the compilation confirmed that impression, with numbers down for nearly all species, across all nine count areas. We ended our day with just over 20,000 individual birds (half as many as last year) and 84 species.

Some upticks were noted, including more than 70 Evening Grosbeaks, a species not recorded in the last 10 years. The Common Redpoll flock on Mount Pleasant was estimated at 300 individuals. One Hoary Redpoll was seen with them the previous day, a bird seen only once in previous counts. We also had a record number (2!) for Eastern Phoebe. For a full summary of our 57th annual Christmas Bird Count species numbers, see the article below.

I also found it more challenging to find birds this year. One American Goldfinch! A handful of Blue Jays! Two Red-tailed Hawks the only raptors! But I explored some territories I hadn't traveled before, and on one route with a couple of new participants, we came upon a small flock of Evening Grosbeaks - a delightful treat for the new year.

More winter birding is on our agenda for the coming weeks. Join us on two field trips this month: a full day trip around the lake on January 13, and a half-day outing on January 20. We never know what we'll find! See our club calendar for details about these trips.

will be arraigned in Caroline town court on January 22nd. The penalties are similar for both state and federal offenses and range up to a \$5,000 fine and 90 days in jail.



Photo by Sarah Salix

A letter-writing campaign was begun just before Christmas to urge the Tompkins County DA to prosecute to the full extent of the law. Mr. Van Houten has reacted positively; here is his response to my letter: "I am very upset, on a personal and professional level, by such an egregious act. Please note that I have instructed the assigned prosecutor not to offer any plea reduction and to prosecute the charges to the fullest extent permitted under New York State law. Respectfully, Matthew Van Houten, Tompkins Count District Attorney."

This an excellent opportunity to send a strong message to the community that the taking of virtually any wild bird is illegal. I will be working in the coming weeks to get this message out and welcome assistance and ideas on how to do it effectively. This is the [best news article](#).

Field Trip Report - Around the Lake

Diane Morton and Ken Kemphues

Our first meeting of 2019, on January 14th, is our annual Share Your Photos night. Share some of your photos of favorite birds, or just come and enjoy the show!

Good birding,

Diane

Ithaca Christmas Bird Count Results - January 1, 2019

We had 146 birders out in the field and another 13 calling in counts from their feeders, for a total of 159 count participants. Our 10-year count average is 131 participants - it was great to have so many additional counters this year.

Our total count of individual birds this year was 20,313, half the number that we found last year, and well below our 10-year average of 38,463.

Counts were especially low for waterfowl, including record low numbers for American Black Duck (5 birds!) and Mallard. Redheads were down to 314 birds, compared to the 10-year average of 1550. Only a single grebe was found (1 Horned Grebe) and no loons or swans. The rough conditions on the lake, lack of ice to concentrate birds, and earlier start to hunting season likely contributed to the low number of birds found on the lake.

Windy weather also contributed to low counts for many species of songbirds, including record low numbers of American Tree Sparrow (39) and House Sparrow (308).

A record high for our count was for Eastern Phoebe - two birds - seen in different count areas. No phoebes have been recorded in our count since 1996. Seventy three Evening Grosbeaks were seen in area III, not seen since 2008. We also found 15 Bald Eagles; this number may become lower as revisions are made to remove duplicate sightings of the same individuals. The previous high count for Bald Eagle was 11, in 2018. Other unusual sightings this year included a Northern Goshawk at the Ithaca Farmers Market and a Short-eared Owl at Stewart Park, both spotted by Ken Rosenberg.

Individual species counts (preliminary) are listed below. Thanks to Dave Nutter and Paul Anderson for these

Nine participants joined us Saturday, December 8 for an all-day trip around Cayuga Lake. Meeting in the morning at Stewart Park, we found new ice extending out from shore, and very few ducks. Gulls rested on the ice and we scanned through them, finding one Lesser Black-backed Gull among the more common species.



Birders at Stewart Park by Beth Lalonde

We could make out a large raft of waterfowl on the west side, and headed over to a private residence on Taughannock Blvd for a better look. There we had excellent views of the waterfowl below. There were many Redheads as well as small numbers of Canvasbacks, Ring-necked Ducks, Lesser Scaup, Ruddy Ducks, American Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers and American Coots. We also enjoyed songbirds that were out that morning, including a chirring Carolina Wren, calling White-throated Sparrows, and several kinds of woodpeckers.

We next headed to East Shore Park, where we were able to get closer views of gulls standing on the ice. A Lesser Black-backed gull was more clearly visible here, as well as both immature and adult Great Black-backed Gulls. Out on the water, a Red-throated Loon was diving. This was a life bird for a couple of participants! As we were looking at gulls, a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher appeared in a close tree for great views. We could all see the bird's white eye ring, darker gray back above lighter gray breast, and busy behavior. The gnatcatcher even vocalized for us. We also watched six Eastern Bluebirds, singing and looking very colorful in the bright sunlight.

numbers.

Cackling Goose - 2
 Canada Goose - 3064
 Am. Black Duck - 5
 Mallard - 468
 Redhead - 314
 Ring-necked Duck - 1
 Greater Scaup - 6
 Lesser Scaup - 10
 Long-tailed Duck - 2
 Bufflehead - 4
 Common Goldeneye - 47
 Hooded Merganser - 19
 Common Merganser - 99
 Red-breasted Merganser - 1
 Ruffed Grouse - 11
 Wild Turkey - 100
 Horned Grebe - 1
 Double-crested Cormorant - 2
 Great Blue Heron - 6
 Turkey Vulture - 38
 Northern Harrier - 5
 Sharp-shinned Hawk - 5
 Cooper's Hawk - 10
 Northern Goshawk - 1
 Bald Eagle - 15
 Red-tailed Hawk - 133
 Rough-legged Hawk - 2
 American Coot - 68
 Ring-billed Gull - 553
 Herring Gull - 627
 Great Black-backed Gull - 68
 Rock Pigeon - 1318
 Mourning Dove - 290
 Eastern Screech-Owl - 23
 Great Horned Owl - 6
 Barred Owl - 1
 Short-eared Owl - 1
 Northern Saw-whet Owl - 1
 Belted Kingfisher - 9
 Red-bellied Woodpecker - 161

A calling Fish Crow greeted us from the spit as we arrived at Myers Point. Bob McGuire spotted an adult Iceland Gull in a row of gulls facing away from us on the ice. The gulls were nicely lined up for good comparison of the unmarked wingtips of the Iceland gull with the black wingtips/white spots of the neighboring Herring and Ring-billed Gulls.

Heading north on Lake Ridge Road, we spotted a large raptor perched in a tree. Scope views revealed it to be a Rough-legged Hawk — identifiable even without binoculars when it took flight to circle down to a fence post. Many snow geese were flying overhead to the east of us, and some had come down into the fields south of Aurora. We saw many more thousands of Snow Geese flying high overhead during the day.



Snow Geese by Beth Lalonde

Factory St. Pond in Union Springs gave us close looks at Gadwall, Buffleheads, American Black Ducks, Mallards and a single female Common Goldeneye. At the North Mill Pond, we added American Wigeon and Green-winged Teal to our list of the day's waterfowl.

We found our first swans at Armitage Road. Trumpeter Swans there seemed to be more vocal than the Tundra Swans, but both were in the same field. We spent some time comparing bill shapes, until the winter wind drove us into our cars.

As we returned on the west side of the lake, we saw huge rafts of Redheads and Snow Geese, but they were far out on the lake. We had better birding along Wyers

Downy Woodpecker - 258
 Hairy Woodpecker - 93
 Northern Flicker - 23
 Pileated Woodpecker - 21
 American Kestrel - 3

Merlin - 2
 Eastern Phoebe - 2
 Northern Shrike - 1
 Blue Jay - 309
 American Crow - 1377

Fish Crow - 9
 Common Raven - 25
 Black-capped Chickadee - 1771
 Tufted Titmouse - 377
 Red-breasted Nuthatch - 57

White-breasted Nuthatch - 267
 Brown Creeper - 20
 Winter Wren - 1
 Carolina Wren - 54
 Golden-crowned Kinglet - 17

Eastern Bluebird - 98
 Hermit Thrush - 1
 American Robin - 62
 Gray Catbird - 1
 Northern Mockingbird - 22

European Starling - 4939
 Cedar Waxwing - 354
 Snow Bunting - 1
 Common Yellowthroat - 1
 Yellow-rumped Warbler - 3

American Tree Sparrow - 39
 Chipping Sparrow - 1
 Dark-eyed Junco - 572
 White-throated Sparrow - 187
 Song Sparrow - 33

Swamp Sparrow - 5
 Northern Cardinal - 329
 House Finch - 179
 Purple Finch - 2
 Common Redpoll - 300

Point road, finding closer groups of Red-breasted Mergansers, Buffleheads and three Horned Grebes.

Despite the cold weather, we had a very enjoyable day, with good looks at many wintering birds.

Field Trip Report - Owls and More

Josh Snodgrass

On Sunday, December 16, around 15 birders joined me at Taughannock SP North Point for a proposed excursion up the lake for waterfowl and then inland for winter owls. A few who arrived early were treated to views of a pair of White-winged Scoters at Taughannock who were quickly flushed by a passing boat. Shortly after arrival we got a notification from Jay McGowan of a Gyrfalcon at the north end of the lake. We quickly changed plans to chase this arctic falcon. After a quick scan of the lake at Taughannock yielded only a bunch of Ring-billed Gulls and a single calling Belted Kingfisher, we formed a caravan and trekked north in hopes of refinding the Gyrfalcon.

We arrived at the designated location and spent some time scanning the treeline over a large flock of Canada Geese in the field. Jay helped us locate the bird; of course we should check the ground. This was after all a tundra native. The flock of geese soon lifted off in a panic and we were able to find the Gyrfalcon in the field on its prey- a Mallard picked out of the crowd of geese by this raptor's sharp eyes. We watched the somewhat macabre spectacle of the Gyrfalcon plucking and consuming his prey for some time. A Red-tailed Hawk appeared over the field, and the Gyrfalcon rose quickly to defend his kill in an amazing aerial battle with the hawk, swooping and diving and successfully driving the hawk off before returning to his prey. Once we had gotten our fill of the Gyrfalcon, we

Pine Siskin - 46
American Goldfinch - 508
Evening Grosbeak - 73
House Sparrow - 308

Total counts January 1 - **20,313** individuals, **84** species

We will also include bird species seen in the week surrounding our January 1 count as "count week" birds. The following five species bring our count up to **89**: Hoary Redpoll (1 seen with Common Redpolls on December 31), Lesser Black-backed Gull, Peregrine Falcon, White-crowned Sparrow, and Brown-headed Cowbird. Species seen in the count circle through January 4 can be included as count week birds, so please report your sightings if you find something new.

Our Ithaca Christmas Bird Count numbers will be reported to Audubon as part of their database from more than 2500 different count areas. You can explore results from other count circles [here](#).

Thanks to everyone who helped with the count this year: participants, area leaders, and Paul Anderson, our count compiler.

Hammond Hill Owls Project

John and Karen Confer

Hammond Hill Owls (HHOWLS) had another successful year of banding. We banded on 16 nights, almost every night with tolerable to good wind conditions and temperatures above freezing, until 6 November. This provided 502 net hours and 0.2 birds per net hour. We had 116 assistant-nights with 42 people who made more than one trip. Plus, we had about 30 brief visitors with the Cayuga Bird Club trip.

I would do the banding for either the data on migratory saw-whets and what we might learn from it, or for the great pleasure in the personal interactions among all of us. The best part is the new and renewed friendships that come from working to our best to process the birds safely and record the data accurately. Put the two aspects together, and you have an awesome experience.

continued on.



Gyrfalcon by Diane Morton

A brief stop at Cayuga Lake SP yielded a nice flock of Tundra Swans, some American Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, and a distant Lesser Black-backed Gull. From there we visited two staked out Snowy Owls in separate locations near the Finger Lakes airport, both of which were stoically perched in their usual spots, and seemed undisturbed by our presence, offering good scope views to all. From there, we hurried south to reach the Finger Lakes National Forest grasslands just after sunset. We were treated to a wonderful show by at least four Short-eared Owls picked out of the fog and gloom. They floated over the fields in their mothlike flight, interacting and barking at each other in the fading light. What an amazing day! You couldn't ask for more cooperative birds. Thanks to all who came, and all who scouted and helped from afar!

Cayuga Bird Club Meeting
February 11

Title: **NY Breeding Bird Atlas III**

Speaker: **Ian Davies**, eBird Project Coordinator, Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY

In 2020, birders across New York will embark on the state's third breeding bird atlas: a five-year effort to document breeding birds in the region. New York will be the first state to start a third breeding

	# of Birds	Average Weight (gms)
Female	70	96.7
After Hatch Year	1	100.3
After Second Year	20	96.9
Hatch Year	31	96.1
Second Year	18	97.4
Male	12	78.4
After Second Year	2	75.4
Hatch Year	7	79.5
Second Year	3	77.7
Uncertain	16	85.7
After Second Year	2	85.9
Hatch Year	12	85.5
Second Year	2	86.6

Aging birds is determined by feather characteristics that change with age and can be detected by examination of hand-held individuals. Hatch Year birds are birds that hatched in the year they were caught. After Hatch Year birds are any number of years older than Hatch Year birds; the plumage pattern is not typical and age determination is very uncertain. Second Year Birds are known to be hatched exactly one year earlier. After Second Year birds can only be aged imprecisely; they are at least three years old, but they may be older.

In sum, we caught 101 Northern Saw-whet Owl, 1 Eastern Screech Owl, and had one mortality. There were totals of one After Hatch Year, 24 after Second Year, 52 Hatch Year and 23 Second Year birds. We had two birds, not tabulated above, that seemed stressed as we processed them. We ringed them and immediately put them on a branch and watched to see that they were able to fly away, which they did. For the first time in five years, and the second instance in 10 years, we had a net mortality. There was a Saw-whet Owl dead in the net as we arrived. It had bled on the net and seemed to have cut itself when flying into the net. I believe that what we learn from our banding may help wildlife in the future.

We caught four birds already banded. Two were from Prince Edward Point Bird Observatory on the north shore of Lake Ontario about 100 miles north of us, one of which was banded 27 days earlier and had moved southward at an average rate of four miles a day, and another that had been

bird atlas and will be taking advantage of modern tools to maximize the area we can cover: the atlas data collection will be run through eBird. Come learn about breeding bird atlases, how you can take part, and how to make your summer birding count.

First-of-Year Birds Reported for the Cayuga Lake Basin

Listed below is Cayuga Lake Basin first arrival reported in December 2018:

Hoary Redpoll

**2018 year total count:
278 species**

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

Minutes

of the December 10, 2018 Cayuga Bird Club meeting are available on the Cayuga Bird Club [website](#).

banded a year earlier. We caught one bird that was banded by John and Sue Gregoire near Watkins Glens a year earlier. And we caught one bird with no information yet submitted to the Bird Banding Laboratory.

The mud was incredibly bad this fall, far worse than any other year. I am thinking of installing drainage tubing this summer. Any strong backs and hands? Join us next year for another exciting experience with migratory birds.

Cayuga Bird Club

Educating and inspiring the birding community of the Cayuga Lake Basin and Central New York since 1914

The Cayuga Bird Club meets on the second Monday of each month, September through June, beginning with refreshments at 7:15pm 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, payable in September. Payment may be made via Paypal at cayugabirdclub.org or by mailing a check to: Cayuga Bird Club, c/o Cornell Lab of Ornithology, 159 Sapsucker Woods Road, Ithaca NY 14850. Please include your email address (or addresses for family memberships) with your membership application to receive the club newsletter. Members receive the monthly Cayuga Bird Club eNewsletter, from September through June. To make sure you don't miss an issue, add newsletter@cayugabirdclub.org to your email contacts.

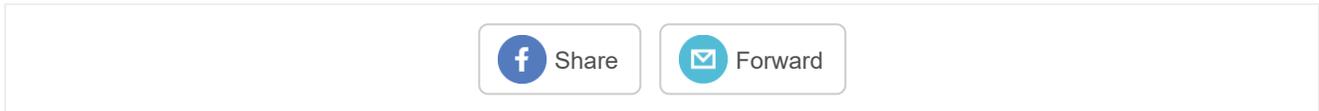
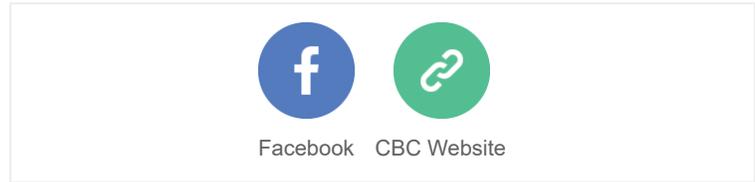
Newsletter submissions may be sent to [Tracy McLellan](#). Of particular interest are articles about local bird sightings, bird behavior, birding hot spots, book reviews, bird conservation news and original poetry, art, and photos.

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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