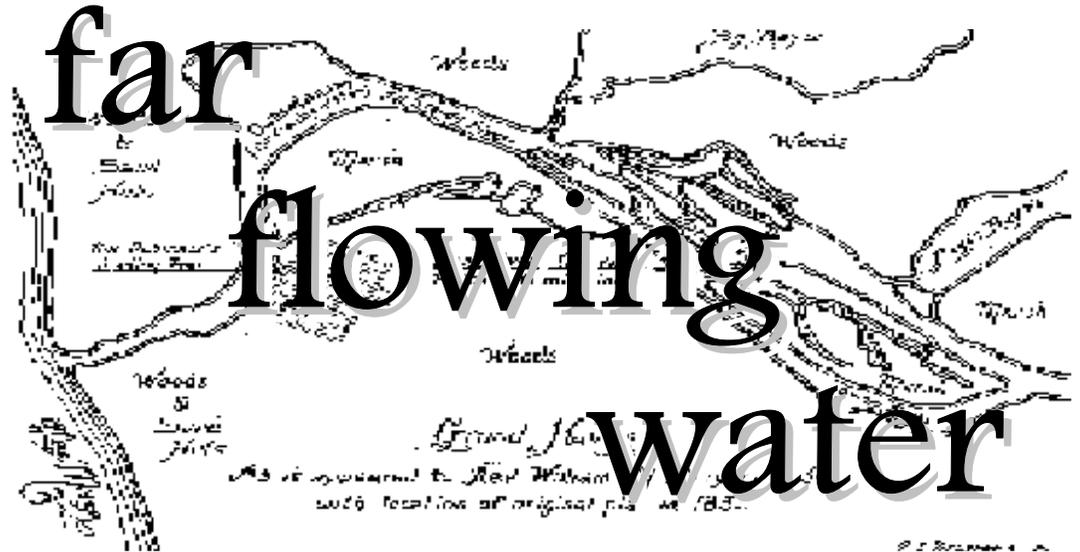


Grand Haven, Michigan



January 20

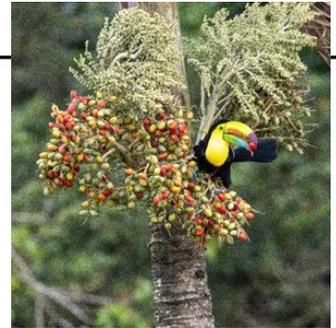
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**PROGRAM
START TIME**

A FLEDGLING'S GUIDE TO BIRDING: TIPS FOR BEGINNERS

Presented by **Cindy Dobrez**, OIAS President

Are you interested in learning how to become a birder in addition to being a bird watcher? Don't know the difference? As a fledgling birder herself, Cindy has tips, resources, photographs, and funny stories to share. Some people have "spark birds" that draw them into birding, others, like Cindy, have a spark event. Others began to notice nature during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Whatever your reason for being intrigued about the hobby of birding, you, too, can soon be on your way from identifying a Tufted Titmouse in your backyard to photographing a Keel-billed Toucan at a gas station in Costa Rica! The obsession is real, and you'll leave the program with a list of resources to help you on your way. Ottawa County is one of the best places in Michigan and in the U.S. for rewarding birding. Don't miss out.



Cindy is a retired school librarian and currently the Vice President of the Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society, starting her 7th year of birding. Her life list stands at 635 and includes birds in all but 14 counties in Michigan, 32 U.S. states, and the countries of Panama, Costa Rica, and Croatia. List? Did you say List? Music to a birder's ear. Wait until you learn how many types of lists you can make as a birder!

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President's Corner – January 2026

Cindy Dobrez

Ooooooh, there's nothing a birder loves better than the flip of the calendar year to start new lists! Well, maybe a special lifer bird or a backyard rarity would top it, but birders do love a good list. Or two. Starting a fresh one, is a special thrill. What species will I see or hear first on January 1st? That's enough to get us out of bed extra early. (Or perhaps you start your list at the stroke of midnight hearing your first owl of the year???)

When I was of school age, September always brought a thrill for me with new school supplies, a fresh planner, and hopes and dreams of what the new school year might hold. Will I like my teacher? Will I be dressed in "style?" Will my grades hold up? What service project might our class undertake? Will we travel somewhere fun for Spring Break? What will I learn this year?

The fresh start of January brings similar joy to birders. The year bird list is as empty as the September planner, just waiting for first sightings. Perhaps there is some newly gifted gear to try out or wear. Can I rank higher this year than last in the county or state birder lists? Can I plan some bird-related travel this year to someplace new? How many lifers will I see? What can I read, watch, or do to expand my bird knowledge? How can I help the birds in my backyard and community?

My lists include yearly yard, county, state, and world lists, and new lifers. I use the eBird app to record, track and sort them, but I also use a small notebook to list my year yard and county birds. It's fun to flip back to previous years to see what is new, missing, or a target bird I should be finding. This year, I've set a goal to select a "patch" near me and to spend time birding there frequently as the calendar pages turn to get to know a specific habitat and its inhabitants.

January is often full of empty promises and broken resolutions. Don't let birding be one of them. Set some birding goals for 2026. Watch from your window, take a cold hike, or drive the farm field roads, but seek out the birds to nurture your soul and lift your spirits. If you know of someone, including youth, who would like to learn more about becoming an active birder, point them in the direction of our January 20, 2026 program, A Fledgling Guide to Birding: Tips for Beginners, which I'll be presenting. It will help get your new year and perhaps, new hobby, off to a good start!

Cindy Dobrez, Vice President, OIAS

Excerpt: <https://www.birdcount.org/2025-final-results/>

The World Has Spoken—Merlin for the Win!



The world loves Merlin! In 2021, Merlin was introduced as a way to contribute to the Great Backyard Bird Count and this year we saw tremendous growth in the use of this tool around the world. At **655,549 submissions**, we more than doubled the number of Merlin entries from last year making this the best year yet for Merlin. The tool continues to awe and inspire those who are turning to birds as a way to feel more connected to the natural world. How fun to be able to identify birds no matter where we are, right in the palm of our hands!

Merlin growth since 2021. Blue = eBird checklists, yellow = eBird users, red = Merlin submissions, and green = Merlin users.



Programs

February 17	Rails at Different Scales: Ecological and Evolutionary Drivers of Vocal Behavior in Rallidae Daniel Goldberg, GVSU, Biology Department
March 17	Chimney Swift Conservation in Michigan Chad Machinski, Michigan Audubon Society
April 21	Annual OIAS Business Meeting, Election, Bird Swap, Image Sharing and Dessert Potluck

2025-2026 MCNC/OIAS Field Trips

Beth Miller

All field trips are from 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon

- Jan. 17, '26 — Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center (WW)
- Feb. 21, '26 — Pere Marquette Park & Muskegon Channel
- Mar. 21, '26 — Dune Harbor Park
- Apr. 18, '26 — Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve
- May 16, '26 — MUSKEGON Big Day Count
- June 20, '26 — Black Lake Park
- July 18, '26 — Lost Lake Trail & Muskegon State Park
- Aug. 15, '26 — Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center (WW)

Announcing Vote on Bylaws

Karl Sineath

Proposal:

The board proposes amending the bylaws so that our final meeting of the season is in April instead of May. We will have a voice vote on this proposal at our January 20, 2026 meeting held at Loutit Library. Social time is from 6:00 - 6:15. The vote will take place after we start the meeting at 6:15.

Current Bylaws with Proposed Changes in Square Brackets:

The May [April] meeting shall be known as the Annual Meeting, at which time elections shall be held...

Regular meetings of the Society shall be held once a month, except during the months of December, [May,], June, July and August.

Process for Amending our Bylaws:

These Bylaws may be adopted, amended, repealed or replaced at any meeting of the Society by a two-thirds vote of those members present, provided a verbatim notice of the proposed change is given to the Society members at least ten (10) days prior to such meeting.

Information about the Change:

- The society and the board are full of people who love birds, and we want to be out birding in May during migration.
- The April meeting will become the Annual Meeting.
 - We plan to keep the "bird swap," where we exchange bird-related items during the annual meeting.
 - We plan to add a mini program, which will allow for one program a year that has a shorter format (such as bird trivia or updating the membership on the work of the club).
 - We will also continue to do any necessary club business during the annual meeting.

Global Bird Count - February 13 – 16, 2026

Birds reported help scientists track bird populations.

“How to Participate

Participating is easy, fun to do **alone or with others**, and **can be done anywhere** you find birds.

Step 1: Decide where you will watch birds.

Step 2: Watch birds for **15 minutes or more, at least once over the four days**, February 13–16.

Step 3: Identify all the birds you *see or hear* within your planned time/location and use the best tool for sharing your bird sightings:

- If you are a **beginning bird admirer and new to bird identification**, try using the [Merlin Bird ID app](#) to tell us what birds you are seeing or hearing.
- If you have **participated** in the count **before** and want to record **numbers of birds**, try the [eBird Mobile app](#) or enter your bird list on the [eBird website](#) (desktop/laptop).”

Excerpts: <https://www.birdcount.org/>

2025 Final Results

“In a Snapshot

- **8,078** species of birds identified
- **217** countries or eBird subregions
- **387,652** eBird checklists
- **655,549** Merlin Bird IDs (step-by-step, sound, or photo)
- **189,741** photos, videos, and sounds added to Macaulay Library
- **838,113** estimated global participants
- **409** reported community events”

Excerpts: <https://www.birdcount.org/2025-final-results/>



This photo from <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/take-a-look-at-americas-least-convincing-cell-phone-tower-trees> is a cell tower in Tucson, Arizona.

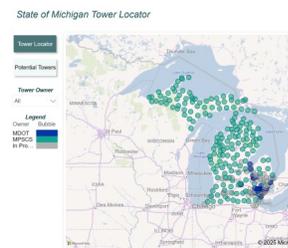
Camo Cell Towers

Judi Manning

In 2013, how many people driving by recognized the 150-foot cell phone tower erected in Portage, MI, disguised as a pine tree, complete with “bark” and the antennae concealed to look like pine branches? A company started producing pine tree towers in 1992 and the first one was installed in Denver to hide a particularly ugly tower. In 2016, one pine tree tower cost \$150,000 and an additional \$100,000 for the tree garb.

Cell tower companies have installed cell pine trees, flag poles, clock towers, cacti, and a zigzagging sculpture near Ann Arbor and in several places in Michigan, including Norton Shores to hide cell towers. The Norton Shores tree is 157 feet tall and located at 5445 Lake Harbor Road. This tree has 18,000 pounds of artificial tree branches. The steel has the texture of bark. This location also has a flagpole with the antenna inside the structure.

References: *These are the coolest cell phone towers you will ever see*, Lucy Perkins, Michigan Radio Newsroom, 7/10/13, <https://www.michiganpublic.org/offbeat/2013-07-10/these-are-the-coolest-cell-phone-towers-you-will-ever-see>, *Cell phone tower in Norton Shores built to resemble 155-foot pine tree*, Brian McVicar, 10/29/11, *Take a Look at America’s Least Convincing Cell Phone Tower Trees*, Lauren Young, 5/17/16, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/take-a-look-at-americas-least-convincing-cell-phone-tower-trees>



American Robin

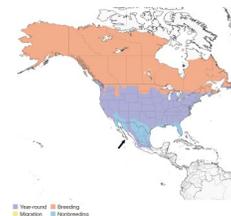
Turdus migratorius

Judi Manning

The American Robin is a common sight from late March until early November. In the late fall and winter months they can be seen in moist woods where berry-producing shrubs and trees (hawthorn, juniper, and sumac) are found rather than on the ground.

In spring and summer, they eat earthworms and insect larvae in the morning and more fruit later in the day. They use auditory and visual cues to locate prey. They also eat from feeders. Early this spring robins were eating mealworms from our tube feeder.

The American Robin is the most resilient, adaptable, and widespread songbird in North America and the largest North American thrush. Robins can be found in several different habitats across the continent.



Males have a brighter, richer orange breast than the female during breeding season. A female considers these features when picking a mate. To her the brightness is linked to overall health and diet quality.

American Robins have anthropogenic acoustic adaptation which is an incredible vocal flexibility and can adjust the timing, pitch, and volume of their songs so they can be heard above human-made sounds (traffic).

Most migratory birds have strict season routes. However, migration movement of the American Robin is mostly influenced by temperature and food availability rather than changes in day length. The flocks are nomadic in search of fruit-bearing trees and shrubs across diverse landscapes in fall and winter.

Why flock?

- More eyes to watch for predators.
- Reduce the risk of predation.
- Share information about food sources.

By eating berries and soft fruits, they disperse the seeds of over 40 plant species and are excellent at insect control due to the variety they consume.

This disease indicator species is especially susceptible to West Nile Virus and can carry high viral loads without immediate death. This enables the virus to expand and be transmitted by mosquitoes.

Robins have adapted to reside in urban settings leading to window collisions, lead poisoning and increased predation by domestic cats, dogs, crows, and jays. They also have a higher baseline level of corticosterone associated with stress and energy balance to help them remain alert and responsive in unpredictable environments.

Local declines are caused by pesticide and herbicide use ingested from lawns they forage on, habitat fragmentation and climate-driven changes that affect migration. They are expanding wintering grounds as a benefit from climate warming, but this may cause a mismatch between insect emergence and breeding.

Follow the following link for instructions to build a nest structure for a breeding pair of robins: <https://nestwatch.org/learn/all-about-birdhouses/birds/american-robin/>. The structure should be installed well before breeding season.

Western populations have almost no white at the tail corners and are paler than ones here. Breeding robins seen on the Canadian Atlantic coast are richly colored, with black on the neck and upper back.

References: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Robin/overview; "American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*): A Master of Adaptation, Survival, and Song", Kelvine, 6/27/25, <https://birdsology.com/american-robin-turdus-migratorius-a-master-of-adaptation-survival-and-song/>



Some leucistic feathers

Judi Manning

Fungi and Landfills

It is estimated that 7 billion tons of plastic has been produced with over 400 million tons are added every year. A Finnish farmer partnered with Miki Agrawal and formed Hiro Technologies to help solve this problem. This company is looking at fungi that grows in dirty diapers to eat plastic in landfill.

The World Economic Forum estimates 300,000 disposable diapers that contain plastic in various forms go into landfills every minute. The diaper industry burns 248 million barrels of crude oil every year. Plastic does not dissolve very quickly or efficiently. One plastic straw takes 200 years to decompose.

Scientists in Germany found several species of plastic-eating fungi species in 2024. This fungus eats lignin that is found in trees used in many types of plastic. The fungus needs fertilizer (poop).

References: *Company says baby poop and fungi could be the solution to plastic waste*, <https://www.msn.com/en-us/technology/biotechnology/company-says-baby-poop-and-fungi-could-be-the-solution-to-plastic-waste/ar-AA1vWLCd>



Landfill — Muskegon Wastewater

SNOW POLICY:

The Board will decide and notify members via email, the website and Facebook.

FAR FLOWING WATER

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Please contact Editor at oiias@oiias.org for other arrangements.

Far Flowing Water is published eight times per year. If you would like to contribute a complete article for the next issue, please have your article to me **by February 1st**.

Summer 2025

In mid-July I was surprised to see a male Baltimore Oriole feeding at the tubular mealworm feeder. It is the first time I have seen this. What was more of a surprise, this time of year the feeder is surrounded by Cup Plants and Joe Pye Weed. I wonder how he even found it. Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Cardinals, and House Sparrows were infrequently eating the mealworms.



Feeder setup in summer



Baltimore Oriole mostly obscured

2025-2026 OIAS Membership Application/Renewal Date _____

SEND BY EMAIL _____ Email: _____

Name _____

Street _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____ How did you hear about OIAS? _____

Check Member Type: \$20 Family \$30 Contributing \$100 Individual Life

My contribution to speaker fees and activism projects \$ _____

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Grand Haven, Michigan

Thank you for your support!

Mission Statement **Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society**

a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Corporation

Provide stewardship of local Grand River island wildlife sanctuaries owned by the Michigan Audubon Society;

Achieve through education, public recognition of the value and need for protecting and preserving wildlife, plants, soil, water and other natural resources as well as an understanding of their interdependence;

Promote an interest in our native birds and as well as native flora and fauna, and their habitats because of their great economic, cultural and recreational value; and

Aid the Michigan Audubon Society in its study, conservation and research efforts.

Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society

Judi Manning, Editor

P.O. Box 1654

Holland, MI 49422

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