

December 2017 eBird Summary

by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the unusual or rare eBird sightings for December 2017 for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. This report does not include rare birds that are flyovers, unchaseable and those with sketchy details. Unusual birds seen on Christmas Counts are not included unless a specific location was given. Starting next month, this report will be limited to only the very unusual and rarities. Rare and unusual eBird sightings are updated daily on the GRAC website.

The unseasonably warm weather continued the first five days of the month. The arrival of an arctic blast with high winds on the 5th and 6th brought us abruptly into winter with much below normal temps and lake effect snow bringing Grand Rapids its first inch of snow Dec 7. Clipper systems and lake effect snow events piled up the snow, and below normal temps continued throughout the following week. Moderating temps the third week brought melting snow cover and short-lived relief, but it was back in the deep freeze and more snow by Christmas. After the holiday, the coldest air of the year moved into the area with high temps struggling to make the teens, record-breaking sub-zero lows, sub-zero wind chills and lake effect snow all continuing through the end of the month.

Port Sheldon hosted 18 species of waterfowl, plus one Pied-billed Grebe Dec 16. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41121182> for Curtis Dykstra's entire checklist of 40 species including a Peregrine Falcon and Pine Siskins.

Many late migrants lingered in the area: a Double-crested Cormorant at Holland SP Dec 14-29; a Sanderling at Muskegon Lake channel Dec 1; a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at a residence near Tunnel Park, Ottawa Co Dec 28 and at a residence S of Holland, Allegan Co Dec 31; a House Wren at Allegan Mountain Bike Park, Allegan Co Dec 23; a Marsh Wren at Causeway Marsh, Muskegon Dec 23; a Hermit Thrush at a residence near Big Blue Lake, Muskegon Co Dec 18 gobbled live mealworms offered by the homeowners; a Gray Catbird along Baldwin between 80th and 88th Aves, Ottawa Co Dec 16; thirteen Yellow-rumped Warblers at Upper Macatawa Natural Area, 84th Ave access, Ottawa Co (five still there Dec 24) and six at Donald Lamoreaux Park, Kent Co Dec 17, four at Millennium Park Dec 19 and a few at other locations – this species has been known to winter in our area; Fox and Swamp sparrows still observed in the area; and Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird (high count of 70 along 14th St N of 138th Ave, Allegan Co Dec 4) still in the area, most in small numbers at feeders.

Finds of the month: A female **Harlequin Duck** first observed at Holland SP Oct 28 continued there through Dec 9 and one (determined to be a imm male) was seen again at W end of Lake Macatawa/Holland SP area Dec 15-31. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41271200> for close-up photos. A gorgeous adult male **Barrow's Goldeneye** was found with 130 Common Goldeneye at Douglas Beach Park in Allegan Co on Dec 2 by Lizzy and Ethan Kibbey and Jim Fyfe. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40863278> for photos. The bird continued to be seen by many in the Douglas Beach Park/Lakeshore Dr guardrail area through Dec 4. Weather conditions deteriorated significantly along the lakeshore making further observation nearly impossible. Conditions eventually improved and later in the month the bird was seen again with a huge flock of Common Goldeneye Dec 21-22,26. One **Purple Sandpiper** (briefly joined by another late last month) continued since Nov 13 at Holland SP Dec 11. After days of nasty weather conditions, it was observed there again Dec 16-26. Two **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were found by Dale and Jeanine Roberts at the Holland SP parking lot Dec 19. One first year bird was seen there on the 20th by the Mannings, but flew off and could not be relocated. On Dec 23 the bird showed up again and was seen by many through Dec 31. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41270190> for photos. **Snowy Owl** mania continued this month making the prediction for a good invasion right on the mark (see "other

notables” for locations). The adult male **Baltimore Oriole** reported coming to a suet feeder since mid-Nov at a residence along 92nd St near Eastern SE in Kent Co continued to be seen through Dec 28 eating live mealworms offered by the homeowner. I believe this is a new late Kent Co record for this species. Unfortunately, he was not seen after this date and sadly, most likely succumbed to the frigid temperatures. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40964381> and <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41292318> for incredible photos of this bird against the backdrop of snow.

Other notables: three **Surf Scoters** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2 and one there Dec 26; up to two **Black Scoters** at Holland SP Dec 2-4 and up to 21 at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2-3; two Long-tailed Ducks continued since mid-Nov at Muskegon Wastewater (odd inland location) Dec 10 and **9,200** at Pere Marquette Park, Muskegon Dec 20; **2,700** Common Goldeneye on Lk MI at Lakeshore Dr guardrail in Allegan Co Dec 17; 900 Common Mergansers at Lake Macatawa Chippewa Pt Dec 22; **3,870** Red-breasted Mergansers at Holland SP Dec 24; a **Red-throated Loon** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2, up to **14** at Holland SP Dec 14-31 and six at Grand Haven SP Dec 22; an **Iceland Gull** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 3, the Wastewater Dec 20 and Holland SP area Dec 21-31; a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Holland SP area Dec 2-7 and 20-28, one continued since Nov at the Wastewater Dec 2 and two at Anchorage Marina on Lake Macatawa Dec 22; a **Glaucous Gull** at Pere Marquette Park Dec 2, two at Green Lake in Allegan Co Dec 10, one at the Fire Dock on Lake Macatawa and two at the Wastewater Dec 20 and at Lake Macatawa Chippewa Pt Dec 22; a larger than normal number (9) of Great Black-backed Gulls at Grand Haven City Beach Dec 6; **Snowy Owls** observed at many locations: up to six continued since Nov at the Wastewater, up to three at Muskegon Lake and channel/Pere Marquette Park area, two at White River Light Station Museum and Muskegon Beachwood Park and one at Moorland and Cline Rds all in Muskegon Co; one at Holland SP (two Dec 22), Grand Haven SP, 72nd Ave/Cleveland St area, 72nd Ave/Taft St area, Taft St and 80th Ave (possibly same bird as previous two locations), Coopersville/Garfield farmland both W and E of 68th Ave, Van Buren St and 144th Ave, 128th Ave/Bingham St area (four Dec 31), 128th Ave and Blair St, Polk St and 96th Ave, 124th Ave S of Van Buren St, 78th Ave S of Lake Michigan Dr, Ransom St and Hallacy Dr and Randall/State Rd area all in Ottawa Co; one along 52nd St W of M-37 and two at Kraft Ave access Gerald R Ford Int'l Airport both in Kent Co; and one at 46th St and 140th Ave, 50th St between Fillmore and 140th Ave, 140th Ave E of 58th St, 140th Ave and M-40 and West Michigan Regional Airport all in Allegan Co; a **Short-eared Owl** at the Wastewater Dec 15 and 22; a Peregrine Falcon at Harbor Island, Tyler St W of 128th Ave in Ottawa Co, Port Sheldon, Holland SP and downtown Grand Rapids; A **Northern Shrike** at Harbor Island Grand Haven Dec 23; a Common Raven at Pigeon Creek County Park in Ottawa Co Dec 2; a Dark-eyed Junco **Oregon race** continued since Nov at a residence in Douglas Dec 17 and one continued since Dec 8 at a residence along 21st St S of 116th Ave in Allegan Co Dec 17; up to 14 White-crowned Sparrows at Outdoor Discovery Center in Allegan Co and up to 21 at a residence near Upper Macatawa Natural Area throughout the month – both are known wintering locations for this species (White-throats and White-crowns also observed at a few area feeders); a **Common Redpoll** at a feeder near Lowell Dec 15 and at a residence in Muskegon Dec 29; and a few Pine Siskins reported at various locations in Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa cos with a high count of 18 at Muskegon SP Dec 1.