

SOAR RECAP

JANUARY 17 2026

Seasonal but not unpleasant temperatures were the order of the day as I arrived at Antietam Meadow Park for the second 2026 bird walk. The ground was partially white from the light snow the night before, but snow might not be the right word. Instead of flakes, there were tiny "balls" that resembled sprinkles on an ice cream cone. The creek adjoining the park was covered by a thin sheet of ice where the water was quiet. I was joined by Dan and Jeff the archeologist, and we were pleasantly surprised part way through our walk to be joined by Jean.

Dan was the first to arrive and he had already seen a red-tailed hawk and numerous bluebirds. Before we began, several black vultures flew overhead. As we started down the path, we quickly added a red-bellied woodpecker and a flicker. There were some juncos in the low brushy areas and a white-throated sparrow. Next to appear was a nearby downy woodpecker.

A little further on there were numerous goldfinches, house finches, a distant starling, mourning doves on the wires (as usual), and a very vocal wren. It became quiet as we rounded the bend at the far end of the park, but that changed as we neared the creek and a kingfisher did a noisy flyby. This pleased Jeff, and he recalled how on a previous walk someone asked: "If you had to get a tattoo of a bird, which one would you choose?" Jeff's answer then was kingfisher. He said it was his favorite bird. (I know, birders can sometimes get a little weird during slow stretches.)

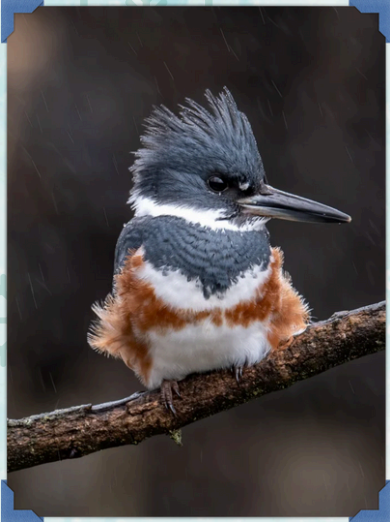
Again it got quiet for the next bit of the path. Even the Merlin app was not hearing anything. Toward the end of our walk, things got much more interesting. At the same place as two weeks prior, we started seeing lots of birds again. There were many bluebirds and goldfinches, and we added a song sparrow, nuthatch, and titmouse. There was also a flyover of a turkey vulture and some Canada geese.

That pretty much wrapped up our day, until I decided to check the open water upstream from us for any ducks that sometimes hang out there. No ducks, so I focused on a dark "blob" on the ice. It was a mink. He was apparently oblivious to our presence. Calling the others, we watched for a few minutes as he dove into the water, only to reemerge a few seconds later. A couple of times he disappeared into small holes in the ice, always surfacing a few feet away. We watched as he clambered onto the bank, looked around, and went back into the water. Sometimes when he climbed out he would shake himself, presumably to shed some of the cold water. When some in our group tried to get a closer look, he went into the water and did not reappear within view. We were thrilled, especially Jeff who has spent much of his career in the western U.S., where mink are presumably not very common.

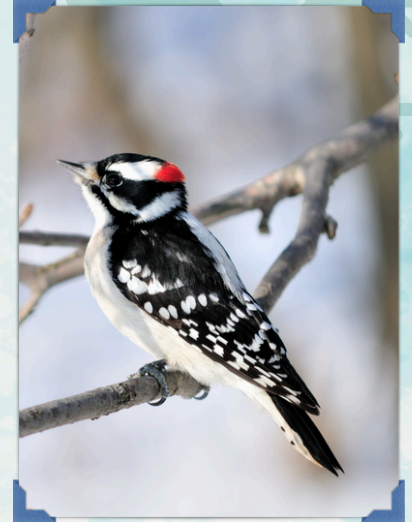
Next SOAR Walk:
February 7 at Carroll Valley Community Park. Meet in
front of Borough Building/Library



SPECIES LIST



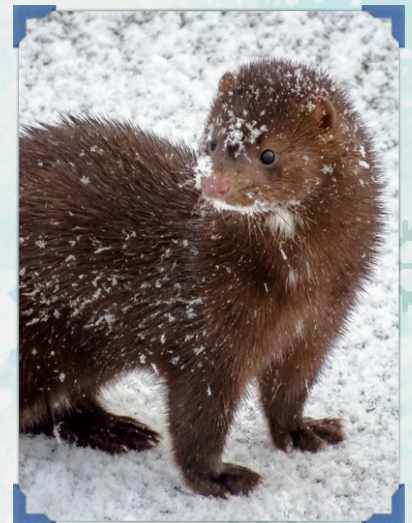
Belted Kingfisher



Downy Woodpecker



Tufted Titmouse



American Mink

- American crow
- American goldfinch
- Belted kingfisher
- Black vulture
- C/BC chickadee
- Canada goose
- Carolina wren
- Dark-eyed junco
- Downy woodpecker
- Eastern bluebird
- European Starling
- House finch
- House sparrow
- Mourning dove
- Northern Cardinal
- Northern flicker
- Northern mockingbird
- Red-bellied woodpecker
- Red-tailed hawk
- Song sparrow
- Tufted titmouse
- Turkey vulture
- White-breasted nuthatch
- White-throated sparrow