

January 2022

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

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Greetings!

March 8th is International Women's Day! We'd love to hear from women birders! Please make recommendations and contribute photos for the March issue.

On The Calendar

Our regular meetings are usually the fourth Thursday of the month at the Boardman River Nature Center on Cass Road at 7:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend!

Jan. 27, 2022 (Thursday) - Club member Kathy Flegel will tell us about her volunteer work at the ARK (Association to Rescue Kitters) in St Helen, Michigan. The ARK rehabilitates hundreds of animals every year, from hummingbirds to turtles to deer. Learn about opossum nutrition, bobcat behavior, and to how to treat an eagle for lead poisoning.

February 24, 2022 (Thursday) - Our monthly meeting will take place at Northwestern Michigan College, where Kirk Waterstripe will give us a tour of the bird specimen collection. With over 100 species, this is your chance to examine many of the birds that only give us glimpses in the field. You can take time to compare similar species and learn valuable tips to help identify them in the field.

Join us at 7:00 pm in Room 117 of the Health & Science Building on NMC's main campus. Park in Cedar or Tamarack lots. (Don't worry about parking permits.)



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Upcoming Field Trips

February 11

Winter Birding in the Soo (see page 2)

February 19

Valentine's Duet of Great Horned Owls (see page 2)



Thanks to NMC for sharing the bird collection with us!

Christmas Bird Counts local results:

Traverse City: 66 species, 9681 individuals were counted by 30 participants.

Lake Leelanau: 65 species, 4989 individuals were counted by 18 observers logging 67 party hours by car, foot and canoe.

Antrim County: 58 species, 4784 individuals were counted by 17 participants logging 50 party hours.

Highlights from counters:

From the Antrim Count: high counts for several species (old records in parenthesis): Bald Eagle 20 (15); Bonaparte's Gull 10 (9); Hairy Woodpecker 25 (21); Red-breasted Nuthatch 59 (37); Brown Creeper 8 (5); American Tree Sparrow 82 (59); White-winged Crossbill 57 (22).

I pished at a couple Golden-crowned Kinglets and *nine* popped out of the bush! Then the chickadees, nuthatches and titmice joined in. I felt I needed to apologize! (Kirk W.)

My personal highlight was seeing a pair of Trumpeter Swans with this year's cygnet at the mouth of Victoria Creek! (Nate Crane)

Upcoming Field Trips

Feb. 11 – 13, 2022 – Winter Birding in the Soo

Join Leonard and Barb Graf on their annual trip to the U.P. Explore the area around Sault Ste. Marie on this multi-day trip, which often features winter finches, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and if we're lucky, some owls visiting from the far north. This trip will consist of daily caravan trips, with the group but in your own vehicle. Contact Leonard Graf (bluethroat@charter.net) for more details. Dress warmly!

Feb. 19, 2022 (Saturday) - Valentine's Duet of Great Horned Owls

Our earliest-nesting species, the Great Horned Owls are already nesting! With good fortune and light winds, maybe we can hear the calls of a mated pair. Join Kirk Waterstripe for a romantic

Birding Calendar

January

Snowy Owls are settling into their winter patterns. When you find one in open country, chances are good you will be able to see it in that area later.

February

Check areas with fruiting shrubs and trees. Waxwings, robins, and the occasional bluebird are making their way through the fruit crops.

March

Early spring migrants like blackbirds, Horned Larks and American Woodcock are returning.

The urgent flocks of waterfowl are coming back as waterways open up, first the bays of Lake Michigan, then the inland lakes.

By the end of the month, hawks are coming back north. Plan a trip to the Straits to see what's flying.

evening of standing in the cold, listening for owls! Meet at 8:00 pm at the Leelanau Trail parking lot on Fouch Road, in Leelanau County. Dress warmly, and bring chocolate and some luck!

Your Favorite Patch

Here's a place to share your treasures! In each issue, we'll feature a user-submitted favorite birding spot.

One of my favorites little birding spots is Platte River State Fish Hatchery on US-31 about halfway between Interlochen and Honor. I have recorded 72 species there with 70 of them taking place during the years 2017 to 2020. There are several habitat types there including ponds, river, wooded areas (both pines and hardwoods), open areas around buildings and the buildings themselves. It is a reliable location for Cliff Swallows during nesting season, in their mud nests under the eaves of a couple of small buildings in the northwest corner of the hatchery. There is a trail around the large pond where you can observe several of the habitats and a walk around the building portion of the property usually produces several species.

The Platte River State Fish Hatchery is located at 15210 Honor Highway (aka US-31), 8 miles west of the stoplight at Interlochen Corner. The entrance is a right turn if heading west, immediately past Maple City Highway. The property is open to the public during daylight hours 7 days a week, 365 days a year, except for a few areas that are posted. According to their web page and Facebook page, the visitor center and certain hatchery buildings are open from 8 am to 4 pm, 7 days a week. Restroom facilities are in the visitor center.

Lauren Vaughn

To tell us about your favorite patch, preferably a little-known, seldom-birded local spot, email the editor!

Outings and Programs in the New Year

Here's a little preview of some of the activities coming up in 2022:

- ❖ Sky Dance of the Woodcocks in April
- ❖ Weekend adventures at Sault Ste. Marie, Tawas Point State Park, and Magee Marsh
- ❖ Christmas (Bird Count) in June, with a potluck lunch
- ❖ More Sunday Morning Bird Walks, including activities to help learn bird songs and calls
- ❖ Nocturnal Migration in September
- ❖ A visit from North Sky Raptor Sanctuary

Watch the newsletter and your email for details!

Coffee Drinkers!

Do you like a cup of coffee or hot chocolate at the Club meetings? Bring your own mug, enjoy your cuppa, then stash your mug at the Nature Center! Let's try to reduce or eliminate our single-use beverage containers!

Editor's Perch

Birding is for Everybody

In the past year, I've started paying attention to how accessible various locations are to birders with wheeled vehicles, whether they are wheelchairs, walkers, or a stroller with a birder-in-training in it. To my disappointment, there are relatively few places around here that are accessible to birders with mobility or health challenges. For a pastime that doesn't require a great deal of physical ability, it's sad that so many potential birders are shut out because of minor physical impediments or lack of design consideration.

A new nonprofit, [birdability.org](https://www.birdability.org/), has done a wonderful job of bringing this issue to the attention of birders. With a week-long series of virtual and in-person events in October called Birdability Week, a website full of resources, and a map where you can add comments about the accessibility of places near you, they are a fantastic source of information. I encourage you to spend some time on their site (link below).

Closer to home, many of our favorite birding places, even with paved trails, have impediments to those with mobility challenges. Lone Pine Trail is paved, but the slope of the section of the trail near the parking lot is greater than the recommended 5%, and there are a couple dips that need to be filled in. Our beloved Medalie Park (Logan's Landing) has a paved trail, but no access where a birder in a wheelchair could reach the water's edge. Kid's Creek Park and Hickory Meadows have gravel paths, which are okay for wheels, but not as good as a solid surface. One of my favorites, the southern unit of Leelanau State Park, allows birding on a road that crosses a wonderful swamp, but the parking lot is unpaved and unlevel.

A couple examples of birding places with good access, including van-accessible parking, are Pyatt Lake Preserve on Old Mission Peninsula and sections of the Heritage Trail through Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, particularly north from the Dune Climb. Check them out sometime this year. They offer an excellent nature experience with planned accessibility for all.

I propose that the Club brings the issue of accessibility to the attention of the managers of some of our favorite places. Medalie Park needs another platform, like the fishing docks, facing the part of the lake where the birds gather. Perhaps the steep section of Lone Pine Trail could be re-graded. The next time you visit your favorite birding patches, think about how you would get around if you were in a wheelchair, were blind, or if you couldn't walk far without getting tired.

For more information, check out <https://www.birdability.org/> and <https://www.massaudubon.org/get-outdoors/accessibility>. I'm sure you'll get some ideas. With a little attention, and talking to the right people, we can make more of our diverse, wildlife-rich, beautiful areas accessible to every body.



Readers' Recommendations

In this space, you'll find recommendations for videos, websites, podcasts, books and other media goodies. If you have a recommendation, email the editor!

Lucy Hammett's Bingo series includes Bug Bingo, Bird Bingo, & about 20 other topics based on pictures. The "caller's" card has a picture and name on it. Box says "Ages 3 to adult, Fun Family Educational". Our children, grandchildren, & a small nature class I had love them. About \$14 - 21.

Lake Michigan (or any Great Lake) Rock Picker's Guide by Bruce Mueller & Kevin Gauthier is \$15.99 at Brainstorm in Sutton's Bay.

Waterford Press Pocket Guides offers a number of plastic folding guides such as Michigan Nature Set of Trees & Wildflowers, Birds, & Wildlife for 16 - \$20. Other states & topics are available. I just received one as a gift!

Sharon Benjey

Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

Now that you have found a bird, note what habitat it's in. What plant is it using and how? Make a note, or add a comment to your eBird checklist. You're making connections between birds and their world.

Feeder-watching for Science this winter

If you're into citizen science, consider joining [Project Feederwatch](#). This program, from Cornell's Lab of Ornithology, has been collecting data for years from people like us. Participation fee of \$18.

For birders in Michigan, Kalamazoo Nature Center conducts a [Winter Feeder Count \(naturecenter.org\)](#), with a commitment of one day per month November through April. Participation fee is \$5.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is February 18-22 this year. Click [here](#) for more details.

Planning Your Bird and Pollinator Garden

Winter is a time to dream, a time to plan. As human activities replace more and more natural ecosystems, our landscape choices can help fill in some of the lost habitat. Do you have some space you could devote to plants that birds and insects like? How about including these plants in your garden plan this year? It doesn't take much to do something that birds will use:

- a couple shrubs thick enough to provide cover near your feeders
- a bed of annual flowers that you let go to seed for finches in the fall

Membership?

Like what you're reading? Consider joining the Club! More info is available at [Membership Information – Grand Traverse Audubon Club](#)

- leave that pile of trimmings in a pile
- plant tubular flowers for hummingbirds (they love red ones)
- a dense tree or shrub where sparrows or cardinals might nest



Tom Ford, our local bird and plant expert, has a few favorites:

Common Milkweed, *Asclepias syriaca* – food plant for Monarch butterfly larvae, and a nectar source for several insect species. It needs cold to germinate, so scratch up the ground in the fall, plant seeds you've gathered, and cover them with a light raking.

Butterfly Weed, *Asclepias tuberosa* – a good nectar source for many insect species, flat flower cluster are a good landing platform for butterflies.

(There are many species of milkweed; find the ones that suit your location and soil type.)

Cardinal Flower, *Lobelia cardinalis* – the tubular red flowers are a favorite of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. It likes high organic matter, often damp soils, and tolerates some shade.

Blue Lobelia, *Lobelia siphilitica* – this favorite of bumblebees and hummingbirds likes damp soils.

Bottle Gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) and White Turtlehead (*Chelone glabra*) – bumblebee favorites; watch them “buzz” the flowers open to get to the nectar. Both like wetlands, but tolerate a range of moisture if the soil is rich enough.

Purple Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*) and New England Aster (*Symphyotrichum novae-angliae*) – showy composites that attract butterflies and bees while in bloom; American Goldfinches feast on the seeds in fall and winter.

Goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) – multiple species in the Great Lakes region can be found in several habitats. Monarch butterflies feed in it in migration, and honeybees use it as the last major food source before winter.



Cutleaf Coneflower (*Rudbeckia laciniata*) – this plant can be large and spread aggressively so plant it at the margins of the garden. Downy Woodpeckers forage for insects overwintering in the stems.

Cranberry Viburnum (*Viburnum trilobum*) – this and a related European species grow in moist soils. The red berries hang on through the winter, and several species of fruit-eating birds consume them after the berries ferment.

If you want to plant trees, consider Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), which is used by 250 species of butterflies and moths, and produces fruit eaten by several species of birds, and Oaks (*Quercus* spp.), which is used by so many species it is referred to as a keystone species in forest ecosystems.

Thanks Tom!

Program Report

Nov. 18, 2021 – A report on the state of Sutton's Bay from Juliana Lisuk, Associate Director, Jillian Votava, STEM coordinator and Rachel Ratliff of Inland Seas Education Association. ISEA is primarily focused on providing hands on educational experiences for people to learn about and promote the health of the Great Lakes. These experiences take place on board the schooner *Inland Seas*. The primary audiences are kids from fourth through twelfth grade, but there are adult and family programs too. Over their thirty years they have had 130,000 participants onboard. The schooner and crew also provide programs to folks as far away as Lake Erie and Lake Superior.

During that time, they have conducted hands-on experiments related to water clarity and fish populations, benthic diversity and more. Data from these experiments have been retained as a longitudinal data set and now provide a data base of information that is analyzed and used by ISEA and other organizations. The data presented showed a marked increase in water clarity over 25 years, probably due to increased populations of quagga mussels. Fish species diversity has also plummeted since the establishment of the Round Goby, but there are signs native fish species are adapting and, perhaps, beginning to recover.

There are many volunteer opportunities for folks interested in the work of the organization, sailing on the schooner, and/or contributing to the work of stewardship of the Great Lakes.

There were reasonably priced two-hour sailing adventures offered this year. Who know what adventures next year will bring. For more information on programs and volunteer opportunities, visit schoolship.org.

Member submissions



Submitted by Scott Sneed

This space is for stories or photos submitted of our members. To submit your story or photo of birds or birders, email it to the editor!

Snowy Owl Facts and Etiquette

The white owl from the north inspires even non-birders to pause and admire. We marvel at this mystical visitor. The Field Guides have assembled a wealth of Snowy Owl facts in their two-part podcast (links below). They're always good for well-researched material. If you'd like to know more about the travels of these arctic wanderers, check out [Project SNOWstorm](http://www.thefieldguidespodcast.com/new-blog/2021/2/7/ep-49-whither-the-snowy-owl), with maps of the travels of GPS-tagged Snowy Owls.

<http://www.thefieldguidespodcast.com/new-blog/2021/2/7/ep-49-whither-the-snowy-owl>
<http://www.thefieldguidespodcast.com/new-blog/2021/2/7/ep-49-whither-the-snowy-owl-ndt8b>



As far as etiquette when observing these and other winter visitors, remember that they are working hard just to find enough food in a trying time of year. Observe from a distance. We have binoculars and spotting scopes for a reason. Let them rest; they may have flown in from hundreds of miles away. If you see other birders or photographers harassing or chasing owls, speak up! Be an advocate for these amazing birds!

Membership List

Would you like a printed list of Club members with contact information? Contact our Secretary, Mary McDowell, mg24mac47@gmail.com. A printable list of members will be sent via email early in 2022.

Thanks for reading! Until the next issue, keep your binoculars clean!