

May 2022

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

Editor: Kirk Waterstripe (newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org)



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Greetings!

Migration! The time we look forward to is finally here. Get out there and enjoy it! Take a friend and share the wonder!

Just like May is full of birds to see, this issue is full of good stuff for you to read. It's a pleasure to bring it to you!

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!

Regular meetings are on the annual summer hiatus. We're all too busy birding! See you in September!

Sunday Morning Bird Outings

Every Sunday from now through June, Kirk Waterstripe will lead a group at a location around Traverse City. If you're a beginning birder, or if you want to polish your skills, these trips are for you! This year, Kirk has a couple special trips in mind, like a morning focused on bird song, and an early morning trip to Leelanau State Park!

Locations and times will be announced in BirdAlert emails, so watch your inbox.



Upcoming Field Trips

May 1

Weekly Sunday Morning Bird Outings start for the season. Contact Kirk Waterstripe (4walkinglightly@gmail.com) or watch BirdAlert for weekly locations.

May 7

Port Oneida Historic District (see page 2)

May 13

Magee Marsh Wildlife Area (see page 2)

May 20

Tawas Point State Park (see page 2)

June 11

Christmas (Bird Count) in June (see page 2)

Upcoming Field Trips

May 7, 2022 (Sat.) - Birding at Port Oneida Historic District

Join leader Kevin Breen to explore the amazing bird life of this area. Meet at 8:00 am at the parking area just north of the cemetery. For more information contact Kevin Breen, 231-342-8101, (kevthebreen1@charter.net). Don't forget your SBDNL park pass!

May 13 – 15, 2022 (Fri.-Sun.) – Birding at Magee Marsh Wildlife Area, Ohio

This is an informal meet-up kind of trip at one of the premier birding spots in the eastern U.S. Board member Kirk Waterstripe will be in the area for the end of the Biggest Week in American Birding. If you'd like to hang out and bird with them, contact him at 4walkinglightly@gmail.com. Make your own arrangements for travel and lodging.

May 20 - 22, 2022 (Fri.-Sun.) – Birding at Tawas Point State Park

Another meet-up trip, but closer to home. Leonard and Barb Graf will be at the park this weekend. If you'd like to go and bird with them, contact them at (231)946-5120, or bluethroat@charter.net. Make your own arrangements for travel and lodging.

June 11, 2022 – Christmas (Bird Count) in June

Here's a chance to see what your Christmas Bird Count territory looks like in the summer. Visit your usual CBC area, or part of it, and see how different it looks, and how many species are breeding there. We'll convene at the Boardman River Nature Center pavilion for a potluck picnic at noon to share what we've seen. If you haven't participated in a Christmas Bird Count, contact Kirk Waterstripe for Leelanau County (4walkinglightly@gmail.com) or Nate Crane (nmcrane@gmail.com) for Grand Traverse County, to be assigned an area or paired up with someone.

Other Birding Events

May 14, 2022 - Global Big Day (see eBird.org for details)

Birding Calendar

May

Kinglets, warblers, flycatchers, vireos, oh my! The month starts out with the hardiest migrants and ends with the true insect-eating specialists. Don't forget to look for shorebirds in wet grassy areas!

June

Breeding is in full swing. The earliest arrivals might have fledglings by the first part of the month. Take note of breeding behaviors.

July

Believe it or not, fall migration starts this month. Shorebirds are moving south by mid-month, and a few passerines may try to sneak through around the end of the month. Start working on your skills with birds in immature plumages.

Memorial Day Weekend – Warblers on the Water

A weekend of birding on Beaver Island! Check out

<https://www.beaverislandassociation.org/2022/01/02/the-9th-annual-warblers-on-the-water-wow-memorial-day-weekend-2022/>

June 2-5, 2022 – Leelanau Birdfest

Saving Birds Thru Habitat's first annual Leelanau BirdFest begins on Thursday afternoon, June 2 and ends on Sunday noon, June 5. Saving Birds Thru Habitat is located in Leelanau County, one of Michigan's premier spring and summer birding areas. Target festival birds include Kirtland's Warbler, Piping Plover and nesting Wood Ducks. Our event includes a visit to Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy's Arcadia grasslands and wetlands with a host of upland species and nesting Trumpeter Swans. There is also a special field trip to a beautiful local winery for wine tasting and good birding on the grounds. Our website is now open(<https://www.mibirdfest.org/>). Each field trip is limited to 15 people; those interested should sign up early.

Your Favorite Patch

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

Several of my favorite patches in Antrim County have become eBird Hot Spots (often my fault!) but I still have a soft spot for a few of them. One such place is Turner Road Fields. Turner Road connects US-131 to the Jordan River National Fish Hatchery and is a little over 1.5 miles long (45.017550, -84.932098). As such, the traffic volume is low. The road itself is wide and paved. Nearest the highway the area is farmland. Moving away from the highway, closer to the hatchery, the land transitions first to grassland then to a shrub – grassland mix and finally to forest edge and forest beyond. The farm fields and grasslands are favored by raptors. The grassland and shrubby grassland are excellent sparrow habitat. Song, Vesper, Savannah, Chipping, and Clay-colored are commonly present in the spring and summer. Grasshopper Sparrow has been reported during the breeding season. Transitional sparrows such as Lincolns and White-Crowned have been reported. Winter brings Dark-eyed Juncos and Tree Sparrows. The shrubby habitat and forest edge are also favored by Indigo Buntings, Eastern Towhees, and a variety of warblers. From within the forested area you can hear the calls of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Scarlett Tanagers and, of course, a variety of woodpeckers. Indeed, variety is the key to this patch. The variety of habitats along the length of Turner Road means that a wonderful mix of bird species can be seen and heard. Combined with low traffic volume and easy access this patch is hard to beat.

Curt Hofer

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

Out birding? Hit a snag!

In the past ten years, we've become used to seeing a lot of dead trees, thanks to the Emerald Ash Borer and Beech Bark Disease. Watching majestic old trees decline and die is depressing, but did you know that these trees continue to serve the forest even in death?

We're familiar with woodpeckers making nest cavities in standing dead trees, or snags. Did you know that old woodpecker holes are used by birds from not one or two, but seven different families? Wrens, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, flycatchers, owls, ducks and even one species of warbler use holes made by woodpeckers. (*Trivia: name the warbler!*) Out west, Acorn Woodpeckers store food in dead oaks, forming granary trees that are used for generations.

Trees in a forest are connected by an underground network of fungi, and they share food and information via this "Wood Wide Web" (Paul Stamets made that up, not me.) Some work by forest ecologist Suzanne Simard suggests that dead trees remain connected to this web. Every leaf that gets munched, and every step we take is known to the Green Ones.

Lastly, when the mighty giants have crashed to earth, they nourish future generations of trees through decomposition. Rotting wood holds a tremendous amount of water, making the forest more resilient to drought. New seedlings often take root along a fallen log. If you like wild mushrooms, know that several popular species help decompose wood.

If you know of a snag at a favorite birding spot, spend a few extra minutes near it. Watch what species are using it and how. If you own land and have a standing dead tree or two, leave them if you can. Obviously, they need to be removed if they pose an imminent danger to people or property. If a tree has fallen over, leave it. Watch it break down over the years. The birds, and our birdwatching, will be better off if we make room for dying, dead, and decomposing trees.

For more information, check out [Something Wild: The Standing Dead | New Hampshire Public Radio \(nhpr.org\)](http://Something Wild: The Standing Dead | New Hampshire Public Radio (nhpr.org))

Birds, Beans and Bakeries



After the dawn chorus, we start to get a little peckish (unintentional bird pun). Let's have some fun. Post a note on the BirdAlert email list with your favorite combination of birding location, coffee shop and bakery. The rest of us can try them

out the next time we're in that neck of the woods. For example: birding at the Grand Traverse Commons, grab a coffee at Cuppa Joe in Building 50, and get a fantastic pastry from Common Good Bakery on 14th St. in TC.

Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

Learn to watch for movements, even in your peripheral vision. With practice, you can "unfocus" your eyes. You'll see a lot of fluttering leaves, but you won't miss many birds!

Editor's Perch

This week's Sunday Morning Bird Outing was a particularly good one. The list of species wasn't exceptional; we encountered ones to be expected in late April up here. What made it special was that we may have hooked a few people on birding today. The walk was done in collaboration with the local library, and their publicity drew in quite a few folks who were new to this pastime that we're so fond of. About twenty of the thirty people on the walk had never been on a bird walk before!

I spent extra time pointing out the features of common birds: the wedge-shaped tail of grackles in flight, the call of a Mourning Dove (not an owl), and the beautiful iridescence on a Tree Swallow. We were able to compare the shapes of a loon and a cormorant on the water. Among the exclamations and excited comments, I could hear my own enthusiasm. I felt a rush of emotion that easily could have spilled out in tears.

In that moment, after nearly 50 years of birding, I felt things coming full circle. Rather another curl was completed in the spiral of a birding life spread across time. After the walk, I reflected on the many adventures I've had with birds, and the deep gratitude I feel for them. What greater way to honor that which you love than by sharing it with others? Paying it forward, as they say these days.

How many hours and days have you enjoyed the company and gifts of birds? I'm sure you feel similar gratitude as I do. Have you considered ways to express that gratitude? Here are a few suggestions:

- Lead a bird walk for beginners. It might increase the "flock", thereby multiplying your own effect in a way.
- Buy a duck stamp. The money goes almost entirely to wetland conservation.
- Donate time or money to an organization that preserves land. This enables them to purchase areas and build trails like the one at Arcadia Marsh.
- Gather data for citizen science projects. eBird is an easy example, and there are many more, including those focused on plants, amphibians, fireflies, and other groups.
- Donate bird-oriented books to your local library, especially books for kids.
- Donate your old binoculars, or buy a new pair, for your local bird organization to loan out on field trips.
- Make a list of sightings or adventures you are particularly thankful for. See the Nov. 7, 2017 entry at <https://aimlessbirding.wordpress.com/>

I am extremely grateful to the Sunday morning "regulars" who pitched in with patience and guidance to make the experience more enjoyable for those less-experienced. This walk would not have been a success without you!

Your expression of gratitude is only limited by your imagination. One of my favorite simple ways is to pause while you're out there among birds, in a wild or sort-of-wild place, sit or stand and whisper "thank you". If it comes from the heart, it's enough.

- Kirk

(Also published at <https://aimlessbirding.wordpress.com/2022/04/24/giving-back-to-the-birds/>)

Member submissions



From Evan Reister

New email for Bird Notes

If you would like to email the editor of Bird Notes, you can send your message or contribution to:

newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org

How do I know if a bird is breeding?

Just because a bird is in the area and singing does not mean it's actually breeding. Maybe he's desperately trying to find a mate. Here are some behaviors that mean a bird very likely is nesting nearby:

- ✓ Carrying nest material. Early in the nesting season, you'll see birds fly by with mouthfuls of grass, sticks, mud, and maybe a feather. If you eBird, enter code CN with your sighting.
- ✓ Building a nest. If your subject carries the material to a certain spot, especially more than once, it's most likely building a nest. Look closely (from a respectful distance) and you may get to watch. Enter eBird code NB.
- ✓ Distraction display. The next time you see a Killdeer calling and dragging a wing, make a note with code DD. It's trying to lead you away from its nest!
- ✓ Carrying food. For much of the breeding season, parent birds are busy carrying food for those ravenous youngsters. Often, they'll be shy and sneaky while doing it. Note that eagles and Osprey will carry fish to a feeding perch even if they're not breeding, and others carry food as part of courtship. Gulls carry food until they get a moment's peace to eat it! If you're certain, use eBird code CF.
- ✓ Carrying fecal sacs. If you see a bird carrying a white object and dropping it, particularly over water, you have witnessed the waste removal part of parenting. The white object was a sac of poop from the young in the nest. Blackbirds do this a lot. Use code FS.
- ✓ Fledglings. Often we'll see young birds being tended by their parents away from the nest. They might have tufts of natal down feathers on their heads, or they might be

making begging calls. We've all seen young robins with spots on their breast. Use eBird code FL.

There are other codes involving nests (occupied, with eggs, and with young), but you're more likely to encounter the situations above. Also note that courtship displays and copulation are only probable evidence of breeding! This season, take time to enter the breeding codes when you see these behaviors. The data are used to create those multicolored maps, and are especially important in determining how breeding ranges are shifting with changing climate.

Purple Martins are Positively Magnificent!

Perhaps you've seen these large swallows that nest in human-made houses swooping over a lake or calling from the roof of their abode. They're not that common in our area, but with a little help, they could be. All they need is a little assistance to overcome the competition from European Starlings and House Sparrows. With a little commitment, anyone with a suitable open area can offer housing for Purple Martins.

This spring, some club members are partnering with the Botanic Garden to monitor a Purple Martin house at Historic Barns Park. We'll be visiting the house each week to count nesting pairs of martins, and clean out nesting chambers taken over by House Sparrows. If we're successful in our endeavor, we might start looking for other potential colony sites! If you'd like to be involved, email Kirk at the address on page 1.



Program and Field Trip Reports

Sky Dance of the Woodcock – On April 2nd, thirteen intrepid folks, undeterred by a cold drizzle, explored some of the trails at Veronica Valley Park in Leelanau County. Several were new to Audubon Club activities! We made our way to some wet fields as dusk fell, and there we heard the *peeennt* of the male American Woodcock! At one field we got to hear the wing noise and vocalization made during the display flight. One participant was heard to say, “What a great way to spend a rainy Saturday night!”

Acadia Marsh – On April 23, Leonard and Barb Graf led 17 people down to Arcadia Marsh in Manistee County. We were graced with the first really warm day of spring, and the southeast wind brought thousands of migrants through the area. At the overlook on M-22 north of the marsh, we watched blackbirds, flickers, Yellow-rumped Warblers and sparrows getting blown out over the lake, then clawing their way back over land, all at eye-level. Along the boardwalk through the marsh, we found a variety of waterfowl, Sandhill Cranes, Greater Yellowlegs and Wilson's Snipe. At the very end of the trip, Ed Kaminski found a Northern Mockingbird at a farm on St. Pierre Road. Ask Ed about his "kite" sometime.

Citizen Scientists!

Do you remember more fireflies on summer evenings when you were younger? Want to learn more about them? If you like participating in projects and contributing data, consider gathering data on fireflies! Massachusetts Audubon and researchers from Tufts University would like your help with [Firefly Watch](#). You can count fireflies in your own backyard, or another location. You only need to commit ten minutes once a week.

Board Update

The Club's Board has been pretty busy this spring. Here are some of the projects we're working on:

Bird Box Workshop – We're pulling together the pieces for a day of building bird boxes and talking about how to place them. This will happen sometime this fall.

Birding Backpacks – We're about to begin testing binoculars for this one. The final goal will be four backpacks, each loaded with a pair of adult binoculars, a pair of kid's binoculars, two field guides, and various "how to enjoy birding" handouts, plus some Audubon Club info, to be distributed to three local libraries. The backpacks will be available for borrowing by people who want to try out this fabulous pastime!

Bird Survey at the GT Commons – A few Club members are helping to determine the parts of the Commons that are used most by birds. They'll be scouring the area 4 times during the migration and breeding seasons. The data will be used by Garfield Township in future management decisions.

Accessibility at Medalie Park – This summer, we're going to talk to folks at the local Disability Network and the Senior Center about improving access for wheelchairs and other vehicles to the shore of Boardman Lake. The existing fishing structures don't face the best directions for birding and we'd like to change that! We'll work with GT County officials to see if we can come up with a structure that allows birding access for everyone.

We're also helping a local 4-H coordinator set up a 6-week class about birds and birding for 4-H kids.

Last but not least, Kirk is in contact with the staff of the Senior Center to lead a couple field trips for them. Hopefully, he can come up with a "wow!" experience and get some more folks interested in birds.

Reader Recommendations

In keeping with the theme of gratitude in the Editor's Perch, here's a book I'm particularly thankful for: *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, by Robin Wald Kimmerer. Her blend of Native American traditions and ecological science, written in a style that perfectly weaves storytelling with science writing, is an absolute gem. This book is worth reading, digesting, and reading again. In particular, I call you attention to the chapter entitled "The Gift of Strawberries".

- Kirk

Your Club needs you!

The Club needs a person interested in helping maintain the GTAC website. Duties include monitoring the site for maintenance needs, contacting the hosting service for unresolved website issues, updating pages with current information, and forwarding visitor comments/questions to the appropriate Board member. For further information contact Don Flegel at (flegel8@gmail.com).

Membership?

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

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