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September 2022

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# Bird Notes

## Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

[grandtraverseaudubon.org](http://grandtraverseaudubon.org)

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

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Ah, fall. The skies and lakes fill with migrants once again. We listen for quiet calls from the bushes and honks from above while leaves turn and fruits ripen. Once again, we mark the passage of the season.

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## 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!

### Sept. 22, 2022 – Monthly Meeting: Bird Migration

We return to our schedule of monthly meetings with a program about bird migration. Members Maryellen Newport and Kirk Waterstripe will discuss some of the new information about migration in a slide show, and then proceed outside to listen with a parabolic microphone for migrants passing overhead! This will be a longer evening than usual because migrants start flying about an hour after sunset.

### Oct. 22, 2022 – Annual Dinner Meeting, featuring North Sky Raptor Sanctuary

It's our big night! We'll meet at Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 1050 Peninsula Drive in Traverse City (across from Bryant Park) at 6:00 pm. The evening will start with a potluck dinner, followed by a short business meeting during which we'll elect Club officers for 2023.



*Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford*

## Upcoming Field Trips

### November 5

Bird box building workshop – details to be worked out. Stay tuned!

### Sept. – Oct.

Sunday Morning Bird Walks. New this fall, the last Sunday of each month will be an evening outing. Watch your email for details.

Once the business is done, we'll move on to the program: Kaitlyn Bohnet and some raptor ambassadors will tell us about raptor conservation and the good work of North Sky Raptor Sanctuary. We might even get to meet Sprocket!

*You won't want to miss this one! Bring the kids, grandkids, interested distant relatives, coworkers, ... you get the idea.*

## Upcoming Field Trips

No trips are scheduled for the fall, but anyone who would like to host one is encouraged to contact the nearest board member!

## Sunday Morning Bird Outings

We're back! Each Sunday from now through the end of October, Kirk Waterstripe will lead a group at a location in Grand Traverse or Leelanau County. If you're a beginning birder, or if you want to polish your skills, these trips are for you! Shorebirds at Boardman lake will be featured, as well as fall migrants at various locations.



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

## Other birding opportunities

Kathy Wiley and Doug Cook are leading a Benzie Audubon trip to Medalie Park (Logan's Landing) to check out migrating waterfowl. Meet at the park on October 15 at 10:00 am.

## Save The Date – Bluebird Nest Box Workshop

Mark your calendars for Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> at 10 am. We're planning a next box building workshop at the Boardman River Nature Center. There will be a short program by Greg Miller of the MI Bluebird Society about providing housing for bluebirds. After that we'll assemble

## Birding Calendar

### September

Early in the month, watch for vagrant flycatchers. Migration intensity picks up this month, with more songbirds drifting through. Watch for sparrows and more warblers in "confusing" fall plumages. The first of the migrating raptors come south too, with Osprey and Broad-winged Hawks among the early migrants.

### October

Waterfowl are beginning to move south, so check lakes and the bays of Lake Michigan. Watch for bluebirds and other thrushes. Juncos will start to appear in the woods, then at feeders. Make note of the last date you see various species around your home or feeders.

### November

Early November has been called Rarity Week, so keep your eyes open for anything. Rafts of ducks and grebes frequent the Lake Michigan bays. Late raptors like Red-tails and Rough-legs are in the fields. You might find an early Snowy Owl by the end of the month.

next box kits for those who would like to take one home. If you'd like to attend, please RSVP to [gtac.board@grandtraverseaudubon.org](mailto:gtac.board@grandtraverseaudubon.org) . The number of kits is limited!

## Birding Backpack Update

Thanks so much to those who have donated. We've loaded four backpacks with binoculars, field guides, a "Birding 101" pamphlet, maps of birding spots, a checklist, and other good stuff.



At the recent board meeting, we donated two backpacks to the Traverse Area District Library, represented here by Aaron (in the middle). Backpacks will be delivered soon to the Leland Library and the Glen Lake Library. Thanks again to those who made it possible for new folks to try out this birding thing!

## Your Favorite Patch

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

On the west side of Traverse City lies a large area of varied habitats, one of the largest green spaces in Grand Traverse County. Known as the Grand Traverse Commons, the preserve encompasses hardwood forest, conifer stands, riparian vegetation, fields, and uncommon "perched" wetlands. One of my favorite parts is the "lowlands" in the southeast part of the Commons. A quiet walk in the morning produces several seasonal common species as well as a few surprises. I've found Sedge Wrens on the large sedge meadows, a Clay-colored Sparrow in a hedgerow, and occasionally, a Great Blue Heron in the creek. Rather than rare birds and big lists, this area is great for easy access to a nice variety of birds. If you're just starting out, the Commons is worth your time.



The low, flat section of the Commons can be accessed from two places: from the south end of Elmwood St, park at the gate and walk in along the wide grassy path. From the west, you can use the parking area east of Silver Drive, across from the Traverse Bay ISD building. This trail is paved, and connects to 14<sup>th</sup> St. Together, the two trails form a plus sign.

This is a great area for a quiet morning walk, or a grab-the-binoculars lunch break. Keep it in mind as you bird around Traverse City.

- Kirk W.

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

## Bot Squad seeking volunteers!

The National Park Service still needs volunteers to walk a length of beach within SLBE. We walk beaches weekly from June to November. Our purpose is to find, bury or collect birds affected by botulism poisoning. Please contact me if you would be willing to help out!

- Maryellen Newport [maryellen.newport@gmail.com](mailto:maryellen.newport@gmail.com)

## Mark your calendars! Christmas Bird Counts are coming!

What better way to spend a day in December than counting birds? Want to participate in the field? Want to count at your feeder? Here are the dates and compiler contact info:

Lake Leelanau CBC – Dec. 14 (Wednesday), contact Kirk Waterstripe at [4walkinglightly@gmail.com](mailto:4walkinglightly@gmail.com) or (231)883-2858

Antrim Co. – Dec. 16 (Friday), contact Curt Hofer at [curthofer1@gmail.com](mailto:curthofer1@gmail.com).

Grand Traverse – Dec. 17 (Saturday), contact Nate Crane at [nmcrane@gmail.com](mailto:nmcrane@gmail.com)

Benzie Co. – Dec. 18 (Sunday), contact [nedthebirder@gmail.com](mailto:nedthebirder@gmail.com)

Watch for more about Christmas Bird Counting in the November *Bird Notes*!

### Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

“For warblers in the fall, go where chickadees call.”

Watch for mixed flocks of chickadees, kinglets, and nuthatches. Warblers like to hang out with them for safety in numbers.

## Editor's Perch

Your Club needs you!

So far, 2022 has been pretty great. I've seen a couple life birds this year due to the spotting and reporting by fellow club members. Thanks! Hopefully, your spring birding was full of feathered gems and sunny mornings.

What club activities have you participated in this past year? Did you come out on a Sunday morning walk? Did you come to a meeting? Did you go to the Soo? Tawas? Magee Marsh in Ohio? Did you make it to a meeting last winter or spring? I bet you've enjoyed the birding updates on Bird Alert, even if you didn't drop everything and run out to Boardman Lake or Maple Bay Natural Area.

Of course, the trips, the meetings and the emails don't happen by themselves. Behind the scenes, a small group of dedicated souls plans the speakers and topics for the meetings, organizes the field trips, minds the budget, maintains the website, and keeps the email list up to date. Our activities are what make us more than just another Facebook group, interacting virtually and birding by ourselves. The Board makes those activities possible. If you have enjoyed club activities this year, please consider helping out on the Executive Board.

Serving on the Board requires a couple of hours a month for the board meetings, and a little time for investigating projects, and contacting speakers and field trip leaders. Here are the Board positions; see which one might be a good fit for you:

President – acts as Chief Executive Officer of the Club, presides over meetings of friendly members and guests, keeps the board meetings moving along, calls for votes as needed.

Vice President - fills in for President as needed, leads the annual planning of field trips and programs, makes sure technology hook-ups for meetings are working smoothly

Secretary - records minutes at the board meetings, writes them up for Club records, reads minutes at the meetings so everyone knows what's been going on (often quite brief), keeps the BirdAlert list up to date

Treasurer - keeps track of balances in the Club's accounts, collects and records incoming memberships, spends funds according to decisions by the Board, presents report at monthly meetings

Publicity/ Newsletter Editor - writes and distributes Bird Notes, sends out publicity notices before outings and meetings (all online), posts notices of club events on social media, might contact the media if we're doing something really cool

Michigan Audubon Liaison - keeps up with MI Audubon's activities and decisions that affect chapters, reports to the Board

Past President - provides some continuity over the years, helps the new President with what they should be doing

Board Member at large – participates in Board activities, serves as a representative of the membership

Does one of those sound like you? Do you have some skill with people? With numbers? These are essential functions in our organization. Without these folks, we can't bring you the organized schedule of opportunities throughout the year. We can't reach out to the community and bring an awareness of birds to others in our area. As noted above, without the Board, we can't be any more than a bunch of birders linked together by yet another social media platform.

If you enjoy the human interaction that trips and meetings provide, help us keep a good thing going. If you'd like to give something back to your club by being a leader, contact the nearest board member, or just put out a quick post on Bird Alert. Help fill the slate of officers so we can vote in October!

- Kirk

## Fall Gardening for Birds

As summer wraps up, gardeners start putting their gardens to bed for the winter. Often, this involves cleaning up dead plants and applying mulch. Consider the following to help your local birds through the winter:

- Leave the dead plants standing. They provide overwintering places for insects, and therefore, bird food.
- Dead flowers from the composite family (black-eyed susans, sunflowers, daisies) are favorites for seed-eating birds.
- Leave the leaves! Left where they fall, leaves contribute to soil and provide more shelter for overwintering and larval insects.

In addition to not cleaning up your garden, consider building a brush pile. A nice big pile of limbs and branches provides cover from the cold winds, and a place to forage for seeds and ground-dwelling insects. Sparrows love them! It's a great place for your old Christmas tree.



Photo by K. Waterstripe

## Field Trip Reports

### August 6, Houghton Lake Sewage Treatment Facility

What better place to find birds? Ten of us met in Houghton Lake to tour the ponds. We found the expected Mallards and gulls, as well as a Trumpeter Swan, Great Blue Herons, Bonaparte's Gulls, a few Northern Shovelers, and Blue-winged Teal. Shorebirds were represented by Lesser Yellowlegs and Spotted Sandpipers. We got good looks at a Merlin enjoying a snack on one of the dikes. Part of the group went north to the Houghton Lake Flats, where we found several Osprey (adults and young) and a Green Heron from the shade of a pavilion at the edge of the marsh. The sewage treatment facility is open weekdays, and closes at 4:00 pm. Birders need to check in at the office. Both of these locations are quite close to M-55, and could be added to a trip to Tawas Point State Park.

- Kirk & Kathie

### Sunday Morning bird walks

What a start to the season! Our trip to the Sutton's Bay Sewage Ponds was amazing, with swirling flocks of Cedar Waxwings and Barn Swallows feeding on newly hatched insects, a Stilt Sandpiper, several Green Herons, and a low-flying Red-shouldered Hawk. The following week, we explored a swampy part of the Leelanau Trail where some fall warblers, a young Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, and a Yellow-throated Vireo were mixed in with some chickadees. A family of Pileated Woodpeckers gave us great looks. Hope you can join us one of these Sundays! Watch your email for details on future walks.

### Don't hang up your binoculars in the fall!

Do you slow your birding efforts when the birds quiet down in the fall? Are you intimidated by "confusing fall warblers"? If so, you might miss out on some spectacular birding! Here are a few hints to help you enjoy birds in the fall, gleaned from a recent ABA podcast (<https://www.aba.org/facts-of-fall-birding-with-amy-davis-greg-neise/>) and personal experience:

- As the mornings get cooler, head for the places the rising sun hits first. The insects, and the birds are active there first.
- Watch the weather to the north and west; that weather will be here in a day or so. A cold front with cool northwest winds will bring new migrants.
- Keep an eye on BirdCast (<https://birdcast.info/>)

### *Volunteer needed!*

The Club gets to use the Nature Center free in exchange for a volunteer's time, and we need a volunteer! Do you have a few hours a week to help out? Email [gtac.board@grandtraverseaudubon.org](mailto:gtac.board@grandtraverseaudubon.org) . Thanks!

- Follow the fruit! Find elderberries, dogwood, wild grape, Virginia Creeper, Autumn Olive and other fruiting plants in their respective seasons.
- Beat the bushes. Sparrows and warblers often hang out low and in thick cover this time of year.
- Head for the weed fields and goldenrod patches. Several species are attracted to the last pollinating insects and the seeds found there.
- Learn to use eBird data to pinpoint the peak migration weeks for your target species. Match that with the right weather, and have fun!
- Savvy birders have learned the jaegers can be found on the Great Lakes in August. Start a lake watch tradition! Take your binoculars to the beach!
- Know that some of the confusing species migrate at different times. Study eBird data as well as your field guide.

## Ways to help your Club

Consider a position on the Executive Board! Our Annual Meeting is coming up in October, and we'll be electing officers for 2023.

Help with the 4-H project! See the July issue of *Bird Notes*.

Help with website maintenance. Contact Don Flegel at ([flegel8@gmail.com](mailto:flegel8@gmail.com)).

Lead a field trip!

Bring snacks to a meeting!

Make a contribution to the Walter Hastings Fund (the money we use for conservation projects).

### 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!**