

January 2023

# Bird Notes

## Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

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Happy New Year! What are your birding goals for this year?  
What would you like to see? What would you like to learn?

## On the Calendar

Our meetings are usually on 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. 26, 2023 – Monthly Meeting: Birds of Costa Rica

Club member Kevin Breen will tell us all about the Sierra Club National Outing that he led in February 2022 to Costa Rica and Panama. They traveled in the mountains and some along the Pacific coast.

### Feb. 23, 2023 – Monthly Meeting: TBD at press time

### Mar. 16, 2023 – Monthly Meeting: Michigan Big Year

Terry Grabill will tell us about his Michigan Big Year, including the birds he chased as well as the people he met along the journey and the deep appreciation he developed for Michigan's beauty.



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

## Upcoming Field Trips

### February 10

A weekend of Birding at the Soo

### February 17

Great Horned Owl Date Night

Time to renew your membership!

Visit the [website](#) to find where to send your dues!

## Upcoming Field Trips

**Feb. 10 – 12 (Fri. – Sun.):** 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. The group will be leaving from the American Best Value Motel at 8:00 AM each day. Contact Leonard Graf ([bluethroat@charter.net](mailto:bluethroat@charter.net)) for more details. Dress warmly!

**Feb. 17, 2022 (Friday)** - Valentine's Duet of Great Horned Owls

Let's take another try at this one! 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 evening of standing in the cold, listening for owls! Meet at 6:00 pm at a location to be announced via BirdAlert. Dress warmly, and bring chocolate and some luck!

## Christmas Bird Counts Results!

Lake Leelanau CBC – Dec. 14

With a near-record 22 participants braving the steady 15-20 mph winds, we came up with 2990 individuals of 55 species. Over the course of the day, we found several species that aren't seen very often, including American Woodcock (thanks to Alice Van Zoeren), Bonaparte's Gull, Red-shouldered Hawk, Eastern Bluebird, Bohemian Waxwing, Winter Wren, and White-winged Crossbill. Nate Crane put in 3 grueling hours by kayak on Victoria Creek and found Green-winged Teal and Northern Goshawk. During the Count Week (3 days before and after the count), birders also reported Northern Harrier and Barred Owl.

Antrim Co. – Dec. 16

We had a relatively quiet year. We found 50 species, 3871 individuals. Our average is about 53 species. No unusual species were reported on the count. We reported **record** numbers of the following species with old high counts in parenthesis: Trumpeter

## Birding Calendar

### January

The Snowy Owls are returning! These magnificent birds like open country with rodents. Check local harbors for uncommon gulls loafing with the usual Ring-billed and Herring Gulls.

### February

The hours of daylight are getting longer. Chickadees are singing their *fee-bee* songs. Watch for courtship behaviors in the ducks that remain in areas with open water.

### March

The early migrants are on their way back. Red-winged Blackbirds are returning to the marshes. Horned Larks and Snow Buntings are passing through, and the early raptors are on their way.

Swan 14 (12); Wood Duck 2 (1); Gadwall 15 (6); American Black Duck 27 (26) Hooded Merganser 182!! (85); Great Blue Heron 3!! (1); American Coot 3!! (1).

We see a lot of Hooded Mergansers gathering in the area in November but the ice cover usually chases them out before the count. This year we had more open water than usual which, I'm sure, contributed to the high number of "waterphilic" individuals.

- Curt Hofer

Traverse City – Dec. 17

Our Count Day total is 67 species. Awesome species were found all around. I think it's fair to say that the accolades for hardest single counter for this count have to go to Matt Winkler, with Northern Harrier, Northern Shrike, and Song Sparrow, and the only Trumpeter Swan! Scott and Leonard cleaned up a pile of dabblers, Canvasback, American Coot, Tundra Swan, and Sandhill Crane. Scott rounded out Wild Turkey which might be the only ones. Tom Ford and Co. got Winter Wren and Snow Bunting!

Thankfully we had two feeder counters, Gail and Mike Jorae brought in two Evening Grosbeaks! And Jorae had to out do himself with a Great horned Owl!

- Nate Crane

## Your Favorite Patch

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

DeYoung Natural Area, the "back side" (44.811502, -85.662213)

This month, the Patch column features a spot with a lot of potential, but not a lot of birder activity. From the parking lot, you can follow a trail south across a replanted, brushy field and connect to other trails that lead to the DeYoung farmhouse. Strips of forest follow the course of a small stream. Across the road, a trail leads north and loops around another replanted field. Young cherry, ash and pines provide habitat for numerous species that prefer edges and forest openings. Species recorded here include sparrows, warblers, Golden-crowned Kinglets, Eastern Bluebirds and Scarlet Tanagers.

To get to this area, follow Cherry Bend Road west from M-22, and turn left on Strang Road. The parking lot is the first driveway on the left.

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

## Editor's Perch

### Birding on a Carbon Budget

It's New Year's Eve. We sit in the dark winter night and contemplate the year that's ending, and the year to come. As birders, we might look over last year's list of species, or our travels, and think about more adventures, or at least finding those birds we didn't see last year. For those of us with eBird accounts, all our lists will show zeros tomorrow morning, daring us to try to beat last year's total.

As I contemplate 2023, I can't resist making some plans. We're going to Tawas this year; the lodging is already booked. I would love to run up to Marquette this winter and find a Boreal Chickadee, and down near Lansing to see Short-eared Owls again. What would it take to beat my "high score" in Michigan of 212 species? How about Texas for Christmas Break? Should I chase more rarities this year?

All these dreams come with a price: travel generates extra carbon dioxide, and we can't afford to do that anymore. Hundreds of scientists agree that, if we are to slow the now-inevitable rise in global temperature, we need to stop producing so much CO<sub>2</sub>. A few years ago, David Attenborough laid it all out plainly and simply: stop burning carbon or we're screwed. He said it much more eloquently, but that's the gist of it. Travel for birding is in conflict with good carbon management for our continued existence as we know it.

That's a hard realization, but a necessary one. For those of us who have grown up with free-and-easy, just hop-in-the-car travel, it's not easy to swallow. I, for one, chafe at the restraint, even if it is self-imposed. I silently vacillate between jealousy and judgment of those who do travel, and in the silent dark of winter, I grieve. We'll all have to work through the loss of our carbon-ignorant lifestyle for ourselves. As a reminder that we're not alone in that grief, here are some adjustments we can make in our birding.

Find a patch. Become the expert on the avifauna of a small area near your home. eBird defines a patch as a series of locations that should be possible to cover thoroughly in a morning, or a few hours of birding by foot or car. These can include transects of up to about five miles or areas up to four or five square miles. Patches are not meant to cover entire counties, multiple widely-separated hotspots, or exceptionally large areas. You can summarize the birds you find in a [patch list](#). The following might be good patches: the various parts of the Grand Traverse Commons, birding spots along the Boardman River Valley from the edge of Traverse City out to Mayfield, and the areas around Port Oneida in Leelanau County.

You can also localize your birding by honing your skills, and by focusing on bird behavior and ecology instead of a big list. On your next outing, record what species of plant each bird was using and how. What was each bird doing? See if you can identify more species by song than last year. To increase the challenge, how many can you identify by call note? There are many ways to find birding satisfaction close to home. I'll propose some others later in this newsletter.

### Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

Study silhouettes. This helps you learn shapes, without relying on color. Pay attention to head and body shape, tail length, bill size, and posture.

Remember, I'm in this with all of you. I'm trying to wean myself from travel and big lists. Our strength is in community. Let's share our frustrations and our successes, however we define them. Let's bird in places we've previously overlooked. Let's bring along someone new to birding. Most of all, let's go birding together.

- Kirk W.

## Reader Submissions



- Alice Van Zoeren



- Sharon Benjey





- From Joe Brooks

## Ways to localize your birding

As promised in the Editor's Perch this month, here are some approaches to enjoy more local birding:

We're naturally competitive, at least a little. Can my patch beat your patch? Keep track automatically on eBird.

Do a Big Sit for at least a half day, instead of a traveling Big Day.

Do a Big Day with a theme, such as a Boardman River Big Day, or a Big Day by Bike.

Do a Big Day in your patch.

Explore a new place. Here are some under-birded locations around Traverse City; directions to most are in the *Birder's Guide to the Traverse City Area* or at [sleepingbearbirdingtrail.org](http://sleepingbearbirdingtrail.org) or [sunsetcoastbirdingtrail.org](http://sunsetcoastbirdingtrail.org) :

MDOT Wetland (Wexford Co.)

Veronica Valley Park (Leelanau Co.)

Pyatt Lake Preserve (all-accessible)

Grand Traverse Commons

Mayfield Pond Park

Miller Creek Nature Reserve

Edwards Nature Preserve (Garfield Rd. south of TC)

Maplehurst Natural Area (Antrim Co.)

Hickory Meadows

Fulton Park and nearby Leelanau Trail

Sleeping Bear Heritage Trail north of Dune Climb (all-accessible)

Find a nest and attempt to identify the builder/ owner.

Record breeding evidence when you see it (birds carrying nest material, carrying food, etc). See the May 2022 issue of *Bird Notes* for more information.

Identify 5 birds by ear (10 if you're experienced).

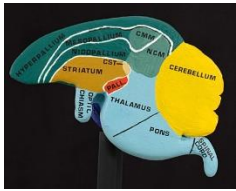
Record plant species and how the bird was using it (5; ex. American Robin eating crabapples).

Bird in every month of the year.

Bird at night (at least 30 minutes).

Lead a field trip for the Audubon Club. You'll get a whole new perspective.

You might also like to bird for science or conservation. Participate in Project Feederwatch, or a Breeding Bird Survey. Start your own project, such as Changes in Avian Use of the Revegetated Floodplain of the Boardman River. When you go birding on Leelanau Conservancy or GTRLC property, send them your list. This helps with their inventory of wildlife.



## Bird Brains

In the first installment of this feature, let's talk about cold feet. Have you ever wondered why birds can stand around in the snow, or on ice, and not seem to be bothered? Birds have a *rete mirabile*, or a countercurrent heat exchange mechanism. Warm blood from the body passes through blood vessels that wrap tightly around the veins returning from the feet. Heat is transferred to the cool blood coming back to the body. In this way, oxygen is carried to the tissues of the bird's feet, but heat isn't lost to the bird's chilly surroundings.

## Sneak Peek at the 2023 schedule

Here's a look at some things the Board is working on for 2023:

- Sunday Morning Bird Walks will be back!
- A pontoon boat tour of Victoria Creek
- Friday evening trips for American Woodcock and Whip-poor-wills
- Hawk-watching with Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch?
- Breeding warblers at Grass River Natural Area?

## What have we been up to lately?

Nov. 5<sup>th</sup> - Bluebird Nestbox Workshop

Twenty-one people came to the Nature Center to learn about bluebirds and how to manage their houses. After a short talk by Greg Miller of the Michigan Bluebird Society, they set to work assembling pre-cut kits. Thanks to Jerry Freels for his hard work and planning to make this event a success!



Building nest boxes



The O'Conner grandchildren ready to host Bluebirds

## Warbler Spring

By Kevin Breen

Well, I admit it, I am somewhat obsessed with warblers. So much so that in May I want to stay around northern Michigan no matter what other offers come my way. This May was a good one. I got out quite a bit and made it to many interesting areas. My final tally came to 22 warbler species either seen or heard.

Highlights included two trips to the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula around May 10th or so. My son, a bird biologist, came along so I had help identifying the birds. On the first trip the tip was full of yellow warblers, and we also had some good sightings of Cape May warblers. One both trips we saw black and white, black-throated green, black-throated blue, Tennessee and Nashville warblers. We also managed to spot at least one northern waterthrush and had some nice looks at magnolia and chestnut-sided warblers.

On both trips, we also walked the trails of Leelanau State Park near Mud Lake. In this area we heard a lot and saw a few northern parulas and heard several common yellowthroats. We also saw at least one pine warbler and of course palm and yellow-rumped warblers, ovenbirds and American redstarts.

Starting on May 13th, I drove completely through the UP, stopping at a couple of remote wilderness areas: The McCormick Tract just west of Champion and the Sylvania Tract near Watersmeet. These four days offered some wonderful sights of warblers, including more blackburnians than I have ever seen in one month. We also sighted several blackpoll warblers, a rarity for me.

Perhaps my best sighting, and one I am still embarrassingly excited about, was of a male bay-breasted warbler foraging in a tree. It had been several years since I got a good view of this elusive bird, so that was a nice moment.



My son pointed out the vocalization of a couple of Connecticut warblers. I heard them and agreed with his identification, but I didn't include that bird in my count just because I wasn't 100% certain and because my role in the identification was limited.

Returning to the Traverse City area I heard the song of a mourning warbler at Fulton Park. I did include this bird in my count because I was the one who identified the song. I also saw and heard at least one golden-winged warbler along Chumski Road near the Boardman River.

If you are keeping count, that's 22 warblers. Best of all, I got some really close looks at the birds. I hated to see May come to an end. I still have hopes of seeing a few more warblers and was disappointed I didn't see or hear any Wilson, Canada or hooded warblers. As they say, better luck next time.

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