

March 2023

# 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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By now you've heard the chickadees singing their fee-bee songs. Days are getting longer. Spring is on the way! This issue's theme is bird song!

## 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!

### March 16, 2023 – Monthly Meeting: Michigan Big Year with Terry Grabill

In 2021, Terry had a big idea of a state big year. "A Bird in the Hand" presents stories and images of his big year run. Terry will bring us along on his journey to bird in all 83 Michigan counties on the way to chase rare birds and share with some special birding people. The challenge allowed for double-digit checklists in 83 counties, over 33,000 miles on the Grabill vehicles, and 323 species of Michigan birds.

### April 20, 2023 – Monthly Meeting: Adventures of Boreal Vagabond

Alison Vilag, who goes by Boreal Vagabond on Instagram, will share some stories and photos of birding and bird-counting at Whitefish Point and other places.



*Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford*

## Upcoming Field Trips

### March 18

Very Early Spring Migrants

### April 2

Sunday Bird Walks begin

### April 14

Peents and Pints!

### April 22

Arcadia Marsh

Note: we don't meet in May because we're all too busy birding!

## Upcoming Field Trips

### March 18 (Saturday): Really Early Spring Migrants

Evan Reister will lead this exploration of local hotspots, looking for migrating waterfowl, late-wintering gulls, and maybe an early spring surprise! Meet at 9:00 am at the YMCA on Racquet Club Drive, off South Airport Road. Most of this trip will be on paved surfaces, but there may be lingering snow.

### April 14 (Friday) – Peents and Pints

It's that time again! Join us to witness the Skydance of the American Woodcock! Meet at 7:00 pm at the YMCA on Silver Lake Road, Traverse City to see (or listen to) this little shorebird take to the skies in an effort to impress a mate. Afterward, we'll reconvene at Rare Bird Brewpub to tell tales and get to know each other.

### April 22 (Saturday): Birding at Arcadia Marsh

Celebrate Earth Day with Leonard and Barb Graf on this annual favorite trip to a fantastic marsh. We'll look for waterfowl, blackbirds, early warblers, and much more. Parts of this trip will be accessible to those with mobility issues. Contact Leonard Graf ([bluethroat@charter.net](mailto:bluethroat@charter.net)) for more details.

### April 2, 2023 (Sunday)– Sunday Morning Bird Outings start!

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! Like last year, on the last Sunday of each month, the walk will take place in the evening.

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



## Birding Calendar

(Featuring songs this time)

### March

Chickadees, titmice and cardinals are singing. Woodpeckers are starting to drum. Red-winged Blackbirds will be *conk-a-reeing* in the wetlands around mid-month.

### April

Listen for *peeents* of woodcock, the *twitters* of Tree Swallows, *spring-o-the-year* of meadowlarks, and the *killdeer!* of, well, Killdeer. On a still, quiet morning, you can hear the courting calls of waterfowl on Lake Michigan, or on an inland lake.

### May

The last trills of juncos overlap with the first rusty squeaks of Black-and-White Warblers. The full orchestra of thrushes, warblers, tanagers and flycatchers will be playing by the end of the month. Remember to catch the nocturnal concerts of Eastern Whip-poor-wills.

## Upcoming bird-related classes

Northwestern Michigan College's Extended Educational Service is offering several classes this spring that will interest bird enthusiasts:

[Birding By Ear](#) – April 28, 6:30-8:30 pm and April 29, 8:00-10:30 am (course code 1140)

[Birding for Beginners](#) – May 5, 6:00-8:00 pm and May 6, 8:00-10:00 am (course code 1217)

[The Amazing Migration of Birds](#) – May 10, 7:00–9:30 pm (course code 1139)

[Birding By Ear, A Sequel](#) – May 19, 6:30-8:30 pm and May 20, 8:00-10:30 am (course code 1141)

Register at [nmc.edu/ees](http://nmc.edu/ees) or pass this on to the new birders in your life. Two-session classes are a Friday evening in the classroom and a Saturday morning in the field.

## 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 eastern horizon, blue tones start to invade against the black of night. The air is still cool and damp. Spring peepers and insects call from the extensive marsh in front of you. A Barred Owl asks "Who cooks for you, who cooks for youuu-all?" from the forest nearby. From the heart of the marsh comes the deep "unk-UNK-a-dunk" of an American Bittern. Before long, its relative, a Great Blue Heron gives an offended squawk. In the dim light, you see ripples cross open water. A smack and a splash confirm the ripple-maker is a beaver. A Song Sparrow offers a few notes from a bush nearby, and a Swamp Sparrow responds with its trill. A loud trumpeting announces the presence of Sandhill Cranes. Then the marsh seems to explode with sound. Grunts and whinnies of Virginia Rail and Sora, the "conk-a-reee" of Red-winged Blackbirds, the non-melodious screeches of Common Grackles, and, from overhead, the tremolo call of a Common Loon. The sky is considerably lighter now, and the voices of Northern Cardinal, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Yellow Warbler and Common Yellowthroat join the chorus.

You've chosen to start the day at the southern unit of Leelanau State Park (45.172978, -85.574227), where Densmore Road crosses the wetlands along Mud Lake. It's a marvelous place to begin or end a day. Since you're near the tip of the Leelanau Peninsula, temperatures will be chilly well into May; you might find more activity a bit later in the spring. If you walk a bit farther back along the road, you'll encounter several open-country birds like Eastern Kingbird, Chipping Sparrow, and Brown Thrasher.

From East Woolsey Lake Road (aka Co. Rd. 629), turn left just past Woolsey Airport. The road ends at an unpaved parking lot. To get the swamp experience, walk back along the road a hundred

yards or so. Note the outhouse at the parking lot. Since the area is part of the state park, make sure you have a pass, or the Michigan Recreational Passport. The airport is active, so don't stray onto the grassy runways in your pursuit of a better view!

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

## Editor's Perch

Putting our money where our binoculars are

It's time to bring up an old issue again, and here's why: I heard last winter that the MI DNR is thinking of removing the dam that impounds Tobeco Creek in northeastern Grand Traverse County and forms Petobego Marsh. This is one of, if not the most significant wetlands in Grand Traverse County. According to eBird, 130 species have been recorded there. It is the only location in the county where Least Bitterns and Marsh Wrens are found regularly, and probably nest. Petobego State Game Area gets less birding attention than it deserves, probably because it's difficult to access.

Birding access aside, to protect the marsh in its current state, we need to get the attention of the DNR. As you know, in today's world, money talks. A large portion of the DNR's budget comes from fees paid by those who use state lands and facilities. We pay to camp, and to use ORVs on state land. Those who hunt and fish buy licenses. Purchases of hunting and fishing equipment include a tax that goes toward managing and protecting the resource. I think it's time to propose that birders shell out a little to make sure we can continue our wonderful, more-or-less free pastime.

Birders have a lot of economic weight to throw around. It's been [estimated](#) that birding has an economic benefit of over \$40 million! The Biggest Week in American Birding, which takes place at Magee Marsh in northwestern Ohio, generates more than [\\$26 million](#) in economic activity. How much do you spend each year on equipment, gas, meals on-the-go, and entrance fees to birding spots? Go ahead and count that \$11 for the Recreation Passport to Michigan State Parks.

One proven way to contribute to protecting wildlife habitat is to buy a [Duck Stamp](#). They cost only \$25, and over 90% of your money goes to wetland conservation. Michigan also has a Waterfowl Stamp [Program](#).

Michigan also has a Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. This money is used solely for research and management of nongame species, and endangered plants and animals. If you'd like to donate, send a check [here](#). This is probably the most direct way to benefit species in places like Petobego SGA. We benefit greatly from the activities of our local conservancies: the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy and the Leelanau Conservancy. Consider them in your support for birds and birding.



After the initial investment in binoculars, birding is a pretty inexpensive pastime. We pay for gas and an occasional entrance fee, but that's about it, unless we choose to travel. Yet, what fun is birding if we don't have places to find birds? What if the only decent habitat is on private land? Let's make ourselves known. When you pay that entrance fee, wear your binoculars. Contribute to conservation programs in your area, whether a land conservancy, or the Nongame Fish and Wildlife Trust Fund. Then post a picture of your receipt on BirdAlert! Maybe that will encourage others to do the same. I'll be posting one soon, and I invite you to share yours!

- Kirk W.

## Reader Submissions

Some waterfowl photos from this winter:



Photo by Joe Brooks



Photo by Lauren Vaughn



Photos by Scott Sneed



## A poem ...

A little something to brighten the last gray days of winter:

common mergansers with dapper duck tails  
hoodies and woodies and virginia rails  
great blues and blue jays and eastern bluebirds  
gorgeous bald eagles who don't say word

downys and hairys with different sized bills,  
waxwings who whisper their afternoon trill  
what do you say when there's more than one grouse?  
what is the plural of tufted titmouse?

AMROs and AMGOs frequent my yard  
the sighting of MODO isn't too hard  
when COLOs are calling their lunatic cheer  
a chill and a thrill and an honor to hear

cheeseburger, cheer up, caw, conkaree  
canada canada, perchikoree  
cheerily cheer-up and who cooks for you?  
who is that singing that coo-coo-coo-coo?

HOFIs and PUFIs fight over seed  
the little green heron is out in the reeds  
kingfisher alight with the fire inside  
i'm caught with an ornithological love that abides

i love the warblers who sing in the dawn  
all of them magic and sent from beyond  
gliding and soaring and diving and still  
my heart longs to fly, and one day i will

- Maryellen Newport

## Regional Bird Festivals coming this spring!

If you feel like traveling this spring, consider checking out these opportunities:

Tawas Point Migration - May 12-14, <https://www.michiganfun.com/event/tawas-point-migration/>

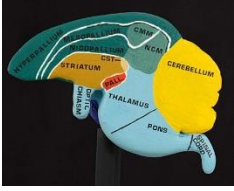
Leelanau Birdfest - May 18-21, Leelanau Co. <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/event/leelanau-birdfest/> (A little bird told me there will be a trivia contest on Saturday night!)

Kirtland Warbler Festival - June 2-3, <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/event/kirtlands-warbler-festival/>

### Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

Learn the songs and calls of the birds you see and hear every day. These will be your reference set. Later, you can compare new songs to them.

**If you plan to trim trees or shrubs in your yard, do it SOON so you don't disturb birds as they begin to nest!**



## Bird Brains

Flying - variations on a theme

Flitting, darting, swooping, undulating, gliding, stooping.... These are all words we can use to describe flight. These are rather poetic, but not very official. There are a few terms that refer to specific types of flight: soaring, hovering and kiting. Soaring is when a bird, usually with broad wings, holds them out and flies seemingly without effort. In the right conditions, such as a current of rising air, a bird might soar for long periods without moving a feather. Masters of soaring include vultures, buteos (hawks), eagles, and occasionally, cranes and storks. Hovering is when a bird flaps its wings but stays in one place. Hummingbirds are famous for this, but we often see kestrels, kingfishers, flycatchers, and Rough-legged Hawks flapping over a field or pond. Hovering is usually employed for a short time, since it costs energy. When you see a hawk or gull holding its position without flapping, it's kiting. This is most often used with the help of a stiff breeze. Many of us have seen gulls kiting over a beach, or a Red-tailed Hawk hanging in the wind over a field, searching for prey. Hopefully, this adds to your appreciation of the wonderful things birds do in the air.

## Birds and their habitat preferences

By Matt Winkler

You're at the hotspot that eBird suggested as an excellent birding location, and you're faced with a variety of habitats. Now what? Where are the birds, exactly? One of the skills of birding is to match birds with their favored habitat, sometimes down to specific details. Here are a few examples:

1. Kirtland's Warbler & Jack Pine habitat. They rely on young Jack Pine habitat exclusively, specifically trees that have branches at or very near the ground. (Photo by Janet S.)

2. Piping Plover & rocky shoreline habitat. They require rocky beach habitat, because, with their coloration and body shape closely mimic the rocks themselves.

3. Ruffed Grouse prefer regenerative growth habitat with high stem density, with small diameter stems. This provides cover and food resources. Alder stands, fallow fields overgrown with invasive autumn olive, dense cedar swamps are usually favored. Time of year can be a factor in which habitat is preferred.



4. Look for American Woodcock in damp/flooded woods, with open areas nearby for display flights. The woods serve as hiding places and feeding place during the day, and the open area/adjacent fields serve as flight display areas during the spring at dusk. These birds need soft, muddy ground to probe for worms and other invertebrates with their long bills.

5. Indigo Buntings have a close association with edge habitat. They are often found along the overgrown edges of wood lots along open field areas. Males will sing high from a prominent perch near such habitat. They also show preferences towards habitats thick with Bracken Fern.

6. Red-headed Woodpeckers prefer oak-dominant habitat and park-like habitat with large tall widely spaced trees. They feed on acorns and beech nuts during the winter, and they will fly-catch during the summer, using tall prominent snags to sally out for insects and to guard/defend territory. Often seen at very top of such snag, noisily calling and drumming.

7. Herring Gulls & their acute adaptation to human altered environments. Here, they take advantage of easy pickings offered by the human environment. They are actively nesting on downtown TC roof tops.

8. Clay-colored Sparrows prefer dry upland fields with high density of Juniper bushes along with some black cherry trees sprinkled throughout. They will sing from the tops of the cherry trees, and nest and take cover in the Juniper.

9. Marsh Wren, Sedge Wren and Winter Wren. Habitat preferences in order, are Marsh Wrens like marshy areas with deeper standing water all year long that is dominated by Cattails. Sedge Wrens like areas that are damp to wet especially early in spring that are dominated by various Sedge species. These areas provide thick low very dense cover, and may become dryer later in the summer. Winter Wrens like habitat with lots of blowdowns or trees with up turned root balls, for hiding and nesting in. They are usually found in quite damp/flooded densely wooded habitats, consisting of cedars, maples etc.

## **A quick synopsis of the February 10th-12th trip to Soo Michigan**

On the 10th we, being Pat and Marlene O'Conner and Barbara and I, started at the Sugar Island Ferry Dock a slow start with only Black Duck, Co. Goldeneye and Co. Mergansers. We proceeded down Riverside Dr. where we saw No. Shrike, Bald Eagle, Rough-legged Hawk, Co. Raven and some Pine Grosbeak. We proceeded to Pickford and found Sharp-tailed Grouse, Pine and Evening Grosbeak and a Northern Cardinal. After lunch Pat and Marlene had to leave and Barbara and I went back to the location of the Evening Grosbeak as Barbara had missed them earlier. We found them and an Eastern Meadowlark. Then we headed to Rudyard and on the way we found a flock of 250 Snow Bunting and a Snowy Owl. On the way back to the Soo we stopped at the Dafter Dump where there were 24 Bald Eagles, 500 Herring Gulls and one Glaucous Gull.

On the 11th we were joined by Jerry and Sherri and Jerry Freels. Again, we started at the Sugar Island Ferry Dock and found Hooded Merganser and Bald Eagle. We proceeded down Nicolet



Rd. and found No. Shrike and Sharp-tailed Grouse. From there we went to Rudyard. Near Rudyard we found Snow Bunting and a Snowy Owl.

On the 12th, the Freels left and Barbara and I went west on M-28 with Red Crossbill on 28. At Strong Corners, we had Cedar Waxwing, Pine and Evening Grosbeak. Between Fibre and Rudyard, we had more Red Crossbill.

We had 33 species which is the 6th highest in 28 years. – Leonard Graf

## Reduce your carbon footprint with this offer from Citizens' Climate Lobby!

Here's an opportunity to lower your carbon footprint with some plant-based eating. This month GTAC is partnering with [Veg-Michigan](#) to promote low carbon food. If you're new to plant-based eating and want to try some popular plant-based (cholesterol-free) food, then this campaign is for you! VegMichigan is offering a free bag of plant-based items to all GTAC members that pledge to eat less meat for 30 days.

Why? Eating a plant-rich diet is one of the most effective ways to minimize our carbon footprint. It reduces worldwide deforestation, land clearing in the US, fertilizer use and methane emissions.

If you are new to plant-based food and want to try some popular products, **please [sign up here](#) by Tuesday March 7<sup>th</sup>. Your bag of food will be delivered to the GTAC meeting on March 16<sup>th</sup>, 7pm at the Boardman River Nature Center, TC.** Thanks for doing your part to minimize your impact on the climate!



- Nicola Philpott

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