

July 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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Ah summer! The madness of migration is over. Now is a great time to pay attention to things that move more slowly. How about insects? It's kind of a theme for this issue. Take some time to watch them. Take some pictures and submit them for the September issue!

## 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!

Note: we're on hiatus for the summer. Regular monthly meetings will resume in September.

Watch the website for dates and information about our meetings coming up in the fall.

## Upcoming Field Trips

**August 13 (Sunday)**– Sunday Morning Bird Outings will resume!

Every Sunday from this date through the end of October, 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.



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

## Upcoming Field Trips

### August 5

Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds

### September 16

Jaeger Watch

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

## August 5th (Sat.): Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds

We'll be carpooling down to the Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds to do some birding. We'll be greeted by one of the staff who will sign us in and give us a brief overview on how the ponds help ecology, hence birds. It's a big thing that they are offering this special access on a Saturday to Grand Traverse Audubon. They typically limit birding to these ponds to Monday through Friday, 8:00 AM till 4:00 PM. If time permits, we may head north to the Houghton Lake Flats and scout things out on the way home.

We'll meet at Tom's East Bay at the east end of the parking lot at 7:30 AM and arrive close to 9:00 AM. Pack a lunch if you wish. Please respond by August 1<sup>st</sup> if you are coming, or even thinking of coming, so we can give them an estimated headcount.

GTAC Contact: Kathie Wiley at 231-409-8913 or [dujour1@gmail.com](mailto:dujour1@gmail.com)

## September 16 (Saturday) – Jaeger Watch

Most years, a few jaegers (gull-like seabirds) are seen near Chicago. We'll join our friends from Benzie Audubon to see if these rare travelers cruise by the Platte River. Meet at the USNPS parking lot at 8:00 AM. A National Park Service pass is required for entry. If the jaegers disappoint, we still hope to see some seasonal shorebirds. At the very least, we'll have a nice day on the beach with friends! You might want to bring a chair for this one.

Contact Kirk Waterstripe for more information ([4walkinglightly@gmail.com](mailto:4walkinglightly@gmail.com)).



Juvenile Parasitic Jaeger

[https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Parasitic\\_Jaeger/photo-gallery/308485691](https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Parasitic_Jaeger/photo-gallery/308485691)

## Birding Calendar

### July

Whereas spring migration was a frantic rush, the southward journey is a lazy affair.

Shorebirds will begin trickling through about the middle of the month. Keep an eye on the mudflats and beaches! Note how many kinds of butterflies you see.

### August

Hérons and several other species are known for post-breeding dispersal. Watch for Great Egrets and others this month, along with Olive-sided Flycatchers toward the end of the month. Adult warblers begin to trickle south at this time too. Watch for fireflies this month too!

### September

Many of the insect-eating birds are heading south, including warblers. While plumages are duller in the fall, only a few species are really confusing. Some hawks are migrating south in earnest this month.

## Editor's Perch

It's summer, and with the season come mosquitos, deer flies, horse flies, and other pesky biting insects. Summer also brings butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, mayflies, beetles, and numerous pollinators like bees and wasps. Near the water, you can find water boatmen, water striders, whirligig beetles, and the larvae of many species that fly as adults. Now is the time to turn loose your inner child and check out bugs!

As people who care about birds, you know that means we have to care about all the things birds need. This time of year, in addition to suitable habitat, birds need insects. Here in the North Woods, insects are an abundant source of protein for young birds, enough to lure birds of many species into making a long and perilous journey from the tropics. Shorebirds, warblers, flycatchers, tanagers, vireos and many more come to northern latitudes to feast and raise young on the insect bounty.

Unfortunately, our society hears "bugs" and thinks "eeeww!". Many modern American humans tend to squash first and ask questions later, if they pause to ask questions at all. Most people don't differentiate between the good and the "bad"; they want an insect-free life. When you first started learning to identify birds, you took an important step in getting to know the world around you. Birds were no longer a group of animals that fly; they had names. As you saw birds around you consistently, they became individuals. It's much harder to harm, or even ignore, an individual. Take the same approach with insects. See if you can identify them, at least to groups like butterflies and moths, bees and wasps, or beetles (they're pretty easy).

As you know, birds are part of an ecological web with the other life forms around them. For example, Eastern Whip-poor-wills eat exclusively insects, and they're fond of large moths. The larvae of those moths need particular species of plants on which to feed. Polyphemus moth caterpillars prefer birch, but will feed on willow, alder, poplar, and oak. These plants are not often included in suburban landscaping. It goes without saying that Polyphemus moths, and all insects, need an environment free of chemicals designed to kill them. Thus, if you want to find whip-poor-wills, go the places with intact forests and without insecticides.

To honor the web, and to keep birds near us, we need to find other ways to deal with undesirable insects, like increasing our tolerance, and using integrated pest management. We also need to replace our useless (to insects) landscaping with plant species that support insects. If you haven't already, start with a corner of your yard. Plant a patch of pollinator-friendly flowers, or host plants for butterflies. Then sit close and watch to see what comes to visit!

- Kirk W.

## Book Review

In keeping with the insect theme, here's a book you might want to check out:  
*Dragonflies and Damselflies: A Natural History*, by Dennis Paulson, Princeton University Press, 2019, hardcover

A review at <https://www.aba.org/birds-and-odes-perfect-complements/>

## Shorebird habitat preferences




Over the next several months, shorebirds (sandpipers, plovers and such) will be migrating south. Here are some suggestions for habitats in which to look for the various species that come through our region:

















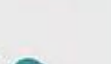
- Killdeer - lawns, gravel areas, foraging on mudflats
- Semipalmated Plover – mudflats and sandy beaches
- Piping Plover – sandy and cobble beaches, up from the surf zone
- Black-bellied Plover – sandy beaches, usually on Lake Michigan
- Semipalmated Sandpiper – sand beaches and mudflats
- Least Sandpiper – mudflats
- Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs – shallow water like flooded fields and ponds, often foraging up to their bellies
- Pectoral Sandpiper - mudflats, short grass with puddles
- Sanderling - sandy or pebbly beaches, feeds along the edge of breaking surf
- Stilt Sandpiper - back waters, slow water that's shallow and mudflats
- Buff-breasted Sandpiper - mudflats or riverbanks with some vegetation, short-grass fields
- Upland Sandpiper - feeds and nests in meadows and hayfields
- Ruddy Turnstone - beaches, feeds along the piles of debris tossed up by waves
- Dunlin – mudflats

- Matt Winkler and Kirk W.

Here are some helpful hints for identifying shorebirds:

### Clues to help identify shorebirds

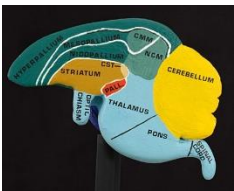
Size & Shape	Bill Length & Shape	Foraging Behavior
<p><b>Size</b> How big is it compared to other birds?</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">    </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Small      Medium      Large</p> <p><b>Overall Body Shape</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">   </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Elongate      Compact</p> <p><b>Specific Body Parts</b> Bill &amp; leg color Eye size <i>Plovers = larger, sandpipers = smaller</i> Leg &amp; neck length</p>	<p><b>Length</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">     </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Short      Medium      As long as head      Longer than head</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Plovers, Turnstone</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Sandpipers</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Yellowlegs</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Whimbrel, Oystercatcher, Willet, Dowitcher, Stilt, Avocet</p> </div> </div> <p><b>Curvature</b></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;">     </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Straight      Tip slightly downcurved      Upturned      Downcurved</p>	<p><b>Sandpipers</b></p> <p><i>Peeps (Semipalmated, Western, Least)</i> Walk or run with the head down, picking and probing</p> <p><i>Spotted Sandpiper</i> Bobs tail up and down when walking or standing</p> <p><i>White-rumped Sandpiper</i> Tail tips up while probing</p> <p><i>Stilt Sandpiper</i> Probes mud like "oil derrick," rear end tips up</p> <p><b>Plovers</b> Run &amp; stop, pick, hiccup, run &amp; stop</p> <p><b>Yellowlegs</b> Stroll and pick</p> <p><b>Dowitchers</b> Probe mud with "sewing machine" bill, body stays horizontal</p>

## Binocular Review

Recently, we replaced a pair of binoculars in the family, and found something worthy of sharing. For those with narrow faces, or eyes set closer together than average, many popular models of full-sized binoculars won't work. The eyepieces won't come together closely enough. In our research, we found three models with a suitable interpupillary distance: Vanguard Spirit, Celestron Trailseeker, and Celestron Granite. All are 8x42, which allows for good magnification and adequate light. All three are waterproof and have fully coated ED lenses. The Vanguard Spirit is made of lighter-weight material, however. All three are available locally, either at Enerdyne in Suttons Bay, or by ordering at Wild Birds Unlimited. In the end, we chose the Trailseeker, and we look forward to many hours of amazing viewing.

### Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

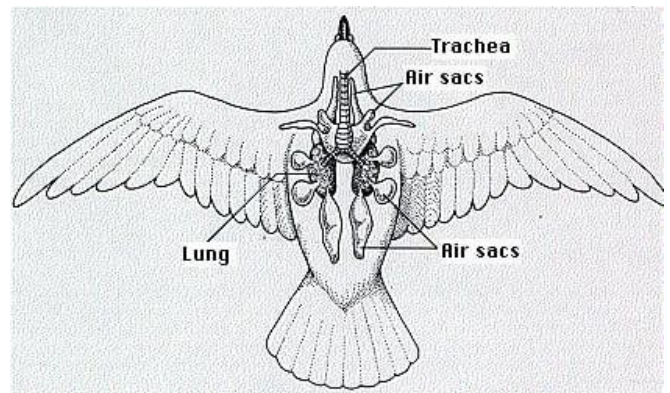
Learn to give directions to birds (2 o'clock in a tree, one binocular field above the horizon, in a spruce tree, etc.) This summer, work on your tree identification skills.



### Bird Brains

#### Bird breathing

Flying demands a lot of energy, and that means a lot of oxygen! How do birds get the oxygen they need? With an ingenious respiratory system! Birds have a trachea and lungs like we do, but they also have air sacs. These are distributed throughout a bird's body. When a bird inhales, some air goes to the lungs, and some goes to the air sacs. With the next inhalation, that air is pushed into the lungs. The air sacs handle the in-and-out movement of air, and keep the lungs supplied with a continuous flow. Human lungs, however, get filled, then have to be emptied before the next breath. Thus, birds can extract oxygen from the air they breath continuously, while we humans can only do it on the inhale.



<https://currumbinvetservices.com.au/what-are-air-sacs/>

Did you know Bar-headed Geese have been seen flying over the Himalayas where humans need supplemental oxygen? Birds living at high altitudes also have hemoglobin that binds more oxygen than does the hemoglobin of birds at lower elevations.



## Your Favorite Patch

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

In keeping with the insect theme, for this issue, I'm going to suggest your own backyard! You may think you know it, but have you taken a close look at what lives in the grass? Have you studied the insects hanging out under your porchlight at night? Have you watched for fireflies? Leave a log or board on the ground for a couple weeks, then turn it over to see what's living under it. Pour some molasses on a tree trunk and visit it after dark. I did that once, and was amazed to find millipedes the diameter of a pencil on the tree! If you want an adventure, look around your place at night while wearing a headlamp, or holding a small flashlight to your forehead. The eyes of spiders reflect light just like those of a deer (but smaller)! In your insect quest, check out the edges and corners of your property, however small. Look behind things and under things. You know where bugs like to hide. Take a close look at any flowers; they might host a crab spider (not an insect) waiting to grab a fly (an insect).

Repeat these exercises, or at least some basic observations, at different times of year. What's the first butterfly you see in the spring? When do you see the last katydid (a green grasshopper-like insect)? What are the pollinators feeding on each month?

After a few visits to your yard, focusing on insects, I bet you'll feel like you're seeing the place for the first time!

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

## Field Trip reports

Pontoon Boat trip up Victoria Creek – June 10

Ten souls boarded a pontoon boat owned and operated by Blake Key (thank you Blake!) and motored across Lake Leelanau from Solon Township Park and up Victoria Creek. As the evening progressed, we saw and heard several swamp inhabitants including, Swamp Sparrow, Great Blue Heron, Belted Kingfisher, and dozens of blackbirds. An immature Bald Eagle preened in a tall pine, and a Common Loon called from the lake, just out of sight. There were several non-avian highlights to, like a Snapping Turtle, a Muskrat, pitcher plants in flower, and cottongrass (actually a sedge). All ten of us made it safely back to the dock, and we declared this first-of-its-kind trip a resounding success! Watch for another one in the future!



Photo by Linda Seder



Photo by Kirk Waterstripe

### Whip-poor-wills in da twilight – June 16

Nine folks managed to find the obscure meeting spot on Brown Bridge Road. As the sun sank to the horizon, we walked down the road to the Boardman River, hearing Ovenbirds and Pine Warblers along the way. While admiring the plants at the river's edge, a Common Nighthawk flew over! Its repeated passes gave everyone a chance to study its characteristic flight. From there, we walked back to the west to an area with Jack Pine and small hardwood trees. Songs of Scarlet Tanager, White-throated Sparrow and Northern Cardinal serenaded us along the way. By this time, it was nearly 10:00 pm, and we didn't have to wait long for the Whip-poor-wills to start calling. The birds even flew across the clearing, barely above our heads at times! A double nightjar evening!

## Michigan changes threatened and endangered status of several species

At the end of March, the Michigan DNR filed several changes to the state's list of threatened and endangered species. Here are the changes for birds:

Added to the list of threatened species:

Black tern  
Eastern whip-poor-will  
Evening grosbeak  
Golden-winged warbler  
Northern goshawk  
Spruce grouse  
Upland sandpiper

Threatened or endangered species down-listed to "special concern":

Merlin  
Prairie warbler  
Red-shouldered hawk  
Trumpeter swan

Kirtland Warblers and Peregrine Falcons have been moved from "endangered" list to the "threatened" list. Good news! Thanks to Dave Newhouse for alerting me to this.

- Kirk W.

## How can you help this club?

Have you been enjoying the bird walks on Sundays? How about trips farther afield? Did you get inspired by Alison Vilag's presentation in April? Do you like keeping up with Bird Alert emails? Hopefully, you answered yes to all. Hopefully, you enjoy the camaraderie as well as the information in what we do. Are you ready to take it to the next level?

Would you be willing to help with a club activity, or even with leadership? Do you enjoy helping others understand the world around us? Do you like to write? Do you bake awesome cookies? Are you full of ideas for what outings you and others might enjoy? Are you good at asking people for money? Do you enjoy speaking to groups? Would you write a letter expressing our position on an environmental issue? Would you lead a bird walk? Our club needs all these people and more. If you would be willing to take a more active role, please consider helping out, whether you bake cookies, or serve as President. Please give it some thought; you'll hear more about this in the future. Thanks!

- Members of the Board



## Tools for observing insects

In case you want to follow up on some of the suggestions above, here are some ways you can get a look at these amazing, fast-moving creatures.

Close-focus binoculars – these allow you to observe at a short distance and not spook the insect.

Pitfall trap – Find a can like the metal coffee cans of days gone by, about 6-9 inches in diameter. Dig a hole in the ground deep enough to let the rim of the can sit just below ground level. Insert can in hole. Wait overnight, or several hours. See what you've caught in the can! After careful observation and photos, release your catches. Cover the trap during the day so you don't catch a human!

Black light and a sheet – Just before dusk, hang an old sheet between a couple trees, from the side of your house, or from a clothesline. Suspend a "black light", or UV flashlight from the top of the sheet. Wait a little while, then examine the insects hanging onto the sheet.

Beating sheet – Make or buy one as seen below. Hold the sheet below some branches or brush, and gently shake or whack the branches. Watch the insects fall onto the sheet. Then transfer them to a device where you can inspect them with a magnifier (second photo) or hand lens.



## My adventures with mealworms

Mealworms? Like the kind that wiggle and squirm all over the place? You have got to be kidding me. Yuck. Why on God's green earth would I want to mess with mealworms? I mean, I love feeding birds as much as the next enthusiast, but one must draw the line somewhere! I don't think this would be for me.

Then I was given a little tub of 500 mealworms squirming around in wheat bran. Ew. I took them home along with directions on how to "care" for them. Seriously. They are worms. How much care could they possibly require?

*Store them in the refrigerator.*

Ummm, okay, but they are going in a bag, so I don't have to look at them every time I open the fridge door.

*Feed them baby carrots or apple slices every seven to ten days.*

Wait, what? They need to be fed? Turns out it's not that difficult or disgusting to put a couple carrots in a tub of worms.

*Put them in a feeder.*

I've got this part! I have a small tray feeder that will work beautifully, I hope.

And then the moment of truth arrives! The feeder is hanging next to other feeders the birds have grown accustomed to visiting. How will I be rewarded for stepping outside my comfort zone? Will my efforts be in vain? It does not take long for the mealworms to be noticed and it's a Tufted Titmouse to take the first morsel from the feeder!

That was just the beginning of my adventures in feeding mealworms to the birds. Early this May after nighttime visits to our yard from a mama bear and her teenager and the destruction of a couple poles and our seed can, we decided to put the feeders away for the summer. We didn't want the hassle of taking them out and bringing them back in every day nor do we have a functional place inside to store seed cans. We really missed seeing all the birds that had made our feeders a frequent stop in their daily foraging circuit. Then I remembered mealworms! I could do mealworms. They don't live in a seed can and the feeder can easily be brought in at the end of the day because it's always empty by then! This spring and summer the mealworm feeder has been visited by chickadees, Red-bellied Woodpeckers (who apparently can't eat just one but fly off with a beak full!) titmice, cardinals, blackbirds, Chipping Sparrows, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and even a Pine Warbler! For me this is definitely worth the effort and definitely not in vain!

- Melissa Waterstripe

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