

May 2023

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

Editor: Kirk Waterstripe newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org

Spring is here! Warblers, orioles, vireos and flycatchers are bursting on the scene. This issue celebrates birding, but it also asks us to think about some difficult issues. Please read slowly and take time to digest. Then go birding and think!

Did you see it? Michigan's first Pink-footed Goose found near Kingsley!

On April 9th, an unusual goose, identified as a Greater White-fronted Goose, was reported from the intersection of Clous and Schneider Roads in Grand Traverse County.



After being posted to eBird, others identified the goose as a Pink-footed Goose, a species that normally breeds in Greenland and winters around the Baltic Sea. Word went out, and goose chase began! On April 11, birders from all over the state descended on the area. Unfortunately, the goose could not be relocated on April 12. Hopefully, you were one of the ones that got a chance to glimpse this wayward traveler. (Photo by Scott Sneed)



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Upcoming Field Trips

May 19

Meet-up at Tawas Point State Park

June 10

Victoria Creek by boat

June 16

Whip-poor-wills in da moonlight

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

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

Upcoming Field Trips

May 7, 2023 (Sunday)– Sunday Morning Bird Outings have resumed!

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.

May 19-21 (Fri - Sun): Meet-up at Tawas Point

Join Leonard and Barb Graf on this annual favorite trip to one of the best birding spots in the Midwest! Tawas Point is known as a great spot for warblers, shorebirds, Summer Tanagers, and much more. Parts of this trip will be accessible to those with mobility issues. This is a meet-up trip; Leonard and Barb will be there for the weekend so stop by and bird with them for a bit. Contact Leonard Graf (bluethroat@charter.net) for more details.

June 10 (Saturday) – Lake Leelanau by Pontoon Boat

Come explore one of Leelanau County's finest wetlands by pontoon boat! We'll see herons, flycatchers, blackbirds, and we might hear Sandhill Cranes and an American Bittern.

Birding Calendar

May

The flurry of migrants swirls around us. New species move into our area each week. By the end of the month, flycatchers, tanagers and nightjars will be here.

June

As fast as it came, the frenzy of migration slows and stops. Check your favorite patches for birds showing breeding behaviors. Watch for juveniles.

July

Only a few weeks after it was over, migration starts again! Shorebirds will be migrating south around the middle of the month. Check the mudflats near you. Warbler parents will begin drifting south this month and next.

Meet at Solon Township Park. From Cedar, head north on Kasson St. to South Schomberg Road and turn right. Turn right again on S. Lake Shore Drive. At 2.3 miles, you'll see the park on the right. Bring some water, and layers for a chilly evening. We'll return to the park at about 10 pm.

THIS TRIP IS LIMITED TO 10 PEOPLE; email Kirk Waterstripe to sign up (4walkinglightly@gmail.com)

April 16 (Saturday): Whip-poor-wills in da moonlight!

The voice of the Eastern Whip-poor-will is one of the iconic sounds of the North Woods. Join us along the Boardman River to hear this vociferous and fascinating bird. Since the trip is so close to the Summer Solstice, we'll meet at 9:30 pm (!) at a point 3 miles east of Garfield Road on Brown Bridge Road (44.648652, -85.463923). Bring a flashlight!

Your Favorite Patch

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

Birding Old Mission Point Park

Birding here tends to be most productive in May when migration funnels birds up the peninsula and they stop to feed before flying north over the water. Most of the northern warblers and vireos have been seen here. Some warblers nest in the park, including Blackburnian, Black-throated Green, Pine and Redstart. The dead trees are a haven for woodpeckers, and all the woodpecker species can be seen here. Red-headed Woodpeckers have been regularly seen over at least the past 4-5 years during the summer, and they are likely breeding here. They are most often seen and heard along the trails to the right of the lighthouse. Golden-crowned Kinglets can be seen year-round and are most frequently encountered in hemlock trees. Barred Owls are resident birds in the park and can be seen or heard along any of the trails leading from the lighthouse, especially the interior trails near hemlocks. I have often seen and heard them during the daylight hours here. Red-eyed Vireos, Eastern Wood-Pewee and Great-crested Flycatchers are common breeders and can be seen along the trails as well as in the trees along the parking lot. Scarlet Tanagers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks are often seen or heard throughout the summer. Most of the Thrush species can be seen and are most often encountered along the interior trails.

In previous years, when the water was low, there was excellent shorebird habitat. Most of the common shorebirds have been seen here as well as many more rare species such as Whimbrel, Wilson's Phalarope, Red Knot, American Golden-Plover and Black-bellied Plover. In 2008 I saw 3 young Black-crowned Night-Herons wading in the shallows near the point. Waterfowl, particularly diving ducks, grebes and loons can be most easily seen during spring and fall migrations but are often very distant and best identified with a spotting scope from the walkway near the lighthouse.

During spring migration, I have found that trees along the shoreline in both directions from the lighthouse are very productive. Concentrate on the cedar trees and hemlock earlier in migration, especially if it is cooler or rainy. One of my favorite spots for warblers is to take the trail that goes

along the water to the right of the lighthouse. The trail will come to a fork, and I take the left fork toward the water and end up on a short point with clumps of low willows which makes viewing pleasant. As you get into the taller trees, there will be many passerines in the peak of migration, but you may end up with "warbler neck" to see them. As with most birding, knowing the songs/calls will alert you to the presence of a particular bird. After leaving the willow point, I continue on the trail paralleling the water until the trail ends and turns to the right (inland). It is along this trail that I most often hear Barred Owls and Black-throated Green warblers. Along this 2-track, which can be driven with a car, there are several walking trails branching to the right which will take you back to the parking area. There are some tall White Pine trees along these trails which is where I typically hear the Blackburnian Warblers.

- Scott Sneed

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

Editor's Perch

This edition of the Perch explores some timely and difficult issues. There will be a lot of questions, and very few answers. Please remember that the opinions herein are mine, and not those of the Club Executive Board. Also, our club is not directly affiliated with National Audubon.

Early this year, the National Audubon Society board voted to reject a proposed name change. The proposal was based on the realization that John James Audubon bought and sold slaves. To date, five organizations bearing the name "Audubon" have decided to change their names. (See NPR's article [here](#).) There are also several name changes under discussion for bird species named for individuals with less than savory pasts.

John James Audubon did own slaves. According to biographers, he was a dandy, favoring a life of parties and limelight. He was also a charlatan. He was also a ground-breaking artist. His work brought lifelike images of birds to the attention of many, and documented the avifauna of early America.

About fifty years after his death, several groups of people (mostly women) were desperate to save birds from the millinery trade. They affiliated under a name that was most strongly associated with birds: Audubon. These groups became the organization and the movement that has preserved land and educated millions about the beauty and plight of birds. The name has become a brand; "Audubon" is synonymous with birds. What is the value of an established brand? Many CEOs would say it's invaluable. Would you think about changing the name Kleenex? How about Xerox?

A few weeks ago, I listened to a podcast about the issue (the Sept. 2021 episode of Always Be Birdin' is available from the usual podcast sources). The host and the guest were talking about the difficulties of working with raptors that had been traumatized or treated poorly in falconry or rehabilitation. I came away with this: trust is fundamental to any healthy relationship, and that trust has been violated and lost in many interactions between black people and white people. The violation of trust between white people and Native Americans is well-documented and easy to see. How can we heal the racial and economic disparities in this country, without reestablishing

this trust? If the names of slaveowners remind black and Native American people of traumatic and unjust treatment, that trust will remain broken. Isn't the trust of marginalized and exploited people a good reason to change the name of an organization?

With that said, is it practical to change the names of everything from buildings to cities? Is there another way to acknowledge the wrongs of the past, especially those that resulted in the deaths of thousands? If we change, are we willing to do the hard work of rebuilding the brand under the new name?

One can say that the men we're talking about, and they were mostly men, were the products of their times, and that's how things were done. We can't change what was done, but an economic system does not supersede our moral responsibility.

Clearly, this topic needs long and thoughtful discussion. No one, past or present, is perfect. None of us have an unblemished past. We may or may not change the name of our organization, but let's find ways to change our behavior. Consider also, what are we doing that violates the trust of current and future generations? What will we be remembered for?

- Kirk W.

A book review

While healing from my recent knee replacement surgery, I read a new book, *Slow Birding* by Joan E. Strassmann, which gave me some new perspectives on birding as a hobby. Strassmann advocates taking a slower approach to birding. Taking your time to really observe a species and appreciate the nuances of birds' daily lives. I've been pretty good at doing that while I photograph a favorite species, like my Sandhill Cranes.

But I'm also guilty of doing what the author calls "motor birding," where birders drive from one good birding spot to another, picking up a few birds here and there and moving on. I'd done that last July when I photographed my first Indigo Bunting. I was excited at finding this new bird for my life list, but I didn't really learn a thing about this gorgeous species from my drive-thru photography.



Besides defining her philosophy of Slow Birding, Strassmann describes 16 common backyard birds and supplies scientific studies (sometimes a bit tedious) that help us better understand these regulars. One bird she focuses on is the American Robin. And we all know robins love worms.

But what I didn't know was that worms are mostly important to robins when feeding their young. Because of that, robins don't even nest until the humidity is high enough to bring earthworms close to the ground's surface. And once adult robins are done feeding worms to their young, they live mostly on fruit.

Another bird Strassmann focused on was the Blue Jay. They are gorgeous birds with bright blue to near purple colors. Yet not a single state claims the Blue Jay as its state bird, probably because of its reputation as being noisy and bossy. But I did learn from the book how smart Blue Jays are. They hide hundreds of nuts for the winter and are able to easily find these nuts, indicating they remembered where they were hidden. I saw evidence of their intelligence too as Blue Jays were the only birds to immediately figure out how to use my new nut feeder.



Strassmann also discusses the Northern Cardinal, another beauty and probably my favorite bird. Unlike the jay, the cardinal is the most chosen state bird, claimed by seven states. I feel the female cardinal, with its tan and russet coloring, is just as beautiful as the bright red male bird.

Strassmann also talks about one bird that's been elusive to my photography, the Cooper's Hawk. She calls it the "predator at your bird feeder." I know it's around because I've seen

it swoop by in a blur and snatch little birds off my feeders. I've also seen feathers and parts of a dead Mourning Dove on the lawn and am sure it was killed by a Cooper's. One day last fall, I the saw a Cooper's Hawk right on my deck railing, something Strassmann calls a plucking perch. I wasn't fast enough with the camera to photograph it, though. Meanwhile, I'm using the fascinating information in *Slow Birding* to enjoy my own backyard birds more and more.

- Review and photos by Karen Casebeer

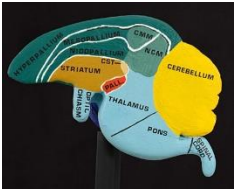
Leelanau Birdfest coming up May 18-21

<https://www.savingbirds.org/leelanau-birdfest/>

(A little bird told me there will be a trivia contest on Saturday night!)

Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

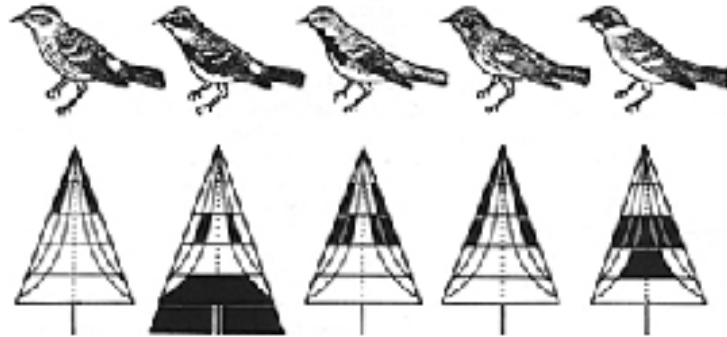
In spring migration, look for northward-pointing peninsulas. They funnel birds together into smaller areas, making the birding more fun. Leelanau is a great example. Also, look for areas of natural habitat in expanses of human-dominated landscapes.



Bird Brains

How warblers share a tree

Have you ever wondered how all those different species of birds in a given habitat avoid competing for resources? Red-tailed Hawks and Great Horned Owls are both predators that live in places with open fields and patches of forest. Red-tails hunt during the day, and the owls hunt by night. In the case of warblers, the answer is more complicated. In 1956-57, Robert MacArthur studied how 5 species of wood warblers divide up foraging space to avoid competition. The short answer is they use different parts of a tree!



(From left to right: Cape May, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Bay-breasted Warbler) For more information, see

https://web.stanford.edu/group/stanfordbirds/text/essays/MacArthur%27s_Warblers.html

A birding ethics reminder

The birding certainly has been exciting recently, with a Pink-footed Goose, and a Little Blue Heron in our area. It's easy to get caught up in the frenzy. Every once in a while, we need a little reminder about who we are and what we do. For a little refresher, here are the three main points of the Code of Ethics from the American Birding Association:

1. Respect and promote birds and their environment.
2. Respect and promote the birding community and its individual members.
3. Respect and promote the law and the rights of others.

Our first responsibility is to the birds. Ours is a "do no harm" pastime. Learn some bird behavior and alarm calls so you can tell when the bird you seek is getting bothered.

The third point is very important. We need to promote the reputation of birders as respectful and courteous. If a landowner wants us to ask permission, we must do so. Anyone who tromps off without permission after a better view, or a better picture, is damaging the reputation of us all. No matter how rare the quarry is, please, just don't do it. People around here are very sensitive about strange behavior and trespassing. With exemplary behavior and politeness, we can, at least, avoid confrontation, and at best, engage in conversation and win them over to birding!

Field Trip reports

Peeents and Pints – April 14

Twenty-five people ventured out in tee-shirt temperatures to look and listen for the annual courtship ritual of the American Woodcock. After a nice slow walk around the pond at Kid's Creek Park, we settled in a wet meadow and waited. About 9:00 pm, the peeenting began. In all, we heard three male woodcock calling and performing their flights. None of us headed for the pints, however. Maybe another time!

Arcadia Marsh – April 22

We met at Meijer's parking lot at 7:00 Saturday morning. By the time we arrived at the Benzonia park we were about 16 in number. The park was nearly dead bird wise. Some were able to ID a first of the year Chipping Sparrow. The next stop was at the Arcadia Overlook. Not much there, except numerous Red-breasted Mergansers, missing was usual Eastern Phoebe. Things picked up at the east section of the Arcadia Marsh Walk. We were able to get great scope views of a singing Northern Mockingbird. Other notable sightings were calling Sandhills Cranes as they floated overhead, also Eastern Phoebe and Brown Thrasher. The next stop was at Frederick Rd. where we heard but did not see an Eastern Towhee and a constantly singing Winter Wren. Waterfowl-wise, the best location was the West section of the Marsh Walk. We were greeted with a pair of Trumpeter Swans doing their courtship display and loud trumpeting. We also saw 14 other species of ducks, geese and swans there. Finally we went to the west end of Chamberlain Rd. We ate lunch and took a walk to Lake Michigan. Not much there except for a Brown Creeper that kept us entertained for about 5 minutes. For the day we had 52 species, I may have missed some, a slightly chilly wind, but otherwise a delightful beautiful day. Everyone felt good.

Meetings – Programs by Terry Grabill in March and Alison Vilag in April were entertaining, thought-provoking, and well-attended. Terry told stories of his Michigan Big Year and insights gained from new friends made along the way. Alison shared photos and stories from travels around the country encountering vulnerable species and exploring her own vulnerability. Thanks to you both for the tales and insights.

- Leonard Graf

Executive Board Planning Meeting report

On April 13, 2023, the Club's Executive Board devoted a meeting to brainstorming ideas for futures meeting, outings and ways to reach out to the community. Here are some highlights:

- Several attendees on bird walks for beginners lack binoculars. Shall we take donations, or raise funds to purchase a few pairs?
- Partnering with TADL has been successful. Could we donate some books about birding?
- Let's offer a walk at Saving Birds thru Habitat to rebuild our connection with that organization.
- Two members are working with Grand Traverse County 4-H to offer a class about birds this year.
- Program and trip ideas included a program about hawk ID followed by a trip to Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch, Bug Nights in July and August, a Birding Tournament in the style of Badgerland Birding (see YouTube), more walks on state land, and a What's That Bird program/ game after the style of the ABA's program on YouTube.
- An off-season meet-up with other conservation organizations
- Several board members took GTAC business cards to give to interested parties
- We should help facilitate getting bird feeders to classroom teachers, and show them Michigan Audubon's education modules.
- We could organize a Parade of Homes style tour of gardens managed for birds and other wildlife.

Bird names in Spanish!

Americans seem to have embraced the Mexican holiday of Cinco de Mayo. Since this newsletter is coming out just before that date, here's a fun link to explore:

https://zipcon.net/~swhite/docs/language/Spanish/bird_names.html

Some examples:

Brown-headed Cowbird	tordo cabeza café
Duck	pato
Crow	cuervo (raven = cuervo grande)
Hummingbird	colibri
Sandpiper	playero (playa = beach)
Woodpecker	pico
Wren	troglodita

Notice how several of the Spanish names resemble the genus names. Not surprising since Latin and Spanish are both Romance languages!

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