

Birder's Guide to the Traverse City Area

By

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Fifth Edition

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About this Guide

One of the frustrations for beginning birders is where to go once they're ready to expand beyond the backyard. Where do the birds live? Where do other birders usually go? This guide is an attempt to capture some of that information for the local beginner, for the new resident, and for the visiting birder. Birding "trails" have been established for Leelanau County to the west (<http://sleepingbearbirdingtrail.org/>) and for the counties to the northeast (<http://www.sunsetcoastbirdingtrail.org/>), but comprehensive and user-friendly recommendations for Grand Traverse County are harder to find. This guide seeks to fill that gap.

In these pages, you'll find descriptions of some well known birding spots, some less well known but still public locations, and some "pull off the road" locations on private land. Each site description includes habitat information, and types of birds to be expected, with a few less common species thrown in to tempt you and make you keep your eyes open. Directions are provided in good old-fashioned words, starting from Traverse City in most cases, and latitude and longitude are given for GPS users. Links to websites, including trail maps, are given if they are available.

If the site is a hotspot on eBird, a link is provided. One of the most useful features of these hotspot pages is the "Illustrated Checklist" tab. This leads to a list of species seen in the area, frequency (% of checklists reporting that species) by month, and a date on which the species was last recorded by an eBird user.

Each site description also contains information regarding accessibility. For each location, I have included a description of the walking surface you will encounter, including comments about slope for paved trails. There is also a note about the closest restrooms. Near the end of the guide, I have included comments about access via public transportation for spots in certain parts of Traverse City. For more about our local public transportation service, visit bata.net. For more information about accessibility and birding, visit birdability.org.

Finally, in your birding travels, please consider supporting local businesses. Often the closest restroom to a birding spot is in a small store or restaurant that would appreciate your patronage. Also, if you enjoy a visit to a particular area, please take a minute to contact the managing agency. They would like to hear from you! In the case of the area land conservancies, your financial support would be greatly appreciated.

Birding in the Traverse City area

Located in the northwestern part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, this region features many species found in eastern North America, but surprises often turn up for those who get out in the field frequently. Nearby locations like Whitefish Point and Leelanau County may account for more rarities, but the Grand Traverse region affords excellent birding nonetheless.

Since the area is more heavily populated than counties to the east or west, natural habitats are often separated and may hold concentrations of birds. The Boardman River Valley is one example of a sizable habitat corridor. Grand Traverse Bay, a 30-mile extension of Lake Michigan, attracts a number of waterfowl and gull species. The forests are mainly mixtures of

maple and beech, or oak and pine. Lowlands contain spruce and cedar forests, alders, cattail marshes, and a few bogs. Numerous lakes dot the region. In the fairly urban area around Traverse City, birders can expect the usual urban and suburban species, but more natural habitats penetrate to the center of town, so Rock Pigeons live quite close to Merlins and Barred Owls.

The typical annual cycle begins with resident passerines (chickadees, titmice and finches) and woodpeckers in winter, with occasional irruptions of Bohemian Waxwings and winter finches. A few Snowy Owls often show up in late December or January and remain for the winter. Spring waterfowl migration starts in early to mid-April, as the ice melts on the inland lakes. The passerine migration begins building in early April when blackbirds, Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds arrive, and reaches a peak in mid-May with the arrival of thrushes, flycatchers, and 15 to 20 species of warblers. In June and July, birds are busy with breeding activities. Southbound shorebirds can be found regularly beginning in late July through August, mostly on the mudflats at Boardman Lake, and along the Lake Michigan shoreline. Larger inland ponds attract a few also. In September and October, birders will be challenged by “confusing fall warblers”, and sparrows, immature and adult. The last three months of the year hold the promise of sea ducks on Lake Michigan, and occasional uncommon gulls on Grand Traverse Bay.

Water levels on the Great Lakes have been known to fluctuate several feet over multi-year cycles. In 2017, Lake Michigan was at levels near the record high seen in 1986. Shallow water habitats for shorebirds was almost nonexistent. Vegetation that grew on exposed areas during the most recent low-water years flooded. Since then, water levels have receded, exposing more beach habitat for shorebirds. You can also expect to find shorebirds on inland ponds and wet meadows. Dam-removal projects on the Boardman River have led to the formation of mudflats in the southern end of Boardman Lake. Sleeping Bear Point remains a good spot for shorebirds (see Sleeping Bear Birding Trail), but get out there early, before the beach-walkers.

A regional **checklist** has been assembled by the Grand Traverse Audubon Club:
<https://grandtraverseaudubon.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/checklist.pdf>

On a final note, property owners in the area are quite wary, probably due to the many liberties taken by summer tourists. Please be respectful, and if confronted, explain that you’re birding. Many of those who live here are also very fond of the natural world, and might just share a story with you, or offer advice.

From the Northwest **(and overlapping with the [Sleeping Bear Birding Trail](#))**

Leelanau Trail at Fouch Road (44.826442, -85.682486)

South of the parking area, this section of the Leelanau Trail, an old railroad line, passes through a lovely swamp. A diverse forest of red maple, ash, cedar and flooded trees with a variety of understory shrubs hosts woodpeckers, warblers, thrushes, blackbirds, resident Barred Owls and Red-shouldered Hawks, and Winter Wrens in season. Waterfowl, including the occasional Common Loon are frequent flyovers. The presence of feeders at nearby houses adds to the likelihood of finding species not usually associated with swamps.

Directions: Head north from Traverse City on M-22 along West Bay to the light at Cherry Bend Road. Turn left and follow Cherry Bend Road for 3.7 miles to the parking lot on the left. You will cross the Leelanau Trail several times before you reach this lot, so don't be fooled!

Accessibility: The trail is paved and smooth; the grade is level. The parking lot is unpaved, but level. Trail traffic can be heavy on weekends and summer days, so keep an eye out for other trail users.

There are no restrooms at this site.

DeYoung Natural Area (44.809632, -85.653403)

This area is listed on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail, but it's close enough to Traverse City to be worth mentioning here. The Natural Area features a trail that passes through an area of alder shrubs and cedars on its way to a fishing dock on Cedar Lake. Several species of waterfowl may be found on the lake in early spring, with Mute Swans, Common Loons, Canada Geese, gulls and Mallards remaining most of the summer.

The trail continues through a cedar forest as it winds along near the lake. Watch for passerines and woodpeckers. Sharp-shinned Hawks have bred in the area. As the trail loops back to the start, it passes through an old field. Eastern Kingbirds, meadowlarks and various sparrows are frequently seen.

Before leaving, take a short walk south on the Leelanau Trail to check out the small pond. Blackbirds, Swamp Sparrows, Wood Ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, teal, kingfishers, and flycatchers may all be found in season. In spring, Caspian Terns often fish in the pond.

Directions: Head north from Traverse City on M-22 along West Bay to the light at Cherry Bend Road. Turn left and follow Cherry Bend a couple miles north to the driveway by the old barn on the right. Park on the far side of the barn.

A porta-potty is available at the parking area in the warmer months. More civilized facilities are available at the convenience stores on M-22.

Accessibility: The parking lot has a paved handicapped-accessible spot. The path to the Leelanau Trail is gravel, but smooth. The Trail is paved, smooth and level. Access to Cedar Lake is by a packed gravel trail and a boardwalk. The path through the cedar forest is a level but unimproved trail.

Fulton Park/ Carter Road (44.780645, -85.641805)

This area is part of a long, narrow strip of habitat along the Leelanau Trail. North of Carter Road, the trail passes through a damp area and into a sedge-and-tamarack forest, perhaps reminiscent of northern Canada. Dead cedars and tamaracks attract woodpeckers and flycatchers. The area begs for an Olive-sided Flycatcher, but so far, none has been reported. White-throated Sparrows are common singers though.

A note: watch your back and keep an eye out for bicyclists; they come along in fast-moving packs at times. Don't step back without looking.

South of Carter Road a couple hundred feet, you'll notice a footpath heading west. It makes a loop through the old Fulton Park, once owned by Traverse City. You'll pass through a forest of maple and older aspens, with an understory of Tartarian Honeysuckle and other shrubs. A clump of cedar marks the crossing of a small stream.

Expect chickadees, titmice, woodpeckers, sparrows and warblers in season. The layers of habitat hold a variety of species. The area is close to Grand Traverse Bay, so keep an eye out for gulls and an occasional Bald Eagle flying over.

Directions: Head north from Traverse City on M-22 (S. West Bayshore Drive) and turn left on Carter Rd. The best parking is on the left a hundred yards or so past the trail crossing, but this lot only has about five spaces. Left turns from Carter Rd. onto M-22 may require a great deal of patience at some times of day.

Restrooms are available at convenience stores on M-22.

Accessibility: wheeled vehicle users should park at the lot on Carter Rd., next to the Leelanau Trail. The trail is paved, smooth and level. The Fulton Park Trail is forest floor, damp or muddy most of the year, and may have fallen trees.

Hickory Hills & Hickory Meadows (44.766676, -85.659765)

Hopefully, this area gets more birding attention than the few checklists reported by ebirders. The variety of habitats alone makes it worth a visit. Hickory Hills is one of Traverse City's ski areas. During the rest of the year, the mature beech-maple forest hosts a number of vireos, flycatchers, warblers, Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, and others. In recent years, Barred Owls have nested in the area.

Just across the shared parking area is Hickory Meadows, with loops trails through grassy meadows and woods edges. One trail takes you by a small pond lined with cattails. For beginning birders, this area provides a chance to practice new skills. Few, if any, grassland sparrows have been reported, but a variety of edge and shrub-dwelling species live here, such as Indigo Bunting, Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Baltimore Oriole, and others. In past years, Eastern Screech Owls and Great Horned Owls have been found here.

While you're in this part of town, spend a few minutes at **Ashton Park**, a few acres of mature woods, with beech, maple, hemlock and other species. A few other forest birds may be found here, including warblers in spring migration.

Directions: From downtown Traverse City, proceed west on Randolph Street. At the end of Randolph, you'll find a paved parking area. Park here and head into the mature forest, or walk toward the Meadows trailhead on the other side of the parking area. The pond is about ¼ mile from the trailhead.

Note: this area has a popular disc golf course. Beware of flying discs!

Ashton Park is close by. Follow Randolph back down to Monroe. Turn left, then left again on Hill St. Park along Hill St. and explore the park.

Accessibility: the walking surfaces at Hickory Meadows are gravel and natural-surface trails. They are fairly level for the most part, with mild slopes and a few undulating sections. Trails through the woods at Hickory Hills are natural surfaces, and can be quite hilly.

Restrooms are available at businesses in Traverse City; this area is largely residential.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L4637685?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Boardman Lake

This large body of water in the middle of Traverse City attracts a large variety of birds at most times of the year. From migrating waterfowl in early spring and late fall to resident songbirds through the summer, birders can find something to watch on just about any day. The lake is two miles long, shallow at the south end, and usually freezes over in January and February. There are several access points for birders in cars, as well as the Boardman Lake Loop Trail (BLLT; see below) that walkers and cyclists can follow all the way around the lake. For more trail information, visit <https://traversetrails.org/trails/boardman-lake-loop-trail/>.

Medalie Park (a.k.a. Logan's Landing) (44.735470, -85.615919)

This grassy park is well known as the best access to the south end of Boardman Lake. In late winter and spring, sizable and diverse flocks of diving and dabbling ducks stop in the lake just north of the park. Common Loons frequently linger on the lake, and have attempted to nest. Mute Swans nest here, and Trumpeter Swans are seen occasionally. Check the numerous Canada Geese for the occasional Snow Goose or Cackling Goose in spring and fall. As ice shrinks the area of available open water, Snowy Owls may be seen on the ice. A Peregrine Falcon was seen near here in February 2007. In the Fall of 2018, sandbars and mudflats formed after the removal of Sabin Dam upstream. These flats host several species of shorebirds, possibly including a few Dunlin late in the year. They are periodically covered by high lake levels.

Take the time to follow the paved path along the east side of the park, which follows a side channel of the Boardman River. Warblers, sparrows, and other songbirds frequent the bushes along the water, and Wood Ducks occasionally hang out in the channel. This trail crosses the water along South Airport Road and winds north along the east side of Boardman Lake (see Boardman Lake Loop Trail).

The west side of Logan's Landing (the name of the shopping complex) is well worth a stop. You can cross the Boardman River on a wooden-decked BLLT bridge, then continue on the trail bridge across the cove in the southwest corner of the lake. In spring, it is often teeming with waterfowl, cormorants, swallows, and turtles. In summer and early fall, this bridge gives excellent views of mudflats where migrating shorebirds can be found.

Directions: There are two entrances, as noted above, from South Airport Rd, which is a divided roadway at this point. The entrance to Medalie Park, on the east side of the river, does not have a

traffic light. Note that the entrance to Racquet Club Drive, and the YMCA South (see below), is directly across from the west side of Logan's Landing, but traffic configuration does not allow crossing South Airport Road directly.

Perhaps the easiest way to visit this and areas on the south side of South Airport Road in one trip is to start at YMCA South (below); when you leave, turn right, cross the river and take a quick left into Medalie Park.

Accessibility: the trail surfaces are level and paved. Unfortunately, the trail does not connect to gaps in shoreline vegetation that provide the best views of the lake. In grassy areas, watch for goose droppings. The approaches to the bridge over the Boardman River may be a little steep for those using hand-operated wheelchairs. At times, there might be standing water along or over the paved walking trail to the east.

Restrooms are available at Medalie Park (closed in winter), and nearby fast food establishments.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L859757>

NMC University Center (44.739449, -85.619547)

Owned by Northwestern Michigan College, this facility allows access to the west side of Boardman Lake, and the Boardman Lake Loop Trail. From the north end of the parking lot, birders can look down on rafts of diving ducks in the fall, and scout the tangled vegetation on the steep bank for sparrows and other passerines. During songbird migrations, the brushy thickets along the entrance road are worth a little time.

Note: the building is busy with classes most days of the week. Park at the north edge of the lot to stay out of the way.

Directions: The entrance road, labeled Dendrinis Drive, is on Cass Road. To reach it, take Cass north from South Airport Road, or south from downtown TC. Dendrinis Drive ends at the parking lot.

Accessibility: there is a paved connection from the parking lot to the Boardman Lake Loop Trail.

Restrooms are available at a convenience store south of the University Center, at the intersection with South Airport Road.

Boardman Lake Loop Trail Scenic Overlook (44.749269, -85.618785)

This addition to the BLLT provides access to a cove that seems to be a favorite with diving ducks. During migration and ice-free periods in winter, scan the flocks of Redhead and Greater Scaup for an occasional Canvasback or Surf Scoter. Long-tailed Ducks turn up on Boardman Lake once in a while, and this is one of the best viewing points. A couple hundred feet north on the trail, a spur lets you descend to the Scenic Pier at lake level via stairs.

Directions: From Cass Street in Traverse City, turn east on Sixteenth St. Go east about one block to the intersection with Lake Ridge Drive. Park on the street and walk over to the lake.

Accessibility: the overlook is connected to the BLLT and is paved. The stairs to the Scenic Pier are not accessible to wheeled vehicles.

Restrooms are available at Right Brain Brewery just next door, or at convenience stores on 14th St.

Boardman River Outlet (44.756969, -85.616837)

A wild little corner in the middle of town, this area is a combination of lakeshore and riparian vegetation. In spring and fall, birders can tease migrating warblers, sparrows, flycatchers and thrushes out of the bushes and trees, particularly where the river leaves the lake. A little farther on, the trail gives excellent views of Boardman lake, and you may find loons, mergansers, and other diving ducks. There is good birding along the trail at least as far as the TACS sailing facility. Check the old martin house for nesting Tree Swallows.

Directions: the parking area can be reached via Lake Ave. or 10th St. There is a section designated for trail visitors. Follow the paved path to the Boardman Lake Loop Trail down the hill and bear right to follow the BLT.

Accessibility: the initial section of the trail is fairly steep, and the approaches to the BLLT bridge over the river may exceed a slope that is comfortable for hand-propelled wheelchairs. The parking lot is unpaved.

Restrooms are available in Oryana Food Cooperative during business hours. Don't forget the customary small purchase!

Boardman River at 8th St. (44.760034, -85.616424)

For waterfowl in winter, this is one of the best places to go. When ice has covered Boardman Lake, the river usually remains open, and a variety of ducks get pushed into this stretch of open water. Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser and Mallard often stay through the winter, with Redhead, Canvasback, scaup, and Ring-necked Ducks joining them in late fall and early spring. Wintering finches, robins and sparrows are often found in the streamside brush. To get closer to the river, cross the bridge on 8th St. and go down the stairs or paved path on the north side of the street. This connects to a boardwalk that is an extension of the Boardman Lake Loop Trail. You'll find yourself almost at eye-level with the waterfowl. The ducks may drift to the other side of the river, but don't seem to mind well-mannered humans on the boardwalk. Be aware that the boardwalk is snow- and ice-covered in winter!

Directions: Make your way to the intersection of Eighth St. and Boardman Ave. in Traverse City. About a hundred feet north on Boardman Ave. is the entrance to the Grand Traverse County

Governmental Center. If possible, park on the west edge of the parking lot, overlooking the river. This is one of those locations best visited on a weekend.

Accessibility: the surfaces are paved and level, although snowbanks are usually present when the ducks are here. A low wooden fence may obstruct views of the river from the parking lot. There is ramp access to the river on the west side, reached by crossing the bridge on 8th St. and following the trail on the right, but this surface might be icy or full of snow in the winter.

Restrooms are available at local businesses. One of the closest is Rare Bird Brewpub, on Lake St., just off 8th, west of the bridge. Warm up with an excellent microbrew!

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L2032490?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Hull Park (44.756121, -85.608987)

Hull Park provides another access point at the northeast corner of the lake. Diving ducks seem to linger close to shore here, offering excellent views. This is an excellent vantage point for scoping the north end of the lake. In the breeding season, several species of songbirds nest in the locust trees at the lake's edge.

Directions: from downtown Traverse City, head east on 8th St. to the intersection with Woodmere Ave. Turn south at the light, then right at the first light on Woodmere, which is Hannah Ave. Look for a small parking area just after you cross the railroad tracks.

Accessibility: the area is level. There is a paved connector between the parking area and the BRT, which has two wooden decks for observation by the lake.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L5635050>

Boardman River Valley

This natural area is one of the finest contiguous areas of riparian and riverine habitats in northwest Lower Michigan. It offers wildlife a habitat corridor stretching from well south of the city almost into downtown. It offers birders excellent opportunities for watching from the middle of town to the outskirts. The valley runs from north to south, then turns east a few miles south of Traverse City, where the river runs through the Traverse City State Forest.

A significant portion of the river valley near Traverse City is managed as the Grand Traverse Nature Education Reserve. The Boardman River Nature Center sits almost in the center of the preserve.

By the end of 2018, all three dams upstream of Boardman Lake had been removed in an effort to restore the Boardman to its former channel, and hopefully, former glory. As a result, the riverbanks are in the early stages of revegetation. Bird communities are not as diverse as they were, but given time, the birds will be back.

<https://natureiscalling.org/grand-traverse-natural-education-reserve>

YMCA South (44.7316, -85.6167)

This wetland is a local favorite, and rightly deserves its acclaim. Migrants and breeding birds are attracted to this pond and cattail marsh beside the Boardman River. Waterfowl including geese, swans, dabbling ducks, Ring-necked Ducks, as well as Pied-billed Grebes are frequently found here. Shorebirds sighted regularly include Spotted and Solitary Sandpipers, and both Yellowlegs. The riparian shrubs around the pond and along the river attract a wide variety of swallows, warblers, sparrows, finches and blackbirds. Rusty Blackbirds are spotted every year here. Raptors including accipiters, Merlin and Bald Eagles occasionally fly over. Because the pond is situated behind an office park with lawns, numerous suburban species are common here too.

Directions: From either direction on South Airport Road, turn south at the light onto Racquet Club Drive. Follow it back to the parking lot at the YMCA building and walk back to the pond. Stay alert for cars as you bird, and be aware that traffic on South Airport Rd. is quite heavy at certain times of day.

Accessibility: the driveway is paved and level, but it can be busy with traffic.

Restrooms are available at fast food and convenience stores on South Airport, or across South Airport at Medalie Park.

Boardman River Trail (North end 44.728781, -85.617418; South end 44.708066, -85.623255)

This remarkable trail follows the Boardman River for 1.3 miles, between the YMCA South facility and the Boardman River Nature Center (BRNC). The main trail and its side branches wind through riparian shrubs, cedar forest, mixed northern hardwoods, alongside cattail marshes, and via a boardwalk, through a boggy section near the south end. Take the time to explore the side branches!

Birders are likely to encounter a variety of resident songbirds including flycatchers, finches, wrens, warblers, woodpeckers, and sparrows. The trail crosses a meadow in the southern half where bluebirds and Tree Swallows have nested. Because this area is part of a greater trail system, the contiguous habitat along the river forms a migration corridor, attracting several species of warblers in the spring and fall. Waterfowl and raptors also follow the river, and may be present at any time of year.

At the north end, you will find the trail by parking at the YMCA South parking lot and walking south from the gate. The trail has been raised and improved with gravel. At the south end, the trail meets a paved driveway that was the access to Sabin Dam. Walk up the short, steep hill to the Boardman River Nature Center. Birding with others and dropping off a vehicle at the far end of your walk is a great way to explore this area.

At the northern end, you can make a loop of about 1.25 miles by starting at the YMCA. Bear right (west) as you cross the soccer field immediately south of the parking lot. Enter the woods by the flagpole and low benches. Where you have a choice, bear right. The trail skirts the edge of some small cattail marshes along the west edge of the floodplain, the largest of which is about a

half-acre. This trail connects to the riverside trail in an open area. Turn north and follow the riverside trail back to the parking area.

At the southern end, the Fox Den Trail provides another opportunity for a loop. Start behind the Boardman River Nature Center (see below) and head down the driveway toward the river. Follow the trail downstream (north), and after a tenth of a mile or so, watch for a trail to branch to the left. It enters a stand of cedars and crosses a stream almost immediately. Several species of passerines are usually found here, including warblers in season, and perhaps Winter Wrens. The trail surface switches from forest floor to boardwalk as the ground gets wetter. After the boardwalk ends, the trail will intersect the main Boardman River Trail. Turn right and you will eventually return to the trail along the river, and the base of the hill behind the Nature Center.

Accessibility: the walking surface is forest floor and grassy, depending on the habitat, and mostly level. As mentioned, a boardwalk traverses a wetland in the southern section.

Restrooms are available at the gravel boat-launch area across from the YMCA building (summer only), and the BRNC pavilion at the south end.

Boardman River Nature Center (44.707983, -85.625404)

This is a favorite with local birders. eBirders have listed 165 species found here. Located at the midpoint, more or less, of the Boardman River Nature Education Reserve, the Nature Center provides birders with answers to questions, restrooms, and bird feeders. Behind the Center, just past the feeders (check for woodpeckers, juncos, titmice, sparrows and Pine Siskins in season), the trail heads quickly to a platform overlooking the former site of Sabin Dam. In 2018, the dam was removed in a larger effort to restore the Boardman River to its free-flowing condition. Because of this change, several waterfowl species on eBird checklists are no longer likely to be found here.

From here, the trail descends to the level of the river. Another platform, at river level, can provide excellent views of herons, Belted Kingfishers and Spotted Sandpipers. The trail continues along the river, through a few pockets of hemlock with Yellow Birch on shadier exposures, and oak and pine on the sunnier slopes. Birds to watch for include thrushes, warblers, sparrows, kinglets, and woodpeckers.

After about 0.3 mile, the trail climbs back up the hill to another platform, where you can look out over the Boardman. Take a few minutes here; foxes and deer may be visible on the far side of the river in the early morning. Eagles, Osprey, and Trumpeter Swans have been known to use this area.

To return to the Nature Center on the more level trail, follow the trail as it winds through stands of young pine instead of dipping down to the pond.

Accessibility: the walking surfaces are a natural trail with wooden steps in the steep places, and boardwalks over the wet places.

Directions: From Traverse City, follow Cass St. south across South Airport Road. After another 2 miles, the road crosses a railroad track. The Nature Center is on the left immediately after the crossing,

The trail along the river can also be reached from the park just south of the school bus garage (44.702898, -85.624959). This area serves as parking for bus drivers, so it's quite busy in the early mornings and afternoons on weekdays.

Restrooms are located in the Center, and in the pavilion out back, though these may be closed in late fall and winter.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1365219>

Lone Pine Trail (44.6843°, -85.6256°)

This area along the Boardman River has been impacted heavily by the dam removal project described above. The landscape on the side of the river opposite the trail basically was stripped of vegetation as of Sept. 2017, but has since been recolonized and replanted. The trail side of the river is largely untouched. Instead of a small lake at the end of the trail, there is now a river finding its way through the exposed bottom, complete with old stumps and mounds of sediment. At present, you may expect the songbirds, woodpeckers, and other species typically found in second-growth forest and open meadow. Belted Kingfishers and Rough-winged Swallows may continue to breed along the river if suitable banks remain. Keep an eye directed upward for passing Bald Eagles and other raptors, as well as migrating waterfowl.

Directions: From Traverse City, head south on Cass Road. (The Boardman River Nature Center will be on your left if you aren't already starting from there.) Where Cass Road meets Keystone Road at a light, turn right. After a quarter mile or so, start watching for the small parking area on the right side. The paved trail leads downriver from the parking lot.

Accessibility: The trail surface is paved, and level for the most part, with a short section of moderate grade near the parking area. The trail has a few bumps and sunken spots along the edges.

No restrooms are found in the immediate area.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1365210>

Shumsky's Landing, Boardman River (44.6508, -85.5902)

Shumsky Road is a quiet little dirt road that runs between a mixed pine and hardwood forest and a brushy wet meadow on the floodplain of the Boardman River. Just about at the end of the public road is a DNR-maintained canoe launch and parking area.

Known locally as the place to go for nesting Golden-winged and Blue-winged Warblers, the willows and alders along the river and across the road attract dozens of species of songbirds,

raptors, waterfowl, Ruffed Grouse, and woodpeckers. eBirders have listed 119 species from the area. The morning chorus in spring will include, most likely, Baltimore Oriole, Purple Finch, White-throated Sparrow, Indigo Bunting, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Common Yellowthroat and House Wren.

Directions: From the west, follow Beitner Rd. from U.S. 31/37 (Chum's Corners), or from the east follow Keystone Rd (farther south from Lone Pine Trail). They meet at a roundabout with River Rd., which goes south. Take River Road, and at 2.3 miles, turn west on Shumsky Rd. Look for the little brown canoe launch sign.

Accessibility: the walking surface is a hard-packed dirt road.

An outhouse is located in the boat launch parking area.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1569546?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Mayfield Pond Park (44.626410, -85.531444)

This little wetland may be another underappreciated wonder. eBirders have only reported 52 species on 13 checklists, perhaps because it's a little out of the way. By the look of the habitat, more effort would yield great results.

The pond and park were originally created as a fishing spot by a few folks passionate about fly-fishing. A small tributary of the Boardman River was partially diverted and dammed to create the pond. The main area of the park is grassy with a few large trees, perfect for nesting Baltimore Orioles. Benches provide comfortable pond-viewing. On the far bank of the pond, a strip of cattails is flanked by cedar and spruce. Behind that, the land rises quickly to a forested upland. If you're in the mood for a walk after checking out the pond, head back toward the bridge to the parking area, but turn right before you cross. You'll find yourself flanked by aspen and spruce on the left, and alder and conifers on the right. The clearing where the creek splits would be a fantastic place to linger for a while on a spring morning. Just upstream, cedar, spruce and hardwoods come down to the creek.

To continue on the walk, cross the metal bridge and head up the trail. It will lead you through mature beech and maple, and up to the top of the hill. After a hundred yards or so of second-growth aspen and maple, you'll come to a platform overlooking the pond. The trail continues around the edge of the hill and meets a wider track. This leads you back down the hill, while giving you mid-canopy views into a stand of hemlocks, perfect for looks at Blackburnian Warblers.

The trail eventually crosses the creek below the pond, via some wooden steps and a footbridge. The total loop is about 1/3 of a mile.

As mentioned, there are few reports from this area. eBird checklists and historical records confirm presence and past breeding of Common Nighthawks, and Whip-poor-wills have been found here. Common breeders and migrants can definitely be expected.

Directions: Head south from Traverse City on Garfield Road 9.4 miles after crossing South Airport Rd., or 11.5 from Front St., and you'll come to the little village of Mayfield. Turn right on E. Blair Townhall Rd., then take the first left. The park is on the right. If you miss that turn on Garfield Road, take a right on Church St., after the Country Store. Turn right after one block (there's only one), then left on Mill St. to the park.

(Note: the park is about 5 miles from Shumsky's Landing if you follow River Road out to its intersection with Garfield Rd. and turn right.)

Accessibility: the walking surfaces around the pond are grassy. The trail is forest floor with wooden steps in the steep places.

An outhouse is present at the picnic pavilion. There is a convenience store another ½ mile south on Garfield road.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1456410>

Grand Traverse Bay Access Points

Aside from the gorgeous blue water of summer, what draws birders to the Bay are waterfowl and gulls. Fortunately, this doesn't conflict with tourist season. Loons (Common and rarely Red-throated), Double-crested Cormorants, grebes, scoters and other "sea ducks", mergansers (including Red-breasted in spring), and an assortment of diving ducks can be spotted from locations on shore. Among the usual Ring-billed and Herring Gulls, watch for the infrequent Iceland, Great Black-backed, Lesser Black-backed, and Glaucous Gulls. Bonaparte's Gulls and Caspian Terns are more frequently seen in spring. Caspian Terns nest up the bay on Gull Island (yes, really) near Northport. Bald Eagles may be present throughout much of the year, as long as the fishing is good.

Clinch Park Marina

Directions: From east or west, proceed toward downtown Traverse City and turn north at the light at the foot of Union St. Parking is a challenge in the busy summer season, but if you're here for waterfowl, you won't have a problem. Park by the Open Space and walk to the water on the north side of the open area, or drive east to the marina parking lot and walk out on the pier. Both places afford wide open views of West Grand Traverse Bay. In addition to the water birds, Snow Buntings have been seen from time to time in the Open Space. Barn, Tree and Rough-winged Swallows are frequently seen around the Marina in spring and summer.

NOTE: In winter, walkways near the water can be VERY ICY! Proceed with caution!
Also, parking is metered except on Sundays.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are paved.

Restrooms are available at the Pavilion in Clinch Park, but may be closed in the winter. In that case, head for downtown.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1305694>

Greilickville Harbor Park and Discovery Pier (44.786472, -85.637812)

The “old coal dock” has been converted to a public space thanks to the efforts of [Rotary of Traverse City](#), ensuring waterfront access. In the summer, you can wander among the masts of the locally-operated schooners. In the winter, you can freeze in the wind and sort through the rafts of diving ducks that linger over the shoals just off the dock. From late fall through mid-winter, concentrations of over 1000 ducks have been seen, predominantly Redhead, with Common Goldeneye, scaup, Bufflehead and Common Mergansers mixed in. Check the flocks of Canada Geese just to make sure a Cackling Goose hasn't slipped in. South of Discovery Pier about a quarter mile, check the big willow at the water's edge. It's a favorite perching spot for Bald Eagles in winter and early spring.

Directions: Discovery Pier lies on M-22, 0.8 miles north of the intersection with M-72. There are a few parking spaces on the right side of the road, with more room across the road at the Discovery Center, or just north of the Pier at the Greilickville Harbor Park (though this is closed in the winter). Access onto the pier is closed in winter, but you can bird from the beach and the land-side of the harbor by the schooners.

WARNING: M-22 is very busy! Cross carefully and at your own risk!! (You'll wish you had wings.)

Restrooms are available at convenience stores north and south of the Pier.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L883028>

North end of Four Mile Road

Public access to East Grand Traverse Bay in the fall and winter can be very limited. The numerous parks and boat launches tend to close for the winter. The hotels and other businesses that line U.S. 31 tend to frown on the use of parking lots by non-customers. The north end of Four Mile Road is one public site that allows access to the water late in the year. Enter this short section of street at the traffic light at U.S. 31 and Four Mile Road. Scan the bay to the east and west.

Accessibility: walking surfaces may be icy in the winter. The pavement ends at the beach, which is private on either side of the access.

Restrooms are available at the convenience store across U.S. 31.

A hotspot page for a nearby location on East Bay: <http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1370220>

Traverse City, Southwest side

Grand Traverse Commons

This large area of public land on the west side of Traverse City contains the former State Mental Hospital, and several buildings have been successfully redeveloped without losing their characteristic architecture. The grounds feature an arboretum-like collection of trees, so don't be surprised to see something out of place. The buildings are surrounded by wilder areas, from mature hardwood forest stretching to the top of the ridge to the west, to damp level lowlands filled with cattails. Kid's Creek winds through this part of the Commons. Open areas of different sizes mark what were farm fields (the State Hospital used to have a working farm). A thick stand of Norway Spruce is located along Division St., and a stand of cedars lines a small stream, tucked between the hills. The area also has some unusual hydrology, including an artesian spring on top of a small hill, and several perched wetlands on the hill above the main trailhead.

As a large area with varied habitats, the Commons hosts an amazing diversity of bird life.

eBirders have found over 100 species here. In appropriate habitats, one may expect most of the local and migrating passerines and woodpeckers. Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe call from the wetlands in spring. Several species of hawks and falcons have been recorded, as have Barred and Great Horned Owls. Turkey Vultures have been known to roost on or in one of the old buildings, and Chimney Swifts occupy many of the old chimneys.

It is worth noting that the area is very popular with walkers, mountain bikers and cross-country skiers. To get a little peace while birding, it's best to go early!

Directions (since this is a large area, GPS coordinates will be given for several access points):

The easiest access to this rabbit warren of drives labeled with colors is from West Silver Lake Road, across from Franke Road. From U.S. 31 a.k.a. Division St., turn west on W. Silver Lake Road, then right at the first traffic light. Turn left after only 200 feet or so onto a paved lane that leads to the Historic Barns Park and the Botanical Garden (44.748372, -85.647361). Continue ahead to wander the grassy areas of the Commons. To reach the main trailhead (44.751518, -85.646615), turn right from the Barns Park. After a 100-yard journey down a bone-jarring, suspension-testing dirt road (5 mph limit suggested!), park across from the building with the copper roof.

For more direct access to the forested slopes of the upper part of the Commons, go to the small parking lot at the western end of Gray Drive, behind the water tower. There is another trailhead along N. Long Lake Road (follow W. Front St. out of Traverse City; 44.755293, -85.654690).

The best access and parking for the lower, wetter section is south of the old power house (44.753257, -85.642917). Use the unpaved parking spots not marked for Village residents. A level, paved trail (Buffalo Ridge Trail) leads east and crosses a grass-and-gravel two-track. Kid's Creek winds through this area as well. Additional parking spots are available in the lot just across Silver Drive.

Accessibility: walking surfaces range from a wide, paved trail to level gravel or grassy two-tracks (old farm roads) to well-packed trails in the forest. There is a significant elevation change from the main trailhead to the upper part of the trail system! Some trails are moderately steep. Others can be damp and muddy most of the year.

Restroom facilities are limited! If businesses around the Commons are closed, they are nonexistent! Your best bet is a nearby grocery or convenience store on or near Division St. (not 7-11).

Security concerns: encampments of homeless persons may be found in areas of dense vegetation near Division St. Traverse City's crime statistics do not show this to be a high-crime area.

<http://www.garfield-twp.com/gtcommons.asp>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1506768>

Miller Creek Nature Reserve (44.7223, -85.6355)

The area may be one of the best under-utilized spots in the region. It encompasses the upper reaches of a side drainage that connects to the Boardman River, and habitats include a small pond, brushy and wet floodplain, an extensive cattail marsh, a hardwood forest, and a cedar swamp forest.

While the species list is rather typical for the region, the preserve seems quite wild, considering the Grand Traverse Mall is nearby, and the walk can be very enjoyable. The cattail marsh may hold American Bitterns, and Winter Wrens have been found in the cedar swamp. More inventory work is needed for this site.

For a relatively short loop through varied habitats, start at the sign kiosk behind Aldi's. Go down to signpost number 6, then go to 10, over to 3, then 2 and 1 and you'll be back up at the parking lot. Take time to stop at the pond between 2 and 1. The boardwalk section through the cedar swamp is between signposts 4 and 3.

Directions: From South Airport Road in Traverse City, turn into the Grand Traverse Crossing complex across from the mall. Find your way past Burger King and behind the building with Aldi's Market and Planet Fitness (on the west end). The trailhead is marked with a sign.

Accessibility: the trail surface is forest floor, with a boardwalk traversing the cedar swamp. The beginning section is a bit steep, but the trail levels out on the valley floor. Several sections are damp, and the trail winds and climbs around trees and cutbanks as it follows the stream on the section near the parking area.

Restrooms are available at the aforementioned Burger King.

[Miller Creek Nature Reserve](#) (from Grand Traverse County)

[Click here for trail map!](#)

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L909508>

Kid's Creek Park (44.7352, -85.6479)

This riparian area is the product of restoration efforts on what was an Oleson Farms buffalo pasture. Extensive planting along Kid's Creek has created a stand of willow and tag alder, with cedars and several large cottonwoods. The gravel trail is laid out roughly in a figure-8. Watch for Common Yellowthroat and Yellow Warblers as you wind through the thick vegetation. On the north side of the creek, the trail follows the edge of the old pasture, so watch for meadowlarks, Savannah Sparrows, and other birds of more open country. As you proceed downstream, go slowly to avoid flushing any ducks or wading birds that might be at the fishing pond. In spring and summer, Warbling Vireos frequently sing from the cottonwoods by the pond.

On the west side of the trail loop, you can connect to a trail that circles the field south of the "new" YMCA West location, and the Buffalo Ridge Trail that runs north toward the TC West Middle School. Common grassland species can be found here, including American Woodcock on spring evenings. Open-country fall migrants like Snow Buntings and Common Redpolls have been found here too.

Directions: Head south on Division Street (U.S. 31 South) and turn right into the Kohl's parking lot, just south of the Great Wolf Lodge. The trailhead is on the west side of the building.

Accessibility: the trail surface is gravel or boardwalk, and is mostly level, with a downhill section at the start, and a short moderate grade on the section that connects to the Buffalo Creek Trail.

Restrooms are available in nearby stores.

[Kid's Creek Park](#)

[Click here for trail map!](#)

Buffalo Ridge Trail

This paved trail is a part of the TART network around Traverse City. As suggested by the name, it traverses fields of a former buffalo farm. At the south end, the trail follows the edge of a grassy field, with a spur overlooking a small cattail marsh. The fields are wet in the spring, and dependably host American Woodcock in April and early May. As you travel north, you'll pass the connector from Kid's Creek Park. Expect blackbirds and Eastern Meadowlarks, along with an assortment of suburban species. After passing the parking lot for the YMCA (a favorite access point), there is a narrow band of willows on the west side. From here, the trail climbs to an intersection with the access road to the middle school. Upland Sandpipers and American Kestrels have been seen in the fields in this section.

Directions:

In addition to Kid's Creek Park described above, the parking lot for the Grand Traverse Bay YMCA provides parking and access (44.736223, -85.652037). To reach the YMCA, proceed south on West Silver Lake Road from Division St. (U.S. 31) in Traverse City. After 1.6 miles, the "Y" will be on the left.

Accessibility: the trail is paved and level, but one or two sections exceed a 5% slope. North of the school access road, the trail drops steeply to another level section.

Restrooms are available at local businesses.

[Click here for trail map](#)

Chum's Village area and Turtle Creek Stadium (44.679360, -85.662392)

Also called Pit Spitters' Park for the local minor league baseball team, this area is under development. Quite a bit of new construction has occurred since the first edition of this guide was published. Unused weedy and grassy areas are accessible by paved roads. Species seen in the past include Eastern Meadowlark, grassland sparrows, Red-tailed Hawk, and a small flock of Brewer's Blackbirds. Snowy Owls used to be found here regularly, but the development seems to have changed their patterns.

Directions:

Follow U.S. 31 south of Traverse City, 3.3 miles from the intersection with South Airport Road. Turn right on Chum's Village Drive west of U.S. 31 (look for the large sign on the west side of the road), just north of Chum's Corners.

Drive slowly along the looped roads, checking fields and rooftops. Also explore the north end of Stadium Drive by the ballpark. Exit the area by way of Heartland Drive S to East Silver Lake Road, or by W Commerce Drive south to U.S. 31. Similar grassland habitat can also be reached on Rennie School Road; from East Silver Lake Road, go north about 0.25 mile and turn east on Rennie School Road. Continue east back to U.S. 31 South.

Accessibility: the surface is paved road, with possible excursions into ditches and grassy or weedy flat ground.

Restrooms are available at nearby fast food and convenience stores.

Interlochen area

Ellis Lake and beaver pond (44.662494, -85.744203)

This area is an excellent example of a small lake bordered by cedar wetlands and mixed hardwood uplands, quite typical of habitats found in the wilder parts of northern Lower Michigan. Birders can find a mix of wetland and forest species.

After parking at the DNR-maintained boat launch, walk back up the road about 0.1 mile and turn left onto the ATV trail. This quickly leads into the cedar swamp, and the trail becomes a little wet. Under most conditions, there is room to walk around the water holes and stay dry. Take your time here, listening for Ruffed Grouse drumming and Winter Wrens singing in the spring. After about 0.4 miles, the trail climbs a small rise and the forest switches to aspen and young maple. Soon you'll see glimpses of the beaver pond through the trees. The trail drops down to a viewing

spot on the edge of the pond. Check for Wood Ducks, nesting Canada Geese, and Ring-necked Ducks in migration.

Directions: From Traverse City, head south on U.S. 31 through Grawn. After 2.6 miles, turn right on Ellis Lake Road. The road ends at the boat launch.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are forest floor and an ATV trail, wet and sandy in different places.

Restrooms can be found at businesses in Grawn or Interlochen Corners, 1.3 miles farther west.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4570669>

Lake Dubonnet

For those seeking a wilder birding experience, this is a great place. The lake is an impoundment surrounded by state land. For the most part, the forest is made up of second-growth maple and pine and older aspen with a few large white pines and oaks scattered throughout. Birders can expect a variety of woodpeckers, flycatchers, warblers, vireos, and other forest songbirds. Ruffed Grouse are also likely, along with Bald Eagle and Red-shouldered Hawk. Barred and Great Horned Owls have both been recorded here.

A boat ramp (see Directions) provides access to the lake, though it faces east so the sun will be in your face in the mornings. Several species of dabbling and diving ducks can be found during migration. Canada Goose, Common Loon, and Trumpeter Swans are present through the breeding season. Sandhill Cranes inhabit the marshy shorelines around the lake.

The area of the dam is worth a visit. Upstream, the open water is lined by forest. Downstream, the outlet passes through a wet area with alders, cattails and other wetland plants.

Directions: From Traverse City, head south on U.S. 31 past Interlochen Corners. On the way, pull off and check the osprey platform in the wetland on the south side of the highway (44.662901, -85.713157), west of Grawn. Turn north on Gondor Road, 7.3 miles west of Chum's Corner, just past the Interlochen Golf Course. Gondor Road goes past a couple roads that lead into a subdivision, then turns to dirt.

Note: from here on, the roads are dirt, less than two lanes wide, and not plowed. They may be impassable until the snow melts in the woods (mid-April?). Four wheel drive, or at least higher ground clearance is suggested in the spring due to the numerous wet spots.

To reach the boat ramp (44.682574, -85.797783), continue north on the dirt road, called Campground Road after it crosses Fewins/ Mud Lake Road. A right turn at the campground entrance will take you to the boat ramp.

From there, the dam (44.683846, -85.807699) can be reached by returning south to the intersection of dirt roads. Turn right onto Fewins Road, then bear right two times, and follow Camp Trail Road north. Signs will direct you to the Trail Camp, and you may see signs of horses. The dam is 0.7 mile north of the second right.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are dirt roads and forest trails.

Another note: this area is open to hunting! Wear some orange clothing if you visit in October or November.

An outhouse is available at the campground, though it may be closed later in the season. There is a convenience store back at Interlochen Corners.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L322643?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Bridge Pond (parking at 44.644063, -85.786312)

This area is owned by Interlochen Arts Academy, and used by science and art classes. The trail leads in from Riley Road, through mixed hardwood forest and a stand of red pine, to a new boardwalk and platform on the edge of the lake. Birders can look forward to finding forest species such as nuthatches, flycatchers and warblers, then songbirds that frequent brushy areas as they approach the lake. From the platform, expect dabbling and diving ducks like Bufflehead and Ring-necked Ducks in migration.

Directions: From U.S. 31 at Interlochen Corners, turn south on M-37. Turn right on Riley Road, with the putt-putt golf course on the corner. At 0.7 miles, you'll see an old wooden cabin with a circular drive on the left. Pull in and park on the drive. The trail leads into the woods, and when it forks, bear right.

Note: this site is not maintained in winter.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are natural forest trails and a wooden boardwalk.

Restrooms can be found at businesses around Interlochen Corners.

Old Mission Peninsula

Northwestern Michigan College, Front Street Campus (entrance at 44.764480, -85.588761)

On a quiet morning, the NMC campus can offer quite a few bird species in a variety of habitats. Part of the campus is a stand of mature White Pine mixed with Red Pine and a few hardwoods. Merlins have nested here in the past, and Pine Warblers often sing here in the spring. In the mature oaks just to the east of campus, watch and listen for Red-headed Woodpeckers. Red-bellied and Pileated Woodpeckers are often found anywhere on campus. Flocks of chickadees, nuthatches and titmice are present year-round, and warblers and thrushes migrate through in spring and fall.

A brushy wetland is located between Cherry or Elm parking lots, just past Cedar lot on College Drive. Pick the side that allows viewing with the sun behind you (Elm in the morning, Cherry in the afternoon). Blackbirds, sparrows and Yellow Warblers frequent the wetland.

At the east end of College Drive (the road through the campus) lies a lowland forest of dying ash, old aspen, red maple, and hemlock. There is no trail access, but you can easily explore the edges from Maple parking lot and the Oleson Center. Barred Owls have been seen here on several occasions.

Directions:

Enter from the light at College Drive and Front Street, following College Drive around to the Cedar parking lot. Metered visitor spaces are available here, but are not necessary on the weekends or after 5:00 pm. Walk between buildings to the south to the large stand of White Pine between the campus buildings and Front Street.

Note: Classes usually end in early May, so after that time, the campus is less active and parking restrictions end for the summer.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are level sidewalks and paved parking lots.

Restrooms can be found in campus buildings, if they are open.

Pelizzari Natural Area (44.786254, -85.574303)

This area near the base of Old Mission Peninsula is very popular with walkers, including many with dogs. The section near the parking area is a long rectangle that used to be an orchard. The vegetation is that of recovering, low-fertility soils: knapweed and some grasses, with a few planted spruces and small trees. Though open, it seems to lack the grass and grassland species one might expect. The various loops of trail pass through young to middle-age forest as you proceed farther to the east. Older aspen are dying and giving way to maple and oak. In this section, watch for woodpeckers, thrushes, vireos, and warblers in season. Near the eastern edge of the property, small meadows interrupt the forest. Check the nesting boxes for Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds.

When you reach the eastern part of the property, bear southeast, to a section attached to the main property by a corner (see the trail maps along the way). This area features one of the finest stands of older forest in the county. Large maple, hemlock and beech form a canopy broken only by fallen trees lost in recent storms. There are even a few large Yellow Birch. Expect thrushes, nuthatches, warblers and other forest passerines.

Note: in 2018, several large oaks were removed to prevent the spread of Oak Wilt disease.

Directions:

From the intersection of Front St. and Garfield Ave. in Traverse City, head north on Garfield. Very shortly, the road bends and becomes Peninsula Drive. At the second traffic light, bend right onto Center Road. Follow Center Road 1.3 miles north, and look for a small gravel parking lot on the right (east side).

Accessibility: the walking surface is natural, either a path worn in the field, or forest floor. It follows the contours of the land, and is rather steep in places.

Restrooms are available at businesses in Traverse City, including the Burger King at Front & Garfield.

<http://www.gtrlc.org/recreation-events/preserve/pelizzari-natural-area/>

Pyatt Lake Preserve (44.9028, -85.5255)

This under-birded gem is well worth the short drive out from Traverse City, particularly in the spring. Second-growth mixed hardwood forest surrounds a small lake and complex of shrubby wetlands. Sections of the trail wind through stands of hemlock as well. Observation platforms allow comfortable and quiet study of the lake and wetland.

Birders can expect a wide variety of breeding and migrating songbirds and woodpeckers, including several species of warblers and thrushes, plus herons, waterfowl, Sora, and Barred Owl. The flute-like song of the Wood Thrush rewards the early riser!

Directions: Take M-37 N/ Center Rd to Seven Hills Rd in Peninsula Township (a.k.a. Old Mission Peninsula). Turn left on Seven Hills Rd. to Bowers Harbor Rd. After a left on Bowers Harbor Rd., bear slightly right on Neahtawanta Rd. After 0.4 miles, take Pyatt Rd. to the right. Follow this dirt, seasonal road and watch for the parking area on the right.

Note: access is limited in winter; Pyatt Road is not plowed! In Spring 2020, some trails were flooded due to high water levels on the Great Lakes.

Accessibility: The trail surface has been improved for universal access from the parking lot to the two platforms. There is a length of forest-floor trail connecting the two areas if you want to walk the loop.

There is an outhouse at the boat launch near the intersection of Bowers Harbor and Neahtawanta Roads. Facilities are also available at the market in Mapleton, just a mile or so to the north.

<https://www.gtrlc.org/recreation-events/preserve/pyatt-lake-the-bill-carls-nature-preserve/>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L5464949?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Old Mission Lighthouse Park (44.989960, -85.480708)

At the tip of Old Mission Peninsula, this forested park attracts spring migrants as they wait for favorable winds to cross Grand Traverse Bay. In spring and summer, the trail through the mature mixed forest is good for thrushes, Eastern Wood Pewee, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, vireos, and several warblers. A pair of Barred Owls has bred here in recent years. Most of the human visitors frequent the lighthouse and the beach. Here, you'll find Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, Caspian Tern in the breeding season, and perhaps other beach-goers like shorebirds and pipits, most often in low-water years.

A bit south of the park, the village of Old Mission provides access to East Bay at Haserot Park (44.961599, -85.485443). Check for waterfowl, loons and the occasional Bald Eagle in season.

Directions:

From the intersection of Front St. and Garfield Ave. in Traverse City, follow M-37 north. The park is 18 miles from town, at the tip of the peninsula. You can't miss it.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are a paved trail near the lighthouse, and natural forest-floor paths.

An outhouse is located near the parking lot. Other amenities, such as the Old Mission General Store, may be found in the charming village of Old Mission, just south and east of the park.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L1197287?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

To the East

Reffitt Nature Preserve (44.743875, -85.540433)

This property, owned by the [Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy](#), preserves an area of “dune and swale” topography along East Grand Traverse Bay. The dunes are slight rises, only a few feet above the alternating swales, low areas with moister soils, or enough water to have wetland vegetation. Thus, oak canopy with white pine understory and a shrub layer of huckleberry alternates with cedar in some places, and tag alder and cattail in others.

The trail system consists of two loops: a 0.6 mile loop that follows two old dunes in an out-and-back fashion, and a 0.9 mile loop that traverses Mitchell Creek and surrounding wetland. To make the most of the mix of habitats, and to avoid parking headaches, start at the main parking area accessible from Oak Drive. Start on the loop to the south of the power line. When you get to marker post #3, make your way around the big loop (trail maps are posted at each intersection). Beyond marker #6, the swales are traversed by boardwalks.

Directions: From Traverse City, head east (technically north) on U.S. 31. Just over 3 miles from the intersection with Garfield Road, turn south on Four Mile Road. After crossing the railroad tracks, take the first right on Oak Drive. Proceed through the subdivision to the dirt driveway and well-marked parking area.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are natural forest floor and boardwalks, and level for the most part.

Restrooms are available at the convenience store at Four Mile Road and U.S. 31.

<http://www.gtrlc.org/recreation-events/preserve/reffitt-nature-preserve-george-ada-reffitt-nature-preserve/>

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L2124336?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Mitchell Creek Meadows Nature Preserve (44.727124, -85.554600)

Recently made accessible by the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy, this 225-acre area is full of potential. The overall area is marshy, including cattail marshes and wet meadows, with slightly higher elevations dominated by shrubs. The area used to be a golf course, and the Conservancy is actively working to restore native vegetation communities. The trail is a combination of crushed stone and boardwalks. It begins at a parking lot just outside the gate. If you bear left at a small pond, you'll pass a small grove of cedars. Check for species sheltering in the grove, especially in winter. To follow the rest of the trail system, bear right at the pond. The trail winds along the boundary between meadow and shrubs, crossing wet areas, and leading to a platform overlooking a large area of moist soils and shrubs, flanked by cedar, spruce and some hardwoods mixed in. An inactive Bald Eagle nest is visible in a tall deciduous tree. From the platform, the trail loops back to the driveway near the Conservation Center. You can cross the driveway and follow the trail back to the parking lot. This area should yield a wide variety of perching birds, open-country raptors, and flyover waterfowl. In early spring, birders should be able to find American Woodcock and Wilson's Snipe.

Directions: from Traverse City, head east on U.S. 31 (Munson Ave.). Turn south on Three Mile Road. The driveway to the GTRLC headquarters is 0.6 mile south of the intersection with South Airport Road. Park at the first lot by the gate, and you can walk the accessible trail back to the building and the rest of the trail system.

Accessibility: the crushed stone trail and boardwalks are designed for all-person access, and the parking lot is paved.

Restrooms are available at the intersections of Three Mile road and U.S. 31 to the north, and at Three Mile and Hammond Roads to the south.

<https://www.gtrlc.org/recreation-events/preserve/mitchell-creek-meadows-the-don-and-jerry-oleson-nature-preserve/>

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L23199345?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

Williamsburg Meijer fields (44.769611, -85.484732)

This is another spot to bird while the birding's good. The "outlot" fields may be developed at some point in the future. The short-grass field west of the Meijer store can attract Upland Sandpipers and other shorebirds, particularly if it's wet, Lapland Longspurs, and grassland sparrows. Occasional flocks of Canada Geese can be found here too, during migration. There are two ponds near the field; both are worth checking for waterfowl and shorebirds in migration. Surrounding the grassy field are large fields of unmanaged vegetation that attract numerous

species such as Eastern Meadowlark and Bobolink, Northern Harrier, Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks, and on a few occasions, Northern Shrike.

Directions: From Traverse City, head north on U.S. 31 to Acme. Turn east on M-72. Within a mile, turn right off the traffic circle. Proceed around the field; it's easy to pull off the road along the back side. Walk back to the pond in the southwest corner.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are paved road, grass, and a bark-chip trail around one pond. There is one short, particularly steep section of this trail.

Restrooms are available inside the Meijer store.

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L5100100?yr=all&m=&rank=mrec>

TART trail, eastern end (44.772484, -85.444691)

This 1.7 mile “orphan” section of the Traverse Area Recreational Trail passes along wetlands associated with Yuba Creek, stands of pine, second-growth forest, and open fields. Birders have reported almost 100 species from this area, including several species of sparrows, Sandhill Crane and Upland Sandpiper. This might be one of the more likely places in Grand Traverse County to find Field Sparrows. Most reports have come from May through July, since the trail is snow-covered in the winter months. Note that this section of trail does not connect to the rest of the TART; cyclists can make the connection by roads.

Directions: parking for this section of the TART trail is on M-72. Head east from U.S. 31 in Acme for 2.9 miles, and look for an unpaved parking area on the south side of M-72 immediately before crossing the railroad tracks.

The closest restrooms are at the Meijer store, just west on M-72.

Accessibility: the trail is paved and level, with slight changes in grade. The parking area, as mentioned, is unpaved.

Nearest birding spot: check out the fields around the Meijer store while you're in the neighborhood.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L1579546>

From here, connect with the Sunset Coast Birding Trail (<http://www.sunsetcoastbirdingtrail.org/>) at Deepwater Point and Petobego Marsh.

Southeast Grand Traverse County, with a stop in Wexford County

Clous & Schneider Roads (44.599460, -85.615113)

Located in southern Grand Traverse County, west of the village of Kingsley, this intersection of roads in farm country has become a favorite among local birders. These roads meet in a low area, with small wetlands on three corners. The surrounding farms grow mainly corn and hay, so grassy fields are mixed with cultivated land. All the land in the area is private, so please be respectful and bird from the roadsides.

The proximity of wetlands and open country uplands attracts a wide variety of bird species. Blackbirds, killdeer, snipe and other species frequent the wetlands, while meadowlarks, several species of sparrows, Sandhill Cranes, Horned Larks and others inhabit the fields. Canada Geese are regular, and Snow Geese have been reported during migration. Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks are often found in season. Bald Eagles may be found in early spring. Flocks of American Pipits have also been reported in fall migration. During the summer of 2017, several Dickcissels were reported in the area. A small colony of Purple Martins nests at the farm on the northeast corner, but the martin house is near the farm house, so catch your views as the birds fly over the area, rather than staring at the house with binoculars.

Directions: From Traverse City, head south on M-37 from Chum's Corner. Turn left on Clous Road 5 miles south of Chum's Corner. Schneider Road crosses Clous two miles to the east. Park as far off the road as you can; there is enough room on the shoulders.

Accessibility: walking (standing) surfaces are gravel roadsides.

Restrooms are back around Chum's Corner, or in Kingsley.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L7048843>

Headquarters Lake, Fife Lake Twp (44.545061, -85.359973)

While well off the beaten path, this area is worth a visit. A narrow seasonal road gives access to a fairly large wetland complex, lake and nearby wet forest. The surrounding area is drier, with mixed maple and pine forest, and some oaks. This mosaic of habitats creates excellent habitat for a variety of birds, including waterfowl, flycatchers, warblers, woodpeckers, vireos, thrushes and edge-dwellers like Baltimore Orioles and American Robins. This location is not an eBird hotspot, but could be with more attention.

To reach this little-known treasure, make your way to the village of Fife Lake and head south on U.S. 31 for 1.6 miles, then turn left on Conservation Road. There are several wide spots and pull-offs once you get to the lake, but these may be used as camping spots. Park as best you can without infringing on the privacy of others.

Note: take your four-wheel-drive or high-clearance vehicle! Most of the road is fine, but you may find a higher spot between the tracks, or some soft sand.

There are no restrooms out here. How do you feel about the woods?

Accessibility: the road is fairly firm and level for the most part near the lake. Parking areas may or may not be level. If walking is difficult, consider birding from the vehicle.

MDOT Wetland (44.446166, -85.459703)

Located in Wexford County, south of Traverse City about 30 miles, this unmarked wetland along a dirt road is worth the drive. From the moment you turn onto N 37 Road, you'll know you're in great bird habitat. Buttermilk Creek crosses the road about ¼ mile south of the turn, and you enter mixed cattail and alder wetland, with numerous snags and live trees. A bit farther south, the wetland gives way to hay fields on the east side and a cattail marsh to the west. It's all private land, so bird from the road; there seems to be little traffic.

Look for dabbling ducks, geese, Pied-billed Grebes, Sandhill Cranes, Sora, several kinds of herons, including bitterns and possibly Great Egret, gulls, shorebirds, blackbirds, Swamp Sparrows, Marsh Wrens, and others. Barn, Tree and Cliff Swallows inhabit the local farms, and Bobolinks nest in the hay fields. Several warblers and other sparrows can be found in season. Short trails lead through the grass to the edge of the pond near the northeast corner, even though MDOT signs warn against trespassing. Vegetation has grown along the edge of the actual pond, so viewing options are limited.

Directions: From Traverse City and Chum's Corner, follow M-37 south about 15 miles to W Center Rd (a left turn where M-37 curves to the right). Continue on W Center Rd for 4.9 miles, then turn right onto Blackman Rd. At the "T" intersection, turn left (east) onto County Line Rd. The next significant right turn is N 29 ½ Rd; turn right and follow it about 5 miles to E 10 Rd, where you will turn left. After about 3 miles, turn right onto N 37 Road. The wetland is about 0.5 miles south on N 37 Rd., but the whole mile from E 10 Rd. south to E. 12 Rd. is excellent habitat.

Accessibility: walking surfaces are a dirt road and uneven "trail" through grass on the dike.

Restrooms? Out here? You should have thought of that before we left!

<http://ebird.org/ebird/hotspot/L726126>

A few noteworthy spots in Leelanau County (not included in the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail)

Popp Road Pond (44.945612, -85.736440)

This combination of two farm ponds is a little gem on the back roads of central Leelanau County. The upper pond is bordered by pasture, while the lower one is edged with cattails and reeds. The ponds attract a variety of geese and dabbling ducks during spring and fall migration, including Northern Shovelers, teal, American Black Ducks, Wood Ducks, and American Wigeon. A few divers, like Bufflehead and Ring-necked Duck can be found here too. Some shorebirds use the ponds, too, including Wilson's Snipe and Solitary Sandpiper. Sandhill Cranes are resident in the area from March through September. Passerines that are typical of the region can be expected here, and the cows across the road seem to attract Rock Pigeons and House Sparrows. Watch for open-country raptors like Northern Harrier and Rough-legged Hawk in season. In 2023, two notable rarities showed up here: a Snow Goose and the county's first Little Blue Heron. Keep your eyes out for the unexpected!

Directions: From the northern part of the county, make your way to M-204. Just west of the village of Lake Leelanau, turn south on French Road. A couple hundred feet south of that intersection, Popp Road goes straight while French Road bends to the right. Follow Popp Road about 2.7 miles south, and you'll see the larger pond as the road bends to the right. From the south, follow Schomberg, then South Lake Shore Drive north from Cedar, and turn left on Amore Road. After some winding, bear right on Popp Road, which is paved.

Please note: the ponds are on private land. Park as far off the road as you can and bird from the road. Also, like most water in Leelanau County, the ponds are frozen in the winter.

The closest restrooms are at a convenience store just west of Lake Leelanau.

Accessibility: this is a good spot for birding from a vehicle.

Nearest birding spots: the DNR boat launches at the Narrows (north of here) and south on Lake Shore Drive are often worth a stop. Veronica Valley County Park is just across the lake (see <https://sleepingbearbirdingtrail.org/locations/>)

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L11031864>

Nelson Road Pond (Northport; 45.135135, -85.636308)

For anyone birding in northern Leelanau County, this little pond on private property is worth a few minutes, especially in migration. Common Yellowthroat, Yellow Warbler, blackbirds, Eastern Kingbirds, Solitary Sandpipers can all be expected here in appropriate seasons. Green Herons have nested here in the past, and may linger around the pond. Ruffed Grouse drum in the thick woods across the road. The pond is fairly wide but not too far across, so views are often relatively close.

Directions: From Mill Street, the main drag as you leave Northport to the north, turn west (left) on Third St. The name changes to Melkild Road, and at about one mile, turn north (right) on Nelson Road. The pond will be on the left. Pull off the road and bird from the shoulder of the road.

The closest restrooms are in Northport. Public facilities are available at the south end of the marina, and in local businesses.

Accessibility: this is a good spot to bird from a vehicle.

Bodus Road (44.906601, -85.771508)

If you seek grassland birds in central Leelanau County, look no further! The section of Bodus Road between Schomberg and French Roads is known for Eastern Meadowlark, Bobolink, Savannah, Vesper and Grasshopper Sparrows, and American Kestrel, thanks to the managed grasslands (hayfields). Dickcissel and Western Meadowlark have been almost regular here. Many other regionally expected species can be found here as well. Birders might find Snow Buntings and other winter specialties in this area. Pine Grosbeaks and White-winged Crossbills have been recorded nearby. Don't take chances pulling off the road in the snow, though. The shoulders are narrow!

Directions: From the north, turn south on French Road from M-204. At 5.8 miles, turn right on Bodus Road (check the farm for Rock Pigeons as you pass). From the south, head north from the village of Cedar and turn right on Schomberg Road shortly after crossing the bridge. At 4.3 miles, turn right on Bodus Road.

Note: this is a pull-off-the-road spot, so stay to the right and bird along the edge of the road. The owner of Sweeter Song Farm is a birder, and might just stop to say hello.

The closest restrooms are at a convenience store just west of Lake Leelanau.

Accessibility: this is a good spot for birding from a vehicle.

<https://ebird.org/hotspot/L11770310>

Fall & Winter Birding Recommendations:

From late October through early March, larger bodies of water attract migrating waterfowl, and open country sites hold the hope of Snowy Owls and Rough-legged Hawks. For those birding in the colder months, here is a short list of sites to explore. For waterfowl:

- Medalie Park on Boardman Lake
- Boardman Lake Loop Trail Scenic Overlook
- Boardman Lake Loop Trail north end (Hull Park)
- Boardman River at 8th St.
- Grand Traverse Bay (various points)

For open country raptors, check the Turtle Creek Stadium area and Clous Road.

Birding and Biking:

For young birders, and for those who prefer to bike instead of drive, several of these locations can be linked together into a bike-birding route. Using the TART trail, the Boardman Lake Trail, side streets, and a few sidewalks, a birder can get from Clinch Park to the YMCA South, or from the DeYoung Natural Area to Kid's Creek Park fairly easily and safely. Those interested in finding out more should contact [Norte](#), a local bicycling organization.

Northern Route:

Leelanau Trail at Fouch Rd to DeYoung Natural Area via Leelanau Trail - 2 miles

DeYoung Natural Area to Fulton Park - 2.1 miles

Fulton Park to Hickory Meadows via TART and Randolph St. - 2.1 Miles

Southwest Side:

Hickory Meadows to Grand Traverse Commons via Randolph and Elmwood Streets - 1.8 miles

Grand Traverse Commons (Elmwood ext.) to Kid's Creek Park via Buffalo Ridge Trail - 2.6 miles

East Side:

Bicycling birders have reported good birding along the easternmost section of the TART. There are several potential stops in different habitats, so a ride, stop and bird approach would work well. The trail section is mostly level, and about 2 miles long.

Boardman Lake:

[Boardman Lake Loop Trail](#) from Medalie Park to 8th St. - 4-mile loop around the lake

The trail around the lake is complete! If you use a spotting scope, start at Medalie Park and scope the lake. Then leave it in your car as you ride around. Sections of the trail worth extra time

include the bridge over the cove in the southwest corner of the lake, the overlook at the end of 16th St., the view behind the University Center, the northwest corner where the Boardman River exits the lake, Hull Park in the northeast corner, the coves along the east side, and the forested area in the southeast corner.

Sutton's Bay:

For a longer excursion (15 miles) on the Leelanau Trail, start at **Fulton Park** and ride north all the way to Sutton's Bay. Along the way north, stop at the DeYoung Natural Area, the section between Cherry Bend Rd and Fouch Rd. (described above), and at the Suttons Bay Sewage Ponds. Just beyond the northern end of the trail, visit the wetland next to the Suttons Bay marina (see the information on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail [website](#)). If that's enough biking, you can get back to Traverse City via the Bay Area Transportation Authority [bus](#).

Universal Access Birding suggestions:

Those who bird from wheeled vehicles such as wheelchairs and scooters might want to check out the following locations (see descriptions above):

- Pyatt Lake
- Medalie Park and the connecting Boardman Lake Trail
- Hull Park and Boardman Lake Trail along the north end of Boardman Lake
- Leelanau Trail at Fouch Road
- DeYoung Natural Area (see [Birdability Map](#))
- Kid's Creek Park & Buffalo Ridge Trail
- Mitchell Creek Meadows Nature Preserve

Birding via public transportation

If your transportation options are limited, or if you choose to bird by bus, here are a few BATA stops near local birding areas:

- For spots to the northwest of Traverse City, use the stop at Leelanau Studios on Cherry Bend Road, on Route 10. Walk west along the road to the Leelanau Trail.
- For points on the southwest side, there are bus stops at Traverse City West Middle School, Division and 10th Streets, Elmwood and 11th, Historic Barns Park, on Silver Drive, and at Meijer.
- For spots around Boardman Lake, use the stops at the Traverse Area District Library on Woodmere, 8th street at Lake Ave, and at the University Center.
- Mayfield Pond, south of Traverse City, can be reached from the bus stop at the Mayfield Post Office.
- On the east side of town, the bus stops at Four Mile Road, and at the Meijer in Williamsburg (see page 23).

Check out bus routes and schedules [here](#). The buses can carry bikes, if you want to combine modes of transportation.

A Boardman River Big Day Suggestion

If you would like to do a Big Day with a local flavor, consider following the Boardman River from the upper parts down to the mouth. Catch the dawn chorus at **Mayfield Pond Park**, then stop at **Shumsky's Landing** before the sun gets too high. The next good stop on the way downriver is the **Lone Pine Trailhead**, which gives you a chance to pick up some open-country birds. Next, stop at the **Boardman River Nature Center** and check the feeders. If you're birding with a friend, set up a shuttle by taking a car down to the **YMCA South**. That way, you can bird the **Boardman River Trail** without having to walk back. Be sure to veer left at the clearing where the power lines cross so you can walk along the wetlands on the west side of the floodplain.

Next, spend some time at **Medalie Park** (Logan's Landing). Be sure to cross the river on the footbridge to check out the west side of the lake's upper end. This is your chance to rack up the waterfowl species. If you haven't walked enough yet, reset your shuttle with a car at Hull Park, at the north end of Boardman Lake. If you feel really ambitious, leave the car at Clinch Park (feed the parking meter!). Return to Medalie Park and walk the **Boardman Lake Loop Trail** on the west side of the lake. Continue walking along the river at the lake's outlet, down to the Union Street Dam, then follow Cass St. to the tunnel, which leads to **Clinch Park**. There you can pick up some bay-loving species like Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, and in spring, Caspian Terns.

Those of us who don't feel that ambitious can just drive to each spot and walk a little to check them out. Parking is available at each location. On your way through town, Rock Pigeons hang out behind McGough's feed store, and House Sparrows are a cinch on Lake Street, behind the auto parts store.

If you'd like to support a local birder, head back to Rare Bird BrewPub on Lake Street for lunch, and to tally up your count. If Nate is there, be sure to let him know how you did!