

November 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

Migration is nearing its end, and the winter residents are arriving. It's time to gather, share stories, give thanks for the year that was, and dream of the year to come.

On the Calendar

For the next two months, our meetings are on the third Thursday of the month at the Boardman River Nature Center on Cass Road at 7:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend!

Nov. 16, 2022 – Monthly Meeting: eBird and Discord

Join one of our regional birding experts, Brian Allen, to hear how these tools help birders and bird conservation. In addition, he'll be sharing the nuances of these platforms that create opportunities to enhance your and others' birding experiences. Learn how to post pictures and audio files, manage lists, and access useful real-time maps for exploring regions.

Dec. 21, 2022 – Monthly Meeting: Annual Member's Sharing Night

Take a break from your busy Christmas Bird Count schedule and warm up with us! It's the evening when members share photos and videos of their adventures during the year. If you'd like to share, please contact Kathy Flegel (flegels@centurytel.net).



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Upcoming Field Trips

November 18

Practice Christmas Bird Count – see page 2

December 14 – 17

Christmas Bird Counts – see page 2

**Time to renew
your membership!**

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

**You can renew via
PayPal now!**

Upcoming Field Trips and Birding Opportunities

The Board is working on next year's calendar! Anyone who would like to host a trip is encouraged to contact the nearest board member!

Sunday Morning Bird Outings

As we enter the months of darkness, we rest. We'll be back at the beginning of April!



Nov. 18th (Saturday) – Practice Christmas Bird Count

Would you like to participate in a Christmas Bird Count but you're not sure if your skills are up to the challenge? Want to know more about what happens out there in the cold? Join Kirk Waterstripe, compiler of the Lake Leelanau Count, for an orientation and practice session. We'll learn how to gather good data, and travel around a count area as a group, honing our skills. We'll also talk about how to participate as a feeder counter. Meet at the Boardman River Nature Center at 9:00 AM.

We'll be out for the whole morning. We'll be walking on natural-surface trails, boardwalks and paved driveways.

Christmas Bird Counts are coming!

What better way to spend a day in December than counting birds? Want to participate in the field? Want to count at your feeder? Here are the dates and compiler contact info:

Antrim Co. – Dec. 15 (Friday), contact Curt Hofer at curthofer1@gmail.com.

Grand Traverse – Dec. 16 (Saturday), contact Nate Crane at nmcrane@gmail.com

Benzie Co. – Dec. 15 (Friday), contact nedthebirder@gmail.com

Lake Leelanau CBC – Dec. 20 (Wednesday), contact Kirk Waterstripe at 4walkinglightly@gmail.com or (231)883-2858

Birding Calendar

November

Early November has been called Rarity Week, so keep your eyes open for anything. Some rare flycatchers are being seen around the state. Rafts of ducks and grebes frequent the Lake Michigan bays. Late raptors like Red-tails and Rough-legs are in the fields. Dark-eyed Juncos are moving from the woods and fields to the feeders. You might find an early Snowy Owl by the end of the month.

December

Ducks are concentrating on areas of open water. Finches are foraging in weedy fields and fruit trees. A few Snowy Owls might be settling in to winter hunting grounds. Birders are eagerly anticipating Christmas Bird Counts!

January

The cycle begins again. Listers restart their annual record-keeping. Want to give it a try?

What are your birding goals for 2024?

Your Favorite Patch

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

Boardman River through downtown Traverse City

For cold-weather birding, this area is hard to beat. The river stays open all year below Union Street Dam, and freezes only partially above the dam. The riverbanks are lined with thick brush, fruiting trees and shrubs, grapevine tangles, and homes with bird feeders. Once Boardman Lake starts to freeze, hundreds of ducks get pushed into the river. Start your trip at the Governmental Center on Boardman Ave. at 8th Street. You can look over the flocks at close range. If you'd like to walk a little, cross the river on the 8th St. bridge and continue on the Boardman Lake Trail. Watch for mergansers, scoters, scaup, and, once in a great while, a Canvasback mixed in with the Redheads and Mallards. Below the dam, Nate Crane even saw a Harlequin Duck several years ago!

If you're up for a longer walk, follow the river and head for Clinch Park Marina, where you can sort through the collection of gulls loafing on the docks. Scan the bay for Long-tailed Ducks, White-winged Scoters, and perhaps a Red-breasted Merganser as spring approaches. Downtown is a lot more than Rock Pigeons starlings and House Sparrows. Take the time to check it out!

Editor's Perch

Birding and Nature Equity

It's a warm morning in mid-May at a widely known birding spot. The boardwalk is crowded with people thrilling at the sights of warblers, tanagers, and the flash of a cuckoo flying through the brush.

It's a cool fall day at the North Lookout at Hawk Mountain. Sharp-shinned Hawks stream past the outcrop as dozens of birders eagerly watch for an American Goshawk (yes, new name), or a Golden Eagle.

It's a monthly meeting of your local birding group, perhaps with Audubon in the name, perhaps not. A leader asks if anyone has seen any interesting birds lately. A few hands rise in the air.

Have you ever paused to think about the people in these scenarios? What conditions these people live in? What sort of background do they come from? Did they have early exposure to green spaces? Did they have a mentor or teacher that introduced them to birds? How did they get here?

For the most part, these people are white, with decent jobs that pay enough so they can buy binoculars, drive themselves to birding locations, and occasionally travel to other parts of the country or the globe. They're able to stand on the boardwalk, climb the mountain, walk the

Be-a-Better-Birder Tip

Watch the wind. In strong winds, head to sheltered areas like cedar swamps, thickets and windward shores of lakes (that means closer to the wind). Birds will linger in these areas, particularly in cooler weather.

unpaved paths, and see the slides at the meetings. Where are the people who depend on public transportation? Where are the folks with darker skin tones who put up with harassment to be there? Where are the ones who cannot walk? The ones who cannot see as well?

We've learned a great deal in the last few years about the benefits of exposure to the natural world. It relieves stress and anxiety. It lowers blood pressure. We just feel better after a walk in the wilds. Perhaps you've heard of "forest bathing", or ornithotherapy. Wouldn't it be great if everyone, each person, each family, had access to green places where they could find birds and flowers, and walk in the shade of a forest? Shouldn't access to nature be a basic human right?

I think we should make a point to strive toward equitable access to nature. Let's make sure that, for one, parks exist and protect wild-ish places, large and small. Let's ensure that those of different abilities can use them. Let's make sure the bus or the train stops within a fairly short distance. Consider offering a ride to someone who may not be able to drive to an outing. Let's make sure that everyone feels safe in those places, and that harassing or assaultive behavior is not tolerated. Perhaps most of all, let's make sure that folks who wouldn't normally use a wild place have a gentle, understanding introduction to the world outside the realms of physical barriers, prejudice, and poverty. Some new organizations are working in that direction; check out the work of [Birdability](#), [Ornithotherapy](#), and the [BIPOC Birding Club of Wisconsin](#).

The holidays are coming up. If you want to give something that will reach far beyond just one person, donate a pair of binoculars to a nature center, or this Club. They will be used by people without a pair, perhaps someone new to birds, Perhaps they'll be the tool to open a kid's eyes to a world full of avian treasures. If you're the patient mentor or trip leader, you might be lucky enough to be there when that happens.

- Kirk W.

Membership?

Like what you're reading?
Consider joining the Club! More info is available at [Membership Information – Grand Traverse Audubon Club](#)

Cooper's vs. Sharp-shinned Hawks: a little ID help

These two hawks, both in the *Accipiter* genus, present a challenge for many birders. Maybe this summary will help.

Cooper's tail tip is rounded, like a "C", when perched.	Sharpie's tail tip is squared off when perched.
In adults, dark gray back is separated from dark color on the head. Cooper's wears a cap!	In adult Sharpies, the dark color from the back extends up to the head, like the bird is wearing a hoodie.
In flight, Cooper's head extends beyond the front edge of the wings, giving the impression of a bigger head.	In flight, Sharpie's head is about even with the front edge of the wings, giving the impression of a smaller head.

Club donates birding books for kids!

In October, the Board approved the purchase and donation of four children's books to the Traverse Area District Library. This gift was in appreciation of the success of outings for beginning birders hosted by TADL in the last two years. We have a wonderful partner; let's keep working together! Here are the titles we donated:

Ruby's Birds by Mya Thompson

Counting Birds: The Idea That Helped Save Our Feathered

Friends (Young Naturalist) by Heidi E.Y. Stemple

Bird Count by Susan Edwards Richmond

Lucy's Life List: A Tale for Young Birders of All Ages by Sally

Deems-Mogyordy



Field Trip Report

Sept 16, 2023 – About 15 people from Grand Traverse and Benzie Audubon Clubs gathered at the mouth of the Platte River, in Benzie County, to scan Lake Michigan for jaegers, gull-like predatory birds that appear in the southern end of Lake Michigan nearly every year. While we saw no jaegers, we did see a Black-bellied Plover, several Herring and Ring-billed Gulls, and a group of Turkey Vultures on the riverbank. Thanks to Doug Cook for putting things together on the Benzie end.

Note: On Oct. 7th, Alison Vilag and Matt Winkler reported a Parasitic Jaeger passing by Point Betsie. See? It wasn't such a crazy idea!



Gift ideas for birdy people



Make a contribution to the Walter Hastings Fund in their name (this is the money we use for conservation projects).

A Grand Traverse Audubon baseball cap! Available in gray (shown) and tan, these caps have a vintage GTAC logo patch sewn on! Selling for \$20 and supplies are limited. Contact Kathie, our Treasurer via email, or get yours at the November meeting!

A journal and some pencils. Encourage your birder to start sketching and taking field notes.

What Bird Am I? (Found this board game online; don't know anything about it, but it might be fun.)

Books:

- *The Bird Way* by Jennifer Ackerman,
- *Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration* by Rebecca Heisman
- *Better Living Through Birding: Notes From a Black Man in the Natural World* by Christian Cooper

The Year in Review

Oh, what a year it was! Here's a quick summary of the notable rarities found in our area so far in 2023.

The first notably rare bird of the year was a Varied Thrush, found at a private residence around Glen Lake. In early April, a Greater White-fronted Goose was found near Clous and Schneider Roads, in Grand Traverse County. On April 11, that goose, or another, was identified as a Pink-footed Goose, a first record for Michigan! Later that month, a Little Blue Heron was observed at the Popp Road Pond in Leelanau County. The rarity train kept rolling with a Red-throated Loon on Boardman Lake at the end of April. In early May, a Yellow-throated Warbler (not a Common Yellowthroat) turned up at Medalie Park and stayed for a couple days. Migration came and went, then in mid-August, a Wilson's Phalarope was found on the mudflats on Boardman Lake. It was followed by a Baird's Sandpiper at the end of September. Most recently, a Harris's Sparrow was seen at a private residence in mid-October.

The first week of November is renowned for its sightings of rare birds. What will turn up next?

Ways to help your Club

Help with website maintenance. Contact Don Flegel at (flegel8@gmail.com).

Lead a field trip!

Bring snacks to a meeting!

Volunteer to be President or Vice-President!

Annual Dinner Meeting Report

October 21, 2023 – About 18 people gathered and shared a potluck dinner at Bethlehem Lutheran. Afterward, we conducted a brief business meeting, where the following slate of officers for 2023 was elected unanimously:

President – (still need to fill)
Vice-President – (still need to fill)
Secretary – Jared Gugnitz
Treasurer – Kathy Wiley (continuing)
Newsletter and Publicity – Kirk Waterstripe (continuing)
Michigan Audubon Rep – Tom Comfort
Member-at-large – Sharon Benjey (continuing)
Past President – Kathy Flegel

A huge helping of gratitude to those who are leaving the Board: Karen Casebeer, Evan Reister, and Leonard Graf.

After the meeting, we had our own version of the American Birding Association's "What's That Bird?" with Leonard Graf and Scott Sneed identifying birds in photos and explaining how they arrived at their conclusions. It was fun and educational for all involved.

Project FeederWatch starts November 1st!

Do you have a bird feeder? Do you have a yard? Would you like to contribute to science? Sign up for Project FeederWatch! You can even report data for areas with food plants or cover. The data are used to create a picture of winter bird populations and distribution. For more information, visit the [FeederWatch website](#).

A Poem You Might Like:

Ed. Note: this was written by a friend that I met on the Puffin Project in Maine.

The Birder's Lament

September morning,
Gray clouds are forming,
Storming and stealing
The late summer's sky.

The geese are leaving
For pastures more pleasing,
And Pintails take flight
While warblers wander
By moonlit night.

Their keen sense of direction
Makes me pause in reflection,
As I listen to summer's last song.
The birds will be gone,
They leave me in haste.
Bittersweet is the taste
Of fall migration.

I grieve for the Guillemots,
Now gone from their rocks.
My heart skips a beat,
For their crimson red feet!

I pine after Pintails,
I wail for the Rails.
I shed tears for the Terns,
But they're not concerned.
They don't need my consent.
A waste of time, is this birder's lament!

Frustration is high,
When no one will listen.
The world doesn't care,
That my birds are missing!

My friends say "Virginia come on, get real!"
"Why would you cry for a Green Winged Teal?"

(continued)

I gather my pride
And I grab a ride
On the back of a Sandhill Crane!
My cries aren't in vain,
We'll find southern terrain
While I ride on her wing,
As she sings and I dream
Of eternal spring.

Virginia Petzold, DC March 20, 2022

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