

May 2024

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

Editor: Kirk Waterstripe newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org

After a weird, mild winter, we get a wacky spring. Some plants and birds seem about two weeks ahead of schedule. Be ready for anything out there! Most of all, enjoy the warming days, whether working hard on a birdathon or relaxing by a pond in the evening.

On the Calendar

Our meetings are usually on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Boardman River Nature Center on Cass Road at 7:00 pm. Everyone is welcome to attend!

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

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

May 11-25: - Birdathon!

One last reminder! Go birding and raise money for a good cause! Pick a day in the range above, collect some pledges, and track down a big list!

Contact Kirk Waterstripe (4walkinglightly@gmail.com) for more details.



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Upcoming Field Trips

June 12

Sunday Bird Walks

May 11-25

Birdathon!

June 15

Kirtland Warbler Tour

Upcoming Field Trips

May 5, 2023 (Sunday)– Sunday Morning Bird Outings

Every Sunday from now through June, Kirk Waterstripe will lead a group at a location around Traverse City. If you're a beginning birder, or if you want to polish your skills, these trips are for you! Like last year, on the last Sunday of each month, the walk will take place in the evening.



Locations and times are listed on the website, and they will be announced in BirdAlert emails, so watch your inbox.

June 15 (Saturday)– Kirtland Warbler Tour – 11:00 am

Michigan Audubon, in collaboration with Hartwick Pines State Park, will offer Kirtland's Warbler Tours in 2024. Tours will be held daily at 7 a.m. with an additional 11 a.m. tour on Saturdays and Sundays from May 25 through June 30. The tours are based at Hartwick Pines State Park just north of downtown Grayling. **Tours cost \$15 per person, and you must have a Recreation Pass to enter the State Park.** Grand Traverse Audubon member Kathie Wiley will be going on this day, (June 15th) to the 11:00 am tour {Carpooling at Tom's East Bay at 9:45 am}, and is hopeful others will register for this date and timeframe as well. Kathie has gone on this tour before and found it thrilling to not only hear, but see this amazing bird that was once on the brink of extinction. Registration for the tours opens online on February 2, 2024 and they are limited to 25 people.

<https://www.michiganaudubon.org/kirtlands-warbler-tours/>

Contact leader and coordinator: Kathie

Wiley: treasurer@grandtraverseaudubon.org

Reminder – Power Island birding opportunity

The Island Ranger has expressed interest in having a survey of the breeding birds on Power Island. We've scheduled this for **June 1st**. Arrangements are being made for transportation to the island on that morning. Contact Kirk Waterstripe

(newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org) if you are interested in this unique opportunity!

Birding Calendar

May

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

June

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

July

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

Editor's Perch

As I write this, it's mid-April and spring migration is gearing up. With it comes an increase in interest and discussion about birds. Recently, I took part in some of that discussion by way of text comments on Ron Jolly's radio show on a local radio station. I'm always amazed by the level of passion, even vehemence toward those "bullying" birds at feeders: Common Grackles, Red-winged Blackbirds, and Blue Jays. Comments ran heavily toward the "how do I get rid of them" side, as always. I would like to use this space to stand up for those species.

First, they're birds. We can't expect them to play by the rules of sharing and fair play we were taught in kindergarten. Those go with human society, and help it function, but wild creatures are, inherently, looking out for their own welfare. To paraphrase Shakespeare, all the world's a food source, and they are merely hungry. If your survival depended on day-to-day efforts to gather food, wouldn't you throw your weight around, so to speak, if you had an advantage?

Next, consider the amount of time they actually spend at your feeders. Blue Jays come to feeders in a noisy, fast-moving group, swooping in, filling their crops with your offerings, and flying off to eat some now and hide some for later. The sudden arrival of the group startles smaller birds into flight, but these individuals return minutes after the Blue Jays leave. Blackbirds tend to come in alone, or in small groups, and their size may intimidate smaller birds, but they don't stick around too long either.

Have you ever taken a close look at the variety of shades of blue on a Blue Jay, or the green, purple and bronze iridescence on a grackle? In their fresh spring plumages, they are stunning birds. Watch the grackles for displays and other mating-related behaviors. Notice when Red-winged Blackbirds bare their red epaulets, and when they don't. See if you can spot any immature males. Is there a hierarchy in their arrival times in the season? In short, rather than dismiss these birds, get to know them for their elaborate colors and intriguing behaviors.

Lastly, do we end up judging these birds harshly because they're common? We humans have altered environments severely. Prairies and pastures have been converted to extensive lawns and suburbs. Forests have been replaced with our manicured and pruned landscapes. Wetlands are drained and replaced with development. Blue Jays, who are responsible for forgetting acorn stashes and planting oak forests, have accepted our food offerings, especially where oak forests no longer exist. Grackles, who flip leaves and forage on the edges of ponds, have found lawns perfectly acceptable. Can we blame them for adapting to the landscapes we have created?

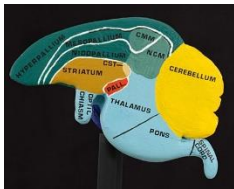
The next time a group of Blue Jays or a flock of blackbirds visits your property, don't judge them by our standards, but view them through a lens of appreciation for who they are: resourceful, colorful, adaptable species just finding a way to survive in landscapes that bears little resemblance to the ones in which they evolved.

- Kirk W.

Tawas Point Migration Days – May 17 & 18

Spend an amazing weekend witnessing a spectacular spring migration in northeastern Michigan along Lake Huron. View a wide variety of migratory birds as they rest and feed at Tawas Point State Park. From waterfowl to songbirds, you'll see it all! The Tawas Point Migration celebration offers nonstop birding activities and interesting information sure to entertain everyone.

For more information, visit <http://ausablevalleyaudubon.org>



Bird Brains

Birds to keep an eye out for

As you know, birds are always moving and bird ranges are always changing. We've had a few rare visitors lately, like the Eurasian Collared-Dove, that have stayed a while. We're seeing southern species more often, like Carolina Wrens. A couple southerners, like the Northern Mockingbirds in Williamsburg and the Hooded Warbler in Leelanau County, have taken up residence.

There are some other species that have been expanding northward, and we should familiarize ourselves with them. Limpkins, cryptically-colored relatives of cranes, have been following non-native snail populations north. Neotropic Cormorants have been seen in southern Michigan, so check all cormorants for one with a slighter build and a longer tail. If you ever see a duck with a dark body, pink bill and pink feet, it's not because you're under the influence. It's most likely a Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

So add these to your list of birds to study, along with Brewer's Blackbirds and Western Meadowlarks. If you see something that doesn't look quite right, take good notes and get a picture if possible. Be prepared to write up a detailed rare bird report when you submit your list to eBird!

Remember, many things are possible, so keep your eyes and ears open!

More help with cormorant ID: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Aoi1ooMXSOk>

Identification Corner – Red-shouldered Hawk and Broad-winged Hawk

For this discussion, let's focus on differentiating the birds in flight, since that's how we see them most of the time.

Red-shouldered-Hawks are famous for the light crescent-shaped patches at the base of the primary feathers, just below the separation into "fingers". These patches are often called "wing windows" since they appear almost translucent when backlit, and are visible from above and

below. On both adults and immatures, the tail has black and white bands, with the black being noticeably wider than the white.

Broad-winged Hawks do not show light areas at the bases of the primaries. The bands on the tail are much wider and of equal width, giving a black-white-black pattern.

Red-shoulders are often quite vocal when flying over their nesting territory. Both species show a dark trailing edge on the wing.

Conservation Project News – Nesting platform for Common Loons

Over the past several years, the idea of a nesting platform for the loons on Boardman Lake has been floated (pun on purpose!). At last a platform is ready to float literally! In partial fulfilment of his Eagle Scout requirements, Nash Roster built a platform. On May 8th, board members Kathie Wiley and Jared Gugnitz accepted the platform in preparation for installation in Boardman Lake.



Cooper and Nash (right) Roster

Kathie, Cooper, Nick Roster (dad), Nash and Jared

The platform is constructed of PVC, with a hardware cloth deck, a ramp, and a vegetation mat cover (installed later) to deter aerial predators. Currently, we are seeking a permit from the MI Dept. of EGLE, then we'll anchor it somewhere off the University Center. Watch for it!

Survey Report

Greetings from your Audubon Club Board. Earlier this spring we sent out a survey designed to assess the interests and goals of the membership in terms of what our priorities should be going forward. The overall response rate was about 50% which is considered very good for this sort of general mailing. Without getting into too much statistical detail, the survey showed that the club is basically doing the things that our members want it to do. The following shows the questions sent out along with a general summary of the responses received.

Question 1

The Board is considering changing the Club's status to a non-profit (501c3) organization. How important is it that your dues and donations are tax deductible?

23% of respondents considered this to be very important or somewhat important to them. Nearly 46% rated this as not important at all. Considering the costs of making this transition (primarily legal), the Board has decided not to pursue this course of action at this time.

Priorities

The remainder of the questions focused on what was most important to our members for us to focus on.

Question 2

Educate both ourselves and our community through birding outings and other educational programs.

This question rated the highest in terms of priority for our members. Just over 57% responded this was very important and another 18% rated it as somewhat important. We will continue to focus on this through monthly presentations, Sunday birding walks, and other birding trips.

Question 3

Participate in various citizen science efforts in the area of birds and their environment (ex. Biodiversity inventories, Christmas Bird Counts.)

While only 10% of the respondents indicated that this was very important, nearly 40% rated it as somewhat important. We intend to continue our current level of focus at the current level and evaluate any new opportunities or requests on a case-by-case basis.

Question 4

Maintain and improve the fiscal health of our organization, including the number of members. (Increase membership, especially among the younger generation, establish other sources of revenue)

The responses to this question indicated that there was no consensus either way. While 44% of the respondents rated this as either very or somewhat important, 31% rated it as neutral. We

interpret this response to indicate that the current level of fundraising was adequate and there was little enthusiasm for massive new fundraising.

Question 5

Hold social events both for ourselves and those open to the public, such as picnics and the Annual Dinner Meeting.

Fully half of the respondents rated this as unimportant. This has been the forum where officers for the next fiscal year have been nominated. The Board is exploring alternatives to the past practice.

Question 6

Lead and participate in conservation efforts, both on our own and in partnership with other organizations (ex. Support for land acquisition projects, and establishing and monitoring bird housing.)

There was no strong consensus on this question. While 46% rated this as very or somewhat important, nearly 37% rated it either somewhat or not at all important. The board interprets this response to mean that we should maintain our current level of effort in this area without significantly increasing or decreasing efforts along these lines.

In summary, the Board would like to thank all members who took the time to respond to the survey. We (the Board), are here to conduct Club affairs in the manner and direction that the membership wants the Club to be run. These survey results will be used as a touchstone to help us in that regard.

- John Imboden, President

Represent Your Club! – volunteers needed June 8th

We're going to have a table at Green Elk Rapids, a large outdoor gathering of local and regional environmental organizations. We'd like a few more folks to staff the table between 11:00 and 2:00 at Elk Rapids Veterans Park. Come meet some folks from the community and introduce them to what we do! Contact Kathie Wiley to volunteer.

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

This newsletter was written by a human, not by a robot!