
July 2024

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

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Summer is a time to watch for subtle changes: young birds getting their adult feathers, adults molting worn feathers, the progression of plants from flowering, fruiting and going to seed. Notice the sequence of insect sounds. Mark the dates when certain birds disappear for the year.

On the Calendar

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

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

Sept. 26 – Regular Meeting: Duke Elsner – 'The Bug Man'

Mark your calendars! You won't want to miss this one! Erwin "Duke" Elsner is a retired small fruit and consumer horticulture Extension Educator at Michigan State University. He is a local renowned entomologist and bee and butterfly expert. He'll be bringing some of his vast insect and butterfly collections with him and speaking to us about the importance of the insect population to the birds.

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



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

Upcoming Field Trips

August 10

Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds

Upcoming Field Trips

August 4 (Sunday)– Sunday Morning Bird Outings will resume!

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



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

Just to pique your interest, our first location on August 4th will be the Suttons Bay sewage ponds!

August 10th (Sat.): Houghton Lake Sewage Ponds

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

Contact leader Curt Hofer (curthofer1@gmail.com) with any questions.

Update to the Club's By-laws

Over the last three months, the Executive Board has been mulling over changes to the by-laws, that foundational document that spells out how we do things as a club. The current version is posted on our [website](#). Any amendments to the by-laws must be approved by a two-thirds majority of those voting. The board is going to publicize the new version of the by-laws at least ten days before the September meeting, at which time we'll vote on the changes. Here's a summary of the major changes:

- Replacement of "objectives" with Objectives/Values

Birding Calendar

July

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

Shorebirds will begin trickling through about the middle of the month. Keep an eye on the mudflats and beaches!

August

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

September

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

Our mission is to provide inclusive opportunities for residents of the Grand Traverse Region to enjoy and learn about birds and the ecosystems that they depend on, and to protect these ecosystems in our region.

To support this mission, we also embrace the following values:

- Wild and near-wild spaces
- Those who share our interest, from the merely bird-curious to life-long birders
- Opportunities for birding and protecting and enhancing birding habitat
- Sustainable financial practices to ensure the long-term viability of the Club
- Changing the October meeting from a dinner to a regular meeting
- New language under "misuse of club funds": Club funds shall not be used for the personal profit of any of its members. Neither the Club nor any of its officers shall enter into any commitments binding on the Michigan Audubon Society. In like manner, the Club or any of its officers shall not accept any binding financial commitment from the MAS without its written consent after a unanimous vote in favor by the Club's Executive Board.
- Elimination of the Michigan Audubon Liaison position from the board since we seem to be the only club that still has this position. Duties of communicating with Michigan Audubon will be assumed by the president.
- Addition of an appendix describing the duties of each board position

You'll have a chance to read the whole document before being asked to vote at the September meeting. This is your club, so be an informed voter!

Officers needed!

Our Nominating Committee, currently one person, would like some help! If you're well connected and good at sweet-talking people into serving on boards of worthy organizations, we would love your help! Contact Kathy Flegel at flegel8@gmail.com.

There are several other roles we could use some help with too. Do you like posting on social media? Organizing conservation projects? Leading field trips? Please contact your nearest board member and let us know if you're interested in helping.

- Members of the Board

ID Corner: Sparrows

This group has a reputation for being hard to identify. This doesn't need to be the case! Sparrows can be separated based on habitat, at least to some extent. Consider these distinctions:

Swamp Sparrows like cattail marshes.

Chipping Sparrows like open areas around human activity. Look for them in open lawns with conifers.

Vesper Sparrows like short-cut fields with patches of bare ground.

Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows favor grasslands.

Lincoln's Sparrows are bog lovers.

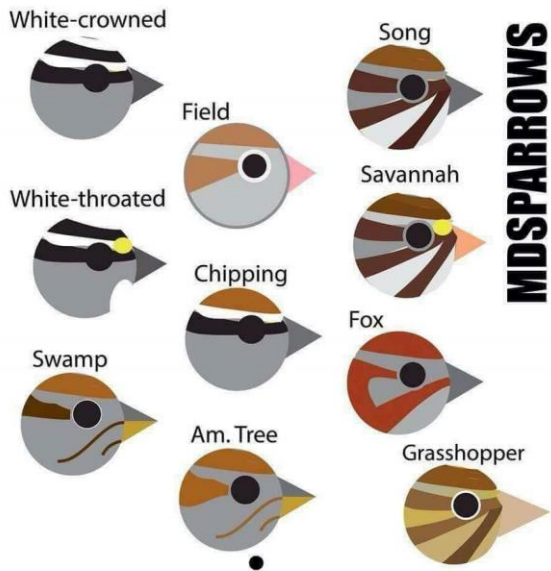
Field Sparrows like fields, but especially those that are starting to grow up with some shrubs.

Song Sparrows are everywhere, but just about always along an edge.

For more information, check out this video on Bob Duchesne's YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J5nUewtFpg>

For the visually minded, this illustration may help:



One way to group our local sparrows:

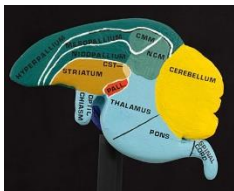
Clear breast (no streaks) and crown stripes – White-crowned or White-throated

Clear breast and no chest spot – Chipping Sparrow (black bill), Field Sparrow (pink bill)

Clear breast and a chest spot – Am. Tree Sparrow (fall – spring)

Streaks on the breast – the others

(We won't mention the Field Sparrow I saw in a bush. Next to a pond.)



Bird Brains

Not saying you might want these in the future, but here are some interesting bits of bird biology trivia:

Herring Gulls take three years to reach their adult plumage.

Tail feathers are called retrices (sing. retriX); wing feathers are called remiges (sing. remiX).

Where we have a larynx, a bird has a syrinx at the bottom of its trachea.

Male birds' testes shrink after the breeding season (saves weight).

The colorful feathers on a hummingbird's throat are called a gorget; the ones on a duck's wing are called a speculum.

Editor's Perch

If you listen to the American Birding Podcast, you're familiar with the Random Birds episodes where hosts Nate Swick and Ted Floyd talk about, well, random birds. Since I have no subjects inspiring passionate rants or dissertations, here's my version:

Sometime in the mid-1980s, a Gyrfalcon decided to hang around the "pheasant farm" just south of the town where I was living. This was a facility where the Pennsylvania Game Commission

raised Ring-necked Pheasant to release for hunters. To prevent the birds' escaping, the staff outfitted each bird with a leather device that prevented full extension of the wing, rendering them flightless. No wonder the Gyrfalcon decided to hang around these open-topped pens full of food!

I was off birding somewhere when mom got a call from a National Audubon Society vice president! She told him, "Kirk's not here but I know where the bird is; I'll show you!" She was quite tickled to be a guide for one of Audubon's upper echelon!

In May 1995, I was working at Wild Birds Unlimited in Leland, when Tom Ford called to tell me there was a Scissor-tailed Flycatcher in the fields along Port Oneida Road (Leelanau County). I had to finish my shift, but I called my mom and dad to ask them if they'd like to chase this rare bird. And would they bring my binoculars? (What was I thinking, leaving the house without them!) Yes, and they did, and we saw the bird. I remember wishing for a way to call everyone and tell them it was there, right now, and they should hurry out here to see it! Twenty years later...

December of 1997, Melissa and I were enjoying a birding honeymoon, hitting many of the favorite spots in south Florida. This particular day, we were in the Everglades, and decided to try Snake Bight Trail. At the time it was a straight line of fill, 1.6 miles long, with a canal running alongside, from the park road to Florida Bay. Within moments of passing the gate, we learned what we were in for, as millions of mosquitos descended on any speck of exposed flesh. Fortunately, it was cool and we were wearing hoodies. With drawstrings pulled as tight as they would go, we set off at a record-breaking speed-walk pace. Then we started to see the alligators. Right there in the canal. Not separated from us by a boardwalk or anything. Again, fortunately it was cool.

The list hasn't made it to eBird, but we saw lots of cool birds, including lifer Gull-billed Tern and, in the heat haze, American Flamingo! Then we had to go back...

Birdathon results!

On May 11th, two teams set out to see how many bird species they could find. One team, Bubbie's Baygulls (named for our sponsor, consisting of Kirk, Melissa and Lauren Waterstripe, Kathie Wiley, and Jared and Eli Gugnitz) met in the rainy darkness and proceeded to northern Leelanau County. A quick stop at Omena Bay got us started with all three merganser species and Spotted Sandpiper. From there we drove to Leelanau State Park's southern unit, where we were met by a singing Wood Thrush and more rain. The expected rail species did sound off, and other wetland species were present. The sun broke through while we were at the other unit of the state park, and the warblers emerged. With nine species of warblers added to our list, we headed south, first to Lighthouse West, then other hotspots. The list grew slowly throughout the day. We finished at Little Glen Park (a.k.a. the Mill Pond), where we added Trumpeter Swan,

Sedge Wren, and an unexpected Rough-legged Hawk. A final count revealed we had seen 104 species! Our trip report link: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/229082?view=checklists>



A rainy start



A beautiful end

The other team, Jenny Young and Pamela Bevelhimer, turned in a list of 65 species. Their trip report: <https://ebird.org/tripreport/236435> Be sure to check out Jenny's photos!

Together, both teams raised \$1111.00 for local conservation efforts! The funds will be allocated and donated as follows:

- Walter Hastings Fund: \$392.00
- DNR Non-Game Wildlife Trust Fund: \$327.00
- Mich. Audubon Society Young Birders Camp: \$ 392.00

Thanks so much to all those who pledged! And a big thank you to Bubbie's Bagels for their pledge, and the bagels, schmeer and treats that helped sustain us!

Power Island Bird Survey

Two teams from the Club participated in a bird survey on Power Island at the request of Scott Swan, the Island Ranger. Let's hear the results in their own words:

*Report from Jared Gugnitz:

Eli and I caught a ride to the island from Park Ranger Scott Swan on Friday evening. He showed us to our campsite (we had our choice of spots, as we were the only ones camping that night). After we set up our campsite, we grabbed our binoculars and headed to the west side of the island. Eli also had a new microphone he was trying out, and he was able to get some recordings of a couple species, which are included in the Ebird lists linked below. That first night the highlight was probably a white breasted nuthatch that we thought we saw on a branch near a swamp and then heard a bit later which confirmed it. We also surprised a spotted sandpiper on the beach near our campsite, and it flew away quickly as we approached. That night, after a late dinner, we

ventured back out into the middle of the island around 11:30pm, listening for owls. We did not hear anything, but enjoyed our night hike, nonetheless. We got a few hours of sleep, and then woke up at 4:30am to try for owls again. All we heard this time was a very persistent kingbird. According to Ranger Scott, there are owls on the island, but we could not confirm based on our one-night visit. Once day broke, we headed for the south side of the island, seeing a white-tailed doe along the way. According to Ranger Scott, this would be one of the last suspected few from the herd introduced in the 1960's. We also got too close to an eagle nest, as the mama eagle seemed not very happy with us. You can hear audio of this encounter in Eli's Saturday morning checklist. We then headed north along the beach on the west coast, seeing a flock of cormorants fly in, and more evidence of deer in the sand. We then headed back to our camp for breakfast, where we found a yellow warbler and a brown creeper right at our campsite. We packed up, then joined the rest of the group. It was our first time on Power Island, and it was a really great and unique experience. Scott was a great guide and gave us some of the history of the island, as well as pointers on what to look for. One thing I noticed was a lot of evidence of woodpecker activity on the island, but we encountered relatively few woodpeckers for the amount of hollowed out trees we saw. Specifically, we were able to pick out pileated and sapsucker holes, but neither bird is on our checklists.

<https://ebird.org/tripreport/247427>

*Report from Kathie Wiley:

Scott Swan, is the Park Ranger for Power Island from Mid-May to October. The Island also has part-time Rangers that help as well. Kathie, Jenny, Joan, and John were shuttled by Scott at 8:35, and it took about ½ hr. to boat over to the island. Jared and Eli had opted to start the survey the night before and camp overnight. Once on the Island, Scott explained the island map to us and the trail options. Scott advised that there are hardly any ticks on the island due to low deer population. In addition, no poisonous snakes. He informed us that there were a great many mature trees on the property as it hasn't been lumbered since about the time WWII ended. Furthermore, he offered the following trivia: according to Geocaching.com, the island boasts the very first Michigan geocache to be placed.

We decided to bird together and let Jared and Eli know via text where they could meet us. We birded from roughly 9:00 am to 1:00 pm. Between when Jared and Eli started Friday evening until our departure back at 1:00 pm Saturday afternoon saw in total 44 species (see attached species list and count). Out near Bassett Island mid-morning, there was a stunning sight of a Green Heron near the shore in calm water that gave a fantastic picture of the heron and its reflection. (see attached) At about noon, we had a remarkable experience. We flushed out a spotted sandpiper that was acting like she was hurt; however, she was rapidly moving in some underbrush. Her alarm call was chilling. After she led us along the path a bit, she had a miraculous recovery.

Obviously, she was leading us away from her nest.

Altogether, we navigated 3.6 miles out of the 5 miles of trails on the Island. Some of the trails were 'cart trails', but others were more challenging. Along the way, we saw good sized American Toads (see attached) and garter snakes (roughly 18 inches long).

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S178685364>

Power Island Combined 2-Day Survey, May 31 – June 1st

Species: 44

Canada Goose 42	American Crow 4
Mute Swan 6	Black-capped Chickadee 9
Mallard 10	Tree Swallow 6
Common Merganser 28	White Breasted Nuthatch 2
Killdeer 3	Red-breasted Nuthatch 3
Spotted Sandpiper 5	Brown Creeper 1
Ring-billed Gull 6	Winter Wren 1
Herring Gull 3	European Starling 8
Double-crested Cormorant 10	Veery 3
Green Heron 1	American Robin 21
Bald Eagle 3	American Goldfinch 7
Red-tailed Hawk 1	Song Sparrow 5
Belted Kingfisher 1	Eastern Towhee 2
Red-bellied Woodpecker 5	Red-winged Blackbird 10
Downy Woodpecker 8	Brown-headed Cowbird 1
Hairy Woodpecker 1	Common Grackle 40
Northern Flicker 2	Ovenbird 2
Eastern Wood-Pewee 5	Black-and-white Warbler 3
Great Crested Flycatcher 5	American Redstart 11
Eastern Kingbird 5	Yellow Warbler 3
Red-eyed Vireo 12	Northern Cardinal 10
Blue Jay 8	Rose-breasted Grosbeak 3

A few photos from Power Island by Joan Kmotorka:





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

This newsletter was written by a 100% human being!

