
BIRD NOTES

GRAND TRAVERSE
AUDUBON CLUB

www.grandtraverseaudubon.org
Editor: Kirk Waterstripe
newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org

January 2025

Upcoming Programs

January 16 - Birding in Ecuador

Jenny Young will share her adventures from the cloud forest to the Amazon Basin, from ecolodges to travel by canoe. Join us for a tropical travelogue as far from the cold and snow as you can get!

VOTE ON THE
BUDGET FOR
2025!



February 20 - Skegemog Raptor Center

Raptors! We love them, so come learn a little more about them. James Manley, Executive Director of SRC, will share some raptor biology, ecology of birds of prey, and more about what the Center does to help them. We'll also get to meet some of their raptor ambassadors! A great program for kids and new birders!

Our meetings are held at the Boardman River Nature Center at 7:00 pm. Doors open at 6:30. All are welcome; building is accessible to all.

In this newsletter:

Meeting
announcements

Field Trip Info

Christmas Bird
Count Summary

Community
Partner Events

Editor's Perch

Past Events

Upcoming Field Trips

February 1-2 - Join Board Member Jenny Young for a field trip to the eastern U.P. for some winter birding. We will leave Traverse City around 8 am Saturday and return late afternoon on Sunday. There is no charge for this event, however, all participants will be responsible for their own food and lodging. I have a block of rooms reserved at Budget Host Hotel in St. Ignace. Room rates (pre-tax) are \$102.60 for single queen, \$112.50 for single king, or \$122.40 for 2 queens.



Our target birds include Snowy Owl, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Shrike, Pine Grosbeak, Redpoll, Pine Siskin, Bohemian Waxwing, Snow Bunting, and Evening Grosbeak. We will caravan to a variety of locations in Chippewa and Mackinac counties.

Anyone interested in joining this field trip should register via this link below (FYI, we are limiting registration to 10 people).

To secure a room, call the Budget Host in St. Ignace at [\(906\) 643-9666](tel:9066439666). The block of rooms will be held until early January and is under Grand Traverse Audubon Club.

Any questions, feel free to give Jenny a call at 317-833-6425.

*Unfortunately this trip is full.
Keep an eye on our website for
cancellations!*



Attention! Bird Flu is here!

If you find a dead bird, **DO NOT PICK IT UP!**

Bird flu has been affecting wild bird populations around North America. To be on the safe side, please don't handle dead birds.

**REMEMBER TO PAY YOUR DUES!
YOU CAN EVEN DO IT ONLINE OR
WITH PAYPAL!**

Highlights of the 125th Christmas Bird Counts

Leelanau County

Thanks to the 25 field counters and 4 feeder counters, we counted 4811 birds of 61 species this year. That's a new record for participation!

Count highlights were a first-ever Northern Saw-whet Owl, record counts of 27 Bald Eagles and 590 Mallards, a Great Blue Heron, 3 Belted Kingfishers, and 2 Snowy Owls!

The overall atmosphere of the count was fairly quiet, but it may take years to top the 2023 count, after all. We didn't miss many species that were expected, like Northern Shrike and Long-tailed Duck.

Stats:

Species: 61

Party hours: 80

Miles by car: 446

Miles on foot: 35 (yay!)

Owling hours: 2.25 (more next year?)

Hours at feeders: 12

Thanks again to all those who help!
We're collecting good data thanks to you!

- Kirk Waterstripe



Traverse City

I think everyone should be very happy with the number of species despite the weather. Anyone out owling in the morning experienced 4 degree F temps! The day did warm up to 33 degrees F with some sun.

Our total remains at 68 species with Count Week Bonaparte's Gull bringing the Count Period to 69 species.

I'm most surprised we missed BARRED OWL, PURPLE FINCH, PINE SISKIN, CEDAR WAXWING and again SNOWY OWL.

We can pat ourselves on the back with some great species we didn't get last year, RING NECKED DUCK, WHITE WINGED SCOTER, AMERICAN COOT, SHARP SHINNED HAWK, PEREGRINE FALCON, and CAROLINA WREN.

The Peregrine Falcon is the first ever record for the MITC count, found by Hans Voss and Paul Smyth. The Carolina Wren is our first Count Day record in 33 years. I hope you will all do it again next year!

- Nate Crane
-



COMMUNITY EVENTS

Jan. 11 - Polar Plumage

GTCD naturalists and Grand Traverse Audubon Board member Kirk Waterstripe invite you to a community bird watching hike along the Boardman-Ottaway River and Boardman Lake.

Meet at the Governmental Center, County of Grand Traverse, 400 Boardman Ave, Traverse City, MI 49684.

Registration: Free. Registration is required. Please [click here](#).

DONATIONS IN 2024

The Club helped out several organizations with financial gifts:

- \$100.00 to G.T. Regional Land Conservancy
- \$100.00 to Leelanau Conservancy
- \$100.00 to Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch
- \$100.00 to North Sky Raptor Sanctuary
- \$100.00 to Animal Rescue of Kritters (ARK)
- \$50.00 to National Audubon/Cornell University earmarked for Christmas Bird Count expenses



Past Highlights

Bird Trivia Night - Nov. 21st

At the November meeting, Kirk Waterstripe, Master Bird Nerd, led a trivia game. Four teams faced questions about birding, bird biology, birds in history, and local birds. The Kingfishers were victorious with a score of 41 out of 50. Congratulations!

Member's Night - Dec. 19th

We enjoyed bird photos from several members, taken in places ranging from backyards to distant lands. This program is always a favorite, and was well-attended. We even got a look at an antique bird feeder!

If you would like to share something next year, let Vice President Jenny Young know in October or November.

Thanks to Tim Webb,
Dutch Zonderman,
and ?? for sharing
photos!

Sneak peek at 2025

Here are a few of the outings the Board is working on for this coming year:

- Digiscoping
- Warblers at Lighthouse West
- Birding in southeast Grand Traverse Co.
- Bird banding demonstration?
- Kayaking

The old favorites like Arcadia Marsh, Woodcocks, and Sunday Bird Walks will be back too!



You might make a good trip leader!

Do you enjoy field trips? Would you like to lead one but don't consider yourself an "expert"?

The good news is you don't have to be! With some bird knowledge, and a desire to help people have fun, you could lead a successful outing. Here are some things to keep in mind:

- Make everyone feel welcome!
- Help folks get a look at the birds. Identifying can come later.
- Show them how to use the equipment. Make sure binoculars are adjusted for them.
- Keep an eye on the weather! They may not be dressed for a downpour.
- Watch for safety hazards like ...
- Watch for overwhelm. New birders may have a limit to how much they can take in.
- Good looks at common species are worth much more than fleeting looks at rarities.
- Be aware of poor etiquette like hogging scope time and stepping in front of others. Mention these at the start of the trip.
- Know your way around the area, including where the restrooms are!



Cough it up!

Don't forget to renew your membership so you don't miss a single Birdalert email, or the next issue of this awesome newsletter!

Pay your dues online, or send a check to our Tremendous Treasurer:
Kathie Wiley, Treasurer GTAC
1513 N Orchard Drive
Traverse City, MI 49686



Editor's Perch - In Praise of Rodents

When the snow flies, our dreams and binoculars turn toward owls: Short-eared, Great Gray (dreams, right?), and especially Snowy. As of this writing, there's a Snowy near Turtle Creek Stadium. What we might not think of is, for these birds to linger through the winter and provide us with birding enjoyment, they need to find an abundance of rodents.

For us to find owls and other raptors, we need to leave room in our world for mice, voles, and rats. At first, this may seem distasteful or even revolting, but it's true. No rodents, no owls.

These furry, gnawing creatures are pretty good at living around the edges of our world. From woodpiles, dumpsters, and dark basements to orchards, fields, and woodlands, they find seeds, grasses, spilled grain, and slices of pizza, and they thrive.

Still, there is one more thing they need: places to be active.

In the depth of winter, under the snowpack, the earth radiates heat. This warmth melts the snow in contact with the ground, creating a world of ice crystals and air spaces. In this subnivean paradise, out of the view of hunting raptors, rodents, especially voles, travel in a network of tunnels.

Human activities, from skiing to snowmobiling, can collapse these tunnels, limiting the voles' ability to find food. If this happens enough, they may abandon a field for greener pastures, so to speak.

Then there's development, the wholesale loss of orchard and meadow habitats. If the rodents go, so do the owls, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks, and the dreams of Great Gray Owls in our area.

If you want to see owls, support management with native plants that make seeds, limit development, and tolerate a few of the cute little orange-toothed faces around your property. As John Muir said, "when one tugs at a single thing in nature, he finds it attached to the rest of the world."

This newsletter was written by a real live human!
