

November 2024

# Bird Notes

## Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

[grandtraverseaudubon.org](http://grandtraverseaudubon.org)

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

Editor: Kirk Waterstripe [newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org](mailto:newsletter@grandtraverseaudubon.org)

Election Day is upon us. This one matters much more than most, for us, for wild places, for water policy, and yes, for birds. Sometime soon, go birding with no motive but to enjoy the company of feathered creatures in wildish places. Let their peace calm your heart and mind.

## On the Calendar

For the rest of the year, 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. 21, 2024 – Monthly Meeting: Bird Trivia!

How much do you know about birds? Join us for a night of brain-bending facts and fun as Kirk Waterstripe, board member and bird nerd, leads a bird-themed trivia contest! Categories include basic birding, identification, bird biology, birds in history and culture, and local bird knowledge. Form a team! There will be prizes!

### Dec. 19, 2024 – 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](mailto:flegels@centurytel.net)).



*Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford*

## Upcoming Field Trips

### November 23

Practice Christmas Bird Count – see page 2

### December 14 – 21

Christmas Bird Counts – see page 2

## 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. 23<sup>rd</sup> (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 Medalie Park (Logan's Landing) at 9:00 AM.

We'll be out for the whole morning. We'll be walking on 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:

Grand Traverse – Dec. 14 (Saturday), contact Nate Crane at [nmcrane@gmail.com](mailto:nmcrane@gmail.com)

Lake Leelanau CBC – Dec. 18 (Wednesday), contact Kirk Waterstripe at [4walkinglightly@gmail.com](mailto:4walkinglightly@gmail.com) or (231)883-2858

Antrim Co. – Dec. 20 (Friday), contact Curt Hofer at [curthofer1@gmail.com](mailto:curthofer1@gmail.com).

Benzie Co. – Dec. 21 (Friday), contact [nedthebirder@gmail.com](mailto:nedthebirder@gmail.com)

## 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?

## Community Events

**Nov. 7** - The [Aldo Leopold Foundation](#) is hosting an online program on Sandhill Cranes entitled "Ajijaak: Ojibwe Lessons from the Crane" [Register here](#).

They also host the Great Midwest Crane Fest, November 8-9 this year in Baraboo, WI.

## Editor's Perch

### Spark Birds

Yes, I'm trying desperately to avoid mixing birding and politics. You know how they're connected, and you know how you're voting. There is nothing to be gained by my entering the fray. So let's talk about how we started birding!

It's getting common for people, when asked how they got into birding, to talk about their "spark bird", the species or experience that sent them down the feathered path. If you'll indulge me, I'll share mine. I didn't have a grand epiphany, or a dramatic life-changing experience. Those came later. If I have a "spark bird", it might be the female Mallard that nested along the creek that wound along the edge of our subdivision. I remember visiting her on the nest after school, so I must have been six or seven. She grew to trust the small group of boys that came down to watch her, but only if we stayed out of reach. Once, I got too close and she pecked the toe of my shoe. Not glamorous, but real; a contact between species that steered me down a path.

If there was a second "spark", it may have been the Evening Grosbeak we found with a sunflower husk caught in his bill. We caught him and removed the seed, but he needed some time to regain his strength. (I say we but it was really my parents.) We fixed him up with a covered box in the dining room, near the glass door that looked out onto the feeders. As he got stronger, he used to flap and propel himself in loops without letting go of the perch. After a week or so, he was ready and we opened the box in the backyard. Off he flew to join his Canadian counterparts in eating huge volumes of sunflower seed.

From there, I went in headfirst, learning all I could about birds, accompanying the local birders (some of the best in the state), and taking classes. My birding horizon doubled then doubled again. The next time we're on a field trip, perhaps on a Sunday morning, let's be aware of the new birders around us. Let's make sure they get a good look at what we're seeing, however common. You never know, but it could be the bird that changes their view of the world.

- Kirk W.



## Finch Forecast for the upcoming winter

The annual forecast from the Finch Research Network is available at <https://finchnetwork.org/winter-finch-forecast-2024-25>.

The winter movements of these engaging birds are driven by food supply. Cone and seed crops are fairly good across most areas of Canada so most finch species will probably stay in or near the boreal forests. Down here in the Great Lakes, we should keep our eyes open for Purple Finches, Evening Grosbeaks, Red-breasted Nuthatches (yes, they migrate) and Bohemian Waxwings. Watch the local berry patches, fruit trees, and box elder trees (a favorite of grosbeaks).

## Meet your new board members

At the October membership meeting, we elected a full slate of officers! Thanks to all those who came to the meeting so we could have the necessary 15 members voting. Your officers for 2025 are:

President – John Imboden  
Vice-President – Jenny Young  
Secretary – Jared Gugnitz  
Treasurer – Kathy Wiley  
Newsletter and Publicity – Kirk Waterstripe  
Member-at-large – Maryellen Newport  
Past President – Kathy Flegel

Here are a couple brief bios so you can get to know our new members.

Jenny recently relocated to Traverse City with her husband from the Indianapolis area after she retired from a 30+ year career in the pharmaceutical industry. She grew up with birdwatching parents, but did not become a serious birdwatcher until Covid hit and found it was a wonderful break from unending zoom calls! In addition to birdwatching, she enjoys cycling, hiking, kayaking, and traveling.

Mary Ellen Newport is recently retired from teaching life sciences at Interlochen Arts Academy. Her spark bird is the red-tailed hawk; once you start looking for them, they are everywhere! She lives on Rainbow Pond (Grawn) with her two dogs and an unpredictable assortment of ducks, geese, sandpipers and yard birds.

## Club accomplishments this year

As a club, we took on some major things this year. First, we revisited the bylaws. The major changes were the addition of a statement of our objectives and values:

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 bird habitat.
- – Sustainable financial practices to ensure the long-term viability of the Club.

Second, we changed the meeting night to the third Thursday of each month, since we were already changing the date for 3 meetings. Third, and most fun, we held a Bird-a-thon that raised over \$1100 for conservation and education efforts in Michigan (see July *Bird Notes* for details).

Here's to a year that's just as productive in 2025!

## Field Trip Report

**October Big Day** – We had a total of 12 people of all ages attend our October Big Day 2024 event including an enthusiastic toddler. Most of the 31 species were found at Boardman Lake/ Logan's Landing, however, we were able to pick up Red Wing Blackbirds when a few of us continued to the YMCA pond.

Below are the two sites included in our Trip Report.

- Mute Swan 7
- Wood Duck 3
- Gadwall 9
- American Wigeon 6
- Mallard 83
- American Black Duck 1
- Green-winged Teal 3
- Lesser Scaup 12
- Hooded Merganser 8
- Pied-billed Grebe 3
- Mourning Dove 4
- American Coot 18
- American Golden-Plover 1
- Killdeer 5
- Spotted Sandpiper 1
- Lesser Yellowlegs 1
- Ring-billed Gull 28
- Herring Gull 25
- Double-crested Cormorant 13
- Great Blue Heron 2
- Belted Kingfisher 2
- Northern Flicker 1
- Blue Jay 1
- American Crow 3
- Black-capped Chickadee 1
- American Robin 2
- White-crowned Sparrow 4
- White-throated Sparrow 2
- Song Sparrow 1
- Northern Cardinal 2

## Gift ideas for birdy people

Make a lens-cleaning kit for the birder in your life: Kimwipes™ (facial tissues leave too much lint), Sparkle™ lens cleaner, air blower in a plastic sandwich container

The Finch Research Network has clothing! Shop [here](#).

Books:

- *The Courage of Birds* by Pete Dunne (due out at the end of October),
- *The Feather Quest* by Pete Dunne (an older title but still worth it; hits the timeless aspects of birding)

## Practice for Trivia Night

These questions may or may not come up on Trivia Night, Nov. 21<sup>st</sup>:

- How can you tell an American Black Duck from a female Mallard on the water?
- Name a Michigan raptor that hovers while hunting.
- What is kleptoparasitism?
- What habit does a Ruddy Duck share with a Brown-headed Cowbird?
- This legislation curtailed the practice of market hunting, which had threatened populations of several shorebirds.

## Tips for the upcoming Christmas Bird Counts

The first Christmas Bird Count was in 1900, and the tradition continues. With these tips, you can make sure you count safely, and your data are the best you can contribute:

- Get out of the car frequently.
- Park as far off the road as you can. Or dare.
- Walk long trails (e.g. TART, Leelanau Trail sections) with a driver to pick you up.
- A little playback is justified. For science.
- Sparrows don't come to pishing, but they do show up for their call notes, so learn to imitate them. Chickadees and kinglets do respond to pishing.
- Don't risk icy hills.
- Note time and direction of travel for rare species and raptors. Someone in a neighboring territory might see it too.
- Take some food and water so you can stay out all day.
- Attend the wrap-up gathering. It can be the best part of the day.

If you can, sign up for one or more of this year's counts. It's great fun, and the data we gather really does get used for the benefit of North American birds.

## Project Feederwatch starts Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>!

Do you have a bird feeder? Do you have a yard? A favorite wintertime patch? 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 or winter bird populations and distribution. For more information, visit the [FeederWatch website](#).



## Gifts we gave ourselves this year

With the continual focus on politics, you may have missed a few bits of good news. It's nice to learn that some refuges have expanded, here in the Great Lakes and in other parts of the country.

**Dansville State Game Area:** The Michigan Department of Natural Resources acquired a residential lot to create public access to a 50-acre marsh area. The marsh is a popular spot for birding, waterfowl hunting, and other outdoor activities.

**Detroit River International Wildlife Rescue:** They have added nearly 20 acres of the Robert and Laurie Sharkus Tract to the wildlife refuge system. The [Detroit International Wildlife Refuge](#) in Trenton is expanding with the acquisition of 114 acres of land. The land will be maintained to exterminate invasive phragmites and foster the growth of native marsh birds like marsh wrens, red-winged blackbirds, great blue herons and egrets.

At the national level: [Interior Department Announces More Than \\$157 Million in Funding for Wetland Conservation Projects and National Wildlife Refuges](#)

- **North American Wetlands Conservation Council**  
Approved 22 small grants for projects up to \$250,000. The grants will benefit 11 Endangered Species Act listed bird species and 68 species identified as Birds of Conservation Concern.
- **Migratory Bird Conservation Fund** Conserved 3,268 acres for seven national wildlife refuges.

### Urban Bird Treaty-funded projects

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) funded projects including restoring Battle Creek's natural areas and advancing Chimney Swift conservation in Pittsburgh.

## Trivia answers

- Female Mallard has a blue speculum with wide white borders;
- American Black Duck has very thin borders
- American Kestrel, Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk
- Stealing food from another bird
- Brood parasite
- Migratory Bird Treaty Act

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