

January 2026

Bird Notes

Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

Editor: Jenny Young publicist@grandtraverseaudubon.org

Welcome to 2026! As Kirk announced in the last newsletter, after many years providing some amazing content, he has handed over the baton of newsletter editor to me. I have big shoes to fill, but hope you enjoy the content. Please let me know if you have any ideas for future newsletters.

- Jenny Young

Program Events

Our meetings are usually on the second Thursday of the month at the Boardman River Nature Center on Cass Road at 7:00 pm. Open to non-members in addition to members!

Jan 9th, 7 pm: Motus Wildlife Tracking System

Max Henschell from Michigan Audubon will share with us the basics of the Motus Wildlife Tracking System, as well as how the data can be used for research. Motus is an international research community working together to study the movement and behavior of birds, bats, and insects. These animals carry miniaturized tags that transmit information to stations placed across the landscape.

In addition, we will review and vote on the upcoming budget for the club and briefly review last year's budget.

Feb. 12th, 7 pm: Planting Native Plants to Attract Birds

Join us for a discussion with Tom Ford and Brian Zimmerman from Four Seasons Nursery to learn about how to landscape with native plants and improve bird and pollinator habitat in your yard.



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

**There is still time to renew
your membership!**

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

March 12th, 7 pm: Lower Rio Grande Valley Birding Adventure Program

Come hear about Nate Crane, Matt Winkler, and Jeremiah Stewart's adventures birding in Lower Rio Grande Valley, Texas. In conjunction with this month's program, GT Audubon will be holding a special fundraising **Nature Themed Silent Auction**. If you have one or two valuables to donate for the tables, please contact Kathie Wiley (dujour1@gmail.com).

Upcoming Field Trips and Partnered Events

February 7th, 10am to 12pm: Winter Birding (Interlochen Library)

This workshop is a collaboration of Interlochen Library and GT Audubon Club and will cover bird identification, winter bird feeding, how to use binoculars and the use of apps to deepen and extend your birdwatching. Dress for the weather! We'll take a walk behind the Township Offices where there are bird feeders. IF there is a snowy owl documented close-by, there will be an optional driving field trip at the end of the workshop. Contact Maryellen Newport (maryellen.newport@gmail.com) for more information.

February 14th Great Backyard Bird Count (Medalie Park & Mitchell Creek Meadows)

9 am – 11 am – Medalie Park

11:30 am – 12:30 am Mitchell Creek Meadows

GT Audubon and GT Regional Land Conservancy are collaborating to bring you this special winter field trip. Come to Medalie Park at the south end of Boardman Lake at 9:00 AM to participate in the global Great Backyard Bird Count happening February 13th – 16th, an annual bird census conducted throughout the world by volunteers like you. You'll help count birds and we'll enter the data into the eBird app. At 11:30 AM, we will travel to a nature walk at Mitchell Creek Meadows off 3 mile Rd. Contact Leader Kathie Wiley – (dujour1@gmail.com) Registration preferred: [Great Backyard Bird Count 2-14-26 Registration](#)

2025 Top Birders

The Top Birders of 2025 in our area were recently revealed (by the number of unique species for the county recorded in eBird in 2025):

Grand Traverse: Jeremiah Stewart (225), Chad Kendall (216), Tim Webb (205), Scott Sneed (204)

Leelanau: Three-way tie – Craig Nilsson, Holly Lang, and Susan Muenzer all with 206

Antrim: Robert Lawshe (168), Theresa Moore (166)

Congrats to all these great birders; can anyone beat 225 this year??

Meet a Member - Jeremiah Stewart

As you saw from the stats above, Jeremiah Stewart was the top birder in Grand Traverse County in 2025 and you may see a lot of Discord alerts from him for bird sightings in the county, but did you know he has only been birding for less than a year?!? Learn more about Jeremiah below:

Tell us a little about yourself. I'm a Civil Engineer, married with 3 daughters and an Aussiedoodle. I grew up in Traverse City and lived in Ann Arbor from 2011 to 2020. I got my degree from Michigan Tech after graduating from TC West High School. I love to golf, disc golf, play pickleball, and go birding. My 9-year-old daughter and one of my 4-year-old twins love to go birding with me on the weekends, but are fair weather birders.



Photo credits: Jeremiah Stewart

How long have you been birding and what got you interested?

I started birding in March 2025. My mom has always been into birds and recently lost the majority of her sight due to a rare eye disease. So, I bought her a smart bird feeder (BirdBuddy) for Christmas in 2024. Unfortunately, the rules at her apartment prevented her from keeping it, so I set it up at my house. I always looked forward to the alerts of a new bird. At first, it was just chickadees, cardinals, finches, and mourning doves stopping by, but in March I got an alert saying a Pine Siskin was on my feeder. I had never heard of such a bird, so I googled it and became fascinated by what I was learning. After that, I was obsessed with birding! For new birders I suggest getting four apps on your phone: Merlin, Ebird, Sibley Field guide, and Discord.

Where is your favorite place to bird in the Traverse City area? Outside of TC? It depends on the season but overall, Petobego Pond is my favorite local hotspot in TC. You can get tree birds, grouse, and warblers on the hike out to the water and then ducks, terns, gulls, bitterns, wrens, and other marsh birds near the pond. Outside of TC, Point Mouillee State Game Area in Monroe County. It's an amazing spot with a bike required to see all the different habitats. I observed 75 species in one visit there in August! If anyone wants to go down there for a group birding trip, I would be happy to lead it.

What has been one of your favorite experiences while birding? This is a great tale of both embarrassment and success. It was a kayaking trip to Petobego Marsh with my friend Nate Crane in hopes of spotting a Least Bittern. It started out great, but my kayak became unstable and I tipped into the water (later learning it had a long crack in it). Nate retrieved my camera and binoculars I was holding out of the water with one hand, while the other was holding the sinking kayak. He ended up towing me back to shore as I held the sinking kayak in a full body bear hug with one arm and the other holding onto the rear handle of his kayak. In spite of a 35-minute tow with only my nose and ears above the water line, we made it back safely AND I saw the Least Bittern (as well as 2 other lifers!) My shirt was filthy and to this day I can't get the green stains from the lily pads out of it. Despite that, I still wear it every time I go birding with Nate for good luck.

Preliminary Christmas Bird Counts Results

Lake Leelanau CBC – December 17 (Kirk Waterstripe, Compiler)

- 57 species (4774 individuals)
- A record 26 counters in the field and 7 who counted at feeders
- New record counts of 3 Winter Wrens and 52 Long-tailed Ducks
- Other species of significance recorded during the count week: Bohemian Waxwing and Great Horned Owl

Traverse City CBC – December 20 (Nate Crane, Compiler)

- 73 species with an additional 5 species during count week (including Snowy Owl)
- Of note: this was the 3rd year in a row with 70+ species thanks to the growing team of counters!
- Species of interest included: Ruffed Grouse, Pine Grosbeak, Winter Wren, Horned Grebe, Northern Shrike, Surf Scoter, Wilson's Snipe, and Pied-Billed Grebe,

Editor's Perch – Winter Birding



Cedar Waxwings

Photo credit: Pamela Bevelhymer

The snow and cold have arrived and many of you may be staying toasty inside watching your bird feeders. But winter can provide some really interesting visitors from even further north. Birds like Pine Grosbeaks, Cedar and Bohemian Waxwings, Snow Buntings, Snowy Owls, and Redpolls, may come south in search of food, especially when their food sources further north are limited. There also can be some interesting waterfowl who end up in our area as they search for open water. There have been recent sightings of Red-throated Loon, Surf Scoter, Long-tailed Ducks, and others. Clinch Marina tends to be a good place to look for waterfowl.

How can you find some of these other winter birds? One of the best ways is to drive around on country roads where you can drive slowly. Look for bushes and trees with berries or cones (spruce, fir, and birch are food sources favored by many) or open fields with corn remnants for birds such as Snow Buntings. I typically watch for movement or will even drive with my window open to listen for bird calls. For the snowy owls, there are two places around Traverse City that seem most reliable – the airport and Chum's Corner (around the baseball stadium). These both have fields near where they hunt rodents (early morning or late afternoon are when they typically are active, but can often be seen sleeping on a high perch such as a roof or light post).



Snowy Owl

Photo credit: Pamela Bevelhymer

Virtual Birding

Maybe you don't like getting out in the cold or perhaps have mobility issues that limit your ability to get out and bird. Or you want to see birds from the tropics, but don't have the desire or travel budget to do so. Did you know that there are a variety of ways you can bird virtually? Here are some of my favorite sites for virtual birding and most are through YouTube, so you can "rewind" to see a bigger variety in a short period of time:

Friends of Big Bear Valley (FOBBV): <https://www.youtube.com/fobbvcam>

Follow along with America's most famous Eagle couple – Jackie and Shadow! This link takes you to their YouTube channel, where you can watch either one of their live cams or they have some great summary videos. Jackie typically lays eggs in January, so it could be anytime!

Great Lakes Eagle Cam: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vMW-S6ZoYgY>

Of course, there is also the cam of our local Eagle couple (Harry and Harriet)

Ontario FeederWatch Cam <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YQ2vfNZA5SE>

Live Boreal birds hosted by Cornell Labs with good chances to see Redpolls, Pine Grosbeaks, and other winter birds.

Panama fruit feeders: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/cams/panama-fruit-feeders/>

Another cam hosted by Cornell labs; I mean seriously, look at this beautiful Keel-billed Toucan that I saw on the cam the other day!



2026 Board Members



Back: Ron McCullick (Vice President), Kirk Waterstripe (Member-at-large), John Imboden (President), Jared Gugnitz (Secretary)
Front: Kathy Flegel (Past President), Jenny Young (Publicist), Kathie Wiley (Treasurer)