

March 2026

# Bird Notes

## Newsletter of the Grand Traverse Audubon Club

grandtraverseaudubon.org

find us on Facebook and Instagram #gtaudubon

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It seems like it's been a long winter, but the snow sure has been beautiful and it's been fun to see some of the winter birds we don't see here too often. However, this recent warming trend has me really looking forward to spring, a magical time where many different species can be seen in the area on their migration back north, and some other feathered friends come back here to stay for the summer. Our calendar is jam-packed with a variety of events, so be sure to join one or all!

- Jenny Young



Official GTA club logo by Tom Ford

**There are many spring events, be sure to bookmark the calendar:**

[Events 2026 – Grand Traverse Audubon Club](#)

## 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!

- **March 12 (Thursday) Lower Rio Grande Valley Birding Adventure Program – Nate Crane / Matt Winkler / Jeremiah Stewart**

Come hear an exciting recap of a destination birding trip to the Lower Rio Grande Valley that these fellas went on earlier this year.

- **April 9 (Thursday) Traveling Birder's Big Year – Daniel Bernard**

Be prepared for lively Big Year tales by traveling birder, Daniel Bernard who embarked on a cross-country birding road trip he's titled "People, Places, Birds."

## Upcoming Field Trips and Partnered Events (see website for more details)

- **Sunday bird hikes start back up on April 5<sup>th</sup>:** locations and time vary by week, so be sure to check out the website for the most up to date info
- **April 25 (Saturday) Arcadia Marsh Field Trip:** Meet up at the car wash by Meijer on US 31 South at 7:00 AM to carpool/caravan to the marsh or meet at the Marsh about 8:15.
- **April 25 (Saturday, 10 am to 2 pm at GT Civic Center) – MakerFest**  
Sponsored by Recycle Smart and Traverse Area District Library. GT Audubon will have a table at this 3<sup>rd</sup> annual event, including a repeat of the popular Bird Shrink Art.
- **May 1 (Friday), 7 pm – City Opera House:**  
As part of the Fresh Coast Film Festival, “Listers – A Glimpse Into Extreme Birdwatching” (with Special Guests Owen and Quentin Reiser) will be the featured documentary. [Get tickets](#)
- **May 2 (Saturday) Peak Spring Bird Migration Workshop (Interlochen Library, 10 to noon):**  
Learn more about birdwatching and how to take advantage of the spring migration, then practice your skills with an optional field trip to Riley Woods
- **May 9 (Saturday, 8 am) Bird Walk at Edward C. Grace Memorial Harbor, Elk Rapids**  
Join Green ER and GT Audubon on Global Big Day for this citizen scientist event on behalf of Cornell University and National Audubon. Park in the Public Parking and walk over to the marina entrance.
- **May 23 (Saturday, 9 am) Birding and Kayaking the Lower Platte River:** We'll see and hear waterbirds, shorebirds, warblers, and others as we pass through Loon Lake and end at Lake Michigan with breathtaking views of Platte Bay and Sleeping Bear Dunes. Limited to 8, BYOK [Register Here](#)
- **May 30 (Saturday, 8 am) – Bridge Lake Kayak Birding Adventure:**  
Explore water-loving warblers from your kayak on lovely Bridge Lake in Interlochen. Limited to 8, BYOK [Register Here](#)

## Winter Birding Presentation Recap

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, GT Audubon and Interlochen Public Library collaborated on a winter birding presentation for new and returning birders. ME Newport and Kathie Wiley showed folks how to use range maps and eBird to anticipate when birds might show up in Grand Traverse County. Habitats were discussed, including the rich variety of locations in our area for birding, with a shout out to the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy properties. The participants traded success stories on bird feeders and seed types, as well as the joys and limitations of using the Merlin app. The session concluded with a short field trip to Turtle Creek Stadium, where Kathie showed the power of a spotting scope in keeping a safe distance from “charismatic megafauna” like our beautiful snowy owls.

**Snowy Owl**



*Photo by Ryan Haveson*

## Great Backyard Count Event Recap

Our Great Backyard Group Count in partnership with Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy held on February 14<sup>th</sup> was fantastic! We had 10 citizen scientists participate including a mix of new and experienced birders, as well as one young birder. With astonishing



luck, Boardman Lake unfroze from a couple weeks before, the sun was shining, and we saw a huge number of waterfowl on the lake including 75 Mute Swans and 400 + Mallards. We were graced with a King Fisher at Boardman Lake and a couple Red Breasted Nuthatches at Mitchell Creek Meadows. In total the group logged 654 birds of 23 different species.

## “Both Bays Now – an Ode to Winter Birding” by Club Member Tim Webb

*(Sung to the tune of “Both Sides Now”, with apologies to Joni Mitchell)*

The other day I drove to town to see what odd gulls were around.  
I hoped an Iceland might be found, or glaucous by the bay.

If only Leonard Graf were here, he'd spot a rare gull on the pier:  
an immature in second year. To me they're all just gray.

I've looked for gulls on both bays now, on West and East, and still somehow,  
There's only ring-billed on the wall. I really don't know gulls at all.

Canvasbacks and scoters, too, can't even find them at the zoo.  
But mallards, yes, I've seen a few. I see them every day.

But now old ducks are sounding strange. Like long-tailed ducks: their name was changed.  
The species get all rearranged, and then they fly away.

I've looked for ducks on both bays now, all black and white, and still somehow,  
with big rafts forming in late fall I really don't know ducks at all.

With Sibley guide and bins in hand, I'll see what's flying back on land.  
Things didn't go as I had planned, no need for me to stay.

I'll search for buntings in the snow, or look at yet another crow.  
There's always birds I still don't know, new life birds every day!

I've looked for birds on both bays now, on shore, in sky, and still somehow,  
I just find starlings at the mall. I really don't know birds at all.

## Meet a Member – Leonard Graf



Many of you probably know Leonard Graf, as he has been involved in Walter Hastings/GT Audubon Club for decades! He first served as president in 1980/1981, again in 1991, as well as 2020/2021. In addition to serving in many other board roles, he also has led multiple club field trips over the years!

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

I have been birding, it seems like forever, since 1959. I started birding because my grandparents gave me a copy of Peterson's "Field Guide to Eastern Birds" for Christmas. I studied it for a week, then began birding the first of the year and was hooked! His life list now stands at over 2,550 species and he has had the opportunity to bird in all 7 continents, all 50 states and all Canadian provinces!

**Tell us a little about yourself. Family? Where do you live and what was your career?** My wife, Barbara, and I moved to Traverse City in 1967 and have lived in the same house in Leelanau County since 1968. We raised 2 children. Both were young birders, but grew out of it as they got older. I spent my career as a civil engineer and retired in 2010.

**What are some of the biggest changes you have seen since you first started birding?** One of the largest expansion of a bird species I have observed is that of the Red-bellied Woodpecker. In 1960 I found the nest of a Red-bellied in Washtenaw County and showed it to my sister. She reported it to her ornithology instructor who told her I was mistaken because Red-bellieds were rare in Michigan. Now they are very common in all of the lower peninsula. On the downside is the loss of habitat due to the expansion of human facilities; one example is at Chums Corners where there used to be little development and a great place for Snowy Owls.

**Where is your favorite place to bird around the Traverse City area?** My favorite place to bird in the area might be Leelanau State Park where in the spring it is a mini bird trap. There I have seen Loggerhead Shrike, Western Kingbird, and White-eyed Vireo, as well as a good number of hawks, flycatchers, vireos, warblers and sparrows. Sleeping Bear Point in the fall is also a favorite with such species as Little Gull, Western Grebe, Red-throated Loon, hundreds of Bonaparte Gulls and numerous other waterfowl. Or maybe Logan's Landing most any time of the year where species like Snowy Egret, Hudsonian Godwit, Stilt Sandpiper and Laughing Gull have shown up. But the place to bird is any place where the birds are.

**What advice would you have for birders wanting to increase their skills at birding?** Just "Go Birding". Go on a field trip, go with the Club's Sunday morning birding excursions or go out with another birder with more experience than you. Just go out and enjoy birds!

## Editor's Perch – Citizen Science Projects

You may hear a lot about being a citizen scientist when it comes to birdwatching, but what does that really mean? It means you don't have to be a scientist by training to provide meaningful data to the science community. One really easy way to do this with birding is through the use of eBird. There are also special projects such as the Great Backyard Bird Count we highlighted above or you may use other apps such as iNaturalist to report birds (as well as other plant and animal species) you have seen. All this information you submit contributes more data about what birds (and how many) are where, how climate change may be impacting their migration, etc

Another way we can contribute data is reporting any banded birds we may see. This takes a bit more work as it can be tricky to actually read the band or color combination of bands. But with a spotting scope or camera with a good zoom, it is possible and can be very rewarding to submit this data and hear back from the banding group the story of this bird. I was recently in Florida with my 85-year-old mother (who is an avid birder!) and we hit a jackpot of banded shorebirds at Fort DeSoto (near St. Petersburg, FL). It was exciting to learn a banded American Oystercatcher we submitted was at least 14 years old! However, Piping Plovers are one of my favorite birds, so when I recognized the orange flag that designates our very own Great Lakes population, I was anxious to find out exactly where these birds came from. It turns out the first one was a 2025 hatch-year from a nest near Glen Haven (I may have seen him as a chick last summer!); he has been at Fort Desoto since August. The second bird was captive-raised in 2025. His egg came from a nest on North Manitou Island that was located in a construction zone, despite the best efforts of the plover monitors to move the pair outside the area. The eggs were collected, incubated and the chicks were raised in captivity. Once this plover was flying well, he and his two siblings were released near the south boundary of Sleeping Bear Dunes. He has been at Fort Desoto since September. It is hoped both of these birds make their way back to SBD sometime next month!

*Banded Plovers photographed by author at Fort Desoto in mid-February 2026*



2025 hatch-year from nest near Glen Haven



Captive-raised in 2025 from Manitou Island

For more information on how to report a Great Lakes Piping Plover, see the options at the top of their website (and if you happen to report one that isn't a Great Lakes Plover, they'll make sure to forward onto the right organization): [Great Lakes Piping Plovers](#). For a general banded bird, use the US Fish and Wildlife website for reporting banded birds: [www.reportband.gov](http://www.reportband.gov)

## “Egg-citing” News!

Have you heard the Leelanau County resident Eagle couple (Harry and Harriet) are incubating two eggs as of Mar 5<sup>th</sup>? You can watch the couple live at this cam [Eagle Cam](#)