

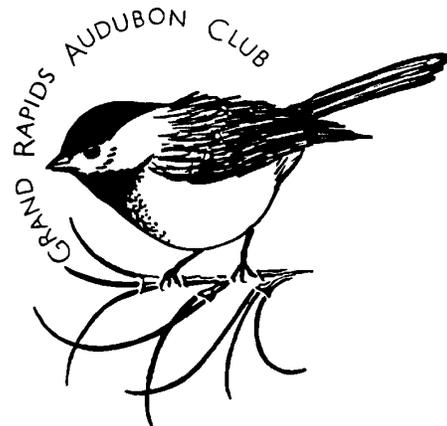
the Caller

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by GRAC, 6152 Georgeann Ct., Belmont, MI 49506-9783

On the web: www.graud.org Information: information@graud.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/grandrapidsaudubonclub/



January Meeting Notes

Date: Monday, January 29
Time: 7:00 PM social; 7:30 PM program
Location: John Donnelly Conference Center
Aquinas College
Speaker: Josh Haas
Topic: Hawks on the Wing

Hawks in flight bring a sense of wonder and struggle to birders, especially when trying to identify them from a distance. Field marks are not enough in back-lit conditions and when birds are too far away to show color. Flight ID has long been the best way to identify hawks at a distance, but books only take it so far. Join hawk watcher Josh Haas as he shares the principles of efficient hawk migration, why Michigan is a hawk-watching paradise and the evolution of hawk ID. Plus, watch clips from his newly released movie “Hawks on the Wing.” Josh’s program and movie also feature side-by-side videos of hawks in flight to help you improve your skills.

Josh first developed a love for hawks working with the birds of prey at the Kalamazoo Nature Center. A hawk-watching trip to Lake Erie Metropark opened his eyes to hawks in migration. He spent seven fall seasons working with the Detroit River Hawk Watch as a relief counter. There, he honed his skills and developed a love for teaching visitors unique ways of telling the shadowy specks apart. This, combined with his experience in bird photography and videography, took his teaching to a new level. His goal of making hawks accessible to everyone has spawned his new movie “Hawks on the Wing,” teaching viewers hawks in flight through the use of video and audio commentary.

President’s Corner

by John Chronowski

Grand Rapids Audubon Club has a few new technological features to offer. On the website, a Conservation and Environment section has been added. It can be accessed by clicking on Activities and then scrolling down to Conservation Issues. Here you will find current articles dealing with conservation and climate issues, as well as bird-related articles. Current articles worth reading include “Wind, Energy and Birds” and “The Plastics Pollution Problem.” Articles rotate and are updated every two weeks or so.

There now is a GRAC Instagram account (@grandrapidsaudubonclub) which will provide members with bird photographs and other avian- and nature-related items. It can be found on the website under GRAC Information, then scroll down to Instagram photos. Contact Tricia Boot if you wish to provide photos or learn more about its features.

The GRAC is in the process of becoming an active participant in the Climate Watch Program sponsored by the Audubon Society. This a new community service program that explores how North American birds are responding to climate change. Bird enthusiasts can now observe birds in designated areas using a specific protocol to aid Audubon in learning how birds are adapting to climate change. There are two periods for observation: Jan. 15 to Feb. 15 and May 15 to June 15. To effectively participate, GRAC will need at least ten individuals to observe specific birds in the designated locations. If you are interested in participating, please contact Katie Bolt at ksbphd51@gmail.com.

Scott Hutchings is now the chairperson of the Nominating Committee. We have several leadership positions open for the 2018-19 year. GRAC can only be as good as its membership. It is paramount that our members take an active role in providing guidance for our organization. The list of positions is now on the GRAC website and on page 9 of this *Caller*. Please contact Scott or me if you have any questions. We definitely need a “few good men and women”!

Deadline for February newsletter articles: **Feb. 1, 2018**

(send to Tricia Boot)



GRAC Field Trips

Visit www.graud.org for the complete 2018 list. Contact Becky Kuhn with field trip suggestions/ideas.

Safety hazards: Driving in a caravan can be hazardous. Get directions from the leader and exercise caution on the road at all times. Have a passenger handle all radio or phone communications. Dress and drive for the weather, particularly in winter months. Hazardous weather may cancel a trip.

Thursdays, Jan. 11, 18, 25, Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22

9:00 AM

Leader: Katie Bolt, Jeanne Griffin or Kathy Haase
Recurring Millennium Park Hikes

Hike Millennium Park to see what's hanging around (route depends on week). A good variety of birds have been reported from this diverse habitat near the river, which includes open and swampy ponds, lowland forest and various secondary growth.

Essentials: Meet at the east end of Veterans Memorial Drive parking area for a three-mile walk.

Saturday, Jan. 27, 2018, 8:00 AM

Leader: Steve Minard

Winter Field Birding

We will plan to search for winter birds such as Snowy Owl, Northern Shrike and Snow Bunting. These can be quite nomadic and hard to find, so we'll try to cover lots of territory. We'll search fields in northern Ottawa County and Muskegon County northwest of Grand Rapids. We'll probably check some of the Crockery Creek bottomlands looking for Red-shouldered Hawk. If conditions permit, we'll try to include the Muskegon Wastewater in our search. Expect to spend most of the time in the car searching the fields for anything different. Bring your CB or Family radio if you have one and we'll try to keep in touch between cars. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the Boy Scout Headquarters west off Walker Road just north of I-96 at 8:00 AM. We plan to bird until noon; you may want to bring a snack to hold you over until lunch.

Saturday, Feb. 17, 2018, 7:30 AM

Leader: Steve Minard

Allegan State Game Area Winter Trip

Explore the Allegan State Game Area, including the Swan Creek Highbanks and the Todd Farm Unit, for winter birds. We are going at a time to avoid the late goose-hunting season. Bald Eagle and Rough-legged Hawk are likely to be near the flocks of Canada Goose at the Todd Farm Unit. Wild Turkey, Northern Shrike and Ross's Goose have been found in past winters. With luck, winter finches will make an appearance. Bring your CB or Family radio and we'll try to keep in touch between cars. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the McDonald's in Hudsonville and carpool from there. A spotting scope will come in handy, as will a bit of food and a warm beverage. We plan to bird until noon. Lunch after is an option.

Saturday, March 24, 2018, 9:00 AM

Leader: Jim Ponshair

Bluebird Box Cleaning at Muskegon Wastewater

Jim has aided the birds for many years with a number of bluebird box trails at the Muskegon Wastewater. With so many boxes to clean, we need a good-sized group to get the job done. This is a great way to learn your way around the Muskegon Wastewater, and to learn about bluebird boxes, how to clean them and to see how the type of box and habitat affect who uses the box. We usually see some good birds while we work, and you may even get to meet mice or flying squirrels up close and personal. You'll also help the bluebirds, swallows, chickadees, wrens and other birds that use the boxes.

Meet at the Maple Island Road entrance to the Muskegon Wastewater System. There, we'll split up to clean out boxes in different areas. Bring your own lunch. After an afternoon break, some participants may bird the nearby Muskegon State Game Area to look for early migrants. This can be an all-day trip, or you can head out before or after lunch. New bluebird boxes are always needed, as they suffer damage over the year. Call Jim Ponshair if you have some to donate.

Essentials: Meet at the Maple Island Road entrance to the Muskegon Wastewater System at 9:00 AM. This is a bit north of White Road. Dress for the weather. Bring your spotting scope, tools (screwdrivers, pliers, scrapper, hammer and nails) and gloves for cleaning out the bluebird houses.

Saturday, April 7, 2018, 7:30 AM

Leaders: Lizzy Kibbey and Steve Minard

Muskegon County Duck Trip

This trip will focus on ducks. Some winter ducks may be around and most of the spring ducks will have arrived. Stops are planned for Pere Marquette Park where bay ducks, scoters, scaup and mergansers are possible as are loons, grebes and gulls. If it's safe and dry, plan to walk on the breakwater. A stop at the Muskegon Channel is planned, where we should see similar species, depending on weather. Time permitting, we'll squeeze in a stop at the gravel pits on Winnetaska Road. A rest stop is planned before Muskegon Wastewater. If the large lagoons are ice-free, they attract divers and puddle ducks. Smaller ponds attract puddle ducks. We will probably run a bit past noon. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the Boy Scout Headquarters on Walker (north of I-96) at 7:30 AM. Bring a drink or snack to keep you going until lunch. Bring your CB or family radio if you have one and we'll try to keep in touch between cars.



November 2017 eBird Summary

by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the unusual or rare eBird sightings for November 2017 for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. This report does not include rare birds that are flyovers, unchaseable and those with sketchy details. Rare and unusual eBird sightings are updated daily on the GRAC website.

The first week and a half of November was a temperature roller coaster. A taste of winter dominated the latter part of the first full week along with the first hard freeze on Nov 8. Temperatures moderated during the second week ahead of a strong storm system that arrived late on the 17th. The first half of the month ended up 4.4 degrees below normal. The remainder of the month was mostly dry and pleasant with a few weak fronts passing through and no snowfall.

Holland State Park was definitely the **hotspot** this month. See “finds of the month” and “other notables.”

Rafts of waterfowl started showing up along the lakeshore and at the Muskegon Wastewater including Northern Shoveler (high count of **4,584** at the Wastewater Nov 11), Redhead (250 at Winnetaska Rd Nugent Sand lagoons in Muskegon Nov 18), scaup sp (250 Lesser at Holland SP Nov 1), all three scoter species were well-represented (see “other notables”), Long-tailed Duck (high count of **1,003** at Holland SP Nov 14 and up to five at an unusual inland location, the Wastewater, from mid-month on), Bufflehead (high count of 175 at the Wastewater Nov 4), Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser (high count of **850** and Holland SP Nov 14) and good numbers of the ever-present Ruddy Ducks at the Wastewater. If the Wastewater lagoons and inland lakes freeze, many will move on, but most of the divers, bay and sea ducks will remain through the winter on the open waters of Lake Michigan.

Shorebird stragglers included Black-bellied Plover (five at the Wastewater Nov 5), Killdeer, a few Greater Yellowlegs at several locations early month, Sanderling, Pectoral Sandpiper, good numbers of Dunlin at several locations (considered a late migrator) and Wilson’s Snipe.

Finds of the month: a **Ross’s Goose** was found by Emily Tornga in a field along Hayes St E of 68th Ave, Ottawa Co Nov 22, one at the Coopersville Sewage Ponds on the same date, joined by another (perhaps Emily’s find) Nov 24 -25, was seen by many and two (may be same birds seen at Coopersville Sewage Ponds) at the Coopersville Goose Field Nov 26-27. The female **Harlequin Duck** first spotted at Holland SP Oct 28 continued Nov 2, and another, or perhaps the same individual, was seen along the Macatawa S breakwall (opposite Holland SP) Nov 13 by Ed DeVries.

A female was seen again by many at Holland SP Nov 21 and 24-28. After strong westerly winds the previous day, a rare **Western Grebe** was spotted beyond the breakwalls at Holland SP by Jamie Krupka and observed by many others Nov 22. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40657561> for photo.

A **Purple Sandpiper** has not been reported in the area for awhile, but lucky Ed DeVries spotted one along the Macatawa S breakwall (across from Holland SP) Nov 13, and one was seen by many on the Holland SP north pier Nov 20 and 23-26 (probably same bird observed on the 13th). It was joined by another Nov 27-28 with one still present the 29th. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40625175> and <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40798546> for photos. Kevin Vande Vusse observed the first **Snowy Owl** of the season in our area at the Allegan SGA Todd Farm Nov 7 (one seen there again Nov 23, 26 and one at another location in Allegan Co Nov 26). Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40380845> for photo.

Others followed: at least five at the Wastewater through the month starting Nov 10, one at the Gerald R Ford Int’l Airport sitting on runway lighting Nov 13, Muskegon Lake channel Nov 17, 18 and 27, Harbor Towne Marina in Muskegon Nov 18, 72nd Ave N of Cleveland in Ottawa Co Nov 17, 128th Ave and Bingham in Ottawa Co Nov 21 and Blair St W of 124th Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 27. Perhaps the strangest sighting was one observed riding the freighter *Manitowoc* in from Lake MI at Holland SP Nov 22. After flying to the piers as the freighter entered the channel, the owl was mobbed by crows and gulls and eventually flew away. Up to two **Short-eared Owls** of the original five seen Oct 29 continued at Allegan SGA Todd Farm through Nov 4 and one Nov 23 and 26. One also was seen Nov 16 near the headquarters. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40304479> to view Marylou Graham’s photos. Another was seen at the Wastewater Nov 5 and 20 and at the Kraft Ave access at the Gerald R Ford Int’l Airport Nov 27. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** was reported roosting in a maple tree at a residence in Holland Nov 8-9. The homeowners graciously allowed many to observe this secretive little owl. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40386090> to view Judi Manning’s adorable photos.

Other notables: eight Snow Geese at Millennium Park Nov 2; up to seven Cackling Geese at the Coopersville Goose Field throughout the month, five at the Coopersville Sewage Ponds Nov 22 and ten at Pickerel Lake NP in Kent Co Nov 25; many reports of Tundra Swans in the four-county area (many flyovers of flocks of 50-plus) with high counts of **140** at the Wastewater Nov 6 and 10 and **239** migrating at Holland SP Nov 7;

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at least **200** Wood Ducks observed flying into roost at Bruce Bayou on the Grand River from M-231 bridge in Ottawa Co Nov 5; four **Surf Scoters** at Holland SP Nov 2, up to four at Douglas Beach Park in Allegan Co Nov 3-11, up to five continuing off and on since Oct 13 at Reeds Lake Nov 11 and one at Grand Haven SP Nov 21; up to 19 White-winged Scoters at Holland SP through the month, eight at Douglas Beach Park Nov 12 and several at other locations; up to **60 Black Scoters** at Douglas Beach Park Nov 3-19 and at least two on Lake MI at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas Nov 11; a **Red-throated Loon** at Holland SP Nov 11, 14 and 24; an immature **Red-necked Grebe** at the Muskegon Lake channel Nov 11-18; up to five **Eared Grebes** at the Wastewater Nov 3-12; the late **American White Pelican** at the W end of Lake Macatawa first seen Oct 27 continued Nov 3; a late Great Egret at M-231 Grand River bridge in Ottawa Co Nov 5; a late Osprey in a tree along I-196 at the old Butterworth Landfill site Nov 1; an extremely late **Common Gallinule** at Newport Harbor, Kalamazoo River in Allegan Co Nov 12; a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Holland SP Nov 2 and 25 and at the Wastewater Nov 11 and 25; a **Glaucous Gull** at Holland SP Nov 22, 26-27; a late Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (immature male) at a residence in NW Grand Rapids Nov 2 and one at Millennium Park Nov 16; Peregrine Falcons in downtown Grand Rapids, 128th Ave and Bingham in Ottawa Co and the Wastewater; a late Eastern Phoebe at Reeds Lake Nov 12; a very late Brown Thrasher at Huff Park Nov 6-8 – probable first Kent Co Nov record; Lapland Longspurs at several locations in Allegan and Ottawa cos with a high count of ten along 23rd St S of 116th Ave in Allegan Co Nov 11; good numbers of Snow Buntings in all four counties with a high count of **270** at the Wastewater Nov 21; **late warblers:** an Ovenbird at a residence in NW Grand Rapids Nov 2, a Tennessee at Grand Ravines Park in Ottawa Co Nov 3 and an Orange-crowned at Pine Creek Park in Ottawa Co Nov 3; **late sparrows:** an extremely late **Chipping** at a residence near Nunica in Ottawa Co Nov 28 – photo <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40790697>, a Field at Hemlock Crossing Park in Ottawa Co Nov 5, a Lincoln's at Huff Park Nov 1 and a Savannah at 128th Ave and Bingham in Ottawa Co Nov 1; a Dark-eyed Junco **Oregon race** at a residence in Douglas Nov 18-19; two late Eastern Meadowlarks along Blair St E of 136th Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 2; 25 Rusty Blackbirds at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Nov 12; an extremely late male **Baltimore Oriole** eating suet and sunflower seeds at a private residence at 92nd St and Eastern SE in Kent Co Nov 23-25 – per homeowner: bird had been hanging around for the previous two weeks. (This bird appeared healthy, had obviously found a food source to his liking

and may eventually migrate south.) Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40688985> for photos. Purple Finch at various locations in all four counties with high counts of 11 at Hemlock Crossing Park and at least 10 in a mixed flock of over 100 finches at a residence near Upper Macatawa Natural Area both in Ottawa Co Nov 2; and four Pine Siskins at Hemlock Crossing Park and 20 at a residence near Upper Macatawa Natural Area Nov 2.

Note: Whooping Crane “Lily” was still observed associating with the Sandhill Cranes at Schoonover WPA and surrounding fields in Lenawee Co Nov 2.

Bird Report and eBird Update

by Carol VanOeveren

Starting this month, because of the dwindling number of reports, a local bird report will no longer be compiled. Members are encouraged to sign up and report their sightings on eBird. By doing so, your observations can be shared with others in about an hour after the posting.

Also, starting in January, the monthly eBird summaries will be limited to only the very unusual and rarities. The “bird sightings” page of the GRAC website will continue to be updated as usual with interesting and rare eBird sightings in the four-county area. The page is usually updated several times daily, so check it often.

Members are encouraged to utilize the county links provided on the “home” page and “bird sightings” page of the GRAC website to view all eBird postings in Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties.

Photography at Reeds Lake Park Field Trip Report

Saturday, Dec. 9, 2017

by Becky Kuhn

Jan Lewis and I meet in the parking lot on a very snowy morning, and chatted briefly before walking over to the boardwalk to check out the lake. It was not surprising we were the only two to show! It was a good morning for even the birds to hide from the weather. We saw a Mute Swan couple and a few Mallards, a gull and two birds too far out on the lake to identify. With our birding complete in less than 30 minutes, we headed back to our cars. Jan joined me in mine to stay warm and share a photography trip she took to Costa Rica. It was eye-opening to learn how the pros do it. I am going to employ a few of the staging ideas around my own feeders and see if I can ramp up the quality of photos taken at my home. Watch our new Instagram profile ([@grandrapidsaudubonclub](https://www.instagram.com/grandrapidsaudubonclub)) to see the results.



December 2017 eBird Summary

by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the unusual or rare eBird sightings for December 2017 for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. This report does not include rare birds that are flyovers, unchaseable and those with sketchy details. Unusual birds seen on Christmas Counts are not included unless a specific location was given. Starting next month, this report will be limited to only the very unusual and rarities. Rare and unusual eBird sightings are updated daily on the GRAC website.

The unseasonably warm weather continued the first five days of the month. The arrival of an arctic blast with high winds on the 5th and 6th brought us abruptly into winter with much-below-normal temps and lake effect snow bringing Grand Rapids its first inch of snow Dec 7. Clipper systems and lake effect snow events piled up the snow, and below-normal temps continued throughout the following week. Moderating temps the third week brought melting snow cover and short-lived relief, but it was back in the deep freeze and more snow by Christmas. After the holiday, the coldest air of the year moved into the area with high temps struggling to make the teens, record-breaking sub-zero lows, sub-zero wind chills and lake effect snow all continuing through the end of the month.

Port Sheldon hosted 18 species of waterfowl, plus one Pied-billed Grebe Dec 16. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41121182> for Curtis Dykstra's entire checklist of 40 species including a Peregrine Falcon and Pine Siskins.

Many late migrants lingered in the area: a Double-crested Cormorant at Holland SP Dec 14-29; a Sanderling at Muskegon Lake channel Dec 1; a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker at a residence near Tunnel Park, Ottawa Co Dec 28 and at a residence S of Holland, Allegan Co Dec 31; a House Wren at Allegan Mountain Bike Park, Allegan Co Dec 23; a Marsh Wren at Causeway Marsh, Muskegon Dec 23; a Hermit Thrush at a residence near Big Blue Lake, Muskegon Co Dec 18 gobbled live mealworms offered by the homeowners; a Gray Catbird along Baldwin between 80th and 88th Aves, Ottawa Co Dec 16; thirteen Yellow-rumped Warblers at Upper Macatawa Natural Area, 84th Ave access, Ottawa Co (five still there Dec 24) and six at Donald Lamoreaux Park, Kent Co Dec 17, four at Millennium Park Dec 19 and a few at other locations – this species has been known to winter in our area; Fox and Swamp sparrows still observed in the area; and Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird (high count of 70 along 14th St N of 138th Ave, Allegan Co Dec 4) still in the area, most in small numbers at feeders.

Finds of the month: A female **Harlequin Duck** first observed at Holland SP Oct 28 continued there through Dec 9 and one (determined to be an imm male) was seen again at W end of Lake Macatawa/Holland SP area Dec 15-31. Visit

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41271200> for close-up photos. A gorgeous adult male **Barrow's Goldeneye** was found with 130 Common Goldeneye at Douglas Beach Park in Allegan Co on Dec 2 by Lizzy and Ethan Kibbey and Jim Fyfe. Visit

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40863278> for photos. The bird continued to be seen by many in the Douglas Beach Park/Lakeshore Dr guardrail area through Dec 4. Weather conditions deteriorated significantly along the lakeshore making further observation nearly impossible. Conditions eventually improved and later in the month the bird was seen again with a huge flock of Common Goldeneye Dec 21-22, 26. One **Purple Sandpiper** (briefly joined by another late last month) continued since Nov 13 at Holland SP Dec 11. After days of nasty weather conditions, it was observed there again Dec 16-26. Two **Black-legged Kittiwakes** were found by Dale and Jeanine Roberts at the Holland SP parking lot Dec 19. One first-year bird was seen there on the 20th by the Mannings, but flew off and could not be relocated. On Dec 23, the bird showed up again and was seen by many through Dec 31. Visit

<http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41270190> for photos. **Snowy Owl** mania continued this month making the prediction for a good invasion right on the mark (see "other notables" for locations). The adult male **Baltimore Oriole** reported coming to a suet feeder since mid-Nov at a residence along 92nd St near Eastern SE in Kent Co continued to be seen through Dec 28 eating live mealworms offered by the homeowner. I believe this is a new late Kent Co record for this species. Unfortunately, he was not seen after this date and sadly, most likely succumbed to the frigid temperatures. Visit <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S40964381> and <http://ebird.org/ebird/view/checklist/S41292318> for incredible photos of this bird against the backdrop of snow.

Other notables: three **Surf Scoters** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2 and one there Dec 26; up to two **Black Scoters** at Holland SP Dec 2-4 and up to 21 at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2-3; two Long-tailed Ducks continued since mid-Nov at Muskegon Wastewater (odd inland location) Dec 10 and **9,200** at Pere Marquette Park, Muskegon Dec 20; **2,700** Common Goldeneye on Lk MI at Lakeshore Dr guardrail in Allegan Co Dec 17; 900 Common Mergansers at Lake Macatawa Chippewa Pt Dec 22; **3,870** Red-breasted Mergansers at Holland SP Dec 24;

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a **Red-throated Loon** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 2, up to 14 at Holland SP Dec 14-31 and six at Grand Haven SP Dec 22; an **Iceland Gull** at Douglas Beach Park Dec 3, the Wastewater Dec 20 and Holland SP area Dec 21-31; a **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Holland SP area Dec 2-7 and 20-28, one continued since Nov at the Wastewater Dec 2 and two at Anchorage Marina on Lake Macatawa Dec 22; a **Glaucous Gull** at Pere Marquette Park Dec 2, two at Green Lake in Allegan Co Dec 10, one at the Fire Dock on Lake Macatawa and two at the Wastewater Dec 20 and at Lake Macatawa Chippewa Pt Dec 22; a larger-than-normal number (9) of Great Black-backed Gulls at Grand Haven City Beach Dec 6; **Snowy Owls** observed at many locations: up to six continued since Nov at the Wastewater, up to three at Muskegon Lake and channel/Pere Marquette Park area, two at White River Light Station Museum and Muskegon Beachwood Park and one at Moorland and Cline Rds all in Muskegon Co; one at Holland SP (two Dec 22), Grand Haven SP, 72nd Ave/Cleveland St area, 72nd Ave/Taft St area, Taft St and 80th Ave (possibly same bird as previous two locations), Coopersville/Garfield farmland both W and E of 68th Ave, Van Buren St and 144th Ave, 128th Ave/Bingham St area (four Dec 31), 128th Ave and Blair St, Polk St and 96th Ave, 124th Ave S of Van Buren St, 78th Ave S of Lake Michigan Dr, Ransom St and Hallacy Dr and Randall/State Rd area all in Ottawa Co; one along 52nd St W of M-37 and two at Kraft Ave access Gerald R Ford Int'l Airport both in Kent Co; and one at 46th St and 140th Ave, 50th St between Fillmore and 140th Ave, 140th Ave E of 58th St, 140th Ave and M-40 and West Michigan Regional Airport all in Allegan Co; a **Short-eared Owl** at the Wastewater Dec 15 and 22; a Peregrine Falcon at Harbor Island, Tyler St W of 128th Ave in Ottawa Co, Port Sheldon, Holland SP and downtown Grand Rapids; a **Northern Shrike** at Harbor Island Grand Haven Dec 23; a Common Raven at Pigeon Creek County Park in Ottawa Co Dec 2; a Dark-eyed Junco **Oregon race** continued since Nov at a residence in Douglas Dec 17 and one continued since Dec 8 at a residence along 21st St S of 116th Ave in Allegan Co Dec 17; up to 14 White-crowned Sparrows at Outdoor Discovery Center in Allegan Co and up to 21 at a residence near Upper Macatawa Natural Area throughout the month – both are known wintering locations for this species (White-throats and White-crowns also observed at a few area feeders); a **Common Redpoll** at a feeder near Lowell Dec 15 and at a residence in Muskegon Dec 29; and a few Pine Siskins reported at various locations in Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa cos with a high count of 18 at Muskegon SP Dec 1.

Local report: On Dec 1, GRAC member Eileen VanHorn observed a **Carolina Wren** at her feeder in Rockford.

Mary's Membership Musings

by Mary Austin

My husband and I have a cottage in the woods in Mason County. At the Nov. 27 GRAC membership meeting, I reported that a Turkey Vulture with a broken left wing had taken up residence under the cottage porch. We nicknamed the bird “Buzz” (which as you can guess, is short for “Buzzard”).

We fed Buzz with all sorts of vulture goodies (like deer entrails and leftover smoked salmon). Buzz did incredibly well living under the porch. Notably, Buzz was out for a walk on more than one occasion and was seen by our neighbors at their cottage a half-mile west of our place. The bird was able to get water from puddles on the ground near the porch. He (or she?) also had water available in Hamlin Lake, just yards away from the cottage.

With the oncoming cold weather, the time arrived in early December for us to close our cottage for the season. After over a month of palatial living under our porch, Buzz needed a new home. My husband, son and brother-in-law conspired to capture Buzz with a large fishing net. This was easily accomplished when Buzz was out for a stroll on our property. Although weary of the threesome, Buzz did not struggle or vomit on the trio. (Vomiting is an effective vulture defense mechanism. What predator wants to get near whatever vittles a vulture has already digested?)

Buzz was safely transported in a roomy live trap to the licensed Wildlife Rehab Center in Grand Rapids. At the Rehab Center, Buzz reportedly is making friends with other avian creatures including a Sandhill Crane and Green Heron. To our knowledge, Buzz is doing well in rehab, although it is doubtful his/her wing will ever heal to the point Buzz can fly again.

On to other musings. Now that we have a New Year spreading before us, it's time to get more involved in GRAC activities. Volunteer your time. Assist any of the Club's committees. A strong Club depends on members – such as yourself – to provide ideas and energy with our activities and events.

Contact our president John Chronowski via email (president@graud.org) or any other officer (including me) to report how you will volunteer with our Club. It's the time for New Year's resolutions. Resolve to be more active with GRAC in 2018.

Thank you to those people who have made recent donations to GRAC special funds.

General Fund: Molly Bradshaw, Bette and Ken Frieswyk, Steve and Nancy Minard, Amanda Whitehouse
Junior Audubon: Eileen and Rick VanHorn

We offer a warm welcome to new members **Polly and Riley Barlow** (Ada), **Leslie Dennis** (Grand Rapids), **Gerald and Susan Roersma** (Comstock Park) and **Stuart White** (Grand Rapids).



Did You Say “Alpha Code”?

by Mary Austin

An alphabet (alpha) code is a shorthand code of an English or scientific bird name that is used by ornithologists to make quicker data entries than by using the full English or scientific name of a bird species.

The alpha codes are standardized four- and six-letter bird species codes. The four-letter codes are for the English common bird names, and the six-letter codes are for scientific bird names. The codes were first developed by the United States Geological Survey (USGS) Patuxent Bird Banding Laboratory (BBL). Bird banders use this set of alpha codes to submit data which are used in tracking North American bird populations.

Here is a summary of the basic rules for deciphering a four-letter code:

1. If the name is one word, the code is the first four letters. (Ovenbird = OVEN)
2. If the name is two unhyphenated words, the code is the first two letters of each word. (Northern Cardinal = NOCA)
3. If the name is three words, the code is the first letter of each of the first two words, and the first two letters of the third word. A name that has three hyphenated words is coded the same way. (American White Pelican = AWPE; Chuck-will’s-widow = CWWI)
4. If the name is a word and a pair of hyphenated words, the code is the first two letters of the unhyphenated word and the first letter of each of the hyphenated words. (Ruby-throated Hummingbird = RTHU; American Golden-Plover = AMGP)
5. If the name has four parts (either separate words or hyphenated parts), the code is the first letter of each part. (Northern Rough-winged Swallow = NRWS)

WARNING! There are conflicts in the BBL system! To address this problem, ad hoc codes are assigned for certain exception bird names. Some ad hoc code examples include Barred Owl = BDOW; Barn Owl = BNOW; Black-throated Green Warbler = BTNW; Black-throated Gray Warbler = BTYW; Cackling Goose = CACG; Canada Goose = CAGO; Carolina Wren = CARW; Cedar Waxwing = CEDW; Cerulean Warbler = CERW; Herring Gull = HERG; Northern Shoveler = NSHO; Northern Shrike = NSHR; Tree Swallow = TRES; Trumpeter Swan = TRUS.

Because of exceptions to the rules and hyphenation inconsistencies among birders, the four-letter bird codes have had limited acceptance. The ad hoc codes particularly can be a communication barrier to those who do not know the exact codes.

With all that said, here is a challenge using current BBL alpha codes. The codes for the birds named below follow the basic rules. Write down a four-letter code on the line behind the bird’s name. The alpha challenge answers can be found on page 8.

1. American Robin _____
2. Black-capped Chickadee _____
3. Black-crowned Night-Heron _____
4. Common Raven _____
5. Common Redpoll _____
6. Eastern Wood-Pewee _____
7. European Starling _____
8. Great Crested Flycatcher _____
9. Hooded Merganser _____
10. House Sparrow _____
11. Mallard _____
12. Mourning Dove _____
13. Red-tailed Hawk _____
14. Ring-billed Gull _____
15. Sora _____
16. Turkey Vulture _____

References:

- https://www.birdpop.org/docs/misc/Alpha_codes_eng.pdf (Accessed Nov. 1, 2017)
- <https://www.carolinabirdclub.org/bandcodes.html> (Accessed Nov. 2, 2017)
- <https://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/bbl/manual/specplist.cfm> (Accessed Nov. 3, 2017)

December Finance Report

Prepared by Jeff Neumann-Treasurer

Checking Account Balance: \$ 9,321.97
Edward Jones Account: \$36,846.31
Total Assets as of 12/31/17: \$46,168.28

Restricted Funds (included in the total assets)

Maher Sanctuary Fund: \$2,979.04
Junior Audubon Fund: \$4,140.12
Life Dues Fund: \$9,103.00

The balances in the Maher Sanctuary and Junior Audubon Funds are restricted to expenditures for items related to the respective funds. The Life Dues Fund is not restricted as to what expenses may be recompensed, but the amount of such payments is limited to only the interest generated by the fund.



Ranger Steve's Nature Niche

Snowy Owls

by Ranger Steve Mueller

Forty-eight transmitters were attached to Snowy Owls from North Dakota to Maine from 2013 to 2017. The solar-powered devices track movements by recording latitude, longitude and altitude. Some owls remain within a quarter mile of where they were tagged and others move hundreds of miles. "Project SNOWstorm" research focuses on winter movements but reveals information gathered on the summer range in the far north that has not previously been accessible.

In winter, some owls spend weeks or months floating on Great Lakes' ice where they hunt gulls, ducks, geese, and grebes. Recently, I have observed Snowy Owls on the center dike between massive ponds at the Muskegon Wastewater facility. Thousands of gulls and waterfowl are found in these ponds. I thought the owls depended on lemmings in the far north and ate a similar diet of voles here.

Evidence indicates gulls and waterfowl can be an important part of their diet and is a reason owls perch on floating ice. A gull provides more food per catch than a small rodent. I wonder what the success rate is for capturing a rodent compared with a bird. It might be more efficient hunting rodents when abundant.

Massive numbers of gulls are present at the Muskegon wastewater facility. It is a birding hotspot where people scan with scopes to find rarer gulls. My friends, the two Gregs, Jim, and I have seen Greater Black-backed, Glaucous and other infrequently seen gulls among abundant Ring-billed and Herring Gulls.

We have only seen the owls observing or moving to new perch locations. They stand patiently. It would be nice to see one pursuing a gull. They have 14 neck vertebrae that allow them to turn their head more than halfway around. Other birds and mammals have seven cervical vertebrae preventing such great head swivel. Owls can look straight back from the direction their body is facing. It appears their head is on backwards.

Adult males and females can be distinguished by plumage. Males are nearly all white, while females have brown or black-flecked feathers. Immatures are more heavily dark marked. Snowy Owls appear larger than they are because fluffy feathers provide a robust appearance. Under the fluff is a lean, three- to six-pound body. Visible contour feathers covering the body shed water. Underneath, non-waterproof down feathers trap air and insulate.

Large eyes have a yellow iris with dark, penetrating pupils. Like ours, their eyes are on the front of the face, providing depth-of-field binocular vision. Close one eye and notice how the distance of two objects is difficult to discern. When hunting, it is important to judge distance

while flying. Notice birds at your feeder have eyes on the side of the head. To determine distance, they must move their heads to gain a three-dimensional view. Eyes on the sides of the head provide an advantage of a nearly 360-degree view for spotting predators.

I did not notice a black transmitter on the back of any owls. It would be just below the skull. With only 48 tagged, I would not expect to see an owl with one. Owls are captured in fine mesh nets strung in flight areas. Mist nets are similar to golf course screens installed to prevent balls from entering highways and hitting cars.

Owls living in the tundra far from human activity reveal their movements when they migrate to our region. Information stored in transmitters north of cell tower range is retrieved when they enter tower range in winter.

Periodically, large numbers move south when arctic food is scarce or populations are high, forcing hunting dispersal. This year is an excellent year for learning more about the daily lives of owls of which we know little. Many have already arrived southward.

Spend time exploring farm country and areas with large fields to search for white bumps. Look with binoculars and you might find a Snowy Owl. Enjoy exploring on your own or participate on Audubon field trips.

Natural history questions or topic suggestions can be directed to Ranger Steve (Mueller) at odybrook@chartermi.net - Ody Brook Nature Sanctuary, 13010 Northland Dr. Cedar Springs, MI 49319 or call (616) 696-1753.

Alpha Code Challenge Answers

Continued from page 7:

1. American Robin = AMRO
2. Black-capped Chickadee = BCCH
3. Black-crowned Night-Heron = BCNH
4. Common Raven = CORA
5. Common Redpoll = CORE
6. Eastern Wood-Pewee = EAWP
7. European Starling = EUST
8. Great Crested Flycatcher = GCFL
9. Hooded Merganser = HOME
10. House Sparrow = HOSP
11. Mallard = MALL
12. Mourning Dove = MODO
13. Red-tailed Hawk = RTHA
14. Ring-billed Gull = RBGU
15. Sora = SORA
16. Turkey Vulture = TUVU



Your Talents Are Needed!

by Scott Hutchings

It takes people to keep the club going, and our bylaws term-limit some leadership positions. Others are filled by members who need to reduce or change their involvement for personal reasons.

This an opportunity to help move our club forward, continue our good work and help us to increase our impact.

Below are the positions open for the 2018-2019 year, beginning in June.

Your Grand Rapids Audubon Club needs you!

President: The President runs the general and board meetings and sets the club's agenda with input from the board and general membership.

Vice President: The Vice President runs meetings in the absence of the President, arranges for speakers at the general meetings and works with the owners of our meeting space.

Secretary: The Secretary records the minutes of the meetings and handles some of the correspondence.

Board Members at Large (two): Board Members at Large attend board meetings, and can make, second and vote on motions, but otherwise have no other official duties unless they choose to assume them.

Assistant Treasurer: The Assistant Treasurer assists the Treasurer and maintains a list of members and their contact information.

Finance Chairperson: The finance committee draws up the budget proposal for the board.

Fund Development Chairperson: Fund Development involves building the endowment fund.

Junior Audubon Leader: Junior Audubon is an educational activity program for kids.

Audubon Adventures Representative: Audubon Adventures supplies educational classroom materials for teachers.

Membership Chairperson: Maintains membership rolls and contact information.

Publisher: Prints and mails the hard copies of the *Caller*.

Special Event Coordinator: A new position that will handle special events and coordinate members who serve as docents and speakers.

New Ornithologist at University of Michigan

by Chris Baer

Benjamin Winger, who came to the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology for a two-year position as a postdoctoral scholar, is a faculty member.

Winger became interested in birding by going on field trips with local birders near his home in Cleveland, Ohio. While attending Cornell University he came to be interested in research of the birdy kind, and earned his PhD at the University of Chicago, where he spent lots of time at the Field Museum.

His field research has focused on the cloud forests in the Andes and the boreal forest of North America. He and his expedition fellows discovered a new species of barbet in Peru in 2008. He is very interested in biogeography and why birds are where they are, and the color patterns that separate so many similar species.

His interests also include why birds migrate to certain places and not others. This is of particular interest to us here in the Great Lakes. These research question are very complicated.

The museum specimens available to Winger at the UM collections allow him, through genetic testing, to look back through time to possibly make future predictions. He already has seen changes in morphology that have connections to migratory behavior. With the new miniature devices that allow tracking of individual birds, data can be gathered to pinpoint where birds start and stop during migration. The knowledge gathered can be extraordinary.

Winger will continue to teach ornithology at UM and considers the 200,000 specimens in the collection to be a big plus in his teaching and research.

Stay tuned. We have a friend in Ann Arbor. Maybe we can have Benjamin as a speaker in the near future.

The information above was gleaned from the Natural Selections report of the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, UM. Note: they have a new building for all the collections and labs for teaching and research. Check out their photo contest at myumi.ch/aG20E.



Maher Audubon Sanctuary News

by Chris Baer

John Chronowski asked me at the last board meeting to post a sign at the parking lot explaining (my interpretation) our deer management policies and to advise people walking the trails to wear orange during the hunting season.

In previous years, the deer ate everything in the sanctuary. We could not plant trees or see native plants bloom and produce seed for the birds because of their insatiable appetite. Two things happened to change this. We let hunters harvest the deer every year, and a disease called blue nose took many of the deer several years ago. We are now holding our own with the deer herd at manageable numbers. We do not completely extirpate the deer, as many of us, including me, like to see them.

The hunters we work with provide valuable services for us. They cut the enormous trees off the boardwalk and trail that fall down because of winds, tornados (this past spring) and disease (the emerald ash borer). The club physically and financially cannot do this. Mr. Durkee, with his son, mows the edges of the boardwalk and trail for a nominal fee, which is less than what the landscape company previously charged.

Winter is a wonderful time to visit Maher with all the visual complexities present. There are no mosquitos to bite you, nor leaves to obscure the wildlife.

If you do not see the wildlife, they leave signs in the snow of their coming and going. The wetland is a literal food magnet to all the visitors we host. The asters, sunflowers, grasses and other seed producers attract the large and small. The grouse patter down the boardwalk, their tracks looking like chickens. The seed eaten by finches leaves dustings of frass all along the edge of the trail. Our muskrat has not shown itself recently in the marle pond, eating its favorite food; the roots of the blue flag.

Deer tracks of both young and old ply the oak savannah, making their own trails while in line. Little post holes in the snow mark where fox have traveled looking for the mice and voles that wander from brush pile to brush pile (all those dead autumn olive!). Skunks and 'possums also wander the trails; the former showing wide/fat feet with no tail marks and likely digging holes here and there, the latter with thin feet and fine toes similar to a 'coon, a tail dragging behind. Pileated woodpeckers announce their presence by elongated holes in some of the dead trees, chips thrown everywhere attesting to the violence.

Nothing ever stays the same. The encroaching cattails and sedges along the boardwalk, the enormous oaks that fell during a spring storm to leave just as enormous root balls for generations of Auduboners to wonder at. How many wildlife happenings can you see at Maher?

Millennium Park Report

November and December 2017

by Kathy Haase

We hiked the Hansen Nature Trail for the last time in 2017 on Nov. 1. We again saw a diverse group of birds. The only warblers this time were ten Yellow-rumped Warblers. We also saw a Field Sparrow, one White-throated Sparrow and two House Finches in addition to the usual birds: Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Double-crested Cormorant, Cooper's Hawk, Bald Eagle, Ring-billed Gull, Mourning Dove, Belted Kingfisher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, American Robin, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow and House Finch. The birders on this trip were Ed Bolt, Katie Bolt, Kathy Haase and Kathleen Steele.

For the Thursday walks in November, we walked from the trailhead where Veterans Memorial Drive ends, covering a three-mile route. The exception was Nov. 9, when we were rerouted to the Meadows trailhead for a two-mile loop. Interesting birds were a pair of Cedar Waxwings, three possible Mallards with unusual coloring, a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, six Green-winged Teal, a large number of woodpeckers (ten Downy and 14 Northern Flickers as well as Hairy, Red-bellied and Northern Flickers) and two Brown Creepers. The regular birds included: Canada Goose, Mute Swans, Mallards, Double-crested Cormorants, a Great Blue Heron, Bald Eagles, Gulls, Belted Kingfishers, Black-capped Chickadees, White Breasted Nuthatches, Yellow-rumped Warblers, American Tree Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Red- and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Blue Jays and Northern Cardinals. Those joining us were Ed Bolt, Katie Bolt, Gary Brems, Jeanne Griffin and Kathy Haase.

In December, we continued the Thursday walks in Millennium Park despite the cold temps (three degrees on Dec. 14) and snow. Since Dec. 7, we no longer saw Double-crested Cormorants, Yellow-rumped Warblers or Great Blue Heron. Replacing them were Dark-eyed Junco and Gadwall. The Mallard count rose (149 on Dec. 14) and we saw Green-winged Teal, Gadwall and an American Black Duck mixed in with the flock gathered in the open water at the northwest end of the Muskrat Trail. The woodpecker count remained high with three Red-bellied, 15 Downy, three Hairy and 16 Northern Flickers on Dec. 7. We continued to see Belted Kingfishers, Brown Creepers, Black-capped Chickadees, White-breasted Nuthatches, Northern Cardinals, American Goldfinches and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Ed Bolt, Gary Brems, Jeanne Griffin, Kathy Haase and Kathleen Steele joined us for one or more of our walks in December.



GRAC CALENDAR

January

- 11 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike (recurring 18 and 25)
- 27 Field Trip: Winter Field Trip w/ Steve Minard
- 29 GRAC Board & General Membership Meetings

February

- 1 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike (recurring 8, 15 and 22)
- 17 Field Trip: Allegan State Game Area w/ Steve Minard
- 26 GRAC Board & General Membership Meetings

Mission Statement:

The Grand Rapids Audubon Club brings together people who enjoy nature, especially wild birds. We seek to protect and improve our natural environment and to advance nature education throughout West Michigan.

Grand Rapids Audubon Club Membership Application

Name _____
 Street _____
 City _____
 State / ZIP+4 _____
 Phone _____
 E-mail _____

(Providing your E-mail address ensures that you will receive E-mail notification when the latest edition of the *Caller* newsletter is posted on the GRAC website.)

Individual	\$ 20.00	_____
Family	25.00	_____
Senior (65+)	12.00	_____
Student (14+w/ID)	12.00	_____
Sustaining	30.00	_____
Patron	60.00	_____
Individual Life Membership	400.00	_____
Donation <i>(General Fund, Jr. Audubon, Sanctuary, Scholarship, Audubon Adventures, etc.)</i>		_____
Total Amount Enclosed		_____

Make checks payable to:
Grand Rapids Audubon Club, Inc.
 Send application and check to:
Mary Austin, Assistant Treasurer
2021 Valentine, NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525-2922

Membership dues and contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

GRAC Board Meetings are held at 6:00 PM prior to each month's general membership meeting.

Junior Audubon Meetings are held Saturdays at various locations.

General Membership Meetings are held the last Monday of the month (Sept. – May) at 7:30 PM at the John F. Donnelly Center of Aquinas College located at 157 Woodward Lane SE. December (Christmas Bird Count) and May (Annual Banquet) meetings are held at different locations and times. Upcoming field trip information is published in each newsletter. See the GRAC website for the complete field trip list. Any additions or deletions to the above calendar will be noted in future issues of the newsletter.

Serving You

GRAC Board and Committee Chairpersons are listed below for

Grand Rapids Audubon Club Board of Directors and Special Committees

The Board of Directors consists of the Executive Council, the Immediate Past President and Chairpersons of the Standing Committees. In addition to the Board Of Directors, "Special Committees" and "Resident Agent" are also listed below.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

5 officers + 4 elected board members
 President – John Chronowski
 Vice President – Becky Kuhn
 Secretary – Cynthia Davidek
 Treasurer – Jeff Neumann
 Assistant Treasurer – Mary Austin
 Board Member – Howard Huisman
 Board Member – Rob Peters
 Board Member – Sheryl Helmus
 Board Member – Keith Helmus

Field Trips – Becky Kuhn
 Finance – Jill Goodell
 Fund Development – open
 Historian – Linda Damstra
 Hospitality – Bea VerBurg
 Junior Audubon – open
 Library – Norine and Jim Shea / Fidencio Paradez
 Maher Sanctuary – Chris Baer
 Membership – Mary Austin
 Nominating – Scott Hutchings
 Publicity – Tricia Boot
 Scholarship – inactive
 Website – Fred VanOeveren

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

(non-voting member)
 Scott Hutchings 2014-15, 2015-16

STANDING COMMITTEES

Per 2013 GRAC Bylaws, there are 19 Standing Committees. Each committee chairperson is a voting member of the Board. Committee names shown are per bylaws.

Audio/Visual – Robert Riepma
 Bird Reports – Carol VanOeveren
 Caller Editor – Tricia Boot
 Caller Publisher – Becky Kuhn
 Christmas Count – Tom Leggett / Steve Mueller

SPECIAL COMMITTEES / CHAIRPERSONS

(non-members of Board of directors in this capacity)
 Audubon Adventures – open
 Insurance – Jill Goodell

RESIDENT AGENT

Larry Burke

Grand Rapids Audubon Club
6152 Georgeann Ct.
Belmont, MI 49306-9783

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Grand Rapids Audubon Club

OFFICERS

President:

John Chronowski (915-9864)
775 Bagley Ave., 49506-3001
E-mail: president@graud.org

Vice President / Programs:

Becky Kuhn (785-7072)
6152 Georgeann Ct
Belmont, MI 49306-9783
E-mail: vice.president@graud.org

Secretary:

Cynthia Davidek (617-7940)
6825 Burger Dr SE, 49506-1506
E-mail: secretary@graud.org

Treasurer:

Jeff Neumann (558-2609)
217 Leyden Ave. SW, 49504
E-mail: treasurer@graud.org

Assistant Treasurer / Membership:

Mary Austin (361-7993)
2021 Valentine NE, 49525-2922
E-mail: membership@graud.org

THE CALLER STAFF

Newsletter Editor:

Tricia Boot (240-3565)
2121 Blueberry Dr NW, 49504-2506
E-mail: newsletter@graud.org

Publisher:

Becky Kuhn (785-7072)
6152 Georgeann Ct
Belmont, MI 49306-9783
E-mail: publisher@graud.org