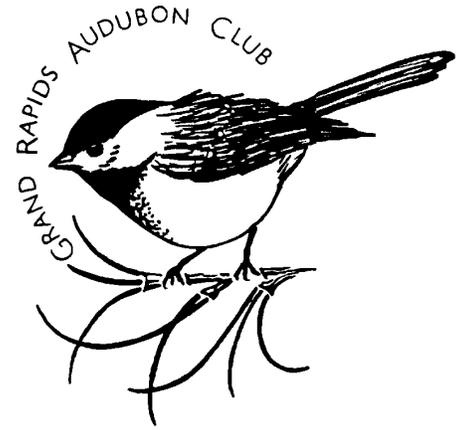


the Caller

March 2018, Volume 56, No. 7

published monthly September – April, bi-monthly May – August, November – December
by GRAC, 6152 Georgeann Ct., Belmont, MI 49506-9783



On the web: www.graud.org Information: information@graud.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/grandrapidsaudubonclub/

March Meeting Notes

Date: Monday, March 26
Time: 7:00 PM social; 7:30 PM program
Location: John Donnelly Conference Center
Aquinas College
Speaker: Dr. Rob Keys, Cornerstone University
Topic: If We Build It, They Will Come:
Henslow's Sparrows, Grasslands and
Restored Prairies

In the early 1800s, southern lower Michigan was covered in 2.23 million acres of prairie and savanna. Much of this was converted for agricultural purposes as the state grew. Over the last 35 years, experts have worked to reestablish tall grass prairies in the region, with the hope of providing new homes for species like the Henslow's Sparrow.

Over the last three summers, a research team has monitored restored tall grass prairies of various sizes with paired grasslands of other types to determine how Henslow's Sparrows are faring with these restorations. Dr. Rob Keys will present insights into the natural history of this state-endangered bird and what his team is learning about the relationship of Henslow's Sparrows with grasslands and restored prairies.

For the past 16 years, Rob has served as a professor of science at Cornerstone University, where he teaches a variety of courses in the biology and teacher education programs, including courses in ecology, environmental science, vertebrate zoology and science methods for elementary and secondary teachers. He also directs undergraduate research at Cornerstone.

President's Corner

by John Chronowski

Spring is on the horizon! A number of events in April and May may be of interest to our membership.

On April 11, the Grand Rapids Chapter of Citizens Climate Lobby will sponsor "Climate Fest: Our Children's Future," a free event from 5:30 to 9:30 PM at the Wealthy Theatre. The event features a live telecast with the members of Our Children's Future, a group of 21 children and young adults who have brought a landmark climate lawsuit against the federal government, claiming that through the government's affirmative actions that cause climate change, it has violated their generations' constitutional rights to life, liberty and property. Following the presentation, a panel of local leaders and students will discuss local sustainability efforts. Former Grand Rapids mayor George Heartwell will moderate.

April 12, the Wege Foundation will host the Wege Speaker Series at 4:00 PM at the Aquinas College Performing Arts Center. This year's speaker is Dr. J. Drew Lanham, an ornithologist, conservationist and distinguished professor at Clemson University. Dr. Lanham, who is African-American, will present "On Being a Rare Bird," which addresses issues related to the environment, social justice and bringing nature into the urban experience. The Grand Rapids Audubon Club is a partner in this event. Stay tuned for more information on the GRAC website and Facebook page.

Also this year, GRAC is a partner in the Thornapple Woodpecker Festival in Middleville on Saturday, April 28. See page 7 of this *Caller* for details.

Finally, on May 19, the Kent County Parks Department will sponsor Discover Millennium Park from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM. This will occur at the Hansen Nature Trail in Millennium Park. This free, family-friendly event will feature a nature walk with themed stations, a scavenger hunt, native plant giveaway, butterflies, birds of prey and more.

Deadline for April newsletter articles: **March 29**

(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, March 15, 22, 29, 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 varies). 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.

Saturday, March 24, 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, scraper, hammer and nails) and gloves for cleaning out the bluebird houses.

Saturday, April 7, 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.

Tuesday, April 17, 7:30 PM

Leader: Ray Gates

Woodcock "Display" at Luton Park

Save the date: Additional details to follow.

Saturday, April 21, 7:00 AM

Leader: Steve Minard

Spring Marsh Birds and Hawks

Join us to look for marsh birds at Lane's Landing in the Muskegon State Game Area. Rails should be in the marsh and Swamp Sparrows should be on territory. After checking out the marsh, we'll see how the winds blow and either head over to the Muskegon Wastewater to check out the waterfowl or head to Grand Haven to check Harbor Island and hawk-watch locations to look for migrating hawks. At the Wastewater, Northern Shoveler and Ruddy Duck are likely; in Grand Haven, we could see Caspian Tern on Lake Michigan or a Peregrine Falcon at the power plant. Rails also can be seen in Grand Haven. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the Boy Scout Headquarters west off Walker Road just north of I-96 at 7:00 AM. We plan to bird until noon. You may want to bring a snack to hold you over until lunch.

Saturday, April 28, 7:30 AM

Leader: Lizzy Kibbey

Spring Migrants at Huff Park

Save the date: Additional details to follow.

Continued on page 3



Continued from page 2

Tuesday, May 1, 6:30 PM

Leader: Steve Minard

Tuesday Evening at Reeds Lake

This trip is an evening walk to the Hodenpyl Woods area at the west end of Reeds Lake. Varied woodland, marsh and lake habitat provides a variety of birds. We will concentrate on waterbirds and early warblers. The boardwalk provides good views of the lake and marsh areas. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the East Grand Rapids Utility Building parking lot on Reeds Lake Blvd north of Gaslight Village. Waterproof footwear and insect repellent may be useful.

Saturday, May 5, 8:00 AM

Leader: Larry Burke

Paul Henry Thornapple Trail in Middleville

This trail is the site of the annual Woodpecker Festival, and is a great place to find Red-headed Woodpeckers and most of the other resident Michigan woodpeckers. Many other species should be present at this time, including early migrating warblers and possibly summering Prothonotary Warblers. The trail is entirely paved and flat, making the walk easy and safe, as well as wheelchair accessible. The trail more or less follows the Thornapple River and is bordered by bayous that invite many ducks and other waterbirds. The variety of birds, and the sheer number of birds that we will likely see, should make this trip enjoyable for novice and experienced birders alike.

Essentials: We will meet at the Arby's at M37 (Broadmoor Avenue) and 44th Street (northeast corner of the intersection) in Kentwood at 7:30 AM and carpool from there to Middleville. Alternatively, you can meet us at the Paul Henry Thornapple Trail behind Village Hall (100 Main St.) in Middleville at 8:00 AM. This will be a morning trip and we will be finished no later than noon. Be prepared for insects.

Tuesday, May 8, 6:30 PM

Leader: Steve Minard

Tuesday Evening at Reeds Lake

This is an evening walk to the Hodenpyl Woods area at the west end of Reeds Lake. Varied woodland, marsh and lake habitat provides a variety of birds. The second week of May should be near the peak of spring migration and just about anything is possible here. Steve will be looking for migrants. Birders of all skills are welcome.

Essentials: Meet at the East Grand Rapids Utility Building parking lot on Reeds Lake Blvd north of Gaslight Village. Waterproof footwear and insect repellent may be useful.

Saturday, May 12

Spring Migration Count

North American Migration Count in Kent County

Michigan will not compile the North American Migration Count. GRAC plans to compile a May 12 count for Kent County and post results on eBird. Steve Minard will send checklists to all who want to participate. If Steve has emailed you in the past, he will email you the checklist as a spreadsheet. He also can email this to anyone else who would like. You can add your numbers for each bird species and return to Steve. If he has mailed you the paper checklist, he will continue to do this unless you'd prefer email. He also will have copies available at the April GRAC meeting and at his Reeds Lake field trips on May 1 and 8. Alternatively, you can share your eBird list with user NAMC_MI_Kent to add your count to the list. Report your birds to Steve. Feeder counts, stationary counts and moving counts all help.

Wednesday, May 16, 8:00 AM

Leader: Mark Moerdyk

Lamoreaux Park

Save the date: Additional details to follow.

Saturday, May 19, 9:30 AM

Leader: Nick Keller

Goodrich Lake Trail and Buck Tale Farm Hike

Spend a Michigan spring morning hiking the trails of Goodrich Lake to see many spring species such as Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Bluebird, Yellow Warbler, Eastern Towhee and many others. A stand of birch trees offers great viewpoints of birds and deer. An open meadow also provides great bird viewing. In the middle of the property is a fen that has great overlooks for viewing birds. One of my favorite parts, however, is the cathedral of pines where people can enjoy the majestic scenery and even have a chance to see a variety of woodpeckers such as the Pileated and if we're lucky, the Red-headed Woodpecker.

Lunch will be provided at Buck Tale Farm before touring a completely refurbished barn and learning its history. Trails around the farm's perimeter allow us to look for different birds such as the Indigo Bunting, Sandhill Cranes and a nesting pair of Red-tailed Hawks. Deer and other interesting wildlife abound.

Essentials: Meet at 1250 Goodrich Lake Dr. in Colon, Mich. 49040. The farm is located about ten miles away at 585 Lindley Road Bronson, Mich.

Safety Hazards: Dress for the weather and have bug spray if needed. The trails are well groomed. There may be poison ivy off the trails.



February 2018 eBird Summary

Very Unusual and Rare Sightings by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the very unusual and rare eBird sightings for February 2018 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.

Arctic air along with lake effect and synoptic snow invaded the area once again the first week of the month. By the 11th, about a foot of snow was on the ground in the Grand Rapids area. A mid-month warm-up followed with temperatures in the low 60s on the 20th. Periods of heavy rain (two-day total 3.31 inches in Grand Rapids) and rapid snow melt on the 19th and 20th contributed to major flooding in West Michigan. Moderating temperatures and mostly dry conditions followed through the end of the month as flooding receded.

Snowy Owls continued to be seen in all four counties. Refer to the “bird sightings” page of the GRAC website for recent locations and the eBird county links for the latest sightings. The winter finch irruption continued. **Thirty Red Crossbills** were observed along the West Loop trail at Port Sheldon Natural Area, Ottawa Co Feb 8 by Carl and Judi Manning. Visit <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S42602918> for photos. Eight **Common Redpolls** were observed at Pigeon Creek County Park Feb 12 and 18 along the West Loop trail at Port Sheldon Natural Area Feb 17 both in Ottawa Co and a few reported at some area feeders. **Pine Siskins** continued to be widespread and in good numbers with a high feeder count of 100 Feb 9 at the Mannings’ property in W Ottawa Co.

The best find was a first Allegan Co record. Nine **Eurasian Collared-Doves** were spotted sitting in a tree and on wires at a dairy farm (Sue Lynn Farms) along 20th St S of 144th Ave near Dorr by Josh Kamp Feb 23. Visit <https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S43120550> for Tim Cornish’s photos. Up to seven continued through at least Feb 25 allowing many observations.

Up to eleven **Ross’s Geese** at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Feb 21-22 and one at Coopersville Sewage Ponds Feb 25; sixteen **Greater White-fronted Geese** continued since Jan 25 at Coopersville Sewage Ponds Feb 1, up to 13 continued since late Jan at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Feb 22, four continued since Jan at Muskegon Wastewater Feb 27, up to 13 at S Swanson Rd/Musketawa Trl pothole area in Muskegon Co Feb 22-28 and three at Upper Macatawa Natural Area 84th Ave access in Ottawa Co Feb 27; a **Red-throated Loon** at Port Sheldon Pigeon Lake Feb 8 and at Pigeon River outlet Feb 17; a **Horned Grebe** was spotted in the creek at Pine Creek Park

in Ottawa Co Feb 12-24 – unusual location; a **Golden Eagle** continued since late Jan at the Allegan SGA Todd Farm through the month with at least two there Feb 18 and 25; the **Black-legged Kittiwake** first seen Dec 19 at Holland SP/W end of Lake Macatawa continued to winter at this location Feb 25, usually seen near the Eldean Shipyard area. Visit

<https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S42595822> to view Aaron Boone’s gorgeous in-flight photos; a **Brown Thrasher** at Pine Creek Park in Ottawa Co Feb 12; **Yellow-rumped Warblers** continue to winter at Millennium Park and Upper Macatawa Natural Area; and a **Fox Sparrow** at a residence near Cascade in Kent Co Feb 17.

Correction: The **Hoary Redpoll** reported at Hoffmaster SP Jan 26 was determined **not** to be that species after the February **Caller** was published.

You Can Help the Club – and the Birds!

by Scott Hutchings, Nomination Committee
Chairperson

The club takes more than money to stay on the wing, it takes people. Many of our committee chairs, who have served the club for a long time, want to reduce their involvement due to age or changing circumstances. The majority of our elected officers are facing term limits that are built into our bylaws.

For next year, we are going to need a president, vice president and a secretary.

What is involved in these roles?

The president runs the meetings. Even if you’ve never run one before, reading the bylaws and Robert’s Rules of Order will give you enough to go on. Plus, there will be at least two former presidents to help you out.

The vice president books the speakers and has a multitude of resources from which to draw.

The secretary takes the minutes of the meetings and handles some correspondence.

Other open positions are listed on the website, but these are the big three we have to fill to continue flying.

You can reach me by email at nominations@graud.org if you’d like to volunteer yourself, or recommend someone I should contact.

We have an important mission of conservation and education, and you can help move us forward.



Mary's Membership Musings

by Mary Austin

Have you ever wondered about how birds sleep? Well, I have and decided to do a little research on the subject.

Most birds are diurnal (that is, they sleep at night and are awake during the day). Perching diurnal birds will find something to rest on (like a branch in a tree or bush) during the evening for their night's sleep. Generally, these birds fluff out their down feathers and turn their heads around to tuck their beaks into their back feathers. These birds might pull one leg up to belly level. In so doing, the beak and legs (the bare parts of the bird) are kept warm under a blanket of feathers.

Roosting birds don't fall from their perches because of their anatomy. When a bird places weight on its feet, the tendons of the feet tighten, and the bird creates a vice-like grasp around any branch it is perching on.

Birds like Chimney Swifts sleep wherever they have good footing, like the insides of chimneys. Birds, such as Horned Larks, quail and sparrows, sleep on the ground in dense vegetation. Cavity-dwelling birds will sleep in their tree cavities or nest boxes. Of interest, although Ruffed Grouse sleep in conifers in the warm weather, they are known to burrow into the snow in winter, presumably to avoid predators.

Waterfowl and shorebirds generally sleep on or near the water. Ducks, such as Mallards, may stand at the water's edge or on a partially submerged log, rock or cattail mat. They are likely to tuck their head and one foot into their body feathers to conserve heat.

Owls and other nocturnal birds (like nighthawks) seek out safe locations around sunrise for sleeping. When sleeping, their eyes are closed to block out light. Owls sleep in an upright position on branches or in cavities, while nighthawks sleep on the ground, blending in with vegetation. When the sun begins to set, nocturnal birds wake up to do their hunting.

Unless birds are in a state of torpor, they tend to sleep in small snatches. They are easily startled awake by other bird noises, cold conditions or predatory threats. Some birds sleep with one eye open, because half of their brain is alert while the other half is asleep. This is called unihemispheric slow-wave sleep (USWS). Long-distance fliers (such as some migrating birds) and birds that spend weeks flying nonstop over the ocean (such as frigatebirds) engage in USWS to get some sleep, while still being able to maintain awareness of their surroundings.

Do birds dream when they sleep? Research at the University of Chicago with zebra finches reveals that the finches' brain cells fire in similar patterns when the birds are sleeping and when they are awake and singing. This suggests to the researchers that the finches sing in their

"dreams," possibly to help them remember or rehearse their songs.

On to GRAC membership news - GRAC sends out a "welcome" to our new members, **Pam Lotterman** of Wyoming and **Jason Musthaler** of Allegan. We also want to say "thank you" to Peggy Falk for her donation to Junior Audubon.

Notice to all members: Please invite a friend or relative to the next general membership meeting on March 26. Your invitation might encourage your friend or relative to join GRAC.

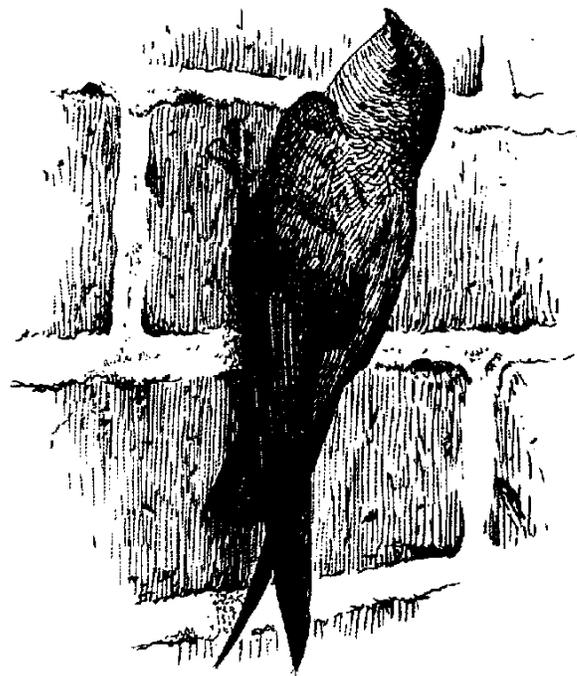
Research Sources:

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Modes of Animal Behavior

Ranger Steve (Mueller) will present an interactive program addressing audience questions about animal behavior and will share stories about experiences with animals. Displayed animal mounts will provide attendees the opportunity for close examination of animals. This popular program includes audience participation for asking questions of personal interest. The presentation will last one hour. Time will be provided before and after the presentation to explore displays and ask additional questions.

Program: Modes of Animal Behavior

Location: Howard Christensen Nature Center (HCNC)
16160 Red Pine Dr., Kent City, MI 49330

Date: March 24

Time: 9:00 AM

Cost: \$3 per person (HCNC members free)

Presenter: Ranger Steve (Mueller)

You can become an HCNC member that day and waive the program fee. Many activities are provided at no additional cost throughout the year for members.

Enter the main entrance for HCNC and park near the Welcome Center. Walk the Ranger Trail to the Red Pine Interpretive Center past Tadpole Pond. Accessible parking is available next to the building by entering the service drive north of the main entrance.

Bring family and friends for a great Saturday morning to enjoy learning about animal behavior.

Ranger Steve was director at HCNC for 20 years before becoming director at Wittenbach/Wege Agriculture and Environmental Education Center in Lowell. Prior work included being a ranger naturalist at Bryce Canyon National Park in Utah, college instructor at Bemidji State University, Brainerd Community College, and Jordan College. He was chief naturalist for Morningside Nature Center in Gainesville, Fla., middle and high school teacher in Dry Ridge, Ky., Kenosha Wis., and Manistique, Mich.

Currently he is the sanctuary ecologist at Ody Brook Nature Sanctuary where he guides management to enhance biodiversity. He writes a nature niche column for newspapers and conservation organization newsletters.

His varied experiences provided opportunity to learn in many ecosystems across the country with opportunities to experience close encounters with animals he studied. He has discovered a new species and range extensions for species in remote areas that lacked adequate study.

Directions: US 131 north from Grand Rapids to Exit 104. West on M-46 (17 Mile Rd.) about six miles to Red Pine Drive, north on Red Pine Drive about three miles to HCNC. Park by the Welcome Center and walk the trail to Red Pine Interpretive Center. Consider staying after the program to enjoy some of the seven miles of trails.

Birdathon – 2018 Annual Fundraiser

The Birdathon is only one month away! Time to get those binoculars tuned up, batteries charged and ready to go – and to fire up your team. Counting can be done any time between 12:01 AM on April 15 and 11:59 PM on May 31.

Teams must have at least two members and can bird for up to six hours. If six hours is not enough, you can form a new team (in the field) and go again!

Remember; there are bragging rights and trophies at stake.

Now is the time. If you haven't previously participated, this would be a great year to start. This can be a great event to help someone with an interest in birds to get started on birdwatching. We all probably know someone who likes birds but doesn't know where to go look outside their backyard. We can be birding ambassadors and help others get involved. Even if we don't win a prize, it is a lot of fun. Last year we raised \$1,300.

Watch www.graud.org for official rules, pledge forms and reporting forms.

Questions and feedback can be directed to Jill Goodell – jillgoodell@yahoo.com or Rob Peters – lrp003@aquinas.edu.

February Finance Report

Prepared by Jeff Neumann-Treasurer

Checking Account Balance: \$ 8,437.86
Edward Jones Account: \$38,130.46
Total Assets as of 2/26/18: \$46,568.32

Restricted Funds (included in the total assets)

Maher Sanctuary Fund: \$2,979.04
Junior Audubon Fund: \$4,150.12
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.



Update on April 28 Thornapple Woodpecker Festival: GRAC Members Asked to Volunteer

Plans continue for the Saturday, April 28 Thornapple Woodpecker Festival in Middleville. It's going to be a great day on the Thornapple River!

The Woodpecker Festival, sponsored in part by GRAC, offers free guided walking tours of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail. A golf cart will be available for a small cost for those who wish to see the trail by vehicle. Festival-goers are likely to observe Red-headed Woodpeckers, the other five more-common Eastern U.S. woodpeckers, warblers, swallows and waterfowl.

There's plenty to do and see at the Woodpecker Festival. Besides the opportunity for great birding, festival-goers can listen to speakers on nature-related topics at 10:00 AM, 11:00 AM, 1:00 PM and 2:00 PM in the Village Hall. An arts and crafts show will be held in the Pavilion, where nature items will be offered for sale. The 1902 Train Depot will be open, and attendees can learn about the history of railroading in the area.

Volunteers from the GRAC birding community are needed to lead walking tours of the Paul Henry-Thornapple Trail, drive the golf cart, and answer questions from two picnic tables along the trail. Volunteers are needed between 8:45 AM and 3:15 PM for flexible shift times.

GRAC members: Contact Becky (vice.president@graud.org) or Mary (membership@graud.org) to offer your services for April 28.

Artists and Crafters Invited to Thornapple Woodpecker Festival Arts and Crafts Show

Attention Artists and Crafters: You are invited to sell your hand-crafted items at the Saturday, April 28 Thornapple Woodpecker Festival Arts and Crafts Show in downtown Middleville, Mich. The show, sponsored in part by the Grand Rapids Audubon Club, will be in the covered Pavilion, 101 E. Main Street. The Festival starts at 9:00 AM and goes until 3:00 PM, with the arts and crafts show set-up at 8:00 AM and take-down at 3:00 PM.

The registration fee covers one eight-foot space, and you must bring your own tables and chairs. Electricity is available for a \$5 cost, and you need to supply your own extension cord. Please note that spaces will be assigned and that you are responsible at all times for your merchandise, display materials and items in your space.

Questions? Contact woodpeckerfest@yahoo.com or Jean at (616) 293-8666.

Thornapple Woodpecker Festival Arts and Crafts Show Registration Form

Artist/Crafter Fee - \$10 if paid by April 21 (\$15 after)	\$ _____
Non-profit Organization Fee - \$5 if paid by April 21 (\$10 after)	_____
Electricity - \$5	_____
Total	\$ _____

Individual (or Non-Profit Organization) Name: _____

Address: _____ City/State/Zip Code: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Make Check Payable to: **Grand Rapids Audubon Club, Inc.**

Send Check to: Grand Rapids Audubon Club, 2021 Valentine NE, Grand Rapids MI 49525-2922



Ranger Steve's Nature Niche

Aggressive Siskins

by Ranger Steve Mueller

Pine Siskins arrived at feeders along with aggressive behavior this winter. Watching birds feed allows us to witness individuals interacting with members of their own species and those of other species.

Some think Blue Jays are aggressive toward other birds at feeders, but it might just be their size and flamboyance causing other birds to flee. Jays arrive with a burst of color and size that raises alarm. They do not peck at other birds or show typical aggression.

The Pine Siskins behave differently. This winter, siskins arrived in flocks where they search open wooded areas and fields for seeds. They seek feeding areas similar to those preferred by goldfinches. Not every winter do we get to enjoy these puzzling birds. They remain farther north most winters but during some years penetrate to the deep south.

They can be challenging to identify. In appearance they look most similar to female House Finches. The size and shape of the bill first drew my attention to suspect Pine Siskin. I am used to House Finches daily with males having red feathers on head and body, but the females are brown and white. I noticed the brown finch-appearing birds on the feeder, but instead of a thick finch bill, they had thin, sharp pointed bills.

Once clued by the bill, I looked more closely for Pine Siskins' features. I expected to see yellow wing bars and yellow along the primary feather edges. I did not. I studied several birds and they appeared to be Pine Siskins but lacked the expected yellow. Not all siskins have evident yellow. They had a light streak over the eye that is lacking on House Finches. The breast was streaked with brown similar to that on the finches.

A little patience paid off. More siskins arrived with yellow wing bars and primary feather edges. Once I was confident with identification, I enjoyed watching the new arrivals and their behavior. Immediately, I noticed they were aggressive toward any bird on the feeder and ground. They thrust their sharp bill toward nearby birds causing them to leave or at least move farther away. In addition to bill thrusting, they spread their wings with a threat. I could not hear if they also made a vocal threat.

Birds often restrict feeding territory defense toward birds of the same species. These feisty little birds intimidated larger Dark-eyed Juncos and even Northern Cardinals. American Goldfinches are numerous on the feeders and the siskins let them know they were not welcome. There were constant leap-frog movements as birds jostled for a place to secure seed.

Territories of several types exist. During breeding season, birds defend areas to secure brood survival with adequate protective isolation for courtship, mating and

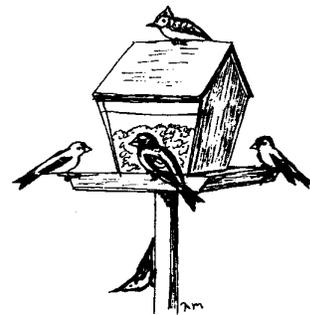
food acquisition. Territories distribute birds in their habitat to prevent overcrowding that could result in death. It helps prevent numbers in a given area from exceeding the environment's carrying capacity necessary for survival.

Being dispersed widely through the habitat helps protect them from predators. Many species remain visually hidden during the breeding season among foliage. They announce their presence and territorial claim by singing from hidden out-of-sight locations.

After breeding season, several species gather in flocks where they feed together and work as teammates with a different territory structure. Pine Siskins, American Goldfinches and House Finches travel in flocks to feeding areas. Each individual shares the watch for predators and helps locate food sources. Survival chances improve.

When feeding, dominant pecking order is expressed by individuals to ensure they get the food they need. If adequate food is lacking, the least aggressive go hungry. At my feeders, the siskins are the most aggressive greedy little birds. They do not know they can relax because I keep the feeders filled.

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.



Editor's Note

In the February 2018 edition of the *Caller*, an editing/layout error caused omission of a sentence from Ranger Steve's Nature Niche, "Desire to Have a Bird Brain." Below is an excerpt, with previously missing words in bold. Apologies for the error:

"I am on a combination of chemos that causes chemo brain, meaning that I have memory impairment from the chemicals used to keep me alive. Fortunately, they do not **impair my long-term memory but I have difficulty** learning new things or remembering things like what I had for lunch without writing it down as a memory jogger."



GRAC CALENDAR

March

- 15 Field Trip: Millennium Park (recurring 22, 24)
- 24 Field Trip: Bluebird Box Cleaning w/ Jim Ponshair
- 24 "Modes of Animal Behavior," Ranger Steve
- 26 GRAC Board & General Membership Meetings

April

- 7 Field Trip: Musk. Co. Duck Trip w/ Lizzy Kibbey & Steve Minard
- 11 Climate Fest: Our Children's Future
- 12 "On Being a Rare Bird," Dr. J. Drew Lanham
- 15 Birdathon Starts
- 17 Field Trip: Woodcock Display w/ Ray Gates
- 21 Field Trip: Spring Marsh Birds and Hawks w/ Steve Minard
- 28 Field Trip: Spring Migrants at Huff Park w/ Lizzy Kibbey
- 28 Thornapple Woodpecker Festival
- 30 GRAC Board & General Membership Meetings

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.

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.

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
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Belmont, MI 49306-9783

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DATED MATERIAL
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Nine Issues per year
Published monthly except May, July
and December

Grand Rapids Audubon Club

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