

the Caller

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



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January Nature Program Offered Online

Due to ongoing COVID-19 safety considerations, our January nature program will be held virtually via Zoom. We enjoyed good attendance and participation for our virtual November program (see page 5 of this *Caller* for details) and hope to welcome many guests to our January event as well.

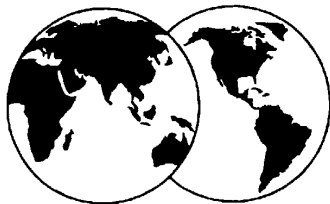
On Jan. 25, Rob Peters will present “Eating Right for Yourself and the Plant: Health and Environmental Impacts of our Diet Choices.”

In this presentation, we will look at some of the published data showing which dietary choices may improve your health and longevity and decrease your environmental footprint. One of the easiest and clearest choices is to eat less meat, especially less beef. We will also briefly discuss the proposed mechanisms for how consumption of animal protein may shorten someone’s lifespan and why it is so much more resource intensive to produce meat.

Join us at 7:30 PM using this Zoom link:
<https://zoom.us/j/97342620872?pwd=Rm96T0R5amQvamxTbktxTHRYTmZHZZ09>

Meeting ID: 973 4262 0872

Passcode: GRACJan



President’s Corner

by Scott Hutchings

The New Year

So here we are; a new year, a more hopeful year for us and the birds. The vaccines are rolling out, so we may be able to return to in-person meetings and field trips later this year. And we’ve come up with ideas to improve both. The new administration seems to care about environmental issues. So maybe we can heal some of the damage, or at least stop further degradation of habitats and species survival. Hope, at least, is back.

This time of year is always fun for me. The most ordinary birds are year birds, giving us a chance to appreciate the birds we’ll probably see every week of this year; the Chickadees, Cardinals, Blue Jays, even the House Sparrows get a fresh look. Their field marks and colors, their habits and behaviors, all are new again. Then there’s the mystery; what rare birds will visit us, what will we learn about old friends, what will surprise us? And then there’s the familiar, the change of the seasons, the spring migration, breeding season, nesting, fledging, fall migration, and back to winter.

I hope you all enjoy this year as much as I hope to.



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

Send to: newsletter@graud.org



November and December 2020 eBird Summaries

Very Unusual and Rare Sightings by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the very unusual and rare eBird sightings for November and December 2020 for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. These reports do not include rare birds that are flyovers, unchaseable, on inaccessible private property and those with sketchy details.

November 2020

We were greeted with strong winds, cold rain and snow showers on the 1st. After drying out, a big warm-up into the 60s and 70s with mostly sunny skies followed the 4th through the 10th (four new record highs 7th-10th). A new record number of 70-degree days in November (6) was also set. Temperatures returned to near normal on the 11th after a windy cold front with thunderstorms. A near to below normal period with occasional rain and some snow showers (strong winds with another messy cold front on the 15th and 16th) lasted through the 16th. Near to above normal conditions with occasional rain, a mix and wet snow (the 24th) followed through the 29th. Wind and temps in the 30s closed the month.

The winter finch invasion/irruption continued. Evening Grosbeaks were spotted at 14 new locations plus two previous ones, most at residents' feeders (see below). Common Redpolls along with several Hoaries (see below), Pine Siskins and Purple Finches were all reported in good numbers in all four counties. Flyovers of Red Crossbills were observed at Hemlock Crossing Park and Holland State Park, but none staying at any specific location. A female White-winged Crossbill visited feeders at the Garris residence in Ottawa Co.

Waterfowl, including Redheads, scaup, scoters, Long-tailed Ducks (high count of at least 900 at Meinert Park in Muskegon Co Nov 28), Red-breasted Mergansers (high count of est 1,000 at Douglas Beach Park Saugatuck Nov 30) and others, continued in large numbers offshore in Lake Michigan. Large numbers of Canada Geese, Northern Shoveler, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck and others continued at the Muskegon Wastewater.

Notables for the month: A **Greater White-fronted Goose** (found by Danielle DeMuth) at Pickerel Lake Nature Preserve in Kent Co Nov 20. Up to 16 **Snow Geese** at the Wastewater Nov 7-27. A **ROSS'S GOOSE** (found on field trip by members of Oakland Audubon Society) at the Wastewater Nov 7-10 and an amazing number of up to 17 there Nov 11-14 (original flock of 13 found by John VanOrman Nov 11; visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76136709> to view photo).

Two **Cackling Geese** at the Wastewater Nov 8, up to six at Coopersville Goose Field (Conran and O'Malley Dr) in Ottawa Co Nov 14-21, up to 14 at Coopersville Sewage Ponds Nov 14-15, one at Myers Lake in Kent Co Nov 18. **Tundra Swans** observed in all four counties with a high count flyover of 250 at a residence on Barry St W of 88th Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 11. A female type **HARLEQUIN DUCK** (found by Aaron Klanderman) at Kalamazoo River mouth in Allegan Co Nov 7. Two **Surf Scoters** at Oval Beach in Saugatuck Nov 1, eight at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas in Allegan Co Nov 2, three at Kalamazoo River mouth Nov 4 and one Nov 22, one at Flower Creek Dunes Preserve Nov 20-26, one (found by Caleb Putnam/Julie Pedreros) at Reeds Lake Nov 22 – unusual inland location, one at Douglas Beach Park Nov 30. Nineteen **White-winged Scoters** at Oval Beach, five at Pere Marquette Park, two at Versluis Lake in Kent Co Nov 7-11 – unusual inland location, 19 at Meinert Park in Muskegon Co. **34 Black Scoters** at Oval Beach in Saugatuck Nov 1, up to 25 at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas in Allegan Co throughout the month, two at Kalamazoo River mouth throughout the month, one (found by Jeff Kunitzer) at Reeds Lake Nov 7-8 and one (found by Caleb Putnam/Julie Pedreros) at Versluis Lake in Kent Co Nov 7-11 – both rare inland locations (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S75938947> to view photos from Reeds Lake), three at Holland SP Nov 11, three at Flower Creek Dunes Preserve in Muskegon Co Nov 26, up to 24 at Douglas Beach Park Nov 29-30. A **Red-throated Loon** at Meinert Park in Muskegon Co Nov 8, two at Oval Beach in Saugatuck Nov 30. A **RED-NECKED GREBE** (found by Brian Allen) at the Wastewater Nov 1, two continued since Oct 31 at the Cottage Grove boat launch in Muskegon Nov 4. An **Eared Grebe** continued at the Wastewater Nov 11-14. A Turkey Vulture at the Wastewater Nov 28 – late. A **GOLDEN EAGLE** (found by Beth Miller) at the Wastewater Nov 10 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76086851> to view photos) – first report and two there Nov 14 and one Nov 22. A **Virginia Rail** at Allegan SGA 44th St wetland Nov 10 – late; two wintered at this location last year. Four **Baird's Sandpipers** continued since Oct at 116th Ave/8th St wetland in Allegan Co Nov 1, one at the Wastewater Nov 12-20 – very late. A **PURPLE SANDPIPER** (found by Carl and Judi Manning) at Holland SP Nov 2-9 and again Nov 22-29 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S75741236> to view Judi Manning's photos), two (found by Aaron Klanderman) at Kalamazoo River mouth in Allegan Co Nov 7 and one there Nov 22, one (found by Brendan Klick) at the Wastewater Nov 15-16 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76289279> to view photo), one (found by Charlie DeWitt) at Pere Marquette Park in Muskegon Nov 17 and 30

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(visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76371232> to view Beth Miller's photos). **920 Bonaparte's Gulls** at Oval Beach Nov 1. An **Iceland Gull** (Thayer's) at Oval Beach Nov 1, one (Thayer's) at Gun River Aggregates gravel pit lake in Allegan Co Nov 5, one at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center Nov 16, two at Green Lake in Allegan Co Nov 23. Up to two **Lesser Black-backed Gulls** at Gun Lake Park in Allegan Co, one at Gun River Aggregates gravel pit lake in Allegan Co, one continued at Holland SP, one at Byron Lakes in Kent Co, one continued at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center, two at Green Lake in Allegan Co. A **Glaucous Gull** at Holland SP Nov 11 – first report, one at the Wastewater Nov 15, one at Green Lake in Allegan Co Nov 23. A **Forster's Tern** at Black Lake Park in Muskegon Co Nov 1 – late. A **Snowy Owl** at the Wastewater Nov 26-29 – first report, one at 96th Ave and Port Sheldon St area in Borculo Nov 27, one at Sternberg Rd and Harvey St in Muskegon Nov 27, one at Pere Marquette Park Nov 30. A **Short-eared Owl** (found by Patricia Bazany) at the Wastewater Nov 8 continued Nov 22. An **Eastern Phoebe** at the Wastewater Nov 14 – late. A **Northern Shrike** at Bass River RA in Ottawa Co, one at the Bend Area in Ottawa Co, one at Roselle Park, one at the Wastewater, one at a residence on Allegan St (M-89) E of 4th St in Allegan Co Nov 18-21. A **Blue-headed Vireo** at a residence on W 35th St E of Pine Ave in Holland Nov 12 – late. A **Marsh Wren** at Windmill Island Park in Holland Nov 3 – late. Two **Swainson's Thrushes** at Black Lake Park in Muskegon Co Nov 5 – very late. A **Gray Catbird** at a residence in SE Grand Rapids Nov 25 – late. A **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** at the Manning residence in W Ottawa Co Nov 22-30 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76580346> to view photos). Massive flock of **310 Cedar Waxwings** at Lowell Rite Aid and vicinity Nov 22. A **BOHEMIAN WAXWING** (found by Craig Kingma) at Windmill Island Park in Holland Nov 4 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S75816011> to view photos). At least 50 **Lapland Longspurs** continued since Oct at 118th Ave/23rd St fields in Allegan Co Nov 1 and 10 there Nov 14, twelve at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Nov 2. **Snow Buntings** at various locations in all four counties; high count of 200 at the Wastewater Nov 3 and at Kraft Ave access Kent Co airport Nov 30. **Late warblers:** A **Nashville** at Window-on-the-Waterfront in Holland Nov 7. A **Tennessee** at Ideal Park in Kent Co Nov 7. A **Common Yellowthroat** at Stu Visser Trails Nov 3. A **Hooded** at a residence near Saugatuck Dunes SP Nov 28. A **Palm** at the Bend Area in Ottawa Co Nov 6. A **Pine** at Kitchel-Lindquist Dunes Preserve in Ottawa Co Nov 11. **Late sparrows:** Three **Chipping** at Plaster Creek Park in Kent Co Nov 15. A **Field** at the Wastewater Nov 11.

A **Savannah** at the Wastewater Nov 19. Two **Swamp** at Reeds Lake Nov 29. Twelve **Rusty Blackbirds** at Stu Visser Trails Nov 3, 19 at 118th Ave marsh (118th W of 8th St) in Allegan Co Nov 3, up to **70** at the Wastewater Nov 15-16. A **Baltimore Oriole** at a residence on Cove St on Pottawattomie Bayou in Ottawa Co Nov 13-23 – late (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76198024> for photos). A **WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILL** at the Garris residence (found by Lonny Garris) along Barry St W of 88th Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 26-29 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76710257> to view photos). **Common Redpolls** very numerous in all four counties; some of the higher numbers: At least 45 at Stu Visser Trails in Ottawa Co throughout the month (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S75760809> to view Ken Bishop's photos), likely upwards of **200+** at the Wastewater Nov 14-30 with at least one **HOARY** found by Ken Bishop Nov 22 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76557783> to view his photos), **110** at condo development on Isle Water/Isle River Dr near Grand Isle Park in Kent Co Nov 17 along with at least two **HOARY** found by Caleb Putnam (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S76382987> to view photos), 45 at Millennium Park Nov 17, est **290** at Brewer Ave and 7 Mile Rd in Belmont Nov 18, 65 at Hemlock Crossing Park in Ottawa Co Nov 21, one **HOARY** (found by Curtis Dykstra/Ty Wagenmaker) at the Bend Area in Ottawa Co Nov 23, 30 along with one **HOARY** (found by Beth Miller) at S Swanson Rd potholes in Muskegon Co Nov 23. Good numbers of **Pine Siskins** continued in all four counties. The **EVENING GROSBEAK** invasion continued: Seven at a residence on Leclare St in Fruitport Charter Twp Muskegon Co Nov 1, up to five at a residence on Morse Lake Ave N of 68th St in Kent Co Nov 1-2, two at a residence in the Sessions Point development in Ottawa Co Nov 1, 15 at a residence on Stillwater Dr in West Olive Nov 1, one at Huff Park Nov 2, nine at a residence on 4th St N of 132nd Ave in Allegan Co Nov 2, two continuing since late Oct at a residence off Lincoln St W of 168th Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 2, eight at a residence on Russell Rd in Twin Lake Nov 3, twelve at a residence on Kathryn St in Muskegon Nov 3, one at a residence in Alger Heights Grand Rapids Nov 5, **50** at a residence on Buchanan St at Chickory in Ottawa Co Nov 5 and 10 continued Nov 10, eleven continued since late Oct at Harbor Island Grand Haven Nov 6, five briefly at a residence Ransom St and 152nd Ave in Ottawa Co Nov 9, three at a residence on 128th Ave W of 26th St in Allegan Co Nov 11, six at Black Lake Park in Muskegon Co Nov 19, five near Kettle Lake Elementary School in Kent Co Nov 22.

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December 2020

After just missing out on a huge snowstorm that hit the eastern half of the state, an uneventful near normal dry period with several sunny days continued through the first eleven days of the month. A messy system brought heavy rain and then a little snow to the Grand Rapids area late on the 11th through the 12th. Fairly seasonable temps followed through the 23rd with only minor precipitation, missing yet another huge storm that passed to our east on the 15th and 16th. Highs only in the 20s on the 24th and 25th produced lake effect snow showers for a white Christmas and finally our first official inch of snow (1.2 in. at Kent Co airport), which was the latest ever in the season. A round of heavy snow and mix followed late on the 29th through the 30th.

With the warmer conditions and open water continuing through the month, good numbers of waterfowl continued congregating at the Muskegon Wastewater including Tundra Swans, Canada Geese, Northern Shoveler (thousands; one leucistic individual late month), Gadwall, Mallard, Ring-necked Duck, scaup, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck (over a thousand) and others as well as up to three Long-tailed Ducks, one of which had been there since November.

The winter finch irruption continued with Common Redpolls (very abundant, some larger numbers reported below) along with a few Hoaries, Purple Finches and Pine Siskins reported throughout the month. Two White-winged Crossbills showed up at a residence in Rockford, one at a residence in Holland and one at Greenwood Cemetery in NW Grand Rapids. Evening Grosbeaks were at private residences in Allegan and Kent Co late month.

Notables for the month: A **Greater White-fronted Goose** (found by Kyle/Amy Werner) on Flat River along Riverside Dr near Lowell Dec 31. Six **Snow Geese** along Bingham St W of 120th Ave in Ottawa Co Dec 3-8, one continued at the Wastewater Dec 11, one at Grand River Open Space in Ottawa Co Dec 18. Up to five **Cackling Geese** at the Wastewater Dec 5-21, six at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Dec 27, one at Byron Lakes in Kent Co Dec 28-29, one at Versluis Park in Kent Co Dec 31. A good number of **Hooded Mergansers (48)** at Myers Lake in Kent Co Dec 4. A **Surf Scoter** continued since Nov 22 at Reeds Lake Dec 3 – unusual inland location, one at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas Dec 7. Up to 25 **Black Scoters** continued since Nov at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas Dec 31, one at Lake Macatawa west end and Grand Haven SP Dec 13, six at Kalamazoo River mouth Dec 22. **1,100 Long-tailed Ducks** at Pere Marquette Park in Muskegon Co Dec 5. Three **Red-throated Loons** at Lakeshore Dr guardrail S of Douglas Dec 7.

A **RED-NECKED GREBE** (found by Jeff Kunitzer) at Muskegon Lake channel Dec 18, one (found by John Hamel) on the Flat River in downtown Lowell Dec 21-22 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77842228> to view Myles McNally's photo). Three **Great Egrets** at a pond on NE corner of Exchange and School St in Spring Lake Dec 5 returned to Mill Point Park (across the street) Dec 6; these birds were previously reported at Mill Point Park in late Nov-Dec 4, one at a pond at Comstock St and 168th Ave in Grand Haven Dec 11 (new record late date for Ottawa Co). One **Turkey Vulture** at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center Dec 28 – very late. A leucistic **Red-tailed Hawk** at Grand River Open Space in Ottawa Co Dec 18 – likely same individual that was present in 2019. A **GOLDEN EAGLE** continued since Nov at the Wastewater Dec 26, one likely (found by Kyle/Amy Werner) along Flat River near Lowell Dec 31 (locals claim both Bald and Golden eagles have been seen in the area). A **Virginia Rail** continued since Nov at Allegan SGA 44th St wetland Dec 27 – two wintered at this location last year. A **PURPLE SANDPIPER** continued since Nov at Pere Marquette Park Dec 6-20 and three (found by the Lautenbachs) there Dec 12 and up to **five** (found by Tom Pavlik [4]/John Kippe [5]) there Dec 13-15 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77534825> to view Jason Carlson's photos along with a beautiful male Long-tailed Duck in basic plumage) – this is likely a record high number for Muskegon Co, up to two (second bird found by the Mannings Dec 8) continued since Nov at Holland SP Dec 13. An **Iceland Gull** (kumlieni) at Gun Lake Park in Allegan Co Dec 9, one at the Wastewater Dec 12, up to two at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center Dec 23-31. A **Lesser Black-backed Gull** at Bostwick Lake in Kent Co Dec 3, up to three continued at the Wastewater Dec 12, up to two at Byron Lakes in Kent Co Dec 11-29, one at Kalamazoo Lake and two at Oval Beach in Allegan Co Dec 21, up to three at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center Dec 23-31. A **Glaucous Gull** at Holland SP Dec 7 and 31, up to two at Byron Lakes in Kent Co Dec 18-30, one at Pere Marquette Park Dec 19, up to two at South Kent Recycling and Waste Center Dec 23-31. Two **EURASIAN COLLARED-DOVES** (found by Stan Koster) at the Ravenna Feed Mill in Muskegon Co Dec 29. Up to two **Snowy Owls** continued since Nov at the Wastewater through the month, one at 128th Ave and Bingham St in Ottawa Co Dec 5 continued Dec 22, one continued since Nov 30 at Pere Marquette Park Dec 18, one at Gerald R Ford Int'l Airport Kraft Ave access Dec 7-8, one along Fruitvale Rd W of Ochs Rd in Muskegon Co Dec 7-15, one at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Dec 11, one along 58th St S of 136th Ave in Allegan Co Dec 16.

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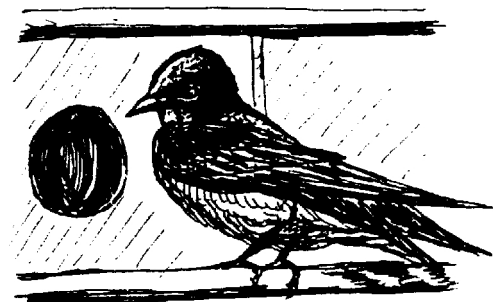
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A **LONG-EARED OWL** (found by Rick Brigham/Will Keller) at Allegan SGA Todd Farm in secluded area near the fields where SEOW hunt Dec 13-15. Up to four **Short-eared Owls** (two initially found by John VanOrman) at Allegan SGA Todd Farm in fields around 116th Ave/62nd St Dec 4-31 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77069891> to view photos), up to two continued since Oct at the Wastewater Dec 21. A **Northern Saw-whet Owl** (found by Jim Markham) at Ball Perkins Park in Kent Co Dec 9 through at least Dec 18 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77350273> to view Michael Bowen's photos) – per request of the initial observer, this listing was removed from the GRAC website bird sightings page due to the species' sensitivity so as not to further disturb the roost site, one (found by Rick Brigham/Will Keller) at Allegan SGA 116th Ave/48th/46th St area Dec 13-27 and one (Rick Brigham) at Round Lake in Allegan Co Dec 27– both nocturnal; heard only. A **Yellow-bellied Sapsucker** at a residence along Buttrick Ave near Whitburn St SE in Kent Co Dec 14-17 – late. A **Northern Shrike** at Grand River Open Space in Ottawa Co Dec 4, one continued since Nov at the Wastewater Dec 6, one at Outdoor Discovery Center in Allegan Co Dec 14-31, one along 110th Ave btw 20th and 22nd St in Allegan Co Dec 26, one at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Dec 27. A **Ruby-crowned Kinglet** at the Bend Area in Ottawa Co Dec 14 – late. A **Hermit Thrush** at Millennium Park Dec 31 – late. A **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (found by Jeremy Overway) at a residence on S Hampton St in Holland Dec 12 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77435824> to view Beth Miller's photos). Eight **Lapland Longspurs** at a residence along Barry St W of 88th Ave in Ottawa Co Dec 7, 20 at the Wastewater Dec 30, a few in farm fields in Allegan Co. **Snow Buntings** continued in all four counties; high count of **200** at Kraft Ave access Kent Co Airport Dec 1. A **Common Yellowthroat** at Windmill Island Park in Holland Dec 19 – very late. A **Yellow-rumped Warbler** at end of 52nd St E of Kraft Ave SE in Kent Co Dec 11 – late. **Late sparrows:** A **Lincoln's** at a residence on Union Ave in SE Grand Rapids Dec 7-11. Two **Swamp** at Windmill Island Park in Holland Dec 19. Up to six **White-crowned** at Outdoor Discovery Center in Allegan Co through the month (winter at this location). A **Rusty Blackbird** at Stu Visser Trails in Ottawa Co Dec 11 – late. Up to two male **WHITE-WINGED CROSSBILLS** (found by homeowner, reported by Caleb Putnam) at a residence on Cahill Dr in Rockford Dec 1-5 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S77022335> to view Tanya Smythe's photos),

one (found by Caleb Putnam/Julie Pedreros) at Greenwood Cemetery NW Grand Rapids Dec 5 and Dec 22 (Scott Hutchings), one female (found by homeowner) at a residence on Bay Circle Dr in Holland Dec 11-12. **Common Redpolls** continued through the month in large numbers at the Wastewater with at least **300+** reported, 50 at Weber Farm in Muskegon Co Dec 2, at least 40 at Outdoor Discovery Center throughout the month, at least 76 (along with one **HOARY** found by Lonny Garris/Cindy Dobrez Dec 10) at residence along Barry St W of 88th Ave in Ottawa Co Dec 10-13, est **200** (total of several flocks) at Allegan SGA Todd Farm Dec 13, 70 at WayPoint Community Church on State St in Zeeland Dec 19, **220** along 120th Ave W of Patterson Rd in Allegan Co Dec 19, 84 along Ellis Rd E of Blackmer Rd in Muskegon Co Dec 31. Two **HOARY REDPOLLS** (found by Rob Keys) with a flock of 40 Common Redpolls at Wabasis Ave and Elkins St in Kent Co Dec 1, up to two continued since Nov at the Wastewater Dec 23. Six **EVENING GROSBEAKS** at a residence along 54th St S of 122nd Ave in Allegan Co Dec 24, one at a residence along Buttrick Ave near Whitburn SE in Kent Co Dec 26.

November 2020 Zoom Membership Meeting Recording

The Nov. 30, 2020 GRAC membership program with Justin Hesling, Stewardship Director, Land Conservancy of West Michigan was hosted online through Zoom. A replay of the meeting is available on YouTube via this link: youtube.com/watch?v=53EzhCfZqK8&feature=emb_title
You may also find it on the GRAC website.





Fantasy Birding – For Real?

by Mary Austin

You may have heard of Fantasy Football or other Fantasy Sports contests. In these online contests, a person makes predictions of sporting events and then gets points based on subsequent real-world results.

According to www.fantasybirding.com, Fantasy Birding is an online game for armchair naturalists of all ages and interest levels. It allows a person to enter a variety of contests with other players, make moves over the course of a “season,” and earn points based on real-world results. (The “payoff” is in terms of recognition. Money supposedly is not involved in these contests.) The Fantasy Birding results are based on real checklists submitted to eBird.

In some games, such as the North American Big Year, the object is to record the most species within a designated timeframe and geographic area. In other games, a person earns points based on a bird’s rarity. Players consult actual weather forecasts and recent sightings for an area to determine what moves they will make for their next predictions.

Matt Smith, who lives in Virginia, is the developer of Fantasy Birding. He states that when he was young, he spent as much time daydreaming about birding as he did actually going out looking for birds. He says he spent hours poring through exotic field guides and reading accounts of Big Year exploits, wondering if he would be able to tackle those things himself. So while he hasn’t been able to take off for Attu or Ramsey Canyon, he’s done what he considers the next best thing: Create a game to simulate that experience.

In March 2019, National Public Radio hosted a segment on its “Wait, Wait. . . Don’t Tell Me” program in which Fantasy Birding was featured. Even the American Birding Association has general information about Fantasy Birding (<https://www.aba.org/fantasy-birding/>).

While Fantasy Birding is an interesting concept, I question how viable it will be. Fantasy Birding might be a diversion on a cold, rainy afternoon. But even in poor weather conditions, I’d rather be outdoors seeing real birds in the real world.

When Does a “Bird” Become a “Birb”?

Adapted from the online *Audubon Magazine*, “When is a Bird a ‘Birb’? An Extremely Important Guide” by Asher Elbein, Dec. 12, 2019,

audubon.org/news/when-bird-birb-extremely-important-guide

by Mary Austin

“Birb” is a word that has been popping up in photos and articles dealing with birds in print and on the internet. So what exactly is a “birb,” or for that matter, what exactly is a “borb” and a “floof”?

“Birb” is an endearing nickname typically used to describe any bird that is being funny, cute or silly. It has been said that all birds are birbs at some time in their lives. Additionally, a chunky bird is a “borb,” and a fluffed-up bird is a “floof.”

Can one birb be more funny or have more cuteness or silliness than other birbs? Writer Asher Elbein says that there must be some basic operational rules before that question is answered.

Rule 1: Birbs are often (though not conclusively) small. Any bird larger than an adult turkey is generally not a birb, although it was likely a birb when it was younger.

Rule 2: Birbs are often (though not always) round. The rounder or fluffier a bird is, the more birblike it is likely to be. Adult hawks and eagles are too sharp and angular to be birbs. Small, round birds like Downy Woodpeckers and Dark-eyed Juncos classify as birbs.

Rule 3: Birbs appear cute. Eagles and other large raptors are too majestic and fierce looking to count as cute. Notably, the aggression of hummingbirds and the Vlad-the-impaler antics of shrikes do not disqualify those birds from being cute.

Mr. Elbein concludes that the following can be unquestionably judged as birbs because of their roundness, fluffiness and smallness: the vast majority of songbirds, Burrowing and Elf Owls, screech-owls, American Kestrels and other small raptors. Additional birbs include Prairie Chickens, quail, shorebirds like sandpipers and smaller seabirds like puffins and penguins. While little waders like the Green Heron are birbs, the Great Blue Heron is not. Indeed, most cranes, herons and storks are too large and lanky to be birbs.

Does it matter whether a bird qualifies as a birb? Mr. Elbein says that strictly speaking, of course, it doesn’t. Nonetheless, these sorts of debates are fun partially because they reveal fault-lines in our definitions. It’s a chance for us to not just think about what birds are, but to consider *how* we think about and react to them. We not only rate them but see insight into our own human thinking process.



GRAC Sponsors Audubon Adventures Program for Teachers

by Mary Austin

Audubon Adventures is an incredible nature program available through the National Audubon Society. GRAC pays the cost for the Audubon Adventures materials for those teachers who wish to supplement their instruction of students grades 3 to 5.

Teachers can use classroom kits, stand-alone printed materials and online resources on 24 nature-related topics. Some popular topics offered are “Sharing Our World with Birds,” “Action for Planet Earth,” “World of the Forest,” “Hooray for Hummingbirds” and “The Nature of Spiders.” Students are engaged in learning through varied formats including reading, experimenting, solving puzzles, watching videos and participating in group activities and games. Audubon Adventures can be adopted for classroom, remote and hybrid learning situations.

If you are a teacher interested in Audubon Adventures, or if you know of a teacher who might be interested in the program, I’m the contact person. Just email me at mary.e.austin@comcast.net for more information.

December Finance Report

prepared by Jeff Neumann, Treasurer

Checking Account Balance:	\$ 9,934.10
Edward Jones Account:	\$64,702.25
Total Assets as of 12/31/20:	\$74,636.35
Restricted Funds (included in the total assets)	
Maher Sanctuary Fund:	\$2,191.55
Junior Audubon Fund:	\$4,048.55
Audubon Adventures:	\$ 358.00

The balances in the Maher Sanctuary, Junior Audubon and Audubon Adventures Funds are restricted to expenditures for items related to the respective funds.

Christmas Bird Count 2020: Summary

by Tom Leggett, co-compiler

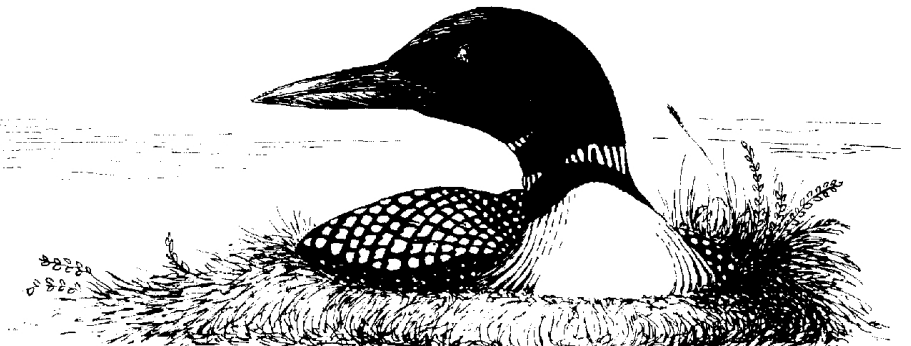
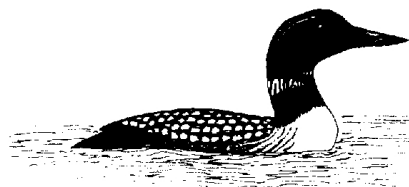
GRAC’s annual Christmas Bird Count was held on Saturday, Jan. 2, 2021 from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM. It was different this year in that it was social distanced, no public meeting, birding alone or with immediate household and all compiling by email. This cut down on social interaction but was still a lot of fun. Thirty-five field observers along with six feeder watchers participated on count day for a total of 41. Three observers identified species during count week but counter numbers are not included in the NAS report. Count week (cw) species included in the bird count report are listed without numbers seen. Counters saw a very respectable 63 species on the count day and four during the count week for a total of 67 species.

This year will be known as the year of the finches, with Common Redpolls in six of the seven count areas; while section D lacked redpolls, they had Evening Grosbeaks.

The mild winter so far and much open water had good waterfowl reporting. Example is a flock of Snow Geese in section E at treetop level in which the counter was able to see in the V that birds six to nine on right wing were juveniles, and nine to twelve on left wing also were juveniles and rest were adults.

Count week is three days before and after the count and was eventful adding four great species that did not show on count day. They were Long-tailed Duck, Cackling Goose, Common Loon and Tundra Swans at Versluis Lake in Section A.

Count day was cloudy and dry with no wind, which was nice after ice and snow from overnight. A full report with tables and commentary will be in the February newsletter. *We are still working the data so some minor alterations to this report are likely to appear in the February Caller (SJM).*





Ranger Steve's Nature Niche

Flocking to Crossbills

by Ranger Steve (Mueller)

People flocked to see White-winged Crossbills in Rockford. They are uncommon winter visitors this far south. The last time I experienced crossbills in Kent County was at the Wittenbach/Wege Agri-science and Environmental Education Center in Lowell when I was leading a college group through the pine forest in 2006. Avid birders have likely encountered them more frequently in our area. Last winter I saw them in the Upper Peninsula along with other northern migrants that do not normally venture much farther south.

It is more likely to see nomadic White-winged crossbills farther north where they drift about erratically in small flocks searching spruce and tamaracks for seeds during winter. Most of the year they are north of the United States but drift southward especially during years of poor cone production.

They have a unique bill with sharp tips on the lower and upper bills that cross over the opposite bill. Use your index fingers and cross them so they make an X just behind your fingernails. The lower part of your finger would represent the main bird bill and the fingertips represent the pointed end of the beak. Move your fingers so the fingertips touch end to end. The bird inserts bill tips between cone scales and partially closes the bill to force scales apart with its crossed tips. With its tongue the bird retrieves a conifer seed.

The White-winged Crossbills have slightly thinner bills than the similar Red Crossbills that lack white wingbars. This bill adaptation allows White-winged Crossbills to secure smaller seeds from tamaracks, or from white and black spruce conifer cones. The Red Crossbill utilizes larger coned red and white pines.

The species are unique from most passerine birds in two other characteristics. They will build nests and raise young in winter or late fall if conifer cone seeds are abundant. This is possible because they feed young regurgitated seeds instead of insects. Most birds that are primarily seed and fruit eaters feed their young insects.

Nest building is in conifer trees in bogs and swamps or in pine trees. The birds feed on other seeds and will take available food when the preferred is not found. Lori Tieman from Northland Nature Nest bird and wildlife store on Belding Road west of the E. Beltline by Bostwick Lake noticed a crossbill at her home feeder in Rockford. It was eating from the thistle seed feeder in her front yard. She posted a picture and soon bird watchers were visiting to look for this infrequently seen species.

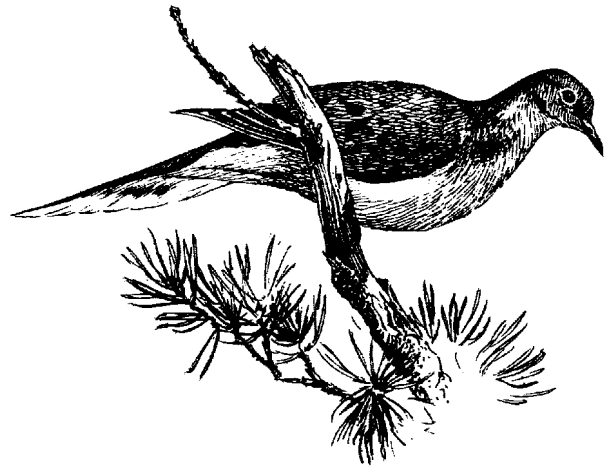
At the Nature Nest I bought metal squirrel guard cones to place on my shephard's hook bird feeder posts and they quickly paid for themselves in seed and suet cost savings. Birds eat hardily at the feeders and suet basket

but enough seed drops to the ground to keep squirrels fed. Ground-feeding birds like Mourning Doves and Dark-eyed Juncos find adequate food to keep returning.

It is enjoyable to browse through a bird and nature specialty store to discover products that help attract wildlife or for decorating the landscape. We bought a Michigan-shaped cement steppingstone for the butterfly garden that makes it easier to enter for weeding. Google "Northland Nature Nest" to see what they offer nature enthusiasts. Shop locally to help area businesses stay open.

This is a good year to attract birds because many of us are staying home and species that normally do not visit this far south are being sighted. Evening Grosbeaks, Common Redpolls and Pine Siskins are showing up at feeders. More common winter migrants like Red-breasted Nuthatches and Dark-eyed Juncos are present. If you are lucky, you might attract crossbills.

Natural history questions or topic suggestions can be directed to Ranger Steve (Mueller) at odybrook@chartermi.net or Ody Brook, 13010 Northland Dr, Cedar Springs, MI 49319-8433. Call (616) 696-1753.





UPCOMING EVENTS (visit the GRAC website for details)

January

- 21 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike
- 25 GRAC Nature Program (virtual)
- 28 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike

February

- 4 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike
- 11 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike
- 18 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike
- 25 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike

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 _____
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 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	_____
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Individual Life Membership	400.00	_____
Donation <i>(General Fund, Jr. Audubon, Sanctuary, Scholarship and/or Audubon Adventure)</i>		_____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to:
Grand Rapids Audubon Club, Inc.
 Send application and check to:
Theresa Dykhuis
3100 Cooks Meadow Dr. NE
Grand Rapids, MI 49525-9401

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.

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- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
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Sheryl Helmus 2018-19, 2019-20

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- Caller* Editor – Tricia Boot
- Caller* Publisher – Theresa Dykhuis/
Peggy Falk
- Christmas Count – Tom Leggett /
Steve Mueller
- Conservation – *open*

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

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