

the Caller

August 2022, Volume 61, No. 1

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Remembering Ranger Steve Mueller

by Mary Austin

So many Grand Rapids Audubon Club members have held Ranger Steve Mueller in great admiration and respect. It was saddening to learn of his June 16, 2022 passing. Steve, however, would want us to remember him for his unending dedication to nature.

Steven Joel Mueller was born on Aug. 13, 1950, in Saginaw, Michigan. Family members report that in his early years, Ranger Steve explored habitats near his home and there developed a passion for nature and conservation. He had a fulfilling career as a park ranger, urban forester, butterfly and moth researcher, author, teacher, and director of a number of nature centers, including the Howard Christensen Nature Center near Kent City. In the 1980s, while I was GRAC president, I had the pleasure of touring the nature center (just days before the Kent County Christmas Bird Count) with Steve as a local TV station crew filmed our birding observations.

Steve remained an active GRAC member even while battling multiple myeloma. He presented numerous nature programs for GRAC throughout the years, with his last on Jan. 31 of this year. That talk covered wilderness as a unique treasure, where he stressed the importance of protecting wilderness remnants for recreation, science and wildlife. As always, his photography was outstanding.

In many other ways, Ranger Steve had an enormous impact on our club. In leadership roles, he served as a GRAC president, coordinator of the annual Kent County Christmas Bird Count and field trip leader. Some of his field trips showcased the Ody Brook Nature Sanctuary surrounding his home. As founder and designer of Ody Brook, Ranger Steve emphasized biodiversity, native plant species and habitat for birds and butterflies.

As an author, Ranger Steve contributed hundreds of articles in conservation and education publications, wrote scientific articles for journals and provided the "Ranger Steve's Nature Niche" column, which has been published in our own *Caller* newsletter. He has been acknowledged in several butterfly books and is credited as the discoverer of a new species of moth, *Grammia brillans* (now known as *Apantesis brillians*).

Steve's family has recorded his recent comment that when he died, he would flutter away on the gossamer wings of a butterfly and would be among us when we commune with and protect nature. Steve, GRAC will miss you, but we will remember you as we gaze upon a butterfly or other wonder of nature.

A service in Steve's memory was held on Saturday, June 25, at the Cedar Springs United Methodist Church. Prior to his passing, Ranger Steve asked that donations be made to organizations that support care for creation. Family members relate that time spent communing in nature, whether hiking, bird watching or sitting quietly would be a wonderful way to honor Ranger Steve's memory.



Deadline for September newsletter articles: **Sept. 1**

Send to: newsletter@graud.org



June 2022 eBird Summary

Very Unusual and Rare Sightings by Carol VanOeveren

The following is an overview of the very unusual and rare eBird sightings for June 2022 for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties. This report does not include rare birds that are flyovers, unchaseable, on inaccessible private property and those with sketchy details.

After the passage of a strong cold front early on the 1st, a pleasant period of near/below normal temps in the high 60s and 70s lasted through the 12th with occasional periods of rain. Severe storms triggered by a hot, moist unstable air mass on the 13th sent temps soaring to the muggy 90s with heat indices over 100 on the 14th and 15th. A cold front early on the 16th brought relief and a pleasant period through the weekend, but the heat moved in again with very dry conditions for an extended period through the 25th with a couple of 90+ degree days. After rain and a cold front, near normal conditions returned until another humid near 90 degree day on the 30th.

Notables for the month: A **Redhead** at pond at a residence along Barry St W of 88th Ave in Ottawa Co June 26-30 – unusual in summer. A **Ring-necked Duck** at Byron Lakes in Kent Co June 15 and one at Millennium Park Trestle Trail ponds June 19-30 – rare in summer. Up to six **Common Gallinule** continued since Apr at Grand Haven SGA Bruce Bayou 129th Ave and Cypress St access – known locations, five at Dermo Bayou in Ottawa Co June 8, three heard and seen near Mill Point while kayaking on Grand River in Ottawa Co June 23. Up to 20 **White-rumped Sandpipers** continued at the Wastewater June 6. At least 40 **Semipalmated Sandpipers** at the Wastewater June 3. A **WILLET** (Lauren Vaughn) at the Wastewater June 1. A **FRANKLIN'S GULL** (Michael Walter) at Pere Marquette Park in Muskegon June 25. A **BLACK TERN** (Joel Postema) at Grand Haven SGA Bruce Bayou 129th Ave access June 19-20 and 132nd Ave access June 26. A **Common Loon** at Reeds Lake June 7 – late/south of typical breeding range. A **Least Bittern** at Muskegon SP Snug Harbor marsh June 10, one at Grand Haven SGA Bruce Bayou 129th Ave access June 20. A **Black-crowned Night-Heron** at Dermo Bayou Grand River in Ottawa Co June 8. The **Merlin** pr is again nesting on the Calvin University Campus. An **Olive-sided Flycatcher** (Bailey Mitchell) at the Wastewater June 3, one (Clinton Boyd) at a residence along Cramton Ave NE in Kent Co June 5, one heard at Rogue River SGA in Kent Co June 8 – all late. A **Blue-headed Vireo** at Saugatuck Dunes SP June 6, one at Cascade Peace Park in Kent Co June 11-19, one at Pigeon Creek Co Park in Ottawa Co June 22 -

all well south of typical breeding range, three at Allegan SGA Swan Creek 116th Ave to Swan Creek Pond June 20 – known breeding location. A **Winter Wren** at Allegan SGA Swan Creek 116th Ave to Swan Creek Pond area June 2, two at Luton Park in Kent Co June 3, two at Rogue River SGA in Kent Co June 8-9 – all late/possibly nesting. A **NORTHERN MOCKINGBIRD** (Aaron Klanderma) at Allegan SGA Todd Farm (58th St/117th Ave) June 4-7, one (Doug Howerzyl) at Lombard St/26th St/Chicago Dr SW area in Grandville June 13-18, one (Mark Boehler) at Pine Creek Impoundment in Allegan Co June 19 (one was also seen here May 14 by Mark), one (Jennifer Reck) at the Wastewater June 27-30. A **Purple Finch** at Muskegon SGA Lane's Landing June 1 – late. **Pine Siskins** still reported at feeders early month. A **Dark-eyed Junco** at Aquinas College June 14 and 20 – late/unknown why it is still here. Varying numbers of **Henslow's Sparrows** continued at Allegan SGA Todd Farm and two continued at 52nd St E of Kraft Ave SE in Kent Co, one also along 60th St S of Gerald R Ford Int'l Airport June 7 – all known locations, one continued since May 21 along 128th Ave N of Stanton St in Ottawa Co June 1. Thirteen **Grasshopper**, three **Clay-colored** and 21 **Vesper sparrows** and two **Dickcissels** at the Campbell Power Plant east ash fields at Port Sheldon June 25 – Ottawa Co Parks field trip to this restricted area, which is a known nesting location for Clay-colored and other sparrows. A **YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT** continued since May at Outdoor Discovery Center in Allegan Co June 19. A **WESTERN MEADOWLARK** (Dave Boekestein) has continued since May 16 at 140th Ave W of 4th St area in Allegan Co. Four **Brewer's Blackbirds** continued at the Wastewater June 3, two at 84th St/Wilson Ave SW (celery flats) June 7 – known location. **Warblers:** A **Louisiana Waterthrush** at Cascade Peace Park in Kent Co June 3, one continued at Allegan SGA Swan Creek 116th Ave to Swan Creek Pond June 11 – known location. Two **WORM-EATING** continued since May at Allegan SGA Swan Creek 116th Ave to Swan Creek Pond area – known breeding location. A **KENTUCKY** (Steve Minard) at Cascade Peace Park in Kent Co June 2-24 (visit <https://ebird.org/checklist/S112023198> to view Caleb Putnam's photos and <https://ebird.org/checklist/S112378189> to view Tori Martel's beautiful closeups) – this bird was an easy find always singing near trail markers 88 and 89 and not shy at all; up to three **Hooded** were also found at the park. A **Cerulean** continued since May at Aman Park June 13, up to five continued at Allegan SGA M-89 Kalamazoo River bridge/boat launch and at least one at other known locations within the game area.

Continued on page 3



Continued from page 2

A **Black-throated Blue** at Cascade Peace Park in Kent Co June 7 – well south of typical breeding range. A **Yellow-rumped** at Harbor Island Grand Haven June 5, one at Frederik Meijer Gardens June 14, two at Waterfront Park in E Grand Rapids June 20 – all late/south of typical breeding range. A **PRAIRIE** continued at Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area/Saugatuck Dunes SP area – known location, two (M Waller/A Olivier) at 48th St/120th Ave area in Allegan Co June 5. A **SUMMER TANAGER** (M Waller/A Olivier) at Allegan SGA Swan Creek 116th Ave to Swan Creek Pond June 5. **Dickcissels** continued in varying numbers at the Wastewater and Allegan SGA/Allegan SGA Todd Farm along with **Bobolinks** – both known breeding locations for both species.

Note: This is my last eBird summary. Please watch the GRAC website “Bird Sightings” page for mega-rarity postings. See the June 2022 *Caller* for information regarding how to sign up for rare bird alerts in real time, or find key points below:

- Sign up for rare bird alerts to be sent to your email for any county and state page (also territory, province, country, etc.) on eBird.
- To receive notifications on what eBird considers to be rare, scroll down and click on “Rare Bird Alerts” in the blue left-hand column of the page and then click the green “Subscribe to this alert” button at the top right of that page.
- Note that the listings include the rarities that are both confirmed and unconfirmed for the past seven days.
- Another option is signing up for the “Birding Michigan” channel on the Discord app. This is a comprehensive platform for all state and local rare bird alerts and chat groups that runs on both mobile and desktop/laptop systems. This replaces the old bird sharing groups app on Whatsapp. For more information on how to sign up, contact Caleb Putnam at caleb.putnam@gmail.com.
- The eBird links for Allegan, Kent, Muskegon and Ottawa counties will remain on the “Bird Sightings” page of the GRAC website for easy access.

New Findings about Woodpeckers

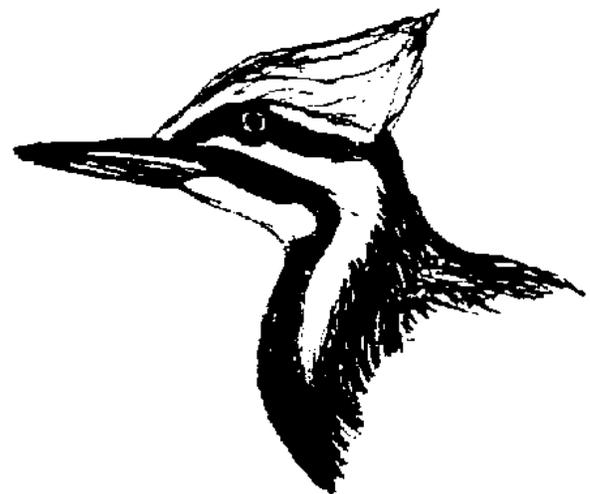
On a daily basis, woodpeckers drill their beaks into trees to search for food, especially insects, grubs, and spiders. Contrary to wide-held belief, *Smithsonian Magazine* reports that recent studies suggest woodpeckers don’t have shock-absorbing skulls. Rather, the birds’ small brain size protects them from getting concussions.

Sam Van Wassenbergh, a biologist at the University of Antwerp, has noted that a built-in shock absorption mechanism would hamper the birds’ pecking ability, and they’d need to exert more energy to reach their meals. Researchers used high-speed cameras to film various woodpecker species hammering into a tree and tracked motion on various points of the birds’ heads to determine how those points moved in relation to each other. They found no difference in movement patterns between the beak and brain, suggesting that the birds’ heads acted like a stiff hammer rather than a shock absorber.

Researchers additionally created a model to calculate pressure in the woodpeckers’ skulls. They found that the birds would need to hit wood twice as fast to concuss themselves.

So how do woodpeckers repeatedly drum their beaks against trees without getting concussions? According to Van Wassenbergh, it has to do with their small brain size. Smaller animals, such as woodpeckers, can withstand higher brain impact decelerations than humans. Because a woodpecker’s brain is about 700 times smaller than a human’s, the brain can decelerate in the bird’s skull without the bird suffering a concussion.

(The above was summarized by Mary Austin from an [article](#) by Margaret Osborne, *Smithsonian Magazine*, July 18, 2022)





Summer Field Trips

Weekly Thursday morning hikes at Millennium Park will continue. See the GRAC website for full field trip information.

Saturday, Aug. 27, 9:00 AM

Leaders: Becky Kuhn and Jim Fyfe

Muskegon Wastewater Fall Shorebirds

Join Becky and Jim for an August shorebird trip. The Wastewater is one of the better spots in the area for finding shorebirds. Shorebirds such as Semipalmated Plover, Sanderling, Least Sandpiper, Semipalmated Sandpiper and Lesser Yellowlegs are likely. Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Baird's Sandpiper and Buff-breasted Sandpiper are possible. Ducks and field birds are also likely to be seen. The plan is to meet at the Muskegon Wastewater and spend the morning looking for shorebirds.

Essentials: Meet at the main entrance to the Muskegon Wastewater, now signed as the Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center on the east side of Maple Island Rd. at 9:00 AM. This is where we meet for bluebird box cleaning in March. Bring your binoculars. A spotting scope, a drink and snacks will be helpful. This trip is planned for the morning.

Saturday, Sept. 10, 8:00 AM

Leader: Steve Minard

Fall Migrants at Reeds Lake

Join us in birding the marshes and woods in the Hodenpyl Woods area at the west end of Reeds Lake. Varied woodland, marsh and lake habitat provide a variety of birds right in town. On this trip, we will check the boardwalks for lake and marsh views and then head into the woods. Warblers and other fall migrants should be heading south at this time. We hope to catch good numbers of them. Eagles are reported to nest at Aquinas College and hunt this area regularly. Other raptors also are possible. 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 at 8:00 AM. Waterproof footwear and insect repellent may be useful. Poison ivy is thick in places.

Changes Ahead for the *Caller*

by Tricia Boot, outgoing *Caller* editor

I'm happy to share that this edition of the *Caller* will be my final as editor. Cynthia Maas will assume the role of *Caller* editor, effective with the September issue of the newsletter. Cynthia, a GRAC board member, serves on the GRAC Publicity committee where she helps to drive the club's social media strategy and execution. Her project management skills and attention to detail will serve her well in this role, as will her creativity and connection to the birding community.

As we look at ways to drive community engagement and increase membership, you can expect to see a more simplified, refreshed and modern version of the *Caller* in the coming months.

My sincere thanks to everyone who collaborated with me over the last six or so years while I served as editor. A special thank you to Carol VanOeveren for her countless hours spent compiling and editing eBird reports—her final report appears in this issue. Carol often also served informally as a proofreader, alerting me to typos or omissions prior to the *Caller* going to print.

I'm also appreciative of the many written contributions from members such as Mary Austin, Chris Baer and everyone else who provides timely and interesting content! Of course, getting to work with the late Ranger Steve Mueller over the years was a pleasure. His Nature Niche articles were always educational and entertaining, and I know he is missed.

The last few years have been a challenge for our members and the club, but I'm excited to see what's ahead. Thank you for reading!





UPCOMING EVENTS (visit the GRAC website for details)

August

- 18 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike (recurring 25)
- 27 Field Trip: Fall Shorebirds w/ Becky Kuhn and Jim Fyfe

September

- 1 Field Trip: Millennium Park Hike (recurring 8, 15, 22 & 29)
- 10 Field Trip: Fall Migrants w/ Steve Minard
- 25 GRAC Membership Meeting and Nature Program

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</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.

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 – Scott Hutchings
- Vice President – Tricia Boot
- Secretary – Shawn Taheri
- Treasurer – Jeff Neumann
- Ass't Treasurer – Theresa Dykhuis
- Board Member – Mary Austin
- Board Member – Jeni Taheri
- Board Member – Spencer High
- Board Member – Cynthia Maas
- Field Trips – Steve Minard
- Finance – open
- Fund Development – open
- Historian – Linda Damstra
- Hospitality – Henry Raad
- Junior Audubon – Hannah Safford
- Library – Kathleen Haase
- Maher Sanctuary – Chris Baer
- Membership – Theresa Dykhuis
- Nominating – Scott Hutchings
- Publicity – Tricia Boot/Cynthia Maas

IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT (non-voting member)

- Scholarship – Katie Bolt
- Special Events – open
- Website – Fred VanOeveren

STANDING COMMITTEES

- Audio/Visual – Robert Riepma
- Bird Reports – Carol VanOeveren
- Caller* Editor – Tricia Boot/Cynthia Maas
- Caller* Publisher – open
- Christmas Count – Tom Leggett
- Conservation – open

SPECIAL COMMITTEES / CHAIRPERSONS (non-members of Board of directors in this capacity)

- Aud. Adventures – Mary Austin
- Insurance – Jill Goodell

RESIDENT AGENT

Larry Burke

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