

GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB



# the **CALLER**

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**Hooded Merganser**

Photo By: Jerry Meaden, via Flickr.com



## FEBRUARY MEETING DETAILS

Monday, February 26 | 7:30PM

John Donnelly Conference Center, Aquinas College

### *Ecological Assessments and Conservation Practices in the Lower Grand River Watershed*

Wendy Ogilvie

The Grand River is the longest river in Michigan, at 262 miles, flowing from its headwaters in Jackson County to its mouth at Grand Haven, where it enters Lake Michigan. The entire Grand River Watershed encompasses about 5,000 square miles. Due to its size, the management of the river is divided into 3 sections, Upper, Middle, and Lower. The Lower Grand River watershed covers nearly 3,000 square miles of land in all or parts of 9 counties in West Michigan. The Lower Grand River Organization of Watersheds (LGROW) has a mission to understand, protect, and improve the natural resources of the Lower Grand River Watershed for all to enjoy. This presentation will provide a summary of some of the work that LGROW does to fulfill its mission and highlight the West Michigan Coastal Corridor project, which was initiated by Audubon Great Lakes 2021 report, Grand River Coastal Corridor.

### President's Corner | Tricia Boot

There's still time to throw your hat in the ring for the club's leadership roster for the 2024/2025 year. Many of our board positions will be up for vote at our May 20 season-ending meeting. We've got a great candidate lined up for President, but many other roles -- such as Vice President -- will need volunteers to step up or raise a hand to help. We'll continue to reach out to prospective candidates in the next few months; don't be surprised if you hear from one of us at a meeting or via phone/email! Interested? Don't hesitate to email [president@graud.org](mailto:president@graud.org) to ask questions

### Door Prizes are Back!

Got a bird- or nature-related item you no longer want?

Donate it to the club's membership meeting door prize pot! Each month, at the end of our membership meetings, we draw tickets to award prizes--there's no cost to participate, as this is purely for entertainment. Examples of items to donate (and win) include: bird feeders, bird seed, tea towels, puzzles, photos/wall hangings/calendars, etc. As long as it's clean, in good repair and has a bird or nature theme, it works! Simply bring your item to the next club meeting and connect with a board member or hospitality to have it added to the "pile of prizes."

*Right: Among the door prizes this month will be an 8x10 print of this artwork from club Vice President, Spencer High, featuring a Kirtland's Warbler.*



## Annual Bluebird Nest Clean-out Day

For many years, Grand Rapids Audubon Club members have helped to erect and maintain hundreds of nest boxes on the Resource Recovery Center property. The nest boxes provide nesting habitat for cavity nesting species such as the Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow. Again this year, we are in need of volunteers to help clean, repair and/or replace the nest boxes before the nesting season begins. Volunteers meet at the Maple Island Road entrance to the Resource Recovery Center, 698 N. Maple Island Road, Muskegon, 49442. Volunteers will then be assigned to clean nest boxes along designated trails. Small tool kits are available to sign-out for the event but volunteers are welcome to bring their own supplies. Helpful supplies for nest box cleaning include: screwdriver, pliers, scraper, small brush, hammer, screws and nails. First time volunteers will receive further instruction on how to properly clean nest boxes the day of the event. The annual Nest Box Clean-out Day event is a great way to learn about cavity nest species, how to properly clean a nest box, how box style and placement affect the species using the box and a great way to do some birding on the Resource Recovery Center property. The event is held rain or shine, so please dress appropriately and bring gloves. The event requires some walking outdoors on uneven ground. As a volunteer, your time is documented and included in the Resource Recovery Center's certification application through the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC). The WHC is a third party organization who certifies companies who implement conservation measures on their property. The Resource Recovery Center has received certification through the WHC since 2014 and has received two conservation awards. The support is appreciated!

Contact Anita Friend at 231-724-3457 for any nest box or predator guard donations.

Since we're at the Wastewater, we usually see some good birds while we work. You may even get to meet mice or Flying Squirrels up close and personal. And you get to help the bluebirds, swallows, chickadees, wrens and other birds that use the boxes. This year you can meet the group, or head directly to clean your group of boxes. Send Steve an email at [sdminard@gmail.com](mailto:sdminard@gmail.com) to get a group of boxes to clean.

Lunch is one your own this year. Following lunch, 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. For all the carpenters and builders out there, we always need more bluebird boxes. Boxes suffer damage over the years and new boxes are always needed. Send Steve an email at [sdminard@gmail.com](mailto:sdminard@gmail.com) if you have new boxes to donate.

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## Apply Today for the Harry F. Stiles Memorial Scholarship

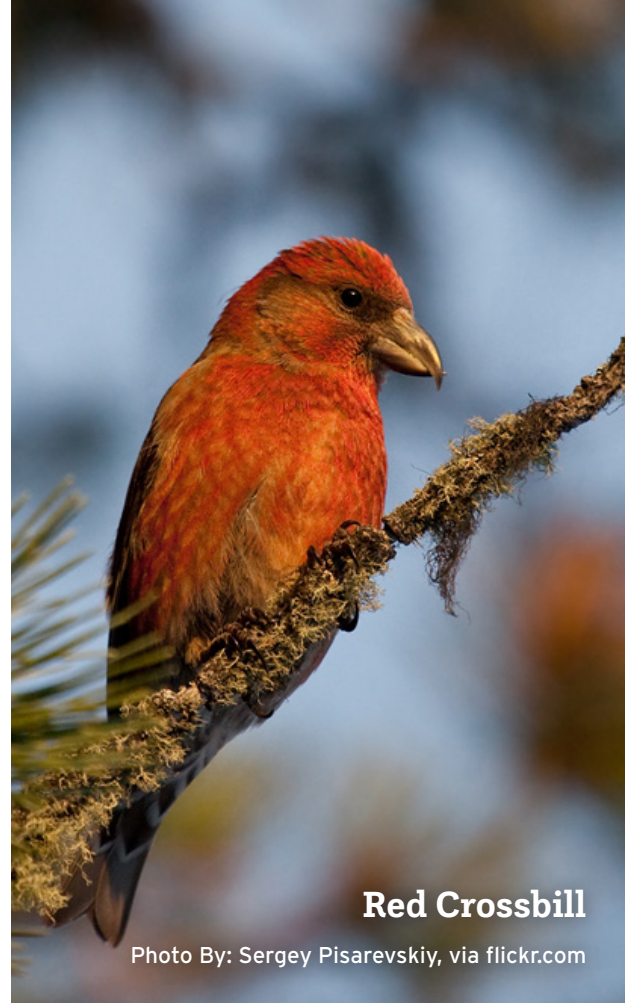
The Harry F. Stiles Memorial Scholarship is named in honor of Harry F. Stiles, an individual who loved the out-of-doors. Mr. Stiles was an expert photographer and in his retirement devoted his time to the study of nature in Michigan. As Grand Rapids Audubon Club (GRAC) Board President from 1954 to 1955, he established the scholarship with enrollment to the National Audubon Camps in mind.

GRAC continues to award a scholarship in keeping with the ideals advocated by Mr. Stiles. The scholarship is awarded to promote and support nature-related educational opportunities. The scholarship is awarded for up to \$200.00 for an award period. There are two award periods in a fiscal year: 7/1 - 12/31 and 1/1 - 6/30. If a \$200.00 scholarship is not awarded for the first period, up to a \$400.00 scholarship can be awarded for the second award period.

The scholarship is to be used for enrollment in environmental, biology, or science/nature programs, workshops, or courses. Individuals of all ages are encouraged to apply. When more than one adult is being considered for a scholarship, first priority is given to GRAC members.

Scholarship recipients are asked to provide a summary of their nature program, workshop, or course experience in a 15-minute talk at a general membership meeting, article for the Caller newsletter, or other sharing of the experience that is determined appropriate by the Scholarship Committee Chairperson.

More details and applications can be found online at [GRAUD.org](http://GRAUD.org). For questions, please contact Katie Bolt at [ksbphd51@gmail.com](mailto:ksbphd51@gmail.com).



**Red Crossbill**

Photo By: Sergey Pisarevskiy, via flickr.com

# The GRAC 63rd Count of the 124th Christmas Bird Count

## A Mild Winter and Great Turnout | Tom Leggett, Compiler

High Participant turnout and lack of winter were the key variables in the Grand Rapid Audubon Club's 63rd Christmas Bird Count of count year 124. Both of these factors shared equally in increased birdy-ness this year. More freedom from Covid also probably was a major factor.

We had 65 observers (with 63 in the field) spotting 63 species in the Grand Rapids Audubon Club's 63rd count, definitely the year of 63!

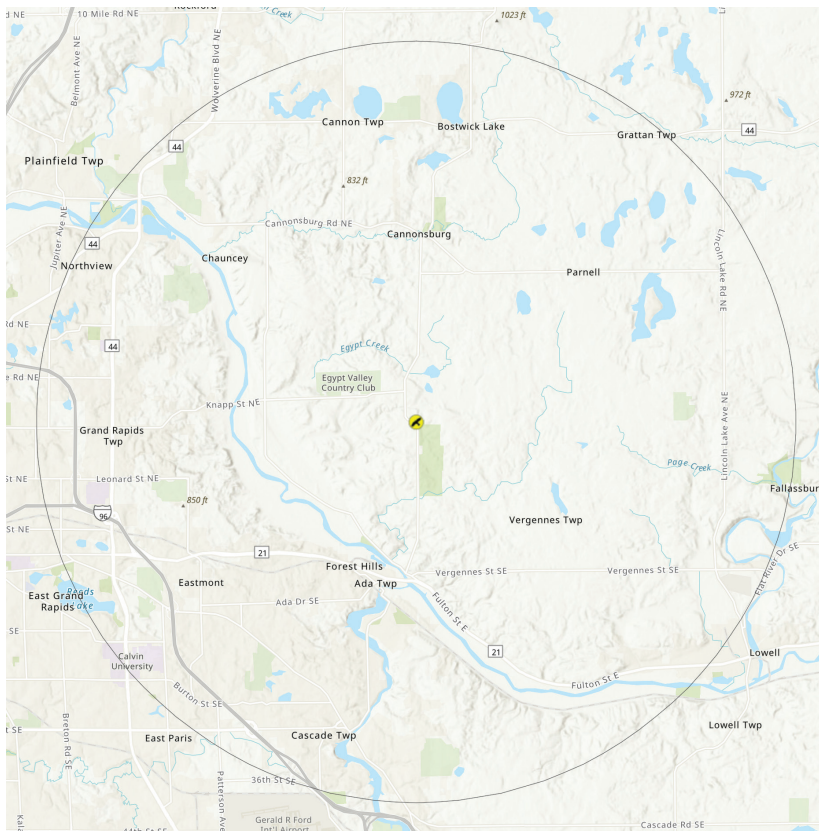
With 100% open water along with dry and mild weather, the only negative on count day was that field teams had to stop and look at every little pond, but the extra counters helped us to accomplish this. These counter's field parties were minimum of 24 and maximum of 27. 3 feeder locations also were watched heavily.

Waterfowl, hawks, owls, woodpeckers, and most songbirds were widely distributed. American Crows, Winter Wrens and Carolina Wrens were all high counts this year. Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers were seen in multiple areas. Canada Goose fell just short of taking the top spot of most seen bird, so Starling was top bird once again.

On negative side, American Goldfinches (though up in numbers a little - with more observers) are still trending down on amount seen. A more glaring concern is the American Kestrel, although still common, continues to decline in numbers with only 2 seen with record observers and hawk numbers being up in general. Habitat loss and climate change are probably both key factors.

Thanks to all our volunteers this year in making our 63rd count very successful and enjoyable. We hope to see many of you on our 64th count in the 125th count year on December 28, 2024.

## Survey Area



## Volunteer Support

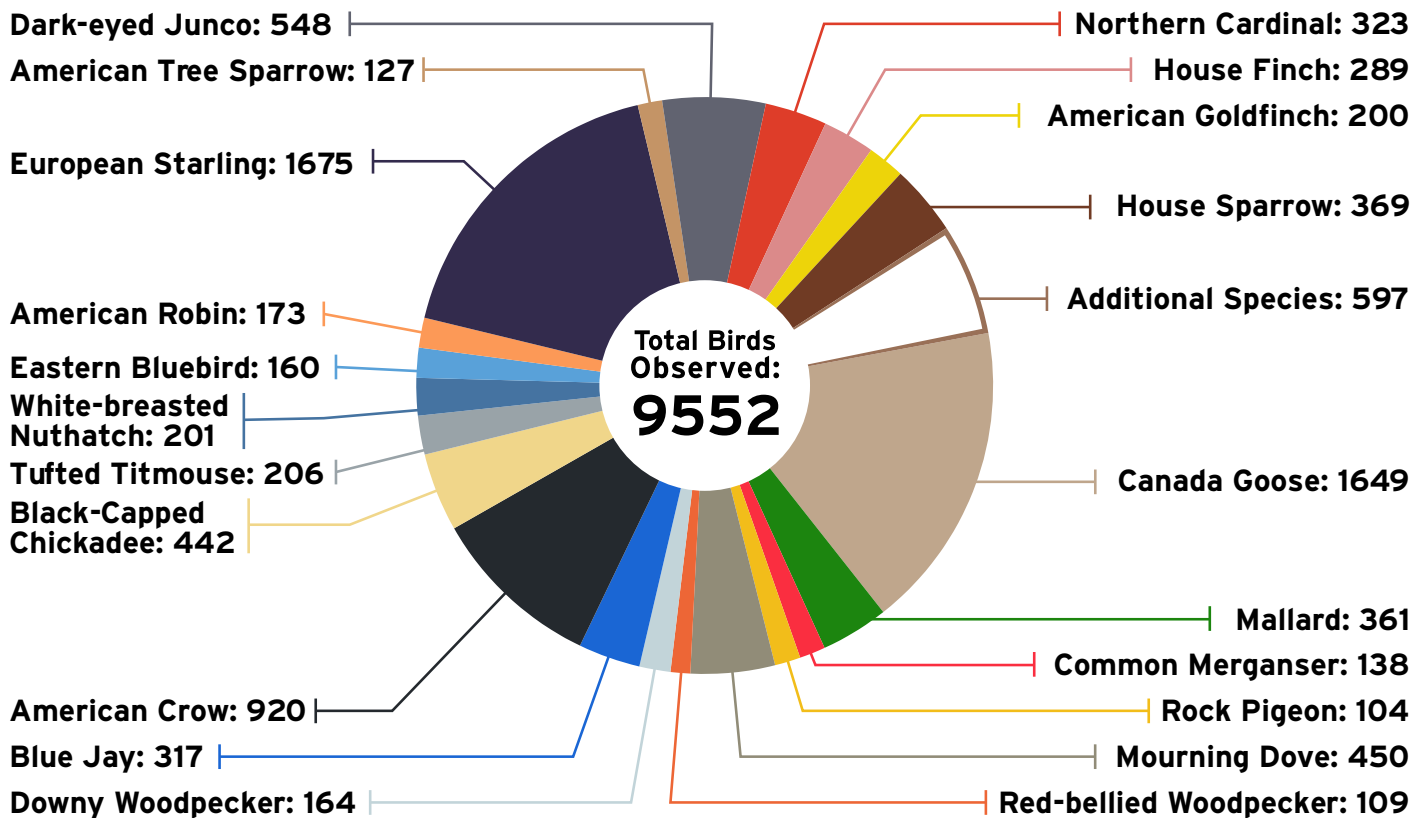
**63**  
Participants

**96.9**  
Hours Spent Birding

**42.45**  
Miles Walked

**607.4**  
Miles Driven

## Species Seen



### Additional Species Seen: 42

Cackling Goose: 1

Mute Swan: 67

Wood Duck: 1

American Black Duck: 4

Green-winged Teal: 4

Ring-Necked Duck: 2

Bufflehead: 39

Hooded Merganser: 15

Wild Turkey: 16

Great Blue Heron: 5

Northern Harrier: 1

Cooper's Hawk: 8

Bald Eagle: 3

Red-shouldered Hawk: 4

Red-tailed Hawk: 59

Killdeer: 1

Ring-billed Gull: 50

Herring Gull: 6

Eastern Screech Owl: 2

Great Horned Owl: 8

Barred Owl: 1

Long-eared Owl: 1

Belted Kingfisher: 17

Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: 3

Hairy Woodpecker: 46

Northern Flicker: 25

Pileated Woodpecker: 16

American Kestrel: 2

Red-breasted Nuthatch: 3

Brown Creeper: 7

Winter Wren: 3

Carolina Wren: 30

Golden-crowned Kinglet: 8

Yellow-rumped Warbler: 1

White-throated Sparrow: 8

Song Sparrow: 9

Eastern Towhee: 1

Red-winged Blackbird: 1

Purple Finch: 3

Pine Siskin: 14

## Know Your Hawks (by their Scientific Names) | Mary Austin

In this quiz, match the common hawk name with its scientific name.

| Common Name                  | Scientific Hawk Name          |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| _____ 1. American Goshawk    | a. <i>Accipiter africanus</i> |
| _____ 2. Broad-winged Hawk   | b. <i>Accipiter cooperii</i>  |
| _____ 3. Cooper's Hawk       | c. <i>Accipiter striatus</i>  |
| _____ 4. Ferruginous Hawk    | d. <i>Buteo jamaicensis</i>   |
| _____ 5. Northern Harrier    | e. <i>Buteo lagopus</i>       |
| _____ 6. Red-tailed Hawk     | f. <i>Buteo lineatus</i>      |
| _____ 7. Red-shouldered Hawk | g. <i>Buteo platypterus</i>   |
| _____ 8. Rough-legged Hawk   | h. <i>Buteo regalis</i>       |
| _____ 9. Sharp-shinned Hawk  | i. <i>Buteo swainsoni</i>     |
| _____ 10. Swainson's Hawk    | j. <i>Circus hudsonius</i>    |

Solution: 1.a., 2.g., 3.b., 4.h., 5.j., 6.d., 7.f., 8.e., 9.c., 10.i.

## Birdy Book Club

### Monday, March 11 at 6pm

"Flight Paths: How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration"  
by Rebecca Heisman

Buy or borrow the book and complete the reading before the meeting. Get 10% off the price of the book if you purchase at Books & Mortar (be sure to mention it's for the GRAC Birdy Book Club!) There is no cost to participate we only ask that you come with an open mind and ready to share your own thoughts, opinions and observations about the book, and any topics related to the reading. This is a space for mutually respectful, curious and sometimes challenging conversations. Book Club Meetings are held at Books & Mortar: 966 Cherry St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506 - Happy reading!



Rivoli's Hummingbird

Photo By: Grigory Heaton, via flickr.com

## A Very Close Encounter with a Hummingbird | Mary Austin

Birders from across the country regularly travel to the Madera Canyon, near Green Valley, Arizona, to see the hummingbirds at the Santa Rita Lodge. On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, my husband Larry, friend Carol (who lives in Holland, Michigan, and winters in Green Valley), and I were among those who watched the Mexican Jays, Hepatic Tanagers, Canyon Towhees, Lesser Goldfinches, woodpeckers, hummers, and various sparrows get their fill at the Lodge feeders.

Suddenly, a Rivoli's Hummingbird (also still known as a Magnificent Hummingbird) broke away from one of the sugar water feeders and flew directly at me. The hummingbird then touched my lower lip with its long beak. It flew backwards about a foot, turned around, and flew off. Larry and Carol both looked in disbelief over what they had witnessed. I was amazed and pleasantly surprised. I had put on lip balm just before stopping at the Santa Rita Lodge, and the hummingbird most likely wished to have a taste of the lip balm. I'd like to believe, however, that the hummer intended to give me a kiss.

## All About Mergansers

The chilly winter months in Michigan bring a unique set of challenges for its diverse wildlife, and among the resilient species that navigate the icy waters are the mergansers. Mergansers are a group of diving ducks. There are three main species of mergansers: the Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*), the Red-breasted Merganser (*Mergus serrator*), and the Hooded Merganser (*Lophodytes cucullatus*).

These ducks can be characterized by their long, serrated bills and slender bodies. Mergansers are constantly seeking open water areas in winter, so during a freeze they can be found near river mouths where they can ensure a steady source of unfrozen fish, crustaceans, and insects to eat. Mergansers are built for life on the water: strong, thin wings and keen eyesight for diving underwater, and sharp, serrated edges on their bills to grab slippery prey. An extra transparent eyelid known as the nictitating membrane acts as goggles underwater, actually changing the refractive properties of their eyes to improve sight underwater! Now that is “quack-tical!”

Although from a distance mergansers can be mistaken for loons due to similar size and shape, but take special note of the coloring differences - male common mergansers have iridescent-green heads and white body, females are a light grey with a shaggy reddish crest. Hooded mergansers have a slightly shorter bill and are smaller - but they are distinctly impressive with raisable hood, creating the illusion of an oversized head. Males are black with a white breast and dark brown flanks, with a large white patch on the crest that can be seen when raised or lowered. During courtship displays, males will raise their crests to attract females. Occasionally, mergansers of different species may hybridize, resulting in little mixed species ducklings. Like cowbirds, hooded mergansers will lay eggs in the nests of other ducks.

Unlike loons, mergansers tend to be more social birds instead of floating solo. Usually you can find mergansers among flocks of other waterfowl, like common goldeneyes, canvasbacks, and buffleheads.

Mergansers bring the flair to “weird duck season” in winter, showcasing unique beauty as a duck unlike others!

## Mergansers of West Michigan

**Hooded Merganser**

**Red-breasted Merganser**

**Common Merganser**



## UPCOMING FIELD TRIPS

### Millennium Park Birding Hikes | Led By: Katie Bolt, Jeanne Griffin or Kathy Haase

Hike Millennium Park to see what's hanging around. Flat 2.0 or 3.0 mile loops are planned to see whatever might show up. Many birds have been reported from this varied habitat near the river. There are ponds, swampy ponds, lowland forest and various secondary growth. This can lead to a good variety of birds. Please dress for the expected weather conditions.

Thursday, Mar. 7, 14, 21, 28 - 9:00AM | Meet at the end of the dead-end section of Veterans Memorial Drive

### Bluebird Nest Clean-out Day | Led By: Steve Minard and Anita Friend (MCRRC)

For many years, Grand Rapids Audubon Club members have helped to erect and maintain hundreds of nest boxes on the Resource Recovery Center property. The nest boxes provide nesting habitat for cavity nesting species such as the Eastern Bluebird and Tree Swallow. Again this year, we are in need of volunteers to help clean, repair and/or replace the nest boxes before the nesting season begins. More information is available within the article in this month's issue of the Caller.

Saturday, March 30 - 9AM-12PM | Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center

### Bird Trivia at Speciation Artisan Ales | Led By: Spencer High and Alex Field

Now's your chance to showcase all of the useless bird facts that have been living in your head over the years! The Grand Rapids Audubon Club will be partnering with Speciation Artisan Ales to host a bird Trivia night on Thursday, April 11 from 7:00-9PM. There will be prizes, a pizza food truck, beer and wine from the bar, and of course some stiff competition.

Thursday, April 11 - 7:00PM | Speciation Cellars - 928 Wealthy St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506

For additional information about these trips, please visit [our Facebook page](#) or [graud.org](#)

## FOLLOW THE GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

Follow our feed for the latest news in and around Grand Rapids about birdwatching, the conservation community, and events to attend. Tag @grandrapidsaudubonclub in your outdoor discoveries and let us know what you see outside!



@GRANDRAPIDSAUDUBONCLUB

## GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

5 officers + 4 elected board members

President - Tricia Boot

Vice President - Spencer High

Secretary - Cynthia Maas

Treasurer - Jeff Neumann

Ass't Treasurer - OPEN

Board Member - Mary Austin

Board Member - John Garbini

Board Member - Alex Field

### SPECIAL COMMITTEES /CHAIRPERSONS

Aud. Adventures - Mary Austin

Insurance - Jill Goodell

### RESIDENT AGENT

Larry Burke

### STANDING COMMITTEES

Audio/Visual - Robert Riepma

Bird Reports - OPEN

Caller Editor - Cynthia Maas

Caller Publisher - Brownlee Press

Christmas Count - Tom Leggett

Conservation - OPEN

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 - Jeff Neumann

Nominating - OPEN

Publicity - Tricia Boot & Cynthia Maas

Scholarship - Katie Bolt

Special Events - OPEN

Website - Spencer High

## MISSION

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.

## CONTACT

Website: [graud.org](#)

General Inquiries:

[information@graud.org](mailto:information@graud.org)

Membership: [membership@graud.org](mailto:membership@graud.org)

Caller Editor: [newsletter@graud.org](mailto:newsletter@graud.org)

## INTERESTED IN SERVING ON THE BOARD OR HELPING ON A COMMITTEE?

Contact Tricia Boot:

[president@graud.org](mailto:president@graud.org)