

GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB



the **CALLER**

IN THIS ISSUE:

- A Year of Up and Down Surprises:
2022 Christmas Bird Count
- Cerulean Warbler Tours
Return in 2023
- A Case for Hybrid Birds
- Community-Driven Science

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Brown Creeper

Photo By: Lance Reis, via Unsplash.com

FEBRUARY MEETING DETAILS

Monday, February 27 | 7:30PM | John Donnelly Conference Center, Aquinas College

Kevin Feenstra | *The Beauty and Biology of the Muskegon River*

This picturesque program will include images from 12 months on a river system, with a look at birds, mammals, aquatic insects, fish and scenery. The photography is from the main stream of the Muskegon River, as well as some of the creeks and connecting swamps.

Kevin Feenstra is a fly fishing guide, author and photographer who spends much of his life on the Muskegon River system. Through 25 years on the river, he continues to learn about our waterways. His photography focuses on the life above and below the surface of this majestic river.

A Note from the Club President | Tricia Boot Vice President, acting President

February may feel like a slog, but spring is just around the corner, and with it, the Grand Rapids Audubon Club's annual election for club leadership. Now is a great time to raise your hand to join the GRAC executive board or a committee! Interested, but not certain where you would be the best fit? Reach out to me or another board member to learn about opportunities, role responsibilities and more.

Stepping into a leadership role--whether it's acting as a Board Member at Large or joining a committee--is a fun, low-pressure way to influence the direction of the club and to positively impact your community. GRAC has experienced lots of growth and momentum in the last six months, including a healthy increase in membership and fun, new opportunities to connect with our communities. YOU can help to keep that trend going by offering just a few hours a month to support a cause you care about!

With that in mind, I'd like to extend my gratitude to the many people--including every member of the executive board and each committee member--who selflessly contribute their time and talents to keep the club functioning. This month, I'd like to call attention to several folks who you may often see at our meetings: Henry Raad, who greets our members and guests, and manages the nametags; and Kathy Haase, who continually seeks out interesting new titles for our club library. And a special thanks also this month to Tom Leggett, who oversaw the recent Christmas Bird Count; a monumental and important task, to be certain. Read all about the results in this month's Caller. I look forward to seeing you all at our next meeting!

Cerulean Warbler Tours Return in 2023

Michigan Audubon is offering Cerulean Warbler guided tours again this spring! From May 5-19, 2023, daily tours will embark at 8 a.m. from the Otis Farm Bird Sanctuary in Hastings to search for this dazzling warbler. Experienced guides will lead this caravan tour to several Cerulean Warbler nesting territories within the Barry State Game Area, where you may see numerous other deciduous forest species as well.

How to register:

Pre-registration is required.

Registration will open on February 10, 2023 at michiganaudubon.org/calendar.

Cost: Tours cost \$15/person.



Cerulean Warbler

Photo By: Julio Mulero, via Flickr.com



Tanabeak (Scarlet Tanager
x Rose-breasted Grosbeak)

Photo By: Steve Gosser

A Case for Hybrids

Emily Tornga

Have you ever seen a hybrid bird? A hybrid bird, by definition, is a bird that has two different species as parents. It is a rare occurrence when two completely different species of bird mate, so spotting and identifying these birds can be a real treat.

Take the Scarlet Tanager and Rose-breasted Grosbeak for example. These two species diverged on their evolutionary path almost 10 million years ago, but a hybrid of the two birds showed up in Pennsylvania this year. This “Scarlet-breasted Tanabeak” was the first ever recorded. Note: Scarlet-breasted Tanabeak is not an official name, but naming hybrids can be an opportunity for you to have fun with seeking out hybrids. Some other examples of hybrids that have been seen in Michigan are a Common Goldeneye x Bufflehead duck (we can call it a Buffle-eye!), a Golden-winged Warbler x Canada Warbler (The Golden Canadian!), or a Dark-eyed Junco x White-throated Sparrow (The White-throated Junckro!).

For some birders, hybrids are of little interest, because they don't offer a tick on their eBird lists, but I implore you to look a little closer at the next “frankenbird” that might show up on a tree or lake near you. Who knows, you could be the first person ever to gaze their eyes upon a Yellow-headed Blue Jay or Red-breasted Nutcreeper.

Conservation Corner | Spencer High Community-driven Science

Volunteer driven research is essential to helping conservation biologists gain information from large areas to help them understand ecosystem connectivity. One of the most successful examples that you may not even be aware you are participating in, is eBird, whose data you record goes towards helping understand bird populations, migratory routes, and high-priority ecosystems used by many migrating birds as stopover sights. This data allows for conservation organizations to make fact-driven decision making instead of best-guesses, and helps every dollar raised for conservation go into programs that will be effective for preserving our natural world. Without a global network of people submitting data, it would be nearly impossible for researchers to collect this amount of data on a yearly basis.

You may have read in the last issue of *The Caller* that The Audubon Society has their ‘Climate Watch’ program which asks volunteers to look for a target species within a survey block twice a year. As years go on, and more survey blocks are recorded, patterns will begin to emerge which conservation biologists will use to understand avian responses to climate change. They will then use their findings to better protect vital bird habitat as we move into a more unpredictable climactic age. This is a great program to become involved with, and will help build a platform for fact-based decision making within the years ahead.

Another fun spring-time program that you can get involved with is the Michigan Vernal Pool Partnership's Vernal Pool Patrol. Vernal pools are seasonal bodies of water that fill depressions in the landscape with snow-melt and rain, providing vital breeding habitat for salamanders, frogs, and fairy shrimp. We aren't quite sure how many vernal pools are in Michigan, but what we do know is that vernal pools play an important role in maintaining healthy forest ecosystems. Because they are typically small and geographically isolated from permanent water, they are not well-protected under current wetland regulations. To help develop an understanding of how many vernal pools are in Michigan, where they are located, and how we can best protect them, you can sign up to become a part of the Vernal Pool Patrol, and help monitor some vernal pools around your home (there may even be one in your own backyard!). There is an upcoming training for this program which begins on March 15th that will help you know how to record and submit the data from your adventures. This is ground-breaking research that you can become an active participant in, and I can tell you from experience, it is very enjoyable to be a part of.

Whether you submit your recordings on eBird, choose to participate in the Climate Watch or Vernal Pool Patrol, I encourage you to remain curious and open to opportunities like these, because conservation can't happen without you.

To learn more about Climate Watch visit: audubon.org/conservation/climate-watch

To learn more about the Vernal Pool Patrol, visit: mivernalpools.com

What about Latin? | Mary Austin

In this puzzle, select the common English bird name for the Latin name. You will have three English bird names to choose from. Not sure? Then just take a guess. Have fun!

Branta canadensis

- A. Barnacle Goose
- B. Canada Goose
- C. Cackling Goose

Accipiter striatus

- A. Sharp-shinned Hawk
- B. Cooper's Hawk
- C. Northern Goshawk

Buteo jamaicensis

- A. Red-shouldered Hawk
- B. Red-tailed Hawk
- C. Swainson's Hawk

Falco sparverius

- A. American Kestrel
- B. Merlin
- C. Peregrine Falcon

Strix nebulosa

- A. Spotted Owl
- B. Barred Owl
- C. Great Gray Owl

Dryobates pubescens

- A. Downy Woodpecker
- B. Hairy Woodpecker
- C. Red-cockaded Woodpecker

Corvus brachyrhynchos

- A. American Crow
- B. Fish Crow
- C. Common Raven

Tyrannus tyrannus

- A. Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- B. Eastern Kingbird
- C. Gray Kingbird

Poecile atricapillus

- A. Carolina Chickadee
- B. Black-capped Chickadee
- C. Mountain Chickadee

Troglodytes aedon

- A. House Wren
- B. Winter Wren
- C. Pacific Wren

Vireo olivaceus

- A. Blue-headed Vireo
- B. Warbling Vireo
- C. Red-eyed Vireo

Leiothlypis peregrina

- A. Tennessee Warbler
- B. Orange-crowned Warbler
- C. Nashville Warbler

Setophaga pensylvanica

- A. Blackburnian Warbler
- B. Yellow Warbler
- C. Chestnut-sided Warbler

Melospiza melodia

- A. Song Sparrow
- B. Lincoln's Sparrow
- C. Swamp Sparrow

Cygnus columbianus

- A. Mute Swan
- B. Trumpeter Swan
- C. Tundra Swan

Anas acuta

- A. Mallard
- B. Northern Pintail
- C. Green-winged Teal

Gavia immer

- A. Common Loon
- B. Red-throated Loon
- C. Pacific Loon

Podilymbus podiceps

- A. Pied-billed Grebe
- B. Horned Grebe
- C. Eared Grebe

Larus argentatus

- A. Ring-billed Gull
- B. California Gull
- C. Herring Gull

Charadrius vociferous

- A. Killdeer
- B. Piping Plover
- C. Semipalmated Plover

Egretta rufescens

- A. Snowy Egret
- B. Tricolored Heron
- C. Reddish Egret

ANSWERS: 1. Branta canadensis (b. Canada Goose) 2. Cygnus columbianus (c. Tundra Swan) 3. Anas acuta (b. Northern Pintail) 4. Gavia immer (a. Common Loon) 5. Podilymbus podiceps (a. Pied-billed Grebe) 6. Larus argentatus (c. Herring Gull) 7. Charadrius vociferous (a. Killdeer) 8. Egretta rufescens (c. Reddish Egret) 9. Accipiter striatus (a. Sharp-shinned Hawk) 10. Buteo jamaicensis (b. Red-tailed Hawk) 11. Falco sparverius (a. American Kestrel) 12. Strix nebulosa (c. Great Gray Owl) 13. Dryobates pubescens (a. Downy Woodpecker) 14. Corvus brachyrhynchos (a. American Crow) 15. Tyrannus tyrannus (b. Eastern Kingbird) 16. Poecile atricapillus (b. Black-capped Chickadee) 17. Troglodytes aedon (a. House Wren) 18. Vireo olivaceus (c. Red-eyed Vireo) 19. Leiothlypis peregrina (a. Tennessee Warbler) 20. Setophaga pensylvanica (c. Chestnut-sided Warbler) 21. Melospiza melodia (a. Song Sparrow)

The GRAC 62nd Count of the 123rd Christmas Bird Count

A Year of Up and Down Surprises | Tom Leggett, Compiler

The first big surprise was that the third weekend of the count time period and count day 12/31 was more Spring-like than the blizzards of the two previous weekends. This mild weather brought out 48 volunteers to count birds, with 42 in the field along with 6 at feeders only. Our resulting 54 species became the 7th most in the state (3-way tie with Berrien Springs and Traverse City). The count individual total was 9,913.

On the downside of the count, our dominant species was the European Starling at 1,367 birds. On the upside, the Common Raven, at 3, was a new species to the count. This new count addition would have made Ranger Steve Mueller very happy as in the last few years he was rooting for Raven range expansion into the count circle.

In this year's count, Great Blue Herons at 10, along with American Robins at 247, and Pileated Woodpeckers at 22 were historic highs, while Purple Finch and Pine Siskin both at 1 were historic lows.

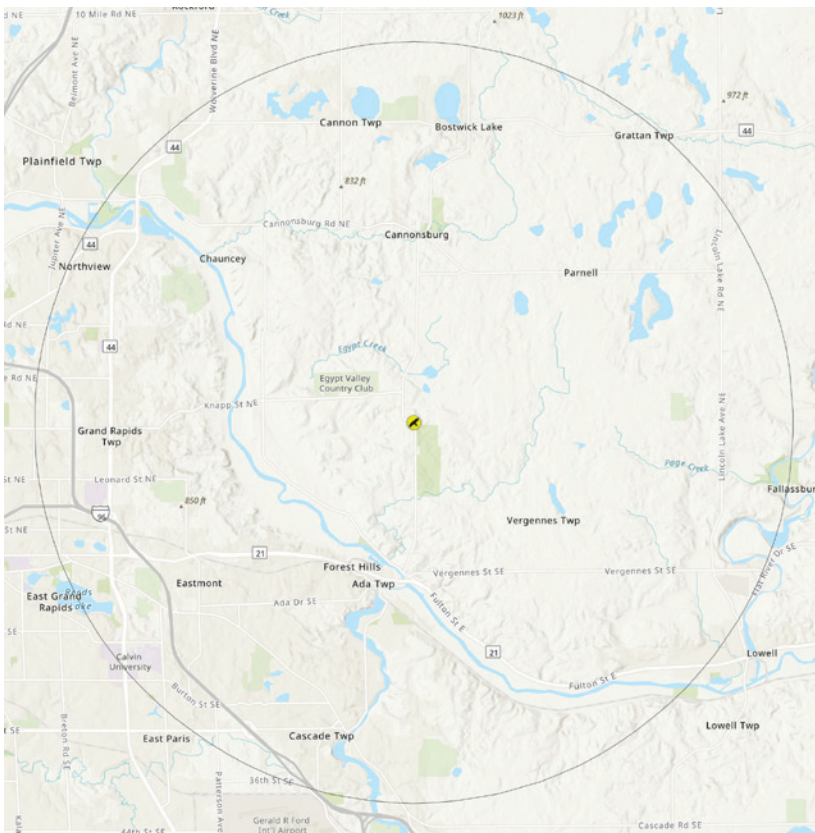
The Common Raven, Hermit Thrush, Redhead and Winter Wren were part of the (12 rare or infrequent species of the 54 seen) a rarity index of 22.2%. On the other hand, count species efficiency was 84.0% (42 species seen of the 50 expected).

This year's count had 8 misses and they were: Ring-necked Pheasant, Ruffed Grouse, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Rough-legged Hawk, Eastern Screech Owl, Barred Owl, Herring Gull and Common Redpoll.

But a good pick up was the 4 Red-headed Woodpeckers after a 20+ year count absence at Wege/Wittenbach Nature Center in what appears to be a now healthy oak stand thanks to community environmental and habitat action.

In closing, I would like to thank all the volunteers in this year's count, and in all the 62 years of counting for the CBC. But I also would like to thank the 16 bird species who have appeared in all of our 62 count years. They are: Mallards, Mourning Doves, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Downy Woodpeckers, Hairy Woodpeckers, Blue Jay, American Crow, Black-capped Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatch, European Starling, American Tree Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, Northern Cardinal, American Goldfinch and House Sparrow.

Survey Area



Volunteer Support

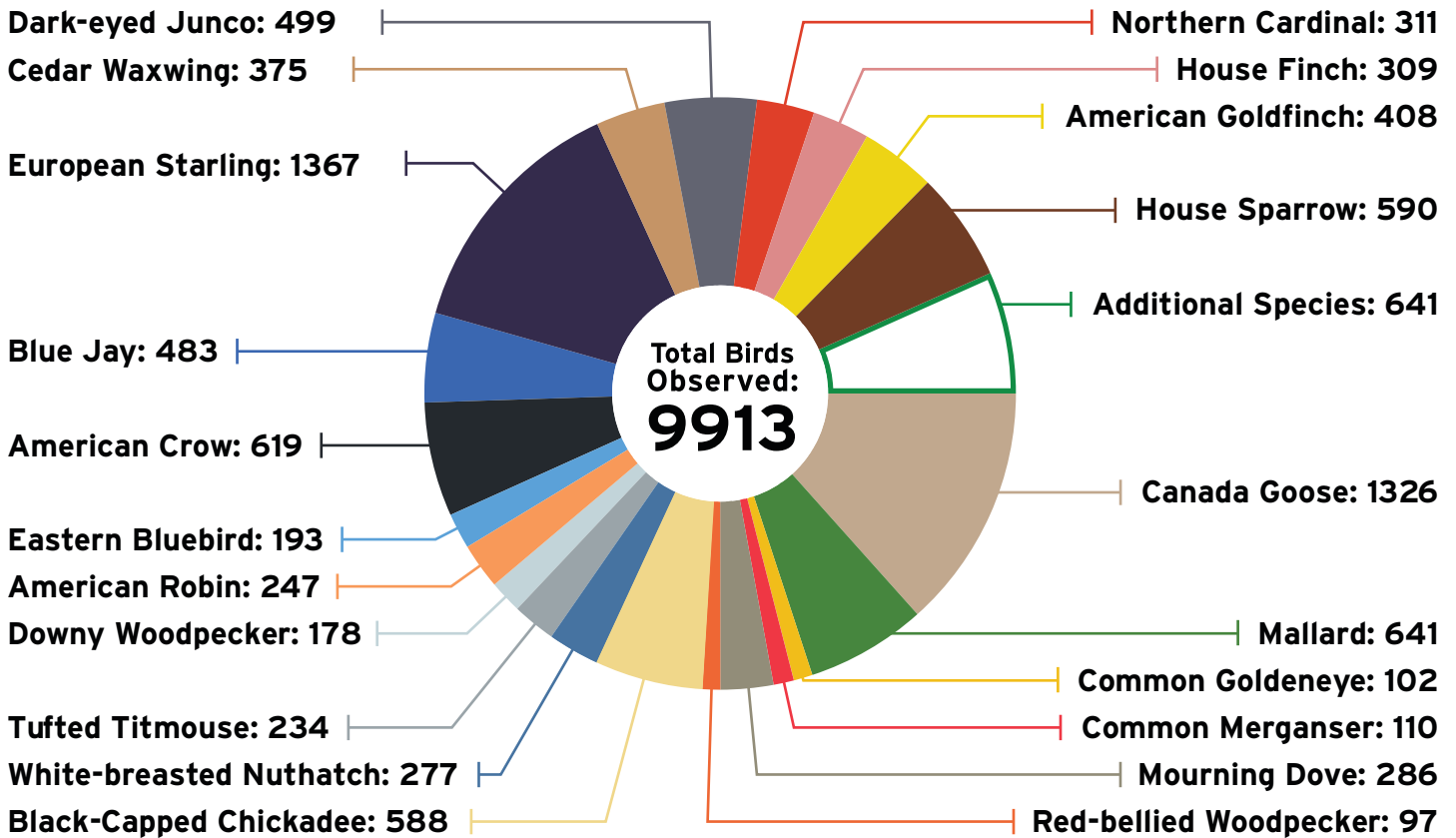
48
Participants

107.4
Hours Spent Birding

36.24
Miles Walked

577.97
Miles Driven

Species Seen



Additional Species Seen: 34

American Black Duck: 3	Hairy Woodpecker: 45
American Black Duck x Mallard (Hybrid): 1	Northern Flicker: 18
Redhead: 3	Pileated Woodpecker: 22
Bufflehead: 2	American Kestrel: 6
Hooded Merganser: 13	Common Raven: 3
Wild Turkey: 50	Red-breasted Nuthatch: 26
Great Blue Heron: 10	Brown Creeper: 13
Cooper's Hawk: 6	Winter Wren: 1
Bald Eagle: 6	Carolina Wren: 12
Red-shouldered Hawk: 1	Golden-crowned Kinglet: 1
Red-tailed Hawk: 42	Hermit Thrush: 1
Ring-billed Gull: 14	Snow Bunting: 50
Gull sp.: 4	American Tree Sparrow: 96
Rock Pigeon: 98	White-throated Sparrow: 7
Great Horned Owl: 6	Song Sparrow: 28
Belted Kingfisher: 6	Purple Finch: 1
Red-headed Woodpecker: 4	Pine Siskin: 1

Brown Creeper

A few days before writing this, a friend asked me what species I would be covering this month, and I told them, “well, if you happen to be gazing at a tree trunk and suddenly see a patch of bark start to spiral up along it, that’s it. That’s the bird.” Yes, folks, this month I’m writing about the Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*).

This diminutive woodland friend’s closest relatives include the nuthatches, wrens, and gnat catchers, and I have frequently seen people in nature and birding Facebook groups ask, “what kind of nuthatch is this?”, with a picture of a Brown Creeper. But don’t be fooled by the somewhat similar overall shape and shared habitat! Brown Creepers, unlike the nuthatches, will NEVER be seen going headfirst down a tree trunk - they always spiral up, up, up, using their stiff tail for support to glean invertebrates from under and between the bark, then fly to the bottom of the next tree to begin the hunt all over again.

Like their feeding style, Brown Creepers’ nesting style also relies on tree bark. They build their nests in the gap BEHIND the bark (between the outer bark and phloem) on dead or dying trees using materials like insect cocoons, twigs, moss, etc. I’d highly recommend Googling “brown creeper nest” and perusing the image and video results (especially those from Cornell) to see how complex and unique these nests are.

While Brown Creepers may not be nesting here in Michigan until May, they are year-round residents in most of the state, including our area. Around Grand Rapids, look for them in any wooded locale, near or far from humans. Cascade Peace Park, Calvin Ecosystem Preserve, and Hodenpyl Woods are all great choices, but your own neighborhood may be just as good. I’ve personally had immense success bringing them close to my house with “bark butter,” a spreadable suet mixture to spread on tree trunks which can be found in specialty bird food stores or made at home - and there’s a bonus here: flying squirrels LOVE the stuff too!

Identifying Brown Creepers



Description:
Small slender songbird with a long spine-tipped tail, slim body, and long curved bill. The back is a speckled brown which blends into the bark of the trees it spirals up while on the search for food.

Habitat:
Mature woodlands are preferred with standing dead trees whose peeling bark is used as nesting locations.

Best Time to See:
Active all year round, but are more common outside of dark forests during the winter.

Best Place to See:
Cascade Peace Park, Blandford Nature Center, Huff Park, Ball Perkins Park.

ID Tips & Tricks

- Could be confused with nuthatches due to size (especially the smaller Red-Breasted Nuthatch) and association with tree trunks - if the bird’s upperpart coloration looks like bark (not a solid color), and if it’s headed up the trunk and never down, it’s a Brown Creeper.
- Decurved (downward-curving) bill is somewhat similar to the wrens’, but Brown Creepers’ bills are longer in proportion; they also never cock their tails up like wrens do.
- Brown Creeper calls can sound remarkably similar to the Golden-Crowned Kinglet’s, with their high pitch and insect-like buzz. During all times of the year except the height of summer when Golden-Crowns are gone, try to get eyes on the bird for a definitive ID instead of relying on the buzzy call sounds - they don’t look alike at all, and kinglets tend to be high in the canopy versus our little trunk dwelling Creeper.

Brown Creepers are my favorite reminder to be mindful and immerse yourself in nature while outdoors. You never know when the piece of bark you think you’re looking at will start moving, revealing itself to be a tiny feathered friend!

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.

February 16, 23 March 2, 9, 16 | 9:00AM | Meet at the end of the dead-end section of Veterans Memorial Drive

Bluebird Box Cleaning At The Muskegon Wastewater | Led By: Steve Minard and Ruth Fridsma

One way we can help our local nesting birds is by providing places for them to nest. Jim Ponshair has aided the birds for many years with a number of bluebird box trails at the Muskegon Wastewater. This helped the Wastewater win a 2015 environmental award. This does add up to a large number of boxes to clean every year, and we need a good-sized group to do the job. The annual bluebird box cleaning is a great way to learn your way around the Muskegon Wastewater. It's also a good way to learn about bluebird boxes, how to clean them and see how the type of box and habitat affects who uses the box. This year you can meet the group, or head directly to clean your group of boxes. Send Steve an email at sdminard@gmail.com to get a group of boxes to clean. 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 if you have new boxes to donate.

Saturday, March 25 | 9:00 AM | Meet at the Maple Island Road entrance to the Muskegon Wastewater System

For additional information about these trips, please visit graud.org/field_trips.html

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!



GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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5 officers + 4 elected board members

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Vice President - Tricia Boot

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Board Member - Spencer High

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Membership - Jeff Neumann

Nominating - OPEN

Publicity - Tricia Boot & Cynthia Maas

Scholarship - Katie Bolt

Special Events - OPEN

Website - Fred VanOeveren

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

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information@graud.org

Membership: membership@graud.org

Caller Editor: newsletter@graud.org

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

Contact Tricia Boot:

president@graud.org