



the **CALLER**

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March 2024, Volume 62, No. 7 | GRAUD.org



Pileated Woodpecker

Photo By: Mark Moschell, via Flickr.com

MARCH MEETING DETAILS

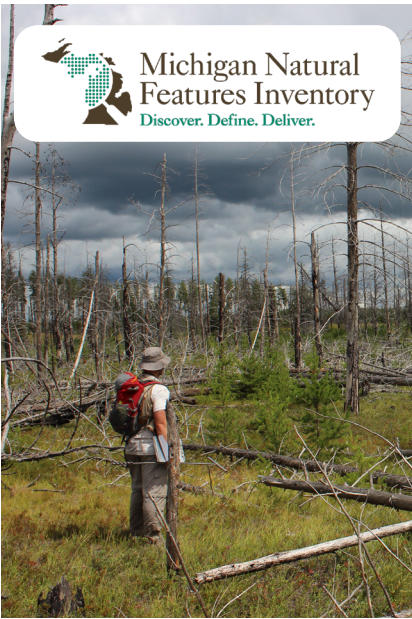
Monday, March 25 | 7:30PM

John Donnelly Conference Center, Aquinas College

Michigan Natural Features Inventory and the Search for Rare Natural Communities

Jesse Lincoln

Jesse has spent 14 seasons as an ecologist at Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI). The work takes him all over the state to some of our most unique and intact natural places. It is a perspective not always available to most people and he enjoys sharing images and lessons learned from our wild places. MNFI is our State's Natural Heritage program. What does that mean? Find out during the presentation when Jesse will show highlights from projects around the state and talk about important efforts which guide the conservation of Michigan's native biodiversity.



President's Corner | Tricia Boot

Time goes by so quickly, doesn't it? And while winter in Michigan can sometimes drag along, this year's decidedly weak rendition of the season was gone in the blink of an eye. (Yes. I know, I know. We'll see some snow, yet. But we're through the thick of it.) By the time you read this, spring is likely here and spring migration is just around the corner.

I'm busily cramming my Cornell Lab Bird Academy "Be a Better Birder: Warbler Identification" lessons and thinking about which local and far-flung hotspots to prioritize. (Word to the wise: consider joining up with a Thursday morning GRAC Millennium Park hike to scour this warbler-friendly locale with friends.)

I'm also looking forward to the bevy of fun club events on the horizon, including Bird Trivia (April 11 at Speciation Cellars), Birdy Book Club (May 13 at Books & Mortar) and Spring Migration Bird Bonanza (May 18 at Blandford Nature Center), among other events (like Birdathon--don't forget to sign up!).

And certainly, the Board and I are focused on promoting the sustainability of the club by ensuring a full roster/ ballot for our spring Board elections. Check out the nominations article in this Caller for more on that topic, and how to get involved!

Looking forward to what the season brings, and hearing how you plan to enjoy what warmer weather brings.

Club Leadership Members Needed!

Over the past several years, many dedicated members have filled the various roles that keep the club operational. Several of these folks have elected to step aside and therefore make a few positions available for other members to fill. These are a few of the critical roles that must be filled to help GRAC sustain itself and the Board is requesting volunteers to step forward:

- Vice President
- Board Members at Large (2 needed)
- Caller Editor
- Birdathon (2-3 people)
- Club Historian (we do have a potential candidate for this role)

If you enjoy what the club provides to you and the community (and you want to help the birds), please consider volunteering. Questions may be directed to Tricia Boot: president@graud.org or Spencer High: vicepresident@graud.org. Thank you for your consideration!



February Voting Results: Exciting Changes Ahead!

The GRAC membership voted unanimously at the February meeting to approve two proposals put forth for consideration: updated club bylaws and a partnership with North Country Trail Association to route a brief portion of the trail through GRAC's Maher Sanctuary land.

Thank you to Jeff Neumann and Chris Baer for their respective work on these projects, and preparing them for board and membership consideration. More to come on both, particularly as a timeline emerges for the Maher Sanctuary project.



Birds Taught Me About Life: Doves and Pigeons | Matt Gard

After a sip of morning coffee, my attention returned to the pages of a paperback book that I was reading intentionally slowly. It's called "Zen and the Art of Saving the Planet" by Thich Nhat Hanh. Thay, as his followers call him, was a Buddhist monk who passed away in 2022 at age 95. The book is about applying teachings from his spiritual worldview to encourage conservation.

In the chapter I was reading that day, Thay argued that in each of us there is a seed of compassion and a seed of violence, and it's important for us to water the seeds of compassion in ourselves, and in each other.

As I paused to reflect, my attention was broken again. Outside my office window, a mourning dove landed on the ground below my feeder. It was an appropriate time for a visit from this bird, because the dove's scientific family has a lot to teach us about watering the seeds of compassion, and not the seeds of violence. It all comes down to the words we use.

Doves and pigeons both come from the family Columbidae. This family is a catalogue of adorably chubby birds that find their meals primarily on the ground. It's not hard to recognize the characteristics that Columbidae species share.

But as similar as they are, doves and pigeons carry very different cultural connotations.

Doves are thought of fondly. They are sacred and divine creatures. Many cultures and religions believe a dove carrying an olive branch is a symbol of peace. Dove brand soap keeps our bodies clean. Dove brand chocolate appeals to the sweet tooth in all of us.

Pigeons are urban scoundrels. They're believed to be dirty. They're nuisance birds. They're always blocking the path meant for human feet, begging for our leftovers. They eat trash. Hockey players even use the word "pigeon" to describe a player who is profoundly unskilled.

We humans assigned the words "dove" and "pigeon" to these creatures. Over time, those names took on deeper meanings. We think of them as opposites, even though science teaches us just how similar they are.

Words matter. We can use our words to unite or to divide; to uplift someone or to reduce them; to water the seeds of compassion or to water the seeds of violence; to make someone feel the admiration of a dove or the ire of a pigeon. Choose carefully.

Birdy Book Club

Monday, May 13 at 6pm

"What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds"

by Jennifer Ackerman

Join us for the next Grand Rapids Audubon Club's Birdy Book Club, hosted at Books & Mortar, a locally owned, independent bookstore. At our May 13 meeting, we'll discuss "What an Owl Knows: The New Science of the World's Most Enigmatic Birds" by Jennifer Ackerman. Get 10% off the price of the book if you purchase at Books & Mortar (mention it's for the GRAC Birdy Book Club!) There's no cost to participate, apart from any books you opt to purchase. Book Club Meetings are held at Books & Mortar: 966 Cherry St. SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49506 - See you there!

Upcoming Community Events

Spring is nearly here and there are a lot of wonderful events that are going to be taking place in West Michigan over the coming months. So, instead of a species spotlight this month, we figured we would highlight these great events being put on by some of our partner organizations to encourage our members to get out and get involved with our community!

Turning Your Home Into a Habitat | Land Conservancy of West Michigan

March 19 | 6:30-8:30pm | Speciation Artisan Ales - 928 Wealthy St SE

Join the Land Conservancy of West Michigan and Wild Ones River City for an educational evening as we learn how to turn your home into habitat for critical wildlife by planting a native garden! For More Info Visit: naturenearby.org/events/monthly-outing-031924

Green Drinks | West Michigan Environmental Action Council

March 21 | 5:30-7:00pm | Harmony Brewing Company - 1551 Lake Dr SE

Every month people who work in the environmental field meet up at informal sessions known as Green Drinks. We have a lively mixture of people from NGOs, academia, government and business. Come along and you'll be made welcome. Just say, "are you green?" and we will look after you and introduce you to whoever is there. It's a great way of catching up with people you know and also for making new contacts. Everyone invites someone else along, so there's always a different crowd, making Green Drinks an organic, self-organizing network. These events are very simple and unstructured, but many people have found employment, made friends, developed new ideas, done deals and had moments of serendipity. For More Info Visit: wmeac.org/annual-events/green-drinks/

Sugarbush Festival | Blandford Nature Center

March 23 | 10:00am-2:00pm | Blandford Nature Center - 1715 Hillburn Ave. NW

Join us for our 54th year of celebrating the sweet arrival of Spring! Learn the maple sugaring process through Sugarbush demonstrations & techniques including a taste test in our Sugarhouse. Activities include wildlife encounters, maple cotton candy, games/crafts, and more. Wildlife Shows will occur at 11am and 12pm in the auditorium.

Check-in and walk-in registration will be located in front of the Visitor Center. There will be no other activities at the Blandford Nature Center Farm.

For More Info Visit: blandfordnaturecenter.org/events/sugarbush-festival-2024/?occurrence=2024-03-23

Jennifer Jewell: What We Sow in Cultivating our Places | Fredrick Meijer Gardens

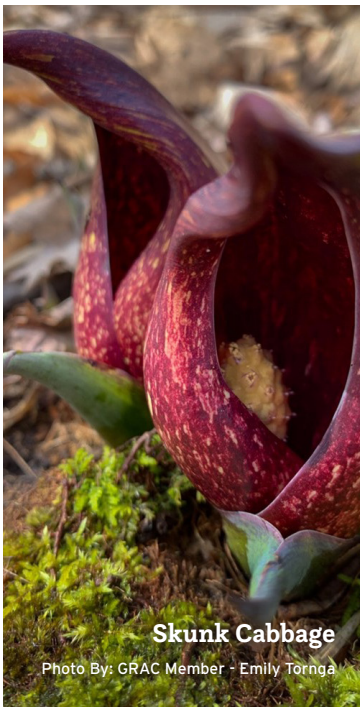
March 26 | 7:00pm | Fredrick Meijer Gardens - 1000 East Beltline Ave. NE

Part of the Master Lecture Series: Secchia Garden Lecture Series

We are excited to welcome Jennifer Jewell for the 2024 Secchia Garden Lecture. Jewell is an interviewer, writer, regular keynote speaker at national gardening conventions, and the creator and host of the national award-winning weekly public radio program and podcast Cultivating Place: Conversations on Natural History and the Human Impulse to Garden. In her presentation, Jewell will explore the philosophy of Cultivating Place and walk you through the power of gardens and gardeners as exemplified by the subjects of her podcast. Together, her books—The Earth in Her Hands: 75 Extraordinary Women Working in the World of Plants, Under the Western Skies: Visionary Gardens from the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific Coast, and What We Sow: On the Personal Ecological and Cultural Significance of Seeds—and the inspiring Midwestern gardens and gardeners she has collaborated with throughout her career are blueprints, guiding us in ways we can all grow our world better: more beautiful and brave.

A book signing with the author will take place immediately following the lecture.

For More Info Visit: buy.acmeticketing.com/orders/459/tickets?eventId=65b7da0a24eb9c6ebe291cc3&cdEventIds=65b7da0a24eb9c6ebe291cc3&date=2024-03-26T19:00:00-04:00



Skunk Cabbage

Photo By: GRAC Member - Emily Tornga

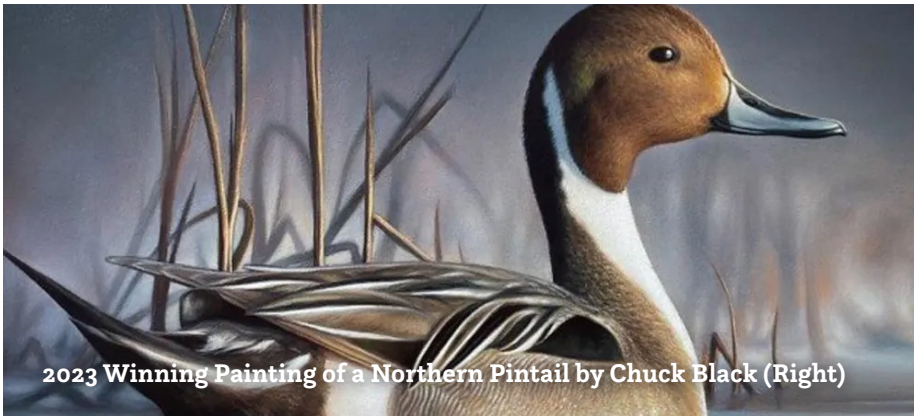
Skunk Cabbage: Weird, Warm, and Wonderful | Emily Tornga

Skunk cabbage is one of the first flowers of spring to bloom. You might spot these wild looking plants coming up near streams, marshes, or wet woods starting in March. They are about the size of your fist and will have a reddish-purple and green splotchy spathe at this stage, which is the tear-dropped shaped hood that surrounds a sputnik-looking spadix within it. The spadix is a round ball covered with tiny yellow flowers.

So why is it called skunk cabbage? Well, it stinks! Some describe the odor as “rotting meat” or “putrid,” but it is also noted to have a “mustard” or “garlic” smell. This is to detract animals from eating it, but its main purpose is to attract flies and other pollinators into the spathe to help pollinate the plant.

Another superpower of this plant is that it produces heat. On cold spring days the inside of the spathe of skunk cabbage can be 60°F warmer than the air outside. Heat rises, so this also helps the plant emit its putrid scent into its surroundings.

So, the next time you are out birding in the early spring and spot skunk cabbage, give it some appreciation, and if you are feeling brave, give it a whiff. These stinky little incubators are sustaining some of the very first pollinators in the spring, who not only pollinate other plants, but are a food source for birds and other animals as well. Thank you, skunk cabbage!



2023 Winning Painting of a Northern Pintail by Chuck Black (Right)



The Federal Duck Stamp | Cynthia Maas

The Federal Duck Stamp, officially known as the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp, is an annual stamp issued by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Migratory bird hunters over the age of 16 must possess a current signed Federal Duck Stamp, along with state licenses and permits, to hunt legally. Federal Duck Stamps are conservation revenue stamps; 98 percent of the purchase price goes directly to help acquire and protect wetland habitat.

The history behind this stamp blends conservation, art, and legislative action in the United States. The Duck Stamp program began in 1934, during the Dust Bowl era, when waterfowl populations were plummeting and wetlands were disappearing quickly. President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized the immediate need for conservation funding and signed the Migratory Bird Hunting Stamp Act into law. By requiring hunters to purchase this stamp annually, there is guaranteed revenue earmarked specifically towards acquiring and preserving wetland habitats within the National Wildlife Refuge Hunting System. This brilliant approach to conservation funding has served as a model for fundraising since its inception.

Beyond the hunting community, birdwatchers are also avid collectors of these stamps. There is a famous federal contest to select the stamp's design, and the winner receives significant recognition. Artists from across the country eagerly apply. Chuck Black of Belgrade, Montana, emerged as the winner of the 2023 Federal Duck Stamp Art Contest with an oil painting of a northern pintail. There is also a Michigan Waterfowl Stamp Program, coordinated by the Michigan Duck Hunters Association, in partnership with the DNR. The 2023 stamp art was created by John Brennan, featuring a pair of hooded mergansers.

In addition to supporting conservation efforts, a current Federal Duck Stamp also serves as free admission into any national wildlife refuge that charges an entry fee. For more information on how to start your own collection or how to purchase, visit <https://www.fws.gov/service/buy-duck-stamp-or-e-stamp>.



- ORNITHOLOGY
- CANOPY
- SHORELINE
- PATCH
- EGRET
- FLYWAY
- TWITCHER
- BACKYARD
- SAVANNAH
- NUTHATCH
- SCOPE
- PUFFIN
- PRAIRIE
- PLUMAGE
- BANDING
- TUNDRA
- OSPREY
- ESTUARY
- FOREST
- BROOD
- TANAGER
- SPARROW
- FLOCK



2024 Membership Meetings

Here is the upcoming schedule for the programming of our remaining membership meetings during the 2023-24 season.

Monday, March 25 - Aquinas College Donnelly Center

Jesse Lincoln, MNFI : Michigan Natural Features Inventory and the Search for Rare Natural Communities

Monday, April 29 - Aquinas College Donnelly Center

Rebecca Heisman, Author : Flight Paths - How a Passionate and Quirky Group of Pioneering Scientists Solved the Mystery of Bird Migration

Monday, May 20 - Blandford Nature Center

Steve Roels, Kirtland's Warbler Program Director and Conservation Team Coordinator - Bird on the Move: Looking to the Past to Secure the Future of the Kirtland's Warbler

Birdathon 2024!

The spring-like weather we have been having reminds us that it is time to start making plans for Birdathon 2024! With an eye to improvement, some changes have been made from prior years. Key things to know:

Timetable:

The Birdathon 2024 Event will take place April 20 - June 1 (7 weeks).

Team Size:

Each team may have no more than 5 members (and no fewer than 2).

Countable Birding Time:

Your Best Day, vs. your Best 6 Hours. No subdividing of the Days.

Area:

Eligible Area for Birdathon is expanded greatly. Instead of Kent, Barry, Ottawa, and Muskegon Counties, we have added Newaygo, Montcalm, Ionia, and Allegan Counties. In essence, this is Kent plus all of the adjacent counties.

Awards:

Currently there are 13 award categories. There is a general feeling that this is too many. The Birdathon Committee will endeavor to reduce the number through judicious deletion of the runner-up category. (There may still be some runners-up too good to drop)

Forms:

Effort is being made to simplify and clarify all 5 standard forms. Tweaked forms will be available in mid-March. All forms will be accessible through 1 access portal on-line.

Solicitation Letter and Q & A Form will be accessible online

Team Registration Form, Pledge Form, and Birding Report Sheet, will also have hard copies available at the March General Membership Meeting, for easy pickup.

Wild Card Bird:

The wild card bird this year is the pileated woodpecker!

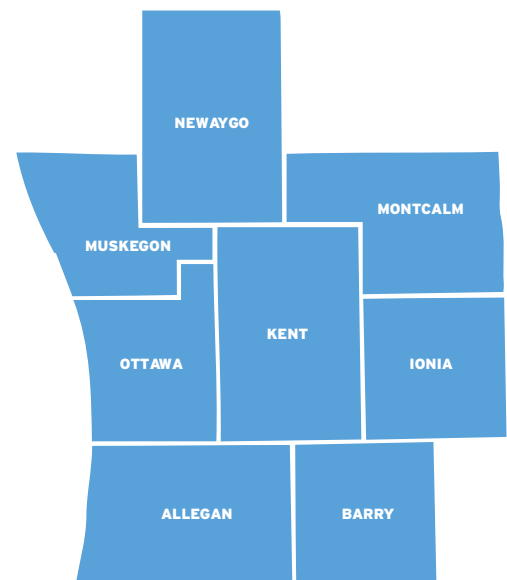
Need People:

To be sure, we need more people and teams to grow this event and make more money for the Club. The Birdathon Committee also needs some new members; 2 to 3 would be ideal. Please consider! Contact Ed Bolt, Jill Goodell, Spencer High, or Tom Leggett.



2024 Wild Card Bird: Pileated Woodpecker

Photo By: Ricky NJ, via flickr.com



Map of the updated Eligible Areas for Birdathon.

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

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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

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