

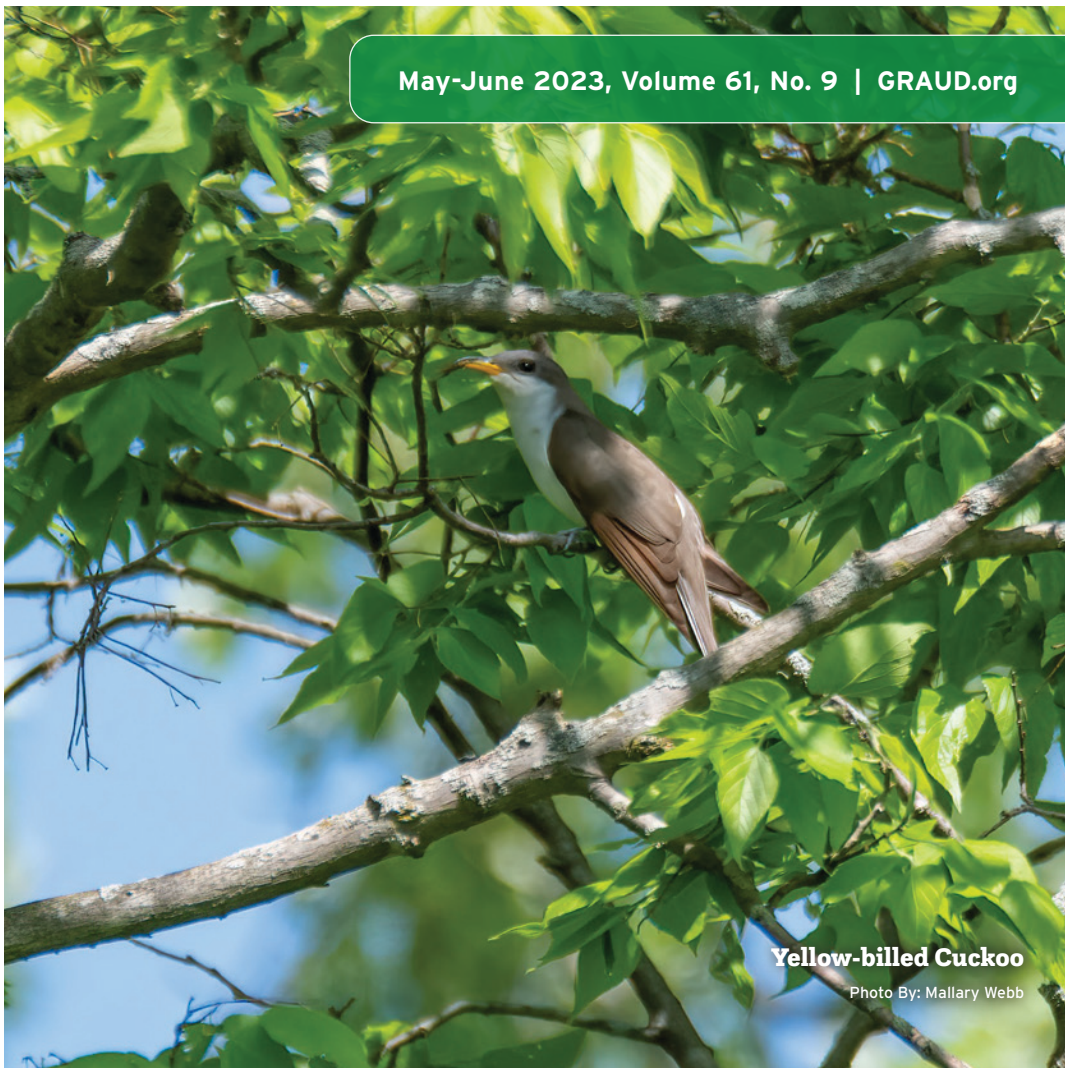


the CALLER

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 2023 Spring Migration Bird Bonanza
- New Board Positions for 2023-24
- North Point Nature Preserve Birding Big Sit
- Charlotte A. Runnells Award
- Identify These Confusing Birds

May-June 2023, Volume 61, No. 9 | GRAUD.org



Yellow-billed Cuckoo

Photo By: Mallary Webb

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

Michigan summers are busy, but early June is when I catch my breath for a few days after a month-long marathon of daily spring migration birding. Summer is also when the club pauses most activities to rest, relax and prepare for a new year. Reflecting on our recently concluded 2022/2023 season, I'm filled with gratitude and hope. Gratitude for this wonderful, growing community of birders, nature lovers and friends. And hopeful for the club's continued growth and positive impact in our community. I'm so thankful for all of the dedicated, hardworking volunteers who power this club and our members who enthusiastically participate in events (and invite their friends to join!). Here are just a few highlights of what we all were able to accomplish together in our 2022/2023 season:

- Added 55 new members to the roster, as well as "cleaning up" the existing roster to bring dozens of other members up to date on their membership dues. This is a huge growth rate for one season!
- Hosted eight, free nature programs for our community--many with above-average attendance!
- Welcomed 48 volunteer participants to contribute important data in the Christmas Bird Count!
- Added new books to our GRAC library!
- Represented the club at several community events, including the Pleasant Peninsula Art & Activism Fair, Spring Migration Bird Bonanza, the Spring Bluebird Festival, local libraries and more!
- Redesigned the Caller and updated the publication process to allow us to continuously improve!
- Revised the club bylaws to present to membership for a vote in the 2023/2024 season!
- Filled the GRAC board, including adding two new board members!
- And much more!

The continued strength of this club--and our growing community of like-minded individuals with a passion for the natural world--is a fitting testament and tribute to the memory of our late club President Scott Hutchings. Scott, who unexpectedly passed away in October 2022, steered this club through the difficult COVID-19 years. Without him, we simply wouldn't be where we are today and we are forever grateful for his dedication and leadership.

Thank you to everyone who participated in some way, shape or form this year. I look forward to connecting with you all this fall. Have a safe, happy and relaxing summer!

2023 Spring Migration Bird Bonanza

Thanks to the wonderful staff and volunteers at Blandford Nature Center, we had a fantastic time at 2023 Spring Migration Bird Bonanza! Much appreciation to our club members who led multiple (and productive!) birding walks, as well as to Katie and Ed Bolt for operating the booth, and to Spencer High for his partnership with Blandford in helping to make it all happen. This event had an incredible turnout with experienced birders alongside the "birding curious"! The total species count for the day was a whopping 57.



A group of birders observe birds in the Bert Hewitt Meadow at Blandford Nature Center



Ed Bolt at the Grand Rapids Audubon Club's informational booth



Common Nighthawk

Photo By: Greg Schechter via Flickr.com

New Board Positions for 2023-2024

Tricia Boot - *President*

Spencer High - *Vice President*

Cynthia Maas - *Secretary*

Incoming New Members

John Garbini - *Board Member at Large*

Bio: I have been an active birder for a little over a year. I started birding when I was invited to tag along on a big sit, I quickly grew to enjoy being surrounded by others who are passionate about the outdoors and appreciate nature's minor beauties. Birding has opened my eyes to a whole new group of friends and has given me another reason to spend more time seeking adventures outdoors. In 2023, my favorite identified bird so far is the Black-throated Green Warbler. I look forward to being an active participant in the GR Audubon!

Alex Field - *Board Member at Large*

Hello! My name is Alex Field. I have enjoyed birds all my life, but really got into birding more seriously approximately three years ago after seeing my spark bird, the Northern Flicker! I find birding to be such a peaceful and relaxing pastime that helps me connect with both the nature around me and with whoever I am birding with. As a recent graduate from Western Michigan University's occupational therapy program, I conducted a research project in which I partnered with Freya McGregor at Access Birding to determine supportive features of mounts and optics that facilitate participation in birding from power wheelchairs. Through this experience, I had the opportunity to work with disabled birders to help brainstorm ideas and ways to enhance birding for individuals in this population. I hope to carry this passion and work to the Grand Rapids Audubon Club as a board member. I wish to see more accessibility throughout the park systems and birding locations we all love, as well as more inclusive spaces for all people to enjoy, regardless of their abilities.



John and Shelby Garbini



Alex Field

North Point Nature Preserve Birding Big Sit

On May 13, several Grand Rapids Audubon Club Members ventured north to help Huron Pines lead a birding big sit at North Point Nature Preserve, a 1,400-acre tract of protected land on the northern rim of Thunder Bay in Alpena, Michigan. As spring migration was in full swing, it was an excellent day for nature exploration and wildlife observation.

North Point Nature Preserve was acquired by The Nature Conservancy of Michigan in 2017 and transferred to Huron Pines as the permanent landowner at the end of 2022. It is home to four miles of undeveloped Lake Huron shoreline and is a vital stopover site for migratory birds. The preserve also protects some of Michigan's rarest ecosystem types such as dune-swale, coastal fens, and a variety of lakeshore types which support some of our rarest plant and wildlife species.

The weather was ideal for a morning of exploring, meeting fellow birders from the community and Thunder Bay Audubon Society, and busy, constant bird ID excitement. Groups led by Grand Rapids Audubon Club Members ventured into different ecosystems to record the bird species that could be found within them. The density of ecosystem types located closely to one another allowed groups to explore dry northern forest, boreal forest, emergent marshes, dune/swales, rich conifer swamps, hardwood swamps and several lakeshore types in search of birds. Downed trees and overgrown paths did not stop anyone from hiking to spot a rare warbler!

Dwarf Lake Iris, Michigan's state wildflower was able to be seen in full bloom at the preserve, and provided a beautiful backdrop for the morning.

During the birding big sit portion of the day, the entire group was able to identify a total of 56 species of birds. However, our GRAC Members stuck around after the event had continued to explore different parts of the preserve, and recorded a total 92 species on the property, highlighted by a Loggerhead Shrike!

The chance to discover the biodiversity and birds in the untouched dune/swale ecosystem and surrounding uplands was an extraordinary treat. The event was an adventure to remember.



Spencer High, Cynthia Mass, Alex Hamilton, Mallary Webb and John Garbini pose with the species list from the big sit portion of the trip



Solitary Sandpiper
Photo by: Alex Hamilton



Participants in the May 13 Birding Big Sit pose with the species list with Thunder Bay pictured in the background.
Photo courtesy of Huron Pines



Fred and Carol Van Oeveren (left) are presented the Charlotte A. Runnells Award by Ed Bolt during our May 2023 membership meeting at Blandford Nature Center

Charlotte A. Runnells Award

"The Charlotte A. Runnells Award is given in honor of Char Runnells and those Grand Rapids Audubon Club members whose exceptional courage, initiative, and dedication as volunteer environmentalists have defended our environmental health and natural treasures.

This award was established by the Grand Rapids Audubon Club membership on the 30th day of September, 1996 and is awarded by the Conservation Committee to no more than one volunteer environmentalist every two years."

The GRAC Board now fills in (as needed) for the Conservation Committee., and "every two years" has averaged out to every 3.3 years.

Past recipients since the first award in 1996 have been: Charlotte A. Runnells, John F. Will, Steve Mueller, Robert Miner, Steve Minard, Joan Wolfe, Mary Jane Dockeray, Chris Baer (2018).

The recipient for the 2022 Charlotte A. Runnells Award goes to an inseparable couple, whose initiative and dedication spans decades, whose nurture of the Club through print and media have helped us all to become better environmentalists. For their lifetime work on behalf of GRAC, the award goes to Carol and Fred Van Oeveren.

A few historic nuggets, thanks to Linda Damstra:

About Carol

Daughter of Alex and Mabel Hook, active members of GR Audubon in the early fifties.

1959-60 - Young Carol and her father were chairs of the Program Committee.

1963 - Co-chair of Junior Audubon and leader of Junior Audubon field trips. At the same time Carol was the Editor of the GRAC Directory.

1992-93 - First year as Editor of the 'Caller'

1994-96 - Detailed Bird Reports for the 'Caller' (Jim Ponshair and Ernie Hoover took over)

2015 - Returned to Bird Reports column again, and Ebird reports

About Fred

1980 is first listing in GRAC records for Fred & Carol together.

1992 - Fred used 'Desktop Publishing' for the 'Caller' for the first time. Carol would type articles into a word processor and Fred would transfer the article to Desktop Publisher for page layout.

Fred has written occasional articles for the Caller; an especially notable one in 1995 on CFC's.

His website work for GRAC has been outstanding, including the Media Page - clear, concise, and above all, easy to access.

On behalf the GRAC Board and the Club, thank you and congratulations, Carol and Fred! Upon accepting this award, Carol and Fred wished to 'rededicate' this honor to Carol's parents, Alex and Mabel Hook, who were among the founding members of GR Audubon, and tireless workers. It was they who inspired Carol and Fred to be so dedicated.

Identify These Confusing Birds | Mary Austin

It could be easy, but it could be challenging. Just select the correct bird name for each pair.

Answers can be found upside down on the bottom of this page.

1 Male Downy Woodpecker or Male Hairy Woodpecker?



A. _____ B. _____

2 Male Purple Finch or Male House Finch?



A. _____ B. _____

3 Adult Cooper's Hawk or Adult Sharp-shinned Hawk?



A. _____ B. _____

4 American Crow or Common Raven?



A. _____ B. _____

Answers to Bird ID Quiz:

Note that while other visual identification differences exist for each pair of birds, the differences listed below are the most apparent.

1. A. Downy Woodpecker - B. Hairy Woodpecker - Although an adult male Hairy Woodpecker is larger than its adult male Downy relative, unless both species are side by side this can be difficult to determine. A Hairy Woodpecker has a noticeably long beak while a Downy Woodpecker has a short, stubby beak. The Hairy's outer tail feathers are unmarked, but those feathers are spotted on a Downy. 2. A. House Finch - B. Purple Finch - An adult male House Finch has a dull redness centered on its head and upper breast, while the counterpart Purple Finch does not have this streaking. It may have, however, diffuse marks under its wings. The Purple Finch can generally be described as having a bulky body and heavy beak. The House Finch usually has a dome-shaped, block-like head; whereas, an adult Sharp-shinned Hawk has a stunted, smaller, smoothly rounded head. The tail of a Cooper's Hawk is notably long with a rounded end. A Sharpie's tail is square-shaped with sharp corners and a straight edge. 4. A. American Crow - B. Common Raven - Common Raven is a large, bulky bird with a large, curved beak. Its throat feathers are shaggy. An American Crow, on the other hand, is a smaller, slender bird with a pointy beak with smooth throat feathers. When viewed close up, both species show bristles at the base of their beaks; the Raven's are notably longer. Although not definitive in the Raven photo of this quiz, a Raven's tail is wedge-shaped as compared to the rounded, fan-shaped Crow's tail.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo

On a recent walk in Roselle Park, my telephoto camera lens caught the attention of some park-goers. One group of curious walkers got a full dose of birder excitement because, by the time I encountered them, I was intensely searching for a Yellow-Billed Cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*) that I had heard calling in some tall cottonwoods by the river. When I pulled up photos in the Merlin app on my phone to show them, they oohed and aahed at its beautiful, long, spotted tail and big, curious eyes. While the group did get to hear the bird calling, unfortunately, they did not get a glimpse of it despite its relatively large size. This individual behaved exactly as expected - staying in denser patches of leaves high up in the cottonwoods and skulking or, when more people were around, staying completely still and hidden.

In addition to their somewhat secretive behavior, members of the Cuckoo family as a whole are notorious as brood parasites; they lay their eggs in other individuals' (or even other species') nests. However, this reputation is mainly due to the behavior of the Common Cuckoo of Europe and Asia - our local Yellow-Billed (and Black-Billed) Cuckoos typically only resort to brood parasitism when food supply (insects) is extremely abundant and they are able to lay more eggs than usual. They are perfectly capable of raising their own young, unlike Michigan's other brood parasite, the Brown-Headed Cowbird, which is completely unable to rear its own chicks.

The Yellow-billed Cuckoo, while considered "Least Concern" by the IUCN and with relatively stable populations in the eastern portion of its summer range, is down to less than 500 breeding pairs in the western US. The western population (which is "Threatened" federally in the US) had a historical range covering 12 states plus British Columbia, but due to habitat loss from water diversion, the livestock industry, and mining activities, has all but disappeared in the last century. We should consider ourselves fortunate to have these reliable summer visitors in Michigan, and do all we can to protect them to avoid a similar situation in the east.

Identifying Yellow-billed Cuckoo



Description:

Slender, brown, long-tailed birds with a white belly and breast, white tips to tail feathers and yellow lower-portion to their beak.

Habitat:

Deciduous Woodlands

Best Time to See:

Late April-September

Best Place to See:

Ball Perkins Park, Cascade Peace Park, Roselle Park, Prairie Wolf Park

ID Tips & Tricks

- If you want to find this bird, I cannot stress enough that you should familiarize yourself with its calls, due to its secretive nature.
- Approximately grackle-sized, long, slender bird with a very long tail.
- Brownish-gray on top, all the way from above the bill, over the top of the head, down to the tip of the tail.
- Underneath is bright white from under bill to belly.
- Tail underneath is black with large, conspicuous, white spots.
- Outer parts of wings are rufous or cinnamon-colored, but can blend well with back color when in shade (which these birds often are).
- Thick, down-curved bill is usually both black and yellow, but more yellow toward the base, and lower mandible is often all yellow. Bill is about the same length as the head.
- Stays high in the trees; very skulky and frequently hunches over, hiding its bright white underparts, giving a curved or arc shape often when perched.
- The only similar species is the Black-Billed Cuckoo, which has much smaller spots/stripes under the tail, fully blue-black bill, and lacks the rufous wings - and the calls are different! Learn the calls!

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, July 6, 13, 20, 27 - 8:00AM | Meet at the end of the dead-end section of Veterans Memorial Drive

Birds & Bagels Series at Blandford Nature Center | Led By: Alex Field, Emily Tornga & Spencer High

Come out and enjoy an early morning of birding, bagels, and coffee in this monthly warm weather series! Coffee provided in partnership with Outside Coffee Co, and bagels from Bagel Kitchen. Grand Rapids Audubon Club members will guide the hikes and introduce you to the birds that call Blandford home in the summer. You'll develop skills for recognizing bird calls and identifying the field marks of wetland, meadow, and forest dwellers, such as the quirky Pileated Woodpecker and the Belted Kingfisher. Everyone is welcome to attend this event, regardless of age, ability, or experience level with birding, so join us on the trail and see how many feathered friends you can find!

Pre-registration is required at blandfordnaturecenter.org. Pricing: Adult/Child Blandford Member: \$15 Adult/Child Blandford Non-Member: \$20. Registration closes the day before the event at 12:00pm. Please contact the Community Programs Coordinator, Camilla, at camilla@blandfordnaturecenter.org if you have any questions.

Saturday, July 22 | 8:00 AM | Led by Alex Field - **Saturday, August 26** | 8:00 AM | Led by Emily Tornga
Saturday, September 23 | 8:00 AM | Led by Spencer High

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!



@GRANDRAPIDSAUDUBONCLUB

GRAND RAPIDS AUDUBON CLUB BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND SPECIAL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

5 officers + 4 elected board members

Acting President - Tricia Boot

Vice President - Tricia Boot

Secretary - Shawn Taheri

Treasurer - Jeff Neumann

Ass't Treasurer - OPEN

Board Member - Mary Austin

Board Member - Jeni Taheri

Board Member - Spencer High

Board Member - Cynthia Maas

SPECIAL COMMITTEES

/CHAIRPERSONS

Aud. Adventures - Mary Austin

Insurance - Jill Goodell

RESIDENT AGENT

Larry Burke

STANDING COMMITTEES

Audio/Visual - Robert Riepma

Bird Reports - Carol VanOeveren

Caller Editor - Cynthia Maas

Caller Publisher - OPEN

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 - 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

General Inquiries:

information@graud.org

Membership: membership@graud.org

Caller Editor: newsletter@graud.org

Librarian: librarian@graud.org

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

Contact Tricia Boot:
president@graud.org