



the **CALLER**

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Snow Bunting

Photo By: Andy Reago & Chrissy McClarren, via Wikimedia Commons

OCTOBER MEETING DETAILS

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

Seeking a Pleasant Peninsula – Art and Activism Working in Symbiosis

Maddie Chaffer - Son Visual

Maddison Chaffer (Son Visual) is a muralist, community organizer, and woodsman. Their large scale public artworks can be readily found around Grand Rapids and greater Michigan area. Drawing inspiration from the natural world, Maddie often works with species native to the Great Lakes region. With the radical visibility of public art, Maddie hopes to reach audiences who may not have regular access to nature. By combining outreach, organizing, art, and their deep love for the earth, Maddie aims to foster local connections between art and activism.



A Note from the Club President | Tricia Boot President

Where do I fit into the club's ecosystem? It's a question I've been pondering since Spencer High, club Vice President, presented in September to our membership on the topic of creating communities of conservationists.

I appreciate -- and wish to echo -- Spencer's point that every person has a role to play in their communities, including GRAC. Just as every being in an ecosystem is vital to that ecosystem's survival, each member brings a unique and critical set of skills, experiences and perspectives to our club's ecosystem.

We are a group that functions 100% on the participation, innovation and passion of volunteers. Each member is a critical source of ideas, input, work, energy, time and effort.

One person's role in the ecosystem may look like inviting a prospective member to join them on a GRAC field trip. For another, it may mean raising a hand to lead a special committee, or offering to help run the GRAC table at a community event. There are so many niches in our club's collective ecosystem--I urge you to find yours, today!

Successful Birding at Huff Park

Thank you to Friends of Grand Rapids Parks for partnering with us for Explore Our Parks: Discover Birds in Grand Rapids at Huff Park September 23. We loved meeting so many new people and sharing our collective awe, joy and excitement for birds, parks and the natural world.

All in all, we ended the day with 46 bird species, and left with our hearts full after sharing our love of birding with many new and old friends.

Thank you to all of those who volunteered at the event! We wouldn't have been able to have such a successful event without your help.

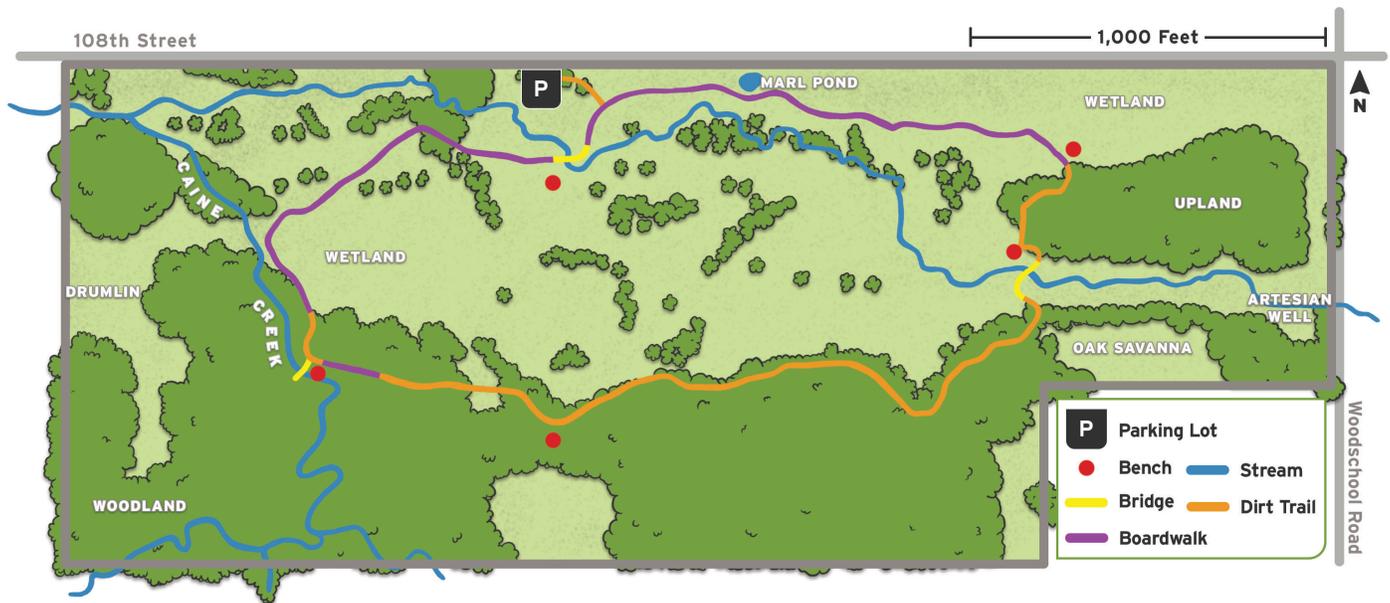
Read more on the Friends of Grand Rapids Parks blog at friendsofgrparks.org.



Alex and Tricia Boot with the species list

Photo By: Tiffany Fant of Grand Rapids Media Initiative and Film Incubator

Explore Maher Sanctuary This Fall



Come and experience the beauty of Maher Sanctuary this fall. A true hidden gem in Freeport, this location is stunning and wild. Maher consists of some high land and fields, bog, marshes and swamp, pond, and a heavily wooded deciduous area of third or fourth growth trees at the westerly side of the property, through all of which meanders a small stream sometimes called Caine Creek, which empties into the Cold Water River. It is a delightfully diversified habitat for bird and wildlife, and especially wildflowers, plants and shrubs. Find out more about the history of Maher Sanctuary and GRAC here.

When visiting October 8, 28 species were counted, including many yellow-rumped warblers. A full-grown buck was spotted as well. There are benches throughout, which can be found on the map. Watch your step on the boardwalk over the wetland.

Directions:

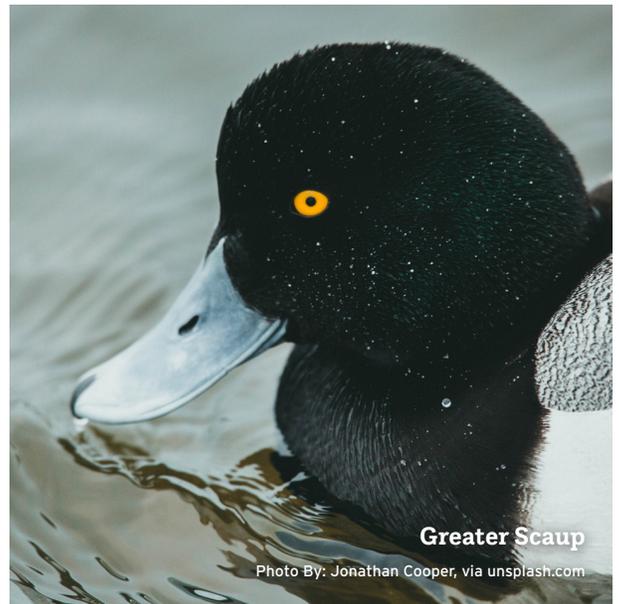
The Maher Sanctuary is located on the southwest corner of Woodschool Rd. and 108th St. on the border of Kent and Barry Counties. From Grand Rapids take I-96 east to Lowell. Exit at the Lowell exit and take Alden Nash Ave. south to 100th St. Proceed east 1/2 mile on 100th to Baker Ave. Turn right and go one mile south on Baker, which becomes Woodschool at 108th St. This is the Barry County line. The Maher Sanctuary is located on the southwest corner of Woodschool and 108th. Turn right on 108th and look for the parking area on the left (south) side of the road about 1/4 mile west of Woodschool.

Michigan Young Birders Network Fall Meet-Up

November 4 | Muskegon Wastewater | 9 a.m.

Join us on Nov. 4 at the Muskegon Wastewater birding hotspot. From raptors to ducks, young birders can expect to see exciting birds and learn new tips and tricks in bird watching and identification. The young birder meet-ups are for those 18 years old and younger and their families. Young birders will be responsible for transportation to and from the meet-ups. An adult must accompany any young birder under the age of 13. Meet-ups will last approximately three hours.

There is no cost to attend, but a suggested donation of \$10 per young birder or family will help cover expenses associated with hosting these events. Pre-registration is required. Events will be canceled if fewer than six young birders are registered one week in advance. Visit the [Michigan Audubon online calendar](#) for more details, including links to register.



Spread the Word on Birds: Become a GRAC Ambassador!

Do you enjoy talking about birds? Are you passionate about connecting people with nature and the outdoors? Would you find value in helping a child to discover a potentially lifelong interest in birds and birding? Are you seeking a low-effort way to have a significant positive impact on the club and your community?

If any of those questions sound like you, please consider becoming a GRAC Ambassador. This group works together to provide education and entertainment to our communities. Sample activities include library presentations, school visits and operating the club's table at conservation-focused festivals.

Simply share your name and contact info (as well as general availability) with Tricia Boot, club President, and your name will be added to our list of amazing Ambassadors. You'll have the opportunity to join in events that work for you and your schedule and interest levels.

GRAUD.org New Website is UP!

After a short delay in our website being down, our new website has been launched! Spencer High redesigned and developed a new website for us, and has included new features with interactive maps, tips for beginning birders and more!

There will be additional pages added throughout the coming months, like the Library, The West Michigan Hall-of-Fame Birds, Conservation Within West Michigan and more.

Visit GRAUD.org to browse the new website. Please send any questions to Spencer at: vicepresident@graud.org





Christmas Bird Count Save the Date | Tom Leggett

DATE: Saturday, December 30, 2023

TIME: 7:30 AM

DATE: Wittenbach Wege Center *(no meet and greet but information pickup at nature center)*

DETAILS

Our board has decided to proceed with the 2023 Christmas Bird Count using National Audubon Society guidelines, as follows:

1. Cancel all in-person compilation gatherings, nature center open for breaks and warming.
2. Masking is required if social distancing is not possible while in the field.
3. Carpooling may only occur within existing familiar or social "pod" groups.
4. Activities must comply with all current state and municipal COVID-19 guidelines.

Tom Leggett will be the on-the-ground coordinator and will base himself at the Wittenbach/Wege Center, but we will not have an in-person gathering. Section leaders will coordinate their sections and gather results by email. Chris Baer is working to confirm section leaders. Section data will be sent to Tom and he will complete the NAS report and prepare the article for the Caller.

Feeders within the count circle add valuable data. Let Tom know before count day if you will be a feeder counter only. Some counters travel a section in the morning and then count at their feeders in the afternoon. In the event of a blizzard on count day, feeders can save a count, despite reduced numbers. Refer to the count map to see if your feeder is within the count circle and report your numbers to the count coordinator.

Direct inquiries to count coordinator:

Tom Leggett: 616-249-3382 E-mail: tomleggett@hotmail.com

(If National changes guidelines and opens up the count, watch GRAC social media for updates)

A Real Penguin Name – or Not? | Mary Austin

Penguins (order Sphenisciformes, family Spheniscidae) are aquatic, flightless birds that live primarily in the southern hemisphere. These birds are highly adapted for life in the water. Notably, their wings have become flippers, and they have dark and white plumages to better avoid detection from predators when the birds are in the water.

The birds are certainly dependent upon the southern hemisphere oceans. Half of their lives are spent in the water and the other half on land. Most feed on sea creatures (such as krill, fish, and squid), which the penguins catch while swimming underwater. Of interest, only a few penguin species live in cold climates, such as Antarctica. Most are found in temperate zones, and one species lives near the equator.

BirdLife International (on behalf of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)) reports that of the 18 species in the penguin family, 11 are Globally Threatened (IUCN Red List).

Here's a short quiz about penguin names. Some of the names are the penguins' real English species names. Others have been created for this quiz. Indicate "Yes" or "No" to each penguin name below.

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

1. Adelie	YES / NO
2. African	YES / NO
3. Chinned	YES / NO
4. Emperor	YES / NO
5. Erect-crested	YES / NO
6. Fiordland	YES / NO
7. Galapagos	YES / NO
8. Gentoo	YES / NO
9. Humboldt	YES / NO
10. Little	YES / NO
11. Macaroni	YES / NO
12. Magnetic	YES / NO
13. Northern Rockclimber	YES / NO
14. Queen	YES / NO
15. Royal	YES / NO
16. Snares	YES / NO
17. Southern Rockclimber	YES / NO
18. Yellow-eyed	YES / NO



1. YES 2. YES 3. NO - BUT THERE IS A CHINSTRAP 4. YES 5. YES 6. YES 7. YES 8. YES 9. YES 10. YES 11. YES 12. NO - BUT THERE IS A MAGELLANIC 13. NO - BUT THERE IS A NORTHERN ROCKHOPPER 14. NO - BUT THERE IS A KING 15. YES 16. YES 17. NO - BUT THERE IS A SOUTHERN ROCKHOPPER 18. YES

Snow Bunting

One of my favorite winter visitors is arriving back in town soon - Snow Buntings! In the winter, when plants and bees are dormant, I like to pass my time by going for long drives while listening to some of the weekend programming on NPR. On an early January morning in 2022, I set out on a whim and ended up over near the Muskegon Waste Water Treatment Plant looking specifically for snowy owls. With no snowies in sight, I decided to just mosey around and spend less time looking at plastic bags in a field, and more time at the other things there were to see. Almost immediately, I spot a small little flock of, what I had assumed, juncos - to my utter surprise and delight, it was a small flock of Snow Buntings!

Because I had never seen them before this, I decided to do a bit of brushing up in my identification skills, and learned that these birds aren't completely white when they visit us in the wintertime, and that it's only the males that sport this coloration in the summertime. The birds I saw that day weren't strictly black on white, but had rusty colored cheeks, brown tops to their backs and heads, but still sported a white stomach and wing feathers, and black patterning on some of the primary flight feathers.

Growing up, I had always been interested by these birds, and their coloration, but without seeing them in the wild, I wouldn't have really taken the time to study their non-breeding plumage variations. Even though it's not the iconic black on white, it is still quite a beautiful sight to behold on a cold January morning, and they really do blend right in with the landscape around them.

Since that day, I have had the fortune of seeing these birds on several occasions while driving country roads near farm fields. I usually spot them in large open areas that mimic their breeding grounds in the tundra - usually, that ends up looking like cattle or horse pastures or agricultural fields. These birds have a beak that is great for cracking open seeds - so habitats with dead wildflower stalks poking out of the snow are a great place to look - oh, and I don't think I've ever just seen one by itself, if you see one, there's bound to be a couple dozen more just lurking around the corner. So good luck this upcoming winter, and be sure to let me know if you've gotten a chance to spot one of these feathered friends spending the winter nearby.

Identifying a Snow Bunting



Photo By: D. Faulder, via Wikimedia Commons

Description:

Medium-sized songbird with a conical bill. Plumages change throughout the year, but in winter, are mostly white with patches of tan/brown near the head and along their backs.

Habitat:

Open fields - Particularly grazing pastures.

Best Time to See:

November-Early March

Best Place to See:

Muskegon Wastewater, Gerald R. Ford Int. Airport

ID Tips & Tricks

- These restless birds flock up by the hundreds in winter, scattering across prairies, pastures and farm fields throughout Michigan.
- Although breeding and nonbreeding Snow Buntings look quite different, the change from nonbreeding to breeding plumage isn't caused by growing in a new set of feathers (molt). The change from brownish to pure white happens when males rub their bellies and heads on the snow, wearing down the brown feather tips to reveal immaculate white features below.
- Look for these birds on the ground, rummaging around in the snow for seeds or over-wintering insects. When they get spooked, the entire group will take off, do a few laps to make sure the coast is clear, and usually return to the same general area as before. So if you don't get a good look the first time, no worries - just sit tight and they'll (hopefully) be back.
- Snow Buntings can be found in the same habitat and are the same general size as Lapland Longspurs. Look for the distinctive white wing patch and black primary flight feathers on the Snow Bunting. I also think their tan coloration is a bit more rosey - but that might just be me.

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, Oct. 26 & Nov. 2, 9, 16 - 9:00AM | Meet at the end of the dead-end section of Veterans Memorial Drive

Lakeshore Migrants | Led By: Steve Minard

We will plan to look for the best reported late shorebirds, winter ducks, winter gulls, or winter finches along the lakeshore. Winter ducks should be in the area, and the other late migrants should still be moving south. This time of year presents an opportunity for birds that can difficult to find in our area, so we'll check the bird alerts and go with the best prospects. We are likely to start on the lakeshore with Holland State Park, Oval Beach or Douglas Beach as possible targets. From Lake Michigan, we're likely to work inland with stops possible along Lake Macatawa, the Kalamazoo River, or the Todd Farm Unit of the Allegan State Game Area. If we are lucky, a mega rarity will be chase able and we may travel further afield. This is planned as a morning trip, but we could extend it with a lunch stop.

NOTE: Please be sure to dress for the weather, as fall birding on the Lakeshore can get a bit chilly.

Saturday, November 4 - 7:30AM | Meet in the McDonald's in Hudsonville

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

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5 officers + 4 elected board members

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Ass't Treasurer - **OPEN**

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Board Member - John Garbini

Board Member - Alex Field

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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