



October 2023

# The Meadowlark

The Newsletter of the Benzie Audubon Club  
www.benzieaudubon.org

## President's Letter

It has been quite a year for the Benzie Audubon Club, and it isn't over yet. More than 60 people have participated in at least one of the 14 field trips we have conducted this year. My thanks to trip leaders Candy Petrick, Emily Cook, Greg Miller, Sally Cook and Todd Warren. Program Chair, Char Ester lined up three outstanding programs, all of which were very well attended. Emily Cook redesigned and boosted our website which has been getting rave reviews from users. In between planned events there have been some incredible bird sightings by people birding the Benzie County area. Still to come are a couple of more field trips, our annual meeting and members photo show, and the Christmas Bird Count December 15th.

As for the annual meeting and election of officers, we will be meeting this year on Thursday, November 2nd, at St. Phillips Episcopal Church—785 Beulah Hwy, Beulah. We are bringing back the potluck dinner, which will begin at 6:00 p.m. Bring a dish to pass and your own table service and beverage. No later than 7:00 p.m. we will begin a short business meeting followed by the photo program. Once again, all of the individuals currently serving in board positions have indicated their willingness to continue for another two years. Please consider the proposed slate of officers for 2023. The candidates for the five open positions are: Carl Freeman, Vice President; John Ester, Treasurer; Greg Miller, Membership Chair; Candy Petrick, Conservation Chair; and Doug Cook, Field Trip Chair. Please note our by-laws permit a person to serve in two positions, so I will also continue as President for the remainder of my two-year term. If you wish to nominate someone else for one of these positions, please let me know prior to the meeting on November 2 by phone or e-mail.

I invite and encourage you to consider supporting Benzie Audubon by becoming a member of the board or a field trip leader. We would also appreciate assistance finding and developing future programs, technical support, or writing an article for the newsletters we plan to produce in 2024. Please contact me or any of our board members if you have an idea to express or a talent to share. We are a low-key but dedicated group and would welcome new input.

Finally, and most important of all, we encourage you to continue to get outside. Benzie County has much to offer, and all we have to do is walk out our doors and watch, listen and wonder at the beauty of it all.

Doug Cook—President , nedthebirder@gmail.com | 231-930-8722



Photo by Carl Freeman

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### BENZIE COUNTY BIRD FACTS

- ◆ Bird species reported in Benzie Co. 2023 **234**
- ◆ Bird species reported in Benzie Co. All years **288**
- ◆ Last species reported for the first time: **Swallow-tailed Kite, July 31, 2023**
- ◆ Current Best Hot Spots
  - Platte Point 160 species
  - Otter Creek 157 species
  - BVT 143 species

Source: eBird



Photo by Doug Cook

## TREASURER'S REPORT

Treasurer John Ester has provided the following financial report for the period of October 1, 2022—July 31, 2023

Starting Checking Balance	\$ 8,543.19
Receipts	2,675.00
Disbursements	<u>3,801.87</u>
Ending Checking Balance	\$ 7416.32
Savings Balance	1059.53
Certificates of Deposit Balance	<u>7,808.84</u>

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*SAVE THE DATE—This year's Benzie County Christmas Bird Count will be held Friday, December 15th. We need people in the field and at feeders. If you would like to help, send an email to [nedthebirder@gmail.com](mailto:nedthebirder@gmail.com)*

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### BAC MINI-GRANTS

In 2001 the Benzie Audubon Club received a bequest from the Estate of Robert Lytle. With this gift the Club established the Robert Lytle Education and Environmental Fund. The Fund is administered by the Club to promote environmental education and to enhance the natural environment within the Benzie County area. Each year the Club offers a limited number of mini-grants to further this goal.

Past grants have been used for special school projects, Scout service projects and wildlife rehabilitation programs. Please see our website for detailed information and specific requirements and instructions on how to apply. Our Mini-Grant Chair, Wes Blizzard, is also happy to talk with anyone who has an interest.

[www.benzieaudubon.org](http://www.benzieaudubon.org)

### BIRDING HOTSPOT HIGHLIGHT by Doug Cook

One of my favorite places to bird is right outside my own door. On eBird, I have identified this area as "Frankfort Neighborhood." My rule for listing birds heard or seen in this area is that the bird has to have been identified by me while on a walk or run from my own home. That limits the distance to a rough circle with a diameter of about 4 miles., which is getting smaller every year, by the way. I don't count birds as having been in the Frankfort Neighborhood if seen or heard in an existing eBird designated hotspot, like Elberta Marsh or Betsie Bay.

A review of the record shows that I have submitted 290 checklists for Frankfort Neighborhood which list 186 species. I have seen some incredible birds in the 17 years we have been here. On April 3, 2013 I found a Townsend's Solitaire just up the road. On May 10, 2018 a Summer Tanager showed up at our feeders and hung around for a couple of days. In 2020 we had Yellow-throated Warbler just a few blocks over. A few weeks ago I was excited to be woken up by a pair of Saw-whet Owls having a calling contest right outside the bedroom window.

My birding friends know that I am not much of a chaser. If a rare bird is spotted more than an hour away, there is not much chance I am going to hop in the car and go look for it, but I wish them well in their search. I'm glad someone gets to see the rare stuff. I don't know the source of my reluctance, but maybe it has something to do with the incredibly rich birding area we live in right here. The birds seem to be willing to come to me, and I am more than happy wait for them here.



Photo by Carl Freeman

## BEST BIRD OF THE YEAR by Doug Cook

The last day of July this year was typically warm and sunny, and I decided to take a walk around the neighborhood to stretch my legs. As I hit the one mile mark, my phone buzzed. It was Carl Freeman. Carl doesn't call me a lot, and when he does it is often bird related, and this was no exception. Straight to the point, Carl announced that he had just seen a Swallow-tailed Kite soar directly overhead on Joyfield Rd near the Smeltzer Orchard processing plant. He had no idea where the bird was now, but he thought I would like to know.

Swallow-tailed Kites have been described as the most beautiful bird of prey in North America. It has also been called, "the coolest bird on the planet." It has strikingly bold black and white plumage and a deeply forked tail, making identification much easier than is typical for most birds of prey. They are usually found soaring over open country hunting for flying insects to eat. They prefer to nest in the swamps and lowland forests of Florida and South Carolina—so why was this one in Michigan? Possibly strong storm activity in the south pushed it northward. Who knows, but here it was, probably the bird of the year, and I wanted to see it.

I fast-walked the mile back to my car, grabbed my binoculars and headed to Joyfield Rd. Carl called again to say he had seen the bird again a few miles west of his first sighting, near the Blaine Church, but then it flew off. Deciding the bird could now be anywhere, he declared he was heading home.

I decided to keep going. Maybe I could get lucky and find the thing again. I turned onto Joyfield and spent the next hour (cont. on pg 4)

### FROM THE ARCHIVES

Excerpt from the Club newsletter dated April 1979 reporting on a field trip to Arcadia Marsh that month written by Pam Jamieson Yarwood:

*April 21st found some 12 Audubon members gathering in the "misty moisty morning" at the Arcadia causeway to do a little birding. In about three hours time some 65 species were seen, including 7 kinds of woodpeckers, 18 duck species and 7 representatives of the sparrow family...*

*...The wind was a bit brisk off the Big Lake, so after seeing Caspian terns, mute swans, Canada geese, wood duck, ruddies, shovelers, and a Great Blue Heron, we moved around to the other side of the marsh. Led by Keith and Kelly Westphal, the caravan stopped suddenly several times, as anyone who has ever followed Keith while he is birding, will understand.*

*Freemans had seen upwards of a hundred snipe on their way to Arcadia, and we counted a few more during the morning...*

*...Stopping at Buckner's whom we have visited annually for this outing for quite a few years, we received his gracious permission to go behind his place along the old narrow-gauge railroad bed which juts out into the marsh from the East. Here the wind was calmer, and we saw kinglets, warblers, Sora rail, turtles, dogfish, pike and meadow vole, and heard the distinctive cry of the sandhill crane...*

**Editor's Note:** This passage caught my eye as it describes a field trip by BAC members to Arcadia Marsh nearly 50 years ago, before it was acquired and preserved by GTRLC.

## BENZIE AUDUBON CLUB

The BENZIE AUDUBON CLUB is a tax-exempt charitable organization and a chapter of the Michigan Audubon Society. All of our meetings and field trips are open to the public without charge. Meetings are usually held the first Tuesday of each odd month (January, March, etc.) at the Tribal Outpost at 7282 Hoadley Road in Benzonia. Field Trips are taken throughout the year.

Our major objectives are promoting an appreciation for a better understanding of the plants and animals of northern Michigan, preserving our natural environment, and preventing any activities that may pose a threat to our natural ecology.

## BEST BIRD OF THE YEAR — (cont fr pg 3)

or so, driving every road between M-22 and M-31, east-west and north-south, with no sign of anything that looked like a Kite. Finally, headed west again, I decided to return to the last place Carl reported seeing the bird—the Blaine Church—before heading for home. I approached the Joyfield Rd intersection from the south and as I stopped for a couple of cars to clear, looked up, and son of a biscuit, there was the Kite, almost directly overhead! I was seeing it from the side, but there was no mistaking that forked tail, even in profile. I watched it for a few seconds as it circled overhead, waiting for an unusual number of cars to clear, then took my eye off the bird to drive into the church parking lot. I hopped out of the car and scanned overhead, but the Kite was no longer there. Just that quickly, it had soared out of sight.

Another birder Carl had called pulled into the lot and we looked for it for another hour or so before giving up. We had both seen Swallow-tailed Kites in their natural habitat, but what a treat for me to see it in my own birding patch. My thanks to Carl for making the call.

# BENZIE Audubon Club

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Dedicated To  
Increasing Our Knowledge  
Of the Natural World