

OCTOBER 2022

THE MEADOWLARK

The Newsletter of the Benzie Audubon Club



President's Letter

The major objectives of the Benzie Audubon Club are to promote an appreciation for and a better understanding of the plants and animals of northern Michigan, to preserve our natural environment, and to help prevent any activities that may pose a threat to our natural ecology. Like most organizations, we have had to alter our method of operation while still striving to meet these objectives. Our field trips continue to be well attended and we have supported several projects in the county this year through our mini-grant program. We have been unable to meet for formal programs but are hopeful we can begin putting together a schedule in the near future beginning with our annual meeting.

I am happy to tell you that we plan to hold our annual meeting, in person, on Thursday, November 3rd at 7:00 pm at St Philips Episcopal Church - 785 Beulah Hwy, Beulah. We will not have a potluck meal as we have done in past years, but we will present our Members' Photo Show following a short business meeting with a goal to elect directors. Directors are elected for two year terms and half of the terms expire each year. The nominees for 2023- 2024 terms are: Doug Cook, President; Irene Marcussen, Secretary; Char Ester, Program Chair; Sally Cook, Publicity Chair; Wes Blizzard, Mini-grant Chair.

Jackie Jackson, who has served several terms as our secretary, has decided to step aside with the completion of her term this year. We are extremely grateful for Jackie's tenure memorializing the meandering actions of our board meetings the past few years. Thanks also to the rest of the group for being willing to serve another term.

I invite 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. 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.

Benzie Audubon has a long and active history and Sally and I appreciate the work its members do and the sense of community it fosters. If it is important to you as well, please renew your membership for next year using the enclosed envelope.

Finally, in these unsettling times of conflict and uncertainty, remember to go outside and let nature restore your peace of mind.

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

This issue:

Mini-grant Requests
PAGE 02

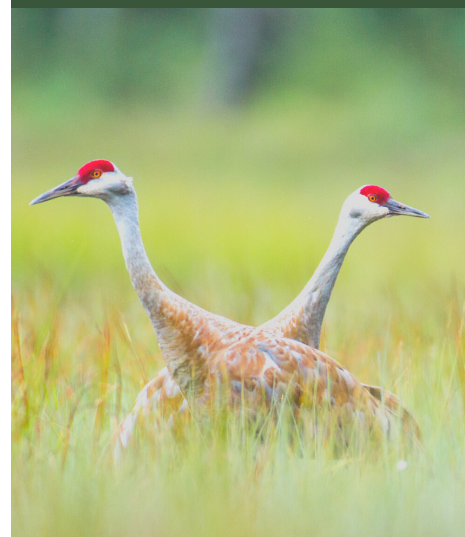
Christmas Bird Count
PAGE 02

Treasurer's Report
PAGE 02

Benzie Co. Bluebirds
PAGE 03

2022 by the Numbers
PAGE 03

Birding Hotspot Highlight
BACK PAGE





Mini-Grants

In February, the BAC Board approved two mini-grant requests.

The first grant was to the Michigan Legacy Art Park to be used for the purchase of binoculars to be available to park visitors during the park's bird watching programs.

The second grant was made to the Benzonia Public Library and was for the purchase of a daypack, binoculars, and field guide to be added to the library's "Library of Things" program and loaned out to library members for one week at a time.

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

Photo By Mary Lundeberg



2022 Christmas Bird Count - Save the Date!

BY EMILY COOK

Carl Freeman has been helping to organize the Benzie Christmas Bird Count (CBC) for decades. For the past many years, John Ester has joined Carl, and together they have made sure Benzie County was well represented for the annual event. This year, Carl has decided to step back from the organizational aspect of the CBC, and Doug Cook has volunteered to assist John with this year's effort.

**THIS YEAR THE DATE HAS BEEN SET FOR
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 16TH.**

They will be in contact with the individuals who have participated in the past but are always looking for more help. Anyone with an interest in participating, either in the field or at a feeder on that date, should send an email to Doug at nedthebirder@gmail.com or John at jester625@earthlink.net. They will provide details for participation and individuals can be placed in existing groups, if that's preferred.

Treasurer's Report

BY JOHN ESTER

Treasurer John Ester has provided the following financial report for the period of October 1, 2021—September 30, 2022

Starting Checking Balance	\$7,966.96
Receipts	\$2,498.50
Disbursements	<u>\$1,922.27</u>
Ending Checking Balance	\$8,543.19
Savings Balance	\$1,059.18
Certificates of Deposit Balance	<u>\$7,789.79</u>
Total Funds	\$17,392.16



Photo By Joe Brooks

Bluebird Trails in Benzie County

Greg Miller, longtime Membership Chairman for the Benzie Audubon Club, has what he calls a ‘crazy hobby’. In 1983, Greg established the Benzie County Bluebird Trail, which runs through the middle of the county, near Honor. A bluebird trail is a collection of nesting boxes located along a specified route, which are then closely monitored during the nesting season. Monitoring nesting boxes helps to produce a significantly higher number of fledged young than unmonitored boxes. Cleaning out the boxes after each nesting increases the chance of a second nesting by the bluebirds as well as allowing monitors to check for insect infestations, predation or to make repairs to the boxes.

Greg reports that 2022 has been a very good year for Bluebirds. Although the spring and summer were quite dry, an abundant wild food crop allowed Bluebirds to thrive. A total of 142 Bluebirds fledged from the boxes along Greg’s central Benzie County route this summer. In the 40 years Greg has been monitoring this trail, he has kept meticulous records. A recent post to his Facebook page summarizes the fruits of his labors over that time:

"I just wrapped up the 40th year on my Bluebird Trail here in Benzie County. The totals tell me that I have fledged 5,648 baby Bluebirds out of 1,380 successful nestings into their new world. Along with these, I also fledged 1,784 Tree Swallows and 349 Chickadees. Kind of a crazy hobby I guess but I also banded 7,974 Bluebirds as well. And. . . during this journey, it only took 18,576 box visits to make it happen."

In 2002, the Friends of the Betsie Valley Trail partnered with the Benzie Audubon Club to establish a second route next to the newly established Betsie Valley Trail adjacent to River Road east of Elberta. The nesting boxes on this route have been monitored by members of Benzie Audubon since that time. The past few years, Greg, with help from Terry Smith, have worked together to keep a close eye on these boxes. This year, 86 bluebirds fledged, and since 2002, approximately 1,600 bluebirds have fledged from the boxes along the Betsie Valley Trail.

Congratulations and many thanks to Greg for his work with Bluebirds in Benzie County. Thanks also to Terry Smith and all of the other Benzie Audubon members over the years who have pitched in to help ensure the continued success of Eastern Bluebirds in the area.



2022 By the Numbers for Benzie County

(Source: Ebird)

242

Species Observed

2,042

Checklists

1,274

Ebirders

53

Hotspots

Birding Hotspot Highlight

BY DOUG COOK

When I am asked to lead a group of birders, the first place I think of is the River Road access to the Betsie Valley Trail a few miles east of Frankfort. I like the spot for several reasons. The trail was formerly a raised railroad bed, which means observers are often looking at birds more or less on the level, or at the very least, not quite as much over their heads as at other sites. The paved trail provides an even walking surface and a less obstructed view for participants. It passes through a variety of habitats which provides for the possibility to see a wide diversity of birdlife. According to eBird, observers have listed seeing 156 species of birds there in recent years including 23 kinds of warblers, 11 sparrows, 7 thrushes, 6 woodpeckers and 5 vireo species. On a fresh, early spring morning, there are so many birds flitting about it might take us an hour to cover a quarter mile. In addition to its proximity to the Betsie River, the trail passes next to some low lying marshland, which adds a variety of water birds to the mix.

Besides birds, the trail provides an opportunity to spot other forms of wildlife. The ponds a hundred yards or so beyond the Lewis Bridge site are often full of painted turtles lined up by the dozens on logs in the water. There are usually a couple of large snappers around, too. Several snake species like to hang around the turtle ponds including Northern Water Snake, Garter Snake, and Eastern Milk Snake. There are Green Frogs, Ebony and River Jewelwing Damselflies, and several species of dragonflies. There are also obviously beavers at work in the area, although I have yet to see one.

This place is one of my favorites, but there are a couple cautions to note. This is a paved bicycle trail, and it is well loved and much used. Please be mindful of bicycle riders coming at a fast clip from both directions. It is best to always stand to one side and not block the trail when walking along or stopping to view birds. Don't get too far off the trail itself, however, because there is a healthy crop of poison ivy growing next to it along its full length.



Benzie Audubon Club

P.O. Box 804
Frankfort, MI 49635

PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE

Photo By Carl Freeman



Dedicated to increasing our
knowledge of the natural world!