

GRAND TRAVERSE
REGIONAL
LAND
CONSERVANCY

Field Guide



Birding Hot Spots



photo by: Joe Brooks



Love the land. *Pass it on.*

FEATURED PROPERTIES

- | | | | |
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| 1 Arcadia Dunes: Grassland | 4 Fruithaven Nature Preserve | 7 Railroad Point Natural Area | 10 Upper Herring Lake Nature Preserve |
| 2 Arcadia Dunes | 5 Maple Bay & Petobego | 8 St. Clair Lake - Six Mile Lake | |
| 3 Arcadia Marsh Nature Preserve | 6 Pyatt Lake Nature Preserve | 9 Timbers Recreation Area | |



Check out the American Birding Association's code of ethics for some things to keep in mind.

[CLICK HERE](#)

While there's no shortage of fun things to do on lands protected by GTRLC, spotting birds is one of the best ways to get in tune with what these special places mean to the wildlife that call them home. What follows is a list of preserves and natural areas protected by GTRLC that are known to have excellent birdwatching. Head over to www.gtrlc.org for trail maps and directions to all the places listed. Be sure to respect wildlife when you head out. Happy birding!



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ARCADIA DUNES: THE C.S. MOTT PRESERVE (GRASSLAND)

Location: Manistee County

Size: 400 acres

Habitats: Grassland

Focal Species: Grasshopper Sparrow, Northern Harrier, Eastern Meadowlark

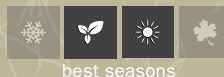


photo by: Angie Lucas

Northern Harrier



photo by: Joe Brooks

Less than one percent of the grasslands that once existed in the state remain. As such, the grassland portion of this beloved preserve is unique and critically important habitat for rapidly declining species of nesting grassland birds, including the Grasshopper Sparrow, listed by the state as a species of special concern. The grassland at Arcadia Dunes has the highest concentration of this species in the entire state!

GTRLC and partners have completed large-scale restoration efforts at this site, restoring native grasses and wildflowers while removing less desirable, non-native species. The result has been a vibrant and healthy habitat for dozens of species, including seven listed by the state. Many of these upland birds nest on the ground in June and July. To avoid injury to these nests, please avoid walking in the fields during these months.

This is also an excellent place to see predatory birds such as the Northern Harrier and endangered Short-Eared Owl, both of which hunt in the open fields.



This property is a stop on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.

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ARCADIA DUNES: THE C.S. MOTT PRESERVE (FOREST TRAILS)

Location: Benzie and Manistee Counties

Size: 3,600 acres

Habitats: Primarily mesic northern forest

Focal Species: Red-eyed Vireo, Ovenbird, American Redstart



photo by: Art Bukowski

American Redstart



photo by: Joe Brooks

The grassland isn't the only place to spot special birds within this expansive 3,600-acre preserve. More than 15 miles of trail criss-cross through a matrix of important natural habitats, including wetlands, open fields, forests and the spectacular and globally rare perched dune known as Old Baldy. This dune is part of a larger critical dune system that extends from Arcadia up through the Sleeping Bear National Lakeshore in Benzie and Manistee counties, and this system is a hotspot for forest birds that either live there full-time or stop along their travels to feast on insects.

Three species in particular – the Red-Eyed Vireo, Ovenbird and American Redstart – are quintessential Arcadia Dunes summer forest birds that can often be heard calling from the treetops. The Ovenbird call is a distinctive “teacher-teacher-teacher” call, while the Red-Eyed Vireo has a sing-song quality that sounds like a conversation: “here I am, how are you? The American Redstart (a distinctive black and orange warbler species) has a thin high pitched trill with an accented ending. Their brief but incessant songs—sometimes more than 20,000 per day by a single male—contribute to the characteristic sound of an eastern forest in summer.



This property is a stop on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.

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ARCADIA MARSH NATURE PRESERVE

Location: Manistee County

Size: 273 acres

Habitats: Great Lakes coastal marsh, sedge meadow

Focal Species: Various waterfowl and shorebirds, including rails



photo by: Angie Lucas

Virginia Rail

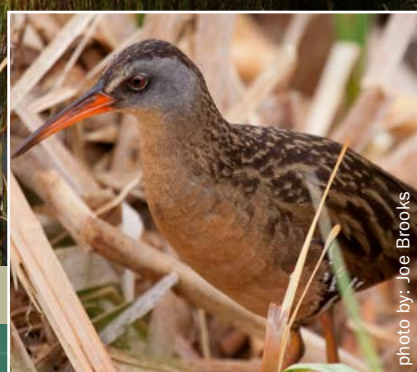


photo by: Joe Brooks

Few properties protected by GTRLC pack more of a birding punch than the Arcadia Marsh Nature Preserve. Audubon lists this Great Lakes coastal marsh (one of only a handful remaining on the entire Lake Michigan coast) as one of the top 10 birding sites in the state of Michigan. Many species of birds nest here, including the Trumpeter Swan, American Black Duck, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Wood Duck, Blue-Winged Teal, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Sandhill Crane, Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren and Swamp Sparrow. Dozens of other species can be seen passing through at various times of the year.

Of particular interest are the Virginia Rail and Sora, two secretive and specialized marsh birds that nest in the spring and summer months in the sedge meadows of the marsh. Rails have the highest ratio of leg muscles to flight muscles of any bird, which explains their propensity to walk rather than fly. Rarely seen but sometimes heard, listen for the Sora's distinctive whinny call from April through July.

A new universal access (UA) trail will be open in the summer of 2019, giving all visitors to this special place and excellent ability to soak in the views – and spot their feathered friends.



This property is a stop on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.

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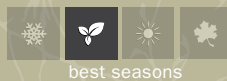
FRUITHAVEN NATURE PRESERVE

Location: Benzie County

Size: 176 acres

Habitats: Mesic northern forest, open field

Focal Species: Scarlet Tanager



Scarlet Tanager

The Fruithaven Nature Preserve, a 176-acre forested gem within the Upper Herring Lake watershed, is comprised of steep slopes interspersed with small seasonal wetlands called vernal pools. This mix of habitats provides valuable food sources for many interior forest birds.

The northern forest habitat at Fruithaven also provides ideal nesting habitat for the Scarlet Tanager, a brilliantly colored migratory bird that spends much of the year in the tropics. Scarlet tanagers fly north each year to build their nests and require significant unbroken areas of forest canopy with tall trees like the maple and beech common in this preserve. Because of habitat fragmentation, this species has declined in recent years in its range.

To find the bird during nesting season in the late spring, look up high in the tree canopy and listen for its distinctive “chick-burr” call. Additionally, both the male and female birds sing to each other in a robin-like song often described as a raspy-robin or a robin with a sore throat. Female and younger scarlet tanagers are olive-yellow while the males are iridescent in red plumage, like a cardinal but brighter. Catching a glimpse of this bird sparkling as it sings high up in the trees is a true life-time treat.

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MAPLE BAY FARM / NATURAL AREA & PETOBEGO STATE GAME AREA

Location: Grand Traverse County

Size: 502 acres

Habitats: Wooded dune and swale, northern hardwood forest,
Great Lakes coastal marsh, open field

Focal Species: Waterfowl and forest birds



Great Blue Heron

The Maple Bay Natural Area and surrounding protected lands, including the Petobego State Game Area, are comprised of a diverse mosaic of habitats that provide important nesting and foraging areas for a wide array of bird species. Maple Bay and Petobego together protect globally rare and critically imperiled habitats including a Great Lakes coastal marsh and a wooded dune and swale system.

This complex is an excellent place to see a variety of birds all year long. In winter months, Snowy Owls are often seen foraging in the fields for rodents, while in the summer Caspian Terns (state threatened) are commonly seen diving for fish off the shoreline of both Maple Bay and Petobego. As temperatures rise, Pine Warblers sing a fast repeated trill from the tops of red and white pines in the dune-swale habitat and are a fun species to listen to as they herald in the arrival of warmer weather.



This property is a stop on the Sunset Coast Birding Trail.

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PYATT LAKE: THE BILL CARLS NATURE PRESERVE

Location: Grand Traverse County

Size: 159 acres

Habitats: Wooded dune and swale

Focal Species: Barred Owl



Barred Owl



This Old Mission Peninsula Preserve – GTRLC’s first, protected in 1992 – contains a rare and unique habitat called a wooded dune and swale, left over from the retreat of glaciers thousands of years ago. It has swales (wet areas) that alternate with drier ridges. Because it has many trees in various life stages mixed with the rich tapestry of wetland habitats, Pyatt offers excellent bird habitat for foraging and nesting.

Pyatt is well-known for its gregarious population of Barred Owls. These owls are “home-bodies” and rarely migrate farther than a radius of 6 miles from their haunts. They are known for their distinctive call that’s reminiscent of someone saying “who-cooks-for-you-all.” You can generally count on them being around to hear or spot in the evening hours, unless a Great Horned Owl (a predator of Barred Owls) has shown up and temporarily scared them off.

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Location: Benzie County**Size:** 207 acres**Habitats:** Mesic northern forest**Focal Species:** Warblers

best seasons

*Black and White Warbler*

Although a wide variety of birds can be spotted hanging out at this popular natural area along Crystal Lake, seasoned birders know it to be an excellent place to see various warblers, including the Black and White Warbler, American Redstart, Yellow-Rumped Warbler, Black-Throated Green warbler, and Ovenbird.

Black and White Warblers in particular are often seen foraging along the ridges within this natural area and are much less shy than other species. Their squeaky-wheel call is distinctive. While you're here, be sure to check out the magnificent view of Crystal Lake from the top of the Mary Margaret Johnson Trail.

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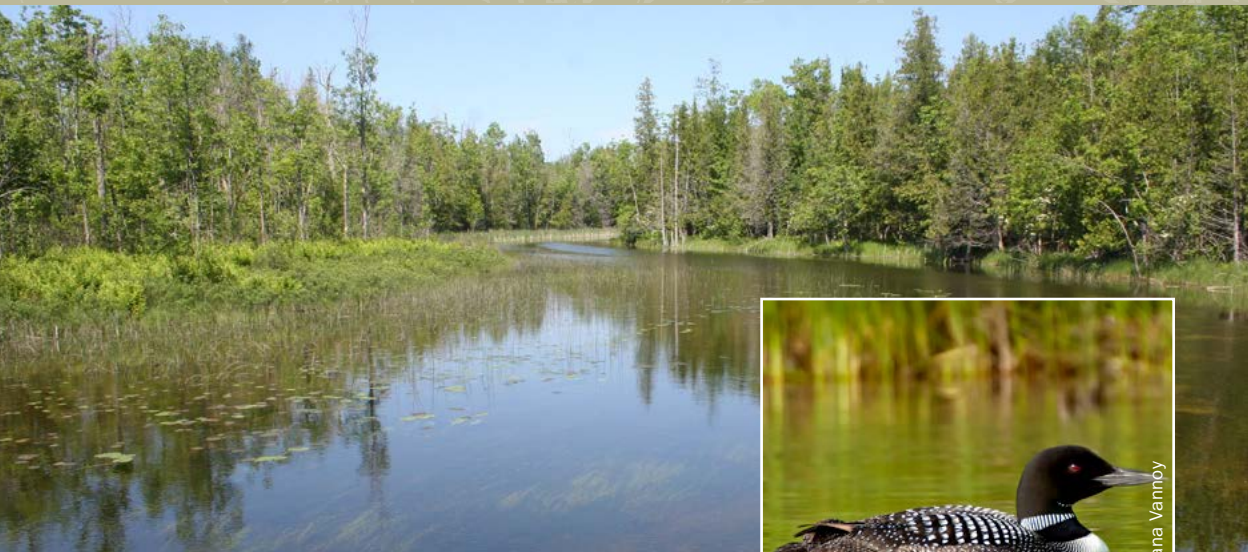
ST. CLAIR LAKE - SIX MILE LAKE NATURE PRESERVE

Location: Antrim and Charlevoix Counties

Size: 255 acres

Habitats: Riparian (river), hardwood wetlands

Focal Species: Common Loon



Common Loon



photo by: Dana Vannoy

Aquatic and avian life is especially diverse near what GTRLC Executive Director Glen Chown is fond of calling “The Amazon of the North.” Birding has long been a popular activity here, and common species along the river include Belted Kingfisher, Green Heron, Gray Catbird and Yellow Warbler. Flocks of Cedar Waxwings and Yellow-Rumped Warblers also take refuge and forage in the swamp during migration.

This preserve is also important habitat for Common Loon, a species unfortunately not as common as it once was throughout the state due to a variety of factors, including habitat loss. It is now listed as threatened species in the state of Michigan. This large and striking bird can often be seen at this preserve and two other GTRLC-protected areas on the north arm of Lake Bellaire: the Golden-Days Loon Preserve and nearby Loon Nursery.



This property is a stop on the Sunset Coast Birding Trail.

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9 TIMBERS RECREATION AREA

Location: Grand Traverse County

Size: 250 acres

Habitats: Northern hardwood forest, wetland,
open field and lake/shoreline

Focal Species: Raptors



photo by: Nate Richardson

Osprey

photo by: Joe Brooks

From a habitat standpoint, Timbers is one of the most varied properties protected by GTRLC. It includes quality hardwood forest, rolling open fields, nearly 2,000 feet of frontage on Long Lake and the entirety of 22-acre Fern Lake.

While many species of birds can consequently be seen enjoying these varied habitats, this is a particularly good spot to see raptors (birds of prey). At least 12 species have been officially documented here, including several species of owls and more uncommon species like Osprey, Northern Harrier, Red-Shouldered Hawk and Merlin.

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UPPER HERRING LAKE NATURE PRESERVE

Location: Benzie County

Size: 180 acres

Habitats: Wet meadow, northern shrub swamp, young forest

Focal Species: Sandhill Crane



best seasons



photo by: Dana Vannoy

Gray Catbird



photo by: Joe Brooks

The shrubby tag-alder and dogwood wetland habitats of the Upper Herring Lake Nature Preserve are excellent nesting habitat for many unique bird species, including the somewhat elusive Gray Catbird. Although muted in color and not often seen, these beautiful slate gray birds have a distinctive cat-like meowing call, which is a good indicator that one could be nearby. This mostly gray bird has a small black cap on its head and is somewhat smaller than a robin, with striking bright black eyes.

Gray Catbirds are migratory song birds that arrive in May from as far south as the northern coast of South America, where they overwinter in tropical forest habitats. When they arrive back north, the males begin establishing nesting territory, where they showcase their astonishing repertoire of songs to prospective mates. As a relative of mockingbirds and thrashers, Gray Catbirds are notable for their amazing mimicry skills, and can sing for up to 10 minutes at a time. If you see or hear one on your walk, it's special treat!



This property is a stop on the Sleeping Bear Birding Trail.

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*Protecting significant natural, scenic and farm lands, and advancing stewardship —
now and for future generations.*

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cover photo by: Joe Brooks