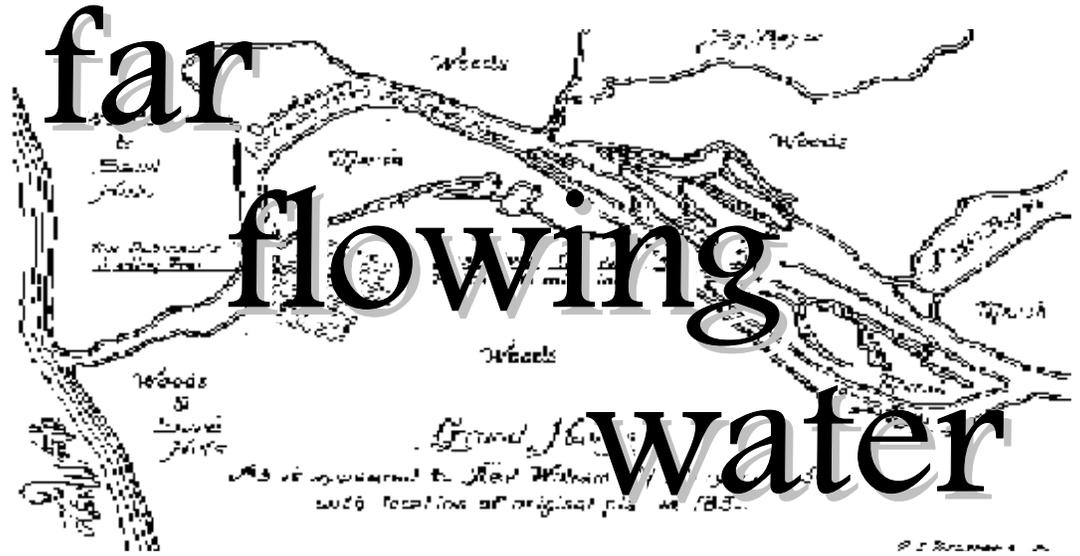


Grand Haven, Michigan



February 17

6:15 P.M.

RAILS AT DIFFERENT SCALES: ECOLOGICAL AND EVOLUTIONARY DRIVERS OF VOCAL BEHAVIOR IN RALLIDAE

Presented by **Daniel Goldberg**, GVSU Biology Dept.

Secretive marsh birds like rails are difficult to study visually because many species vocalize from within dense vegetation at times that are difficult to survey. Furthermore, behavioral information is lacking for many species, which poses challenges for rail conservation. Over the course of my doctoral research, I have discovered that Soras do not decrease their vocalization rates following predator calls, and furthermore, that Soras migrating at night during the spring show high site fidelity in choosing stopover locations, but are not more attracted by either Sora calls or habitat cues. Finally, my comparative analysis of the family Rallidae has revealed that about 60% of rail species duet — one of the highest rates of any group of birds — and that this duetting is associated with year-round territory defense by mated pairs, in species that primarily occur in densely to highly vegetated habitats.

My research interests span both animal communication and comparative studies of behavioral ecology and the evolution of elaborate signals, which I pursued during my Bachelor's and Master's degrees at the University of California Riverside, and during my Ph.D. at Illinois State University. I have published research articles on dorsal fin-based courtship displays in freshwater livebearer fishes, parental carrying of offspring on their backs in waterbirds, and vocal behavior and duetting in rails.

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President's Corner – February 2026

Lonny Garris

Winter

Winter birding carries a quiet charm that feels almost secret—an invitation to step into a world softened by snow, slowed by cold, and brightened by the birds that remain when most other signs of life lie hidden. Part of the pleasure comes even before stepping outside: pulling on warm layers, wrapping a scarf close, and tugging on insulated boots. There's something grounding about this small ritual, as if preparing your body for the cold also prepares your mind for the calm.

Out on the trail, the landscape feels newly simplified. With leaves gone and sounds muted, each movement becomes easier to notice—a cardinal's red flash against white snow, a nuthatch spiraling down a trunk, the delicate tracks of a junco marking fresh powder. Bundled in your coat and gloves, you stand still, your breath puffing into the cold air, and suddenly the winter world seems to open up.

Winter also brings special guests seldom seen during warmer months: northern finches, snow buntings, and occasionally a snowy owl gliding across a frozen field. Spotting one feels like a reward not just for being observant, but for braving the elements at all.

Yet the greatest joy may simply be the peacefulness. Your warm layers create a cocoon of comfort, letting you linger longer in the silence. It's in these moments—boots crunching softly, fingers curled around binoculars, wool hat pulled low—that winter birding becomes more than a hobby. It becomes a reminder that beauty still thrives in the coldest seasons, waiting for anyone willing to step outside and look.

Lonny Garris, Board Member, OIAS

February is National Bird Feeding Month

In 1994, Congressman John Porter established February as National Bird Feeding Month due to the harsh conditions endured during one of the coldest months of the year.

During National Bird Feeding Month in February, keep the bird feeders filled and your binoculars ready. The month is also an opportunity to learn more about birds and birding as a hobby.

<https://www.nationaldaycalendar.com/february/national-bird-feeding-month-february>



Global Bird Count - February 13 – 16, 2026



Check Page 4 of the January Far Flowing Water for additional information.



Programs

March 17	Chimney Swift Conservation in Michigan Chad Machinski, Michigan Audubon Society
April 21	Annual OIAS Business Meeting, Election, Bird Swap, Image Sharing and Dessert Potluck

2025-2026 MCNC/OIAS Field Trips

Beth Miller

All field trips are from 8:00 AM to 12:00 noon
--

Feb. 21, '26 — Pere Marquette Park & Muskegon Channel
Mar. 21, '26 — Dune Harbor Park
Apr. 18, '26 — Muskegon Lake Nature Preserve
May 16, '26 — MUSKEGON Big Day Count
June 20, '26 — Black Lake Park
July 18, '26 — Lost Lake Trail & Muskegon State Park
Aug. 15, '26 — Muskegon County Resource Recovery Center (WW)

Announcing Vote on Bylaws

Karl Sineath

Proposal:

The board proposes amending the bylaws so that our final meeting of the season is in April instead of May. We will have a voice vote on this proposal at our February 17, 2026 meeting held at Loutit Library. Social time is from 6:00 - 6:15. The vote will take place after we start the meeting at 6:15.

Current Bylaws with Proposed Changes in Square Brackets:

The May [April] meeting shall be known as the Annual Meeting, at which time elections shall be held...

Regular meetings of the Society shall be held once a month, except during the months of December, [May,], June, July and August.

Process for Amending our Bylaws:

These Bylaws may be adopted, amended, repealed or replaced at any meeting of the Society by a two-thirds vote of those members present, provided a verbatim notice of the proposed change is given to the Society members at least ten (10) days prior to such meeting.

Information about the Change:

- The society and the board are full of people who love birds, and we want to be out birding in May during migration.
- The April meeting will become the Annual Meeting.
 - We plan to keep the “bird swap,” where we exchange bird-related items during the annual meeting.
 - We plan to add a mini program, which will allow for one program a year that has a shorter format (such as bird trivia or updating the membership on the work of the club).
 - We will also continue to do any necessary club business during the annual meeting.

National Bird Day was January 5

This special day was created by the Avian Welfare Coalition in 2002 to raise public awareness of the plights, hardships and needs of birds of birds. This date coincides with the end of the annual Christmas Bird Count.

Birds are barometers of the planet's environmental health. Most birds are under threat due to disease, habitat loss, and illegal pet trade causing them to be endangered or protected. They are also an important species in the ecosystems, signifiers of its health and vitality.

Judi Manning

Reference: <https://nationaltoday.com/national-bird-day/>

Birds By the Numbers

- 11,017 species according to the Clements Checklist.
- Smallest bird on Earth – 2 ¼ inches – Bee Hummingbird
- Ostrich can run up to 43 mph
- Ducks typically keep one eye open when they sleep. This behavior is called unihemispheric slow-wave sleep, where one half of their brain sleeps while the other half remains awake, alert and active.
- Downy woodpeckers absorb loads of head trauma from hammering, so scientists have been studying their brains to learn more about degenerative diseases such as chronic traumatic encephalopathy and Alzheimer's.
- Pied-billed grebes switch to submarine mode by compressing their feathers to decrease their buoyancy and sink below the water's surface when enemies approach.
- Calliope hummingbirds weigh 1/10 of an ounce and are the lightest birds in the United States and among the most fearless.

Above information was taken from various web pages.

Some interesting facts about Birds

- None of the bird species have teeth, how do they chew?
- There are 11,017 species according to the Clements Checklist.
- Birds can communicate effectively by chirping and singing and to attract a mate.
- The largest eyes of any land mammal are found in ostriches.
- Only warm-blooded vertebrate animals with feathers include birds.
- A female bird can lay eggs whether or not she has a mate.
- Being in a flock allows birds to look in multiple directions, which aids in maintaining alertness.
- Parrots, for example, can mimic human speech.

Reference: <https://www.jagranjosh.com/general-knowledge/why-do-we-celebrate-national-birds-day-1672898061-1>

Impact of Road (Rock) Salt

Judi Manning

Road salting and brining consisting of sodium chloride and other similar chemicals have a significant negative environmental impact as well as on birds, plants, waterways, and other wildlife. Salty runoff flows into streams, ponds, lakes, wetlands, the Great Lakes, and seeps through the soil into the ground water. Salt accumulates in the environment threatening fresh-water ecosystems and human health and there is no way to remove it. The level of sodium and chloride in lakes is 25 times higher than 50 years ago.

In 1938, New Hampshire was the first U.S. state to use salt to deice roads. In 1940 Detroit was the first city in Michigan to apply salt to roads. Since the 1970s, the amount of road salt per mile has been dramatically increasing. Michigan is now using over 2 million metric tons each winter resulting in a massive increase of chloride in the environment.



This salty runoff:

CONTAMINATES:

- ◇ Water systems, wetlands, marshes, rivers, lakes adversely affecting fish, amphibians, invertebrates, and aquatic plants.
- ◇ Causes stress, stunted development and high mortality to macroinvertebrates and zooplankton living in the water.
- ◇ Amphibians absorb salt through the skin.
- ◇ Unprotected egg surfaces of the Wood Frog are penetrated by dissolved salt causing a significant decline in the size of the adult affecting their survivability.
- ◇ Rainbow trout hatchlings size is reduced by 30% due to excessive salt.
- ◇ If a drinking well is near a road or sidewalk, it could have an increase in salinity.
- ◇ A US Geological Survey in 2014 found 84% of urban streams studied had rising chloride levels, and 29% exceeded federal safety guidelines for part of the year.
- ◇ If the level of sodium in lakes, it results in oxygen depletion and fish kills.

CAUSES DAMAGE TO VEGETATION AND SOIL:

- ◇ Gets absorbed into roadside plants reducing their life and growth as they become weakened and stressed by salt.
- ◇ Erodes soil texture, causes decreased aeration and water infiltration of soils.
- ◇ Can help invasive and toxic species spread.
- ◇ Altered plants could affect the development of butterflies that feed on them. One study showed roadside milkweed had up to 30 times more sodium either absorbed inside or stuck to the outside of the plants.

POISONS BIRDS:

- ◇ Gulls, waterfowl and animals that eat grit can have many health problems including dehydration, kidney damage and death.
- ◇ Birds looking for grit ingest salt particles. One particle of salt can be deadly to the bird.

DISRUPTION TO FOOD CHAIN:

- ◇ Dead birds eaten by animals disrupt the entire food chain and ecosystem affecting everything from predators to plant life.
- ◇ Animals eating salt off the roads are killed by vehicles.

Liquid salt brine results in 70% less salt being used. Another way is to use abrasive salt or liquid. It was determined that road salt contaminated Flint's municipal water supply with elevated chloride levels, leading to high levels of lead from corroded lead pipes through the city's plumbing system. It is recommended using 12 ounces of salt for a 20 foot driveway and sweep up any leftover salt.

There is a lot of specific information in the references about how different animals and ecosystems are adversely affected by road salt.

References: *The Impacts of Road Salt on Birds and Other Wildlife*, Jennifer Latzgo, Pennsylvania Master Watershed Steward and Member of Little Lehigh Watershed Stewards, 12/16/04, <https://www.lvaudubon.org/newspage/2023/10/the-impacts-of-road-salt-on-birds-and-other-wildlife>, *Road salt use*, <https://infogram.com/road-salt-use-by-state-1h8n6m1971nm6xo>, *The Hidden Dangers of Road Salt*, Joshua Rapp Learn, 5/26/17, *The Smithsonian Magazine*, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/road-salt-can-disrupt-ecosystems-and-endanger-humans-180963393/>, *Effects of Road Salt in Michigan*, Brianna Lee, 2/11/21, <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d459b1501ada4c01a2530e217de4a62b>, *How Road Salt Harms the Environment*, Jeremy Hinsdale, 12/11/18, <https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2018/12/11/road-salt-harms-environment/>

Birds and Salted Peanuts

Judi Manning

Safe peanuts provide protein, healthy fats and essential nutrients for many bird species and are a great source of food. Peanuts should be whole (without the outer shell), halves or chopped in small pieces for ease of eating. Peanuts in the shell are difficult for them to open.

Unsafe peanuts:

- Salted peanuts. Birds are sensitive to salt and even a small amount will harm them.
- Dry roasted peanuts are very difficult for birds to digest. Birds have a hard time removing salt from their body.

Safe peanuts:

- Unsalted, unflavored, uncoated, raw or roasted peanuts that are fresh and not spoiled or moldy.

Different species of birds vary in their intolerance to salt. Finches, chickadees, nuthatches, and sparrows are low-salt diet birds. Birds living near oceans and eating marine foods have a higher tolerance for salt. They have glands to handle the salty foods. You should not feed them salted peanuts either because it is hard to control the portion size and may cause a salt overdose.

Washing or soaking salted peanuts does not completely remove the sodium content. Salt can penetrate the peanut during processing.

High salt in a bird's diet causes:

- ⊗ Dehydration
- ⊗ Kidney Damage
- ⊗ Electrolyte Imbalance that affects nerve and muscle function
- ⊗ Reduced Reproductive Success
- ⊗ Impaired Feather Health
- ⊗ Digestive Problems
- ⊗ Weakened Immune System
- ⊗ Behavioral Changes by becoming lethargic or showing signs of discomfort.
- ⊗ Reduced Lifespan due to chronic health issues making them more vulnerable to predation.
- ⊗ Might cause migration disruptions.

References: *Can Birds Eat Salted Peanuts? What You Need To Know*, Liam Jones, 12/31/25, <https://www.bugbog.com/can-birds-eat-salted-peanuts/>, *Can I Wash Salted Peanuts for Birds?* 9/22/25, <https://naturewithbirds.com/can-i-wash-salted-peanuts-for-birds/>

SNOW POLICY:

The Board will decide and notify members via email, the website and Facebook.

Far Flowing Water is published eight times per year.
If you would like to contribute a complete article for the
next issue, please have your article to me by **March 1st.**

FAR FLOWING WATER

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Please contact Editor at oiias@oiias.org for other arrangements.

Bee Hummingbird

Mellisuga helenae

Judi Manning

The Bee Hummingbird is the smallest warm-blooded animal that has legs thinner than a toothpick, is 2-2.5 inches long and weighs only 0.05-0.07 ounces. The wingspan is 2-2.5 inches and is smaller than many flying insects.

This is a Cuban endemic and listed as Near Threatened because of its small population and disjunct populations. With only nine provinces and seventeen protected areas, it makes surveys challenging. Males are polygamous and it is unknown how many females he mates with. Each sex defends independent territories and partakes in local post breeding migrations.



They eat nectar, insects, and arachnids and their seasonal movement follows flowering plants. They can fly up to 30 mph and may spend 20 hours a day in flight looking for nectar visiting up to 1,500 flowers each day. They are fussy about the nectar they eat. Nectar flowers must contain higher concentrations of sugars. They show a preference for one species of the *Solandra grandiflora* flower, an endemic flower to Cuba.

<https://ebird.org/species/beeHum1>

Wings beating in flight 80 times a second can be mistaken for a large bee if they buzz by. Areas around the eyes and legs allow the excessive heat to escape built up from hovering. In flight, they breathe over 250 times per minute.

Hummingbirds originated in Eurasia from a line of swifts about 42 million years ago. Modern day taxa indicate the Bee Hummingbird emerged from adaptive radiation that originated in the lowlands of South America 20-25 million years ago.

They are aggressive and will chase bumblebees and other Bee Hummingbirds away.

Predators: Hawks, birds of prey, frogs, reptiles, rats, and fish.

References: <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/beeHum1/cur/introduction>, <https://birdsoftheworld.org/bow/species/beeHum1/cur/systematics>, Bee Hummingbird Facts, <https://factanimal.com/bee-hummingbird/>



April 19, 2013
Refugio de Fauna Bermeja, Cuba

Burmese Python -- Florida

Judi Manning

Burmese pythons are native to Southeast Asia first showed up in Florida's exotic pet trade in the 1970's and gained a foothold by the mid-1980's. They either escaped or were released into the wild in Florida.

A female python can lay between 50 and 100 eggs at a time with a 60-90 day gestation period. So they quickly proliferated. The USGS puts the invasive Burmese python population in the Everglades as high as 300,000 snakes. The large number of pythons caused a decline in half a dozen native species in the Everglades ecosystem. They can open their jaws to 10.2 inches in diameter and scientists observed one swallowing a 77-pound white-tailed deer, nearly 70 percent of the snake's mass.

With few natural predators in B. pythons were responsible for 77% of the marsh rabbit deaths in 2015.

Experts say it will be almost impossible to fully eradicate them, but they are trying many things to make a dent in their population. They have migrated as far north as Georgia with the warming temperatures.

Snake hunters from the Irula tribe in India were brought in to hunt the pythons and teach others. Infrared cameras, specially designed traps, tracking them by DNA shed in the water, and trackers on male snakes to lead them to females, have been used to remove them. Bounty hunters removed nearly 16,000 snakes since 2019.

In 2012 rabbits released into the Everglades did not fare well. Live rabbits in pens attract one python per week. This attempt required too much manpower as pens were spread across the landscape.



The University of Florida is testing if a stuffed mechanical rabbit with a heater that mimics a rabbit's body temperature will attract invasive Burmese pythons. Read the full story. [UF researchers deploy robotic rabbits across South Florida to foil Burmese python invasion](#)
Provided By Robert McCleery, University Of Florida

Researchers at the Univ. of Florida created and "released" the newest technique: 40 fake, furry toy robo-rabbits. Stuffing was removed from a toy rabbit and replaced by a heater and 30 solar-powered electronic components, allowing the robo-rabbit to move randomly to mimic the movements and body temperature of the marsh rabbit. Each rabbit costs about \$4,000 that was financed by the water district.

They are also equipped with cameras that notify District officials when a snake is detected who dispatch a python removal agent to the area. The robo-rabbits were placed in different areas in July 2025. The hardest part was waterproofing them, and next researchers will add bunny scent to help fool the snakes. They hope to entice them from their hiding places instead of researchers spending time searching through the swamp looking for them.

Each year there is a 10-day challenge to remove B. pythons from Florida's state land. Last year, 195 Burmese pythons were removed. This year 934 hunters from Canada and 33 from U.S. states captured 294 pythons. A participant that bagged 60 pythons and received \$10,000.

References: *Meet the robo-bunny: This tiny, furry robot is taking on invasive pythons in Florida* Burmese pythons have terrorized the Florida Everglades for years. Scientists are hoping robotic bunnies will end the reptile's reign over the region, Kimberly Miller & Karissa Waddick 7/16/25, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2025/07/16/robot-bunnies-florida-everglade-pythons/8524600007/>, *Robo-Bunnies' Are the Newest Weapon in the Fight Against Invasive Burmese Pythons in Florida*, Sarah Kuta, 7/21/25. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/robo-bunnies-are-the-newest-weapon-in-the-fight-against-invasive-burmese-pythons-in-florida-180987018/>, *DYK: Using Robotic Rabbits to Remove Invasive Pythons, South Florida Water Management District*, 7/22/25, <https://www.sfwmd.gov/news-events/news/dyk-using-robotic-rabbits-remove-invasive-pythons>, *Robot rabbits in Florida battle to control invasive Burmese pythons in Everglades*, Curt Anderson and Cody Jackson, Associated Press, 8/28/25, <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/robot-rabbits-latest-tool-florida-battle-control-invasive-125048998>



The City of Grand Haven

19h · 🌐

The City of Grand Haven is proud to announce its official support of the "Bird City Michigan" initiative.

Birds are an important and valued part of our community. From year-round residents to migratory species passing through along the Lake Michigan shoreline, birds contribute to the natural beauty, ecological health, and economic vitality of our region. They help control insect populations, support pollination and seed dispersal, and attract visitors who enjoy wildlife and outdoor recreation.

Across North America, migratory birds are facing increasing challenges due to habitat loss and environmental threats. By supporting Bird City Michigan, Grand Haven joins communities working to protect bird habitats, promote conservation awareness, and encourage residents to take action to support healthy bird populations.

Bird City also connects our community to World Migratory Bird Day, a global celebration that highlights the journeys of nearly 350 bird species and inspires education, conservation, and community engagement.

Grand Haven City Council formally adopted this resolution on February 2, 2026, affirming the City's commitment to protecting birds and strengthening the natural ecosystems that benefit both wildlife and residents.

Congratulations Bruce Ostrow.

Bruce has spent a lot of time working on this project.

February 4, 2026 Facebook

2025-2026 OIAS Membership Application/Renewal Date _____



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Mission Statement Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society

a 501(c)(3) Nonprofit Corporation

- Provide stewardship of local Grand River island wildlife sanctuaries owned by the Michigan Audubon Society;
- Achieve through education, public recognition of the value and need for protecting and preserving wildlife, plants, soil, water and other natural resources as well as an understanding of their interdependence;
- Promote an interest in our native birds and as well as native flora and fauna, and their habitats because of their great economic, cultural and recreational value; and
- Aid the Michigan Audubon Society in its study, conservation and research efforts.



Current amount of rock salt used

Owashtanong Islands Audubon Society
 Judi Manning, Editor
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