



It's a Bird...It's a Plane... It's a Ruby-throated Hummingbird!

by

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As I sit outside near the bike path, an unrelenting hum pulls my eyes away from my summer reading. Turning and tilting my head, I see a glinting flash of red dart past me at unimaginable speeds. I put down my book and gawk at the fury-winged pollinator hovering above me, grateful that it is not a grown man in spandex.



Aside from the rare vagrant, the ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) is the only hummingbird species in Michigan. Both the females and males are marked by emerald-colored backs and grayish-white bellies, and the males are adorned with unmistakable shimmering red throats. During migration, they travel an astonishing twenty-three miles per day. These mighty fliers are even capable of a direct flight across the Gulf of Mexico (500 miles!) which they complete annually. Take that, Superman!

How do these little birds sustain themselves on a journey like that? They know how to bulk up! Before they venture across the gulf, ruby-throated hummingbirds eat enough to nearly double in

size. Their diet consists of small insects such as gnats, spiders, and a great deal of nectar. Akin to a six-year-old child, or teenage boy, or me, they have to feed every ten to twenty minutes when not migrating. This is because of their rapid metabolisms and the fact that they sustain themselves, as I do, primarily on sugar.

To find their sugar fix, hummingbirds, lacking a strong sense of smell, rely heavily on their formidable color vision. Have you ever wondered why so many of their feeders are red? When feeding on wildflowers, ruby-throated hummingbirds are keen to visit those that are red, orange, and yellow, so our artificial feeders are designed to match their natural preferences.

In fact, our flitting friends are among the primary pollinators of the brilliantly red wild columbine and other tubular-shaped wildflowers such as Canada lilies. Because of the reach of their forked tongues, which are twice the length of their narrow beaks, hummingbirds and long-tongued bumblebees make up the vast majority of tubular wildflower pollinators. Their pollinating role renders these dainty birds an essential part of the ecosystem.



The success of hummingbirds in pollinating these wildflowers can be attributed to the flowers' tubular shape, which forces the bird to hover just beneath the blooms while drinking the nectar. The hummingbird's head then rubs against the anthers of the flowers and accumulates pollen, which will be deposited on the stigmas of subsequently visited flowers.



Continuing our human-hummingbird parallels, we turn our attention to the roles of the sexes in the species. After courtship and mating, the male ruby-throated hummingbird spends its summer preening, sunbathing, sleeping, feeding, and aggressively deterring all other hummingbirds from visiting its feeder of choice. It is not until the end of August, when males have begun to migrate south, that females and juveniles finally have the opportunity to access our hummingbird feeders without interference from the territorial males. Meanwhile, while the males are chilling after a taxing courtship period, the females are busy locating a nest site, building a nest, laying and incubating their eggs for two weeks, brooding their chicks for nine days, and feeding those chicks for approximately four weeks. Phew, I'm exhausted just writing that out; I certainly know which role I would prefer!

If you wish to hear the unmistakably gentle and rapid drumming of a ruby-throated hummingbird's wings outside your window, hang a brightly colored feeder (red is best), fill it with

nectar (one part sugar with four parts water), and those hungry, avian ballerinas will swiftly make your acquaintance. Be sure to empty and clean your feeder at least once weekly to ensure the health of these unique pollinators. Happy birding!

Photo of Gulf of Mexico by NOAA

IT FEELS LIKE THANKSGIVING



CAME EARLY TO GRNA

We are always thankful for the financial gifts we receive at GRNA, but this month our cornucopia of thanks is overflowing.



Spring appeal donations continue to arrive, which help us meet our budgetary needs, such as the summer camps that connect young people (like these pictured) to nature and its magic. Every gift makes continued programming possible, helps to purchase items we need like the nets pictured here, and pays our staff who conduct these programs and maintain our trails.

In May each year (with the exception of 2020), the Dockside on Torch Lake hosts a fundraiser for GRNA on the first Tuesday of the month. It was a cold and rainy day, so no one was venturing onto the deck, which meant our crowd was smaller than usual; but Brandon from the Dockside still recently presented Jenn with a check for \$1,400 for Grass River. We cannot thank Ruben and Brandon and all the staff at the Dockside enough for hosting this event every year. It is one of our first chances to see many of our friends who travel south and west for the winter, which makes it an even more special night.



**GREAT LAKES
ENERGY**

In May, we were nominated to be considered for a Great Lakes Grant Giveaway of \$7,000, along with many other

nonprofits served by GLE in the North, Central, and South regions of the lower peninsula. Subsequently, we became a finalist to receive one of the three awards, and thanks to the GLE customers who voted for us online, we received the grant for the North region. This is an unexpected grant that will help us further our mission. We congratulate the Lakeshore Food Club and the Bass Lakes Area Environmental Partnership who received the other two awards. And we express our profound gratitude to Great Lakes Energy and CoBank, one of their lenders, for the opportunity.

The Worthington Family Foundation notified us in early July that they are funding a grant we wrote for educational programming and protecting the environment. We received \$9,000 that will help pay for new technology, hire summer interns for camp, and possibly aid in the removal of invasive species. Though our request was not fully funded, we are grateful we will be able to accomplish many of the things that will improve the GRNA experience.



In December of 2021, Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and The Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund board recommended to the Michigan legislature approval of a \$300,000 grant to Antrim County to support the reconstruction of the GRNA boardwalk from the cabin to the dock. This recommendation had to be approved by both Michigan Congressional Appropriations Committees before we could move forward. That came with the 2021-2022 budget approval on July 1, and Governor Whitmer signed the final legislation into law on Monday, July 18th. We can now get updated bids for the project and subsequently hire contractors to complete the work. It is likely our timelines will be moved back by a few months, but we are thankful to begin moving forward with this important project.

No turkey, no trimmings, no pumpkin pies; but lots of thanks to give from Grass River Natural Area to all those who help us fulfill our mission!



PROGRAMS ON THE HORIZON

Weekly through the summer



Blooms & Birds: Wildflower Walk

Every Tuesday this summer

10:00 am - 12:00 pm

Donations appreciated. No pre-registration is necessary.

Go for a relaxing stroll on the trails with GRNA docents Julie Hurd and Phil Jarvi each week to find and identify the beautiful and unique wildflowers at Grass River. Along the way, we will listen and look for the birds that call Grass River home.



Naturalist on the Trail

Every Friday this summer

10:30 am – 1:30 pm

Every Friday this summer a naturalist will be stationed outdoors on our trail system, offering a new mobile mini-program each week. Stop into the Center to find out where the naturalist is that day, or go find them on the trail! You can drop in any time during the 3-hour window of the program. For all ages! Donations welcome.

Programs Through the End of July and Beginning of August



Painting with Pastels

Thursday, July 28

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

\$10 per person, please preregister

Join others at Grass River Natural Area as Catherine Connolly, pastel artist, presents and works with you to create landscape paintings using the gentle medium of pastels. Photos will be available for inspiration. Materials supplied. [Preregister here.](#)



Elk Rapids Slow Roll with Norte

Thursday, July 28

6:00pm

Free

Join Grass River and Norte for a slow-roll bike ride in Elk Rapids. We ride slow, chit-chat, ding our bells, wave, and smile a lot at a slow roll. All abilities and levels of biking experience are welcome. We ride to celebrate neighbors, community, bicycles, and staying healthy. Grass River Natural Area is the special guest on the 28th, so come join your GRNA friends for a fun evening!



Kayak Grass River

Wednesday, August 10

9:30 am – 12:00 pm

\$45 per person - includes tour, kayak, PFD, and paddle for each participant

There is no better way to experience Grass River than by paddling its calm waters and enjoying its unique wildlife! On these morning guided tours, visitors explore Grass River by kayak and find out about GRNA's conservation efforts, wetland plants, and wildlife. **Adults Only. Limited to small groups, must preregister.** Call GRNA to register: 231-492-8793, or email james@grassriver.org. This program meets at the Grass River Center and then walks to the dock to launch kayaks. Kayaks and paddles are provided and ready for you at the dock.



Zentangle

Thursday, August 11

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

\$10 per person

Learn the meditative art of Zentangle at Grass River Natural Area. Created either in black-and-white or brilliant colors, this art form uses your imagination to create stunning patterns within natural shapes. All materials supplied. [Preregister here.](#)



Dyeing with Fungi and Lichens

Thursday, August 25

1:00 - 3:00 pm

\$10 per person

Join Julie Hurd, Grass River Natural Area's wildflower guide, as she weaves the story of fiber dyes created from fungi and lichens. Both these natural sources have long been used to provide a rich range of unique and glowing hues. Attend this presentation for an introduction to the history and techniques used to extract the colors of the fields and forest. [Preregister here.](#)

GRASS RIVER CENTER HOURS

10:00 am - 4:00 pm, 7 days per week

Trails open dawn to dusk

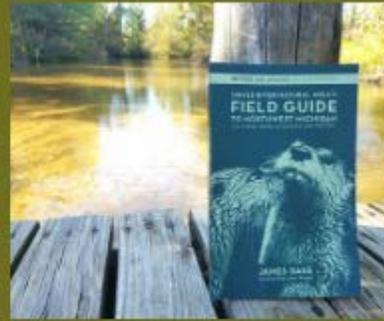
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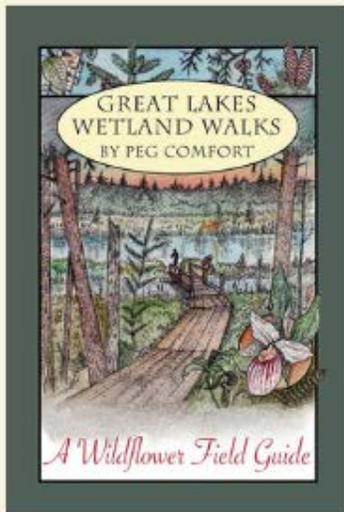
**The 2nd Edition of
Grass River Natural Area's
FIELD GUIDE
to Northwest Michigan
is now available.**



This guide is written and compiled by GRNA Education Director James Dake. It features several new and expanded sections and a new Foreword by Executive Director Jenn Wright.

Cost is \$18.87 plus tax

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Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-two years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation, and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

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