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# INDIANA AUDUBON QUARTERLY

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**Cover photo:** Ferruginous Hawk at Bear Run Mine, Sullivan County 08 February 2020. Photo by Ryan Sanderson.

**Back cover photo:** Breeding plumaged American Avocets on 14 April 2020 at Fairfax SRA, Monroe County. Photo by Nancy Lightfoot.

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# Letter from the President

**Amy Wilms, Connersville, IN**

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Dear Indiana Audubon Society Members and folks who love birds,

I want to share with you my thoughts about the Indiana Audubon Society in honest measure. I do hope that my short article will resonate to all of us that care about birds, conservation, and our organization.

For years, I have been combing through previous IAQs and Yearbooks to find out more about IAS history. I have a passion to learn about our birds and people who influenced our society's mission before me. I am working diligently to help make our past issues accessible to the public. This is a huge challenge and an immense project to scan over 100 years of our publication. It will take time, but hopefully you'll be rewarded with the effort in the future.



I would be remiss in addressing the challenges we are facing this year. There's no doubt 2020 will be remembered in the history books as a difficult year for our Society. The Coronavirus Pandemic has affected the way we live, birdwatch, and gather in groups. We've cancelled field trips that folks look forward to such as birding festivals, meet online instead of face to face and now practice social distancing as a way of life. We've witnessed actions to strip away critical protections in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA), watched a video of Christian Cooper who experienced blatant racism in New York Central Park, and found our lives forever changed.

Yet, let us look at the positives that have occurred over the last several months.

- Folks are birdwatching in their backyards more
- Air Pollution is down (if only for a short time)
- Many have learned to work in a digital world and continue to communicate
- A new focus on racial inequalities existing in our nation/world provides IAS with a prompt to assess the impact of such discriminations within our community's shared passion of birdwatching and appreciation of nature and formulate solutions.

I miss seeing everyone, hopefully 2021 will allow us to re-energize our field trips and offer opportunities to, once again, spend time together.

# Kankakee River Indiana Waterfowl Survey 2019

**Peg Kohring, Sawyer, MI**

pkohring@conservationfund.org

## Executive Summary

The Conservation Fund, (TCF); in concert with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife, (IDNR), desired to estimate and document waterfowl populations and habitat use for the middle and upper Kankakee River system northern Indiana in late winter and early spring. This effort would augment the ground count surveys that were currently being conducted by IDNR during the fall and early winter migration periods. To perform this task a series of aerial waterfowl population surveys were scheduled to be conducted along the Kankakee River system and associated wetland systems in late winter and early spring. The survey route and several points of interest were developed with consultation with Margaret “Peg” Kohring of TCF and R. Mike Morton, Wildlife Biologist.

A series of aerial surveys were to be conducted between mid-January 2019 and into late-March, 2019; by, R. Mike Morton. Observation and population reports were to be prepared and provided to Peg Kohring of TCF. During these surveys, observed peak populations of 6,155 geese; 5,614 ducks; and 16,961 Sandhill Cranes were documented on different survey dates, in 2019. While these populations of this survey are reported as numbers; these types of data should be considered only as simple “data points”, at this time, due to the relative few observations rather than a complete and total waterfowl population inventory, within the survey areas. This is due to the fact that it would be impossible to observe, record and document all waterfowl within such an expansive survey area. It would be considered inappropriate to attempt to develop a significant statistical analysis on these limited number of observation data, at this time.

However, in future years, it would be reasonable to compare these separate survey numbers as percentage(s) of change from other surveys and/or trends from other years. Reporting of unique individuals observed as numbers is acceptable for high interest species with an expectation of low population numbers and/or low frequency of observation, such as Sandhill Cranes, Whooping Cranes, White Pelican and/or Bald Eagles.

## Methods

The Conservation Fund developed a Consulting Services Agreement with R. Mike Morton (Wildlife Biologist/Observer) to conduct a series of aerial, low altitude, single-engine, fixed-wing, waterfowl inventory surveys along the middle and upper Kankakee River along with the associated wetlands and Fish and Wildlife Areas in close proximity to the river in northern Indiana. This series of aerial surveys were to be conducted roughly weekly beginning the week of January 14, 2019 and continued through the week of March 29, 2019. The time to conduct each survey route was estimated as not to exceed 3.0 hours +/-, per flight. Given this estimated survey time and the proposed cost of each survey the total survey cost was not to exceed \$24,000.00, without prior authorization from Peg Kohring with TCF.

The procedure was to fly the agreed, prescribed route developed by R. Mike Morton in concert with Peg Kohring of TCF; along the Kankakee River and include a few specific associated wetlands and two additional Fish and Wildlife Areas near this river system. See the survey areas listed in Appendix 1.

Waterfowl numbers were to be reported by species and estimated in numbers as; individuals up to flock sizes of 20; estimated in blocks of 10's in flocks up to 100; estimated in blocks of 100's in flocks up to 1,000; and estimated by blocks of 1,000's in larger flocks.

Morton, in turn, contracted with Eagle Aviation of Valparaiso, Indiana to provide the aircraft and pilot services to perform the aerial surveys. The aircraft utilized to conduct the surveys was a Cessna 172, high-wing/fixed-wing aircraft. This aircraft was selected for its availability in the region, as well as cost of operations, good visibility of the primary observer, (right front seat), and excellent low altitude and low speed stability. Surveys were to be conducted at an estimated altitude of <250 feet and at a speed of <110 knots. R. Mike Morton would be the primary observed and Peg Kohring of TCF or other designees would accompany him as their schedules would allow.

The survey area would include approximately 90+/- river miles of the Kankakee River and several associated un-named wetlands adjacent to the main stem of the river and two associated Fish and Wildlife Areas in the vicinity. The actual survey route would begin at the eastern end of the Kankakee River headwaters near South Bend Indiana and proceed westerly downstream along the river to the Indiana/Illinois boundary at the LaSalle FWA. The survey would also include the lakes at the Wheatfield Power Station located within Segment 2 of the survey route as well as in inventory of the Willow Slough and Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Areas south of the Kankakee River. (See Appendix 1 for the Segment descriptions.)

#### Summary of the 2019 weather conditions and migration

The winter of 2018-19 was unique in many ways. The early fall migration period was noted with well above normal temperatures and below average precipitation. This condition remained unchanged through much of the late fall and early winter until around the 10<sup>th</sup> of January when a series of moderately strong cold fronts passed through the region. However, overall, the migration during the hunting season was considered as "near normal" by Adam Phelps of IDNR, (personal communications) in the fall and early winter. Then the week of January 12" another strong cold front passed through the region and returned the weather conditions to more "normal" in mid to late January, with low temperatures in single digits and a light snow cover across much of the survey area.

Conditions remained near "normal" for the rest of January and through February; with the region frozen and snow covered. Beginning in early March the region began to have pulsing warm fronts and minor thawing of the frozen shallow water wetlands. As conditions began thawing waterfowl and Sandhill's began moving away from the cooling lakes at the Wheatfield Power Station and began utilizing the available shallow wetlands and ponded sites in the agricultural fields along the river course.



**Waterfowl migration along the Kankakee River basin.  
Photo by USFWS.**



### Individual 2019 Survey Narratives

A series of ground truth site visits were conducted on 12-18-18 and again on 12-20-18. Data collected included on those visits included: GPS points for specific survey sites such as; starting and end points of survey segments, Fish and Wildlife Areas; a general review of the river system and segments along the Kankakee River; and an opportunity to view the general aerial conditions along the survey course. Also, a meeting was held with the Eagle Aircraft staff, (the air services provider), and general discussions were held with the pilots and office staff regarding scheduling of survey dates, potential flight courses, sites of concern such as power plants, high tension utility wires, power plant staff notifications, highway bridges and population centers.

Several Indiana Fish and Wildlife Areas (FWA) along and adjacent to the Kankakee River were visited and the respective staff members were met to have general discussions regarding where waterfowl would be expected to be seen and advisories were provided about late season goose season dates and public use on specific FWA's.

The first survey was scheduled for January 16<sup>th</sup> was conducted as scheduled. A moderately strong cold front had passed through the region on 1-11-19 and had dropped 4+/-inches of snow cover and frozen up almost all shallow water wetlands. Weather the day of the survey was cold, cloudy, light north winds and good visibility. A total of 965 ducks and 4,219 geese along with 7,515 Sandhill cranes were observed on the route. Most of the cranes were standing on the ice cover of the cooling lake at the Wheatfield Power Station.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.5 hours.

The second survey was scheduled to be conducted on January 23<sup>rd</sup>, was delayed until the 24<sup>th</sup> due to undesirable weather conditions. Weather the day of the survey were cold with temperatures between 16-21 degrees F and light winds. A total of 756 ducks and 2,083 geese were observed along the route. Most notable was a personal observation record of 16,961 Sandhill cranes, most of which were at the Wheatfield Power Plant cooling lakes. There was a notable drop in both ducks and geese observed on this flight.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.4 hours.

The third survey was scheduled for January 30<sup>th</sup> was delayed until the 31<sup>st</sup> due to severe cold conditions. Weather the day of the survey remained at a near record cold with temperatures in the double digit sub-zero levels. Beginning temperature of this survey was -18 degrees F and ending temperature was -8 degrees F. (A personal record cold temperature for aerial surveys.)

As would be expected, all shallow water systems were frozen solid along with major sections of the Kankakee River. Almost all waterfowl were concentrated on the lakes near the Wheatfield Power Station, even though those lakes were mostly frozen. Several Goldeneye and Mergansers were observed in the few open segments of the main stem of the river. A total of 674 ducks, 1,105 geese and 9,070 Sandhill Cranes were observed. Again, a



**Wintering Sandhill Cranes near NIPSCO Wheatfield Power Station.**

decline in numbers observed, likely due to harsh weather conditions and lack of available open water habitat(s).

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.0 hours.

The fourth survey was scheduled and flown on February 13<sup>th</sup>. Weather remained cold and the ground was still snow covered as a result of the snowstorm from the day before, which dropped another 1-2 inches of fresh snow over the region. A strong warm front had passed through the region the week of February 4<sup>th</sup> with lots of rain; but it did not open up many of the shallow water systems. All shallow and still water systems remained frozen and were snow covered. The waterfowl observed were scattered along the main stem of the river and all the Sandhill cranes were concentrated at the Wheatfield Power Station cooling lakes. A total of 155 ducks,

1,122 geese and 10,500 Sandhill Cranes were observed; with most being concentrated at the Wheatfield Power Station Lakes. Duck numbers were lower, and goose and Sandhill Crane numbers were nearly unchanged.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.1 hours.

The fifth survey was scheduled for February 20<sup>th</sup> but was moved up to the 19<sup>th</sup> to avoid an incoming weather front with expectations of poor visibility and heavy rains. Temperatures were in the mid-20's at the time of the survey. Water levels were still considered as normal and most shallow water systems remained frozen and snow covered. There was a moderate increase in the number of waterfowl observed along the route with a total number of ducks was 1,552, the total number of geese was 1,950 and a total of 7,958 Sandhill Cranes were observed of which most were located at the Wheatfield Power Station cooling lakes.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 1.9 hours.

The sixth survey scheduled for February 27<sup>th</sup> was conducted as planned. However, there had recently been a complaint filed regarding our use of low altitude aircraft and the result was the local FAA office required a low altitude waiver for future surveys. Until that was obtained, future surveys were to be conducted at a slightly higher than preferred altitude. This reduced visibility and species precision estimates, somewhat; however, the flight was considered a success and observations were within normal. Conditions on the 27<sup>th</sup> were near perfect regarding visibility which allowed for a successful aerial survey. Temperatures were in the upper 20's °F on takeoff and at 30 F on return. Water levels were still normal with all systems well within their banks and more of the shallow water wetlands were beginning to open up with waterfowl located at several newly thawed systems. There was a significant increase in the number of both ducks and geese observed while there was only a slight increase in the number of Sandhill Cranes observed on this date. The total number of ducks observed was 5,614; the total number of geese observed was 6,155; and, the total number of Sandhill Cranes observed was 10,215, with most of them being at and very nearby the Wheatfield Power Station cooling lakes.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.0 hours.

The seventh survey scheduled for March 6<sup>th</sup> was conducted as scheduled. Another strong cold front had again passed through the region March 2-7<sup>th</sup>, re-freezing almost all shallow water areas. The temperatures on the day of the survey ranged between 14 and 21 degrees °F with moderately strong NW winds of 15-19 mph. The total number of ducks observed was 1,617, the total number of geese observed was 3,303 and the total number of cranes observed was 13,358. The decline in number of ducks and geese observed was likely due to



the reduction of available open water habitat along the survey route. Most interesting on today's observation was the presence of 5 whooping cranes at the Wheatfield Power Station cooling lakes.

The aircraft time for the survey was 2.2 hours.

The eighth survey scheduled for March 13<sup>th</sup> was moved up to March 12<sup>th</sup> in anticipation of a major rain front in the region for the remainder of the week. The weather had moderated in the past week, but temperatures were still below freezing the day of the survey and ranged from 24-40 F. Most waterfowl had moved away from the cooling lakes near the Wheatfield Power Station and were widely and thinly scattered in the available sheet water and shallow wetland areas near the main stem of the river. A total number of 3,375 ducks, 4,704 geese and 9,731 cranes were observed on this date. No whooping cranes were observed on today's flight; but, 45 pelicans were observed at Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area. There was a strong increase in the number of ducks and geese observed and a decline in the number of Sandhill Cranes observed was likely due to those birds dispersing into the recently widely available shallow water habitat

The aircraft time for the survey was 2.4 hours.

The ninth survey scheduled for March 20<sup>th</sup>; was move up to the 19<sup>th</sup> to avoid a potential rain front on the 20<sup>th</sup>. The weather in the region had continued to moderate most of the past week with temperatures ranging from the upper 20's mid 40's daily. Most of the waterfowl observed had moved away from the power plant lakes and were utilizing the recently opened up shallow water wetlands and ponded sites in the agricultural fields. Along the main stem of the river. A total of 5,124 ducks, 3,143 geese and 8,125 Sandhill Cranes were observed. Many Sandhill Cranes were observed in northward flight during today's survey. Additionally, of note, was the presence of 255 swan and 135 white pelicans along the route. The swan were scattered in wetlands near Willow Slough and many were airborne in the vicinity. With the observation of the large flock of swan and pelicans there is an obvious movement of waterfowl and migratory birds into the region.

Actual aircraft time for the survey was 2.2 hours

The tenth and last survey scheduled for March 27<sup>th</sup> was conducted as scheduled. Weather in the region continued to moderate with temperatures ranging from the low 30's to the mid40's F, and no ice was visible for today's survey. A total of 2,059 ducks, 383 geese and 1,991 Sandhill Cranes were observed. Few Sandhills were observed in flight in contrast to the previous week when several hundred were observed in apparent migration flights (northward). There was a strong decline in the number of geese observed on today's flight.

Total aircraft time was 2.1 hours.

Several general conclusions can be drawn after completion of one year (2019) of aerial waterfowl surveys in the middle and upper Kankakee River System, in Indiana.

1. This region has documented populations and good variety of waterfowl during the winter period. This is documented by an extensive history of ground count surveys employed on several Fish and Wildlife Areas near and along the Kankakee River by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Fish and Wildlife Division and these aerial survey observations. This demonstrates the significance of this habitat base to the region as well as to the overall waterfowl populations in the mid-west. The

region winters and provides a significant spring habitat base for a large population of waterfowl, especially Sandhill Cranes.

2. Most of the waterfowl observed on these winter surveys (2019) were strongly associated with the lakes at the Wheatfield Power Plant along the survey route. When conditions moderated in March and the systems thawed; then, waterfowl were more strongly associated with the quality shallow water wetlands systems along the river course. While observations in permanent wooded wetlands have been low in the winter periods, they could be higher during earlier migrational movements and prior to freeze-up conditions, in the fall and early winter.
3. A peak population in nearly 17,000 Sandhill Cranes, 6,000 Geese and over 5,000 ducks was observed on several surveys, on different dates. As expected, and the dominate duck species observed along the routes is consistently the Mallard, (as is observed throughout most of the mid-west in fall and winter surveys). There is a consistent presence of a small number of Black Ducks in the survey areas and this is a species of concern in eastern North America.
4. There is an abundant population of Sandhill Cranes associated with the region utilizing the cooling lakes at the power plant, seasonally flooded agricultural fields and the Fish and Wildlife Areas along the survey route.
5. There was the observation of several White Pelicans at a few locations along the survey route.
6. While this year's observations did not include the extensive overbank flooding of the Kankakee River system that occurred in 2018 there is an extensive habitat base in the system and this could be enhanced utilizing acknowledged "Best Management Practices" along the river. These practices would include: re-connecting the oxbows to the river system and its hydrology, installation of filter strips along ditches and the river bank to hold back sediments, plugging some lateral ditches, (even seasonally) to restore or mimic natural hydrology and reduction of agricultural disturbances and maintenance practices along the immediate river and stream banks.

### Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Continue to survey and report the waterfowl use by routine aerial waterfowl surveys through the entire prescribed survey area as in and listed in the 2019, Appendix 1 of this report to establish a "baseline" of data for comparison purposes.

Recommendation 2: Although all the small and isolated wetland systems were frozen during the first two-thirds of the survey periods they did receive extensive use after the systems opened up with the spring thaw. It is highly likely that waterfowl numbers would be much higher if aerial surveys were conducted in the fall and early winter portions of the migration.

Recommendation 3: There is a need to work with other governmental and non-governmental organizations to establish, enhance and renovate the existing wetlands systems within the survey area.

## Appendix 1. Areas surveyed in 2019 by aerial methods of the upper and middle Kankakee River, in Indiana.

Unit#      Description

1. From the Indiana/Illinois state line upstream to I-65, including LaSalle Fish and Wildlife Area
2. Between I-65 to the US HWY 421.
3. Wheatfield Power Station cooling lakes and immediate vicinity
4. Between US HWY 421 to US HWY 30, including Kankakee Fish and Wildlife Area.
5. Between the US HWY 30 to the headwater, including Kingsbury Fish and Wildlife Area
6. Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area and immediate vicinity
7. Willow Slough Fish and Wildlife Area and immediate vicinity

## Appendix 2. Aerial Waterfowl Survey Dates,

(See the attached Excel Files, 2019 Waterfowl Surveys)

2019 Survey Dates:

January 16, 2019

January 24, 2019

January 30, 2019

February 6, 2019                      Not scheduled or surveyed, due to lack of available observer

February 13, 2019

February 19, 2019

February 27, 2019

March 6, 2019

March 13, 2019

March 19, 2019

March 27, 2019

### Appendix 3. List of aerial survey dates and reported observations 2019

Date	Observed Numbers			Notes
	Ducks	Geese	Cranes	
1-16-19	518	4,219	7,515	
1-24-19	756	2,083	16,961	Highest Sandhill Crane observation
1-30-19	674	1,105	9,070	
2-4-19	--	--	--	Survey observer unavailable
2-13-19	155	1,122	10,500	
2-19-19	1,552	1,950	7,958	
2-27-19	5,614	6,155	10,215*	*Includes 5 Whooping Cranes, Highest duck and and goose populations, observed in 2019
3-6-19	1,617	3,303	12,358	
3-13-19	3,375	4,704	9,731	
3-19-19	5,124	3,143	8,125	
3-27-19	2,059	383	1,991	

Kankakee River Survey, for The Conservation Fund				Survey Coverage					
Observer: Robert M. Morton				Partial:			Aerial: XX		
1/16/2019				Complete: XX			Ground:		
Species	Illinois state line to I-65	I-65 to US HWY 421	Wheatfield power plant lakes & vic.	US HWY 421 to US Hwy 30	US HWY 30 to upstream end	Jasper-Palucki FWA	Willow Slough FWA	Total	
Mallard	25	20	250	42			6	343	Mallard
Black Duck								0	Black Duck
Gadwall			25					25	Gadwall
Widgeon			150					150	Widgeon
B-W Teal								0	B-W Teal
G-W Teal								0	G-W Teal
Shoveler								0	Shoveler
Pintail								0	Pintail
Wood Duck								0	Wood Duck
UK Dabbler								0	UK Dabbler
<b>Total Dabbler</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>518</b>	<b>Total Dabbler</b>
Redhead								0	Redhead
Canvasback			50					50	Canvasback
Scaup			75					75	Scaup
Ring Neck			260					260	Ring Neck
Goldeneye		20	4	6	6			36	Goldeneye
Bufflehead								0	Bufflehead
Ruddy Duck								0	Ruddy Duck
UK Diver								0	UK Diver
<b>Total Diver</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>389</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>421</b>	<b>Total Diver</b>
Mergansers		10		12				22	Mergansers
UK Ducks				4				4	UK Ducks
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>814</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
Canada Geese	2,530	25	740	730	34		160	4,219	Canada Geese
White-fronts								0	White-fronts
Snow Geese								0	Snow Geese
<b>Total Geese</b>	<b>2,530</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>740</b>	<b>730</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>4,219</b>	<b>Total Geese</b>
Coots								0	Coots
Loons								0	Loons
Swans	10							10	Swans
Eagles							1	1	Eagles
Pelicans								0	Pelicans
Cranes		450	7,050				15	7,515	Cranes
Cormorants								0	Cormorants

Kankakee River Survey, for The Conservation Fund				Survey Coverage					
Observer: Robert M. Morton				Partial:			Aerial: XX		
1/24/2019				Complete: XX			Ground:		
Species	Illinois state line to I-65	I-65 to US HWY 421	Wheatfield power plant lakes & vic.	US HWY 421 to US Hwy 30	US HWY 30 to upstream end	Jasper-Palucki FWA	Willow Slough FWA	Total	
Mallard	400	12	40	4	84			540	Mallard
Black Duck								0	Black Duck
Gadwall					4			4	Gadwall
Widgeon								0	Widgeon
B-W Teal								0	B-W Teal
G-W Teal								0	G-W Teal
Shoveler								0	Shoveler
Pintail								0	Pintail
Wood Duck								0	Wood Duck
UK Dabbler								0	UK Dabbler
<b>Total Dabbler</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>Total Dabbler</b>
Redhead			20					20	Redhead
Canvasback			40					40	Canvasback
Scaup			15					15	Scaup
Ring Neck			20					20	Ring Neck
Goldeneye		59	10	1	4			74	Goldeneye
Bufflehead								0	Bufflehead
Ruddy Duck								0	Ruddy Duck
UK Diver								0	UK Diver
<b>Total Diver</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>Total Diver</b>
Mergansers		23	10	6	4			43	Mergansers
UK Ducks								0	UK Ducks
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>756</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
Canada Geese	1,030	40	760	25		8	220	2,083	Canada Geese
White-fronts								0	White-fronts
Snow Geese								0	Snow Geese
<b>Total Geese</b>	<b>1,030</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>760</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>2,083</b>	<b>Total Geese</b>
Coots								0	Coots
Loons								0	Loons
Swans	9							9	Swans
Eagles	1	5						6	Eagles
Pelicans								0	Pelicans
Cranes			16,950				11	16,961	Cranes
Cormorants								0	Cormorants

Kankakee River Survey, for The Conservation Fund				Survey Coverage					
Observer: Robert M. Morton				Partial:				Aerial: XX	
1/31/2019				Complete: XX				Ground:	
Species	Illinois state line to I-65	I-65 to US HWY 421	Wheatfield power plant lakes & vic.	US HWY 421 to US Hwy 30	US HWY 30 to upstream end	Jasper-Paluski FWA	Willow Slough FWA	Total	
Mallard		4	400	2	22			428	Mallard
Black Duck								0	Black Duck
Gadwall			25					25	Gadwall
Widgeon								0	Widgeon
B-W Teal								0	B-W Teal
G-W Teal								0	G-W Teal
Shoveler								0	Shoveler
Pintail								0	Pintail
Wood Duck								0	Wood Duck
UK Dabbler								0	UK Dabbler
<b>Total Dabbling</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>425</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>453</b>	<b>Total Dabbling</b>
Redhead			20					20	Redhead
Canvasback			20					20	Canvasback
Scaup								0	Scaup
Ring Neck			120					120	Ring Neck
Goldeneye		24		6	15			45	Goldeneye
Bufflehead								0	Bufflehead
Ruddy Duck								0	Ruddy Duck
UK Diver								0	UK Diver
<b>Total Diver</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>160</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>Total Diver</b>
Mergansers		14		1	1			16	Mergansers
UK Ducks								0	UK Ducks
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>585</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
Canada Geese	15	46	1,040	4				1,105	Canada Geese
White-fronts								0	White-fronts
Snow Geese								0	Snow Geese
<b>Total Geese</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>1,040</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,105</b>	<b>Total Geese</b>
Coots								0	Coots
Loons								0	Loons
Swans			34					34	Swans
Eagles		2		1				3	Eagles
Pelicans								0	Pelicans
Cranes			9,070					9,070	Cranes
Cormorants								0	Cormorants

Kankakee River Survey, for The Conservation Fund				Survey Coverage					
Observer: Robert M. Morton				Partial:				Aerial: XX	
2/13/2019				Complete: XX				Ground:	
Species	Illinois state line to I-65	I-65 to US HWY 421	Wheatfield power plant lakes & vic.	US HWY 421 to US Hwy 30	US HWY 30 to upstream end	Jasper-Paluski FWA	Willow Slough FWA	Total	
Mallard	0	4	10	35	16			65	Mallard
Black Duck								0	Black Duck
Gadwall								0	Gadwall
Widgeon								0	Widgeon
B-W Teal								0	B-W Teal
G-W Teal								0	G-W Teal
Shoveler								0	Shoveler
Pintail								0	Pintail
Wood Duck								0	Wood Duck
UK Dabbler								0	UK Dabbler
<b>Total Dabbling</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>Total Dabbling</b>
Redhead								0	Redhead
Canvasback								0	Canvasback
Scaup								0	Scaup
Ring Neck								0	Ring Neck
Goldeneye		22		4	10			36	Goldeneye
Bufflehead								0	Bufflehead
Ruddy Duck								0	Ruddy Duck
UK Diver			25					25	UK Diver
<b>Total Diver</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>Total Diver</b>
Mergansers	2	15		10	2			29	Mergansers
UK Ducks								0	UK Ducks
<b>Total Ducks</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>Total Ducks</b>
Canada Geese	155	52	115	800				1,122	Canada Geese
White-fronts								0	White-fronts
Snow Geese								0	Snow Geese
<b>Total Geese</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1,122</b>	<b>Total Geese</b>
Coots								0	Coots
Loons								0	Loons
Swans			32					32	Swans
Eagles								0	Eagles
Pelicans								0	Pelicans
Cranes			10,500					10,500	Cranes
Cormorants								0	Cormorants











# Spring Indiana Field Notes 2020

**Kenneth J. Brock, Chesterton, IN**

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This spring's copious rarities included: Cinnamon Teal, Eurasian Wigeon, Ruff, Little Gull, California Gull, White-faced Ibis, Glossy Ibis, White-winged Dove, Common Raven, Lark Bunting, Swainson's Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, and Western Tanager.

## **Longshore Flights**

Once again Kyle Wiktor conducted longshore/lake watches at the Green Tower site. An all-time record flight, based on Grube Magnitude, was set on 2 May. The new magnitude was 90.42: it replaced the 87.34 value set on 2 May 2018.

May 15 was an unprecedented day at the Green Tower. At Brendan Grube's urging Caleb Putnam and Stephanie Beilke (along with Brad Bumgardner, Kyle Wiktor, Richard Garrett, and Terry Bonace) manned the tower and established a phenomenal Grube Magnitude record. They logged an unbelievable 110 species and established an off-the-scale Grube Magnitude of 149.89, which exceeded the above 2 May record by almost 60 points. In the process they also set three Indiana record counts [Cape May Warbler (202), Golden-winged Warbler (12), and Scarlet Tanager (70)] along with five lakefront high-count records: Blackburnian Warbler (35) and Orchard Oriole (30), plus the previous three. This spectacular effort also included the following "good" species that did not contribute to the Grube Magnitude: Cattle Egret, Clay-colored Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, and Connecticut Warbler. The initial Grube Magnitude was even larger, but several participants at the tower reported that careful tallies were not conducted for every species. These problem totals were corrected by dividing the questioned numbers by two. Despite these corrections this remarkable record may never be broken.



**Rose-breasted Grosbeak at the Indiana Dunes SP longshore tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**

## **Dunes Birding Festival**

This year's festival was canceled due to the CoronaVirus pandemic.

## **Abbreviation Definitions are appended**

## **Caution Regarding High Bird Numbers**

Remarkably large counts, compared to STYMs, are reported throughout this report, especially for passerines. In most cases these tallies reflect increased observer effort, rather than growth of bird populations.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Greater White-fronted Goose:- As occurred last year at Celery Bog (Tippecanoe Co) a single bird lingered at Cane Ridge through the season's end.

### DUCKS

The overall duck migration was quite good with only six species below the STYM and 21 above. Black Scoter was not reported and Long-tailed Ducks were quite scarce. Among puddle ducks the Northern Pintail numbers were lowest and Wood Duck was at the top with a POT (definition at the end of this article) of 304%. The bay duck flight was strong with every species above average. Among the sea ducks Black Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks were scarce, but Surf Scoters were unusually plentiful. Merganser numbers were near average.

Cinnamon Teal:- Gary Dorman found a male associating with Blue-winged Teal at Muscatatuck NWR (Jackson Co) on 9 April. A male was found in Blackford Co on 12 April (John Velasquez). Finally, Richard Garrett found (1) at Cane Ridge on 7 May, though the possibility that this bird is a hybrid is being considered. Both of the first two reports constitute first county records.

Eurasian Wigeon:- The drake found at Wheeling Bottoms (Gibson Co) in late winter was last reported on 7 March (Bob Decker). Interestingly, a second bird, believed to have been a hybrid (backcross) male, was photographed in Dubois Co on 8 March (Sean Verkamp).

Long-tailed Duck:- Acutely scarce with only six reported across the state (TYM=155). This is the lowest spring total in three years.

Bufflehead:- The (300) birds logged by Amy Kearns at Monty's Station (Gibson Co) on 7 March constitute Indiana's second largest inland count.



**Bufflehead at Eagle Creek Park, Marion Co., 20 March 2020. Photo by Deborah Cooney.**

### GREBES

Red-necked Grebe:- An unprecedented event occurred just offshore from the Green Tower Site on 3 April. Early that morning Kyle Wiktor, Brendan J. Grube, & Kim Ehn observed a near-shore group of (117) swimming Red-necked Grebes. Unfortunately, these birds departed soon after being counted. This report exceeds the previous lakefront high count by 111 grebes. It is also Indiana's largest daily count, as the state's previous maximum of 21 birds was logged at Turtle Creek Reservoir on 30 March 2014 (that was the spring in which the entire state was inundated by an unparalleled Red-necked Grebe invasion).

White-winged Dove:- On 24 May Brendan J. Grube et al. saw a flock of (3) fly past the Green Tower Site. Larry Caldwell had (1) at his Perry Co feeder for 15 minutes on 25 May.

Chuck-will's-Widow:- Myron Yoder had a singing bird on his property near Middlebury, Elkhart Co. Annie Aguirre et al. heard the bird on 27 May. This is a first county record.

## **RAILS**

Virginia Rail:- This rail was unusually widespread this spring with 235 reports from 22 counties (STYM=79.8). The largest numbers occurred in Porter Co where Lynea S. Hinchman tallied the season's high count of (17) at Cowles Bog on 18 May.

## **SHOREBIRDS**

Thirty-one shorebird species were reported in the state this spring, 21 of which were in numbers above their STYMs. Both Piping Plover and Whimbrel went unreported.

Black-necked Stilt:- Singletons were reported at two locations on 16 March: Cane Ridge (Evan Speck) and Goose Pond (Amy Kearns). These reports tie Indiana's second earliest record.

American Avocet:- The (35) Avocets that Dan Kaiser found at Fairfax (Lake Monroe) on 14 April constitute a record spring tally. The previous spring maximum was 32 that were logged at Lake Gibson on 30 April 1989.

Semipalmated Plover:- The (400) that Sean Verkamp logged in Dubois Co on 17 May provided Indiana's second largest daily count (STYM=905).

American Golden-Plover:- Although this plover was plentiful on the lakefront the statewide flight was well below average: indeed it was the lowest spring flight in five years with 2547 reported (STYM=3800).

Upland Sandpiper:- It was not a good spring for this vanishing shorebird. Only eight were reported for the season, which is the lowest spring total since 2001 (STYM=15.4).

Hudsonian Godwit:- Although the majority of reports came from Goose Pond FWA, this godwit was also reported at five different locations. The season total of 26 constitutes the largest spring flight on record (STYM=5.3) The (9) that Heath Harlan counted at Goose Pond FWA on 17 April was the season's largest tally and the singleton that Eric Stockton photographed in Montgomery Co tied two other reports as the latest spring record.



**Singleton Hudsonian Godwit in Montgomery Co., 19 May 2020.  
Photo by Steve Stockton.**

Ruff:- On 15 May Michael Clay discovered (1) in flooded fields on Combs Road, Indianapolis. The bird's size suggested that it was a female, though some observers believed it was an immature male (STYM=0.9).

Western Sandpiper:- An amazing 11 were reported this spring and all were either photographed or documented (STYM=1.0). The largest report consisted of (5) at Eagle Marsh in Fort Wayne (Jeffrey J. McCoy). This is Indiana's largest fully accepted report since the Hengevelds had nine at Lake Lemon on 17 July 1996.

Short-billed Dowitcher:- Thunderstorms on 14 May forced down migrants generating an enormous spring count of (171) at the 129th Street wetland in Hammond (Julie Bonnema, Kristin Stratton, and Matthew Iglecki). This tally is Indiana's second largest count.



Long-billed Dowitcher:- Most amazingly Amy Kearns photographed a basic-plumed bird in Gibson Co on 20 May. This is Indiana's third latest spring record. By this late date Long-billeds are normally in full alternate plumage. An all-time latest record was logged at Reynolds Creek Gamebird Habitat Area on 17 May (Kyle Wiktor & Daniel Kozlak). This identification, which was based on the call note, added six days to the latest record.

Wilson's Phalarope:- The basic-plumed bird that Edward M. Hopkins found at Goose Pond FWA on 5 April tied Indiana's second earliest record.

## **GULLS**

Little Gull:- An adult was photographed at the Wakarusa facility on 20 April (Kyle Miller). This is Indiana's first spring record since 2003. The adult was still present on 21 April and was joined by a first-cycle bird (Eric Michael).

California Gull:- Most surprising was an adult that Eric Michael photographed at the Elkhart Landfill on 10 April. The latter

provided Indiana's first April record.

Lesser Black-backed Gull:- An Indiana record count of (29) was logged at the Elkhart Landfill on 3 April when Eric Michael tallied (29): 27 adults and 2 first-cycle birds. The state's previous maximum count was a dozen.

## **TERNS**

Common Tern:- A peak count of (53) that Nick Kiehl logged at Geist Res. on 9 May contributed to the best spring total of 256 in nine years (STYM=146).

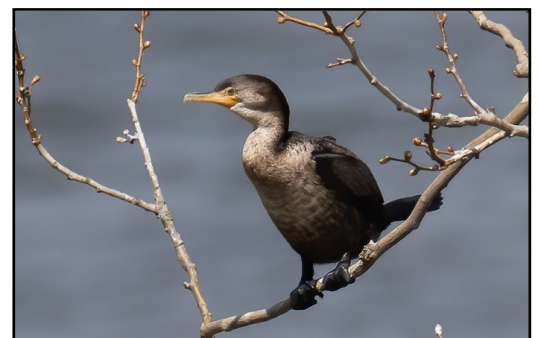
American White Pelican:- Indiana's population continues to expand. This spring's total of 16,390 is the largest ever recorded (STYM=4278).

White-faced Ibis:- Spring of 2020 brought an unprecedented invasion with 92 reported in 11 different counties (STYM=6.55). Indiana's previous maximum spring total of (9) was logged in 2010. Randy Vanderbilt, Lisa Vanderbilt, and Bill Sharkey observed an Indiana record count on 14 April with (10) at Goose Pond FWA (main pool west). However, this record was brief, as Austin Broadwater photographed an incredible flight of (37) at Goose Pond FWA on 19 April. Austin's tally constitutes an Indiana record.

Neotropical Cormorant:- It was the best spring ever for this cormorant with 29 birds reported (STYM=2.40). An immature that Nick Kiehl found at Geist Reservoir on 26 March provided a new



**Spring Little Gull at Wakarusa Wastewater Treatment Facility, Elkhart Co., on 01 May. Photo by Jeff McCoy.**



**Neotropic Cormorant at Eagle Creek Park, Marion Co., 11 April 2020. Photo by Ryan**

earliest record for Indiana. Additionally, the (3) that Steve Lima found at the J.I. Case Wetland (Terre Haute) on 2 April constitute the state's largest count.

## **HERONS & EGRETS**

American Bittern:- Surprisingly this spring's numbers were the lowest since 2005 with only 45 reported (STYM=65.7). The season's best count was (3) that Heath Harlan logged at Sommerville Mines (Gibson Co) on 29 March.

Least Bittern:- In direct contrast to the American, a record number of Least Bitterns were noted with a total of 64 reported. (STYM=23.6). The peak tally was the (3) three that Leland Shaum found at Pigeon River FWA (LaGrange Co) on 15 May.

Great-horned Owl:- On 15 April Matt S. Kalwasinski set an Indiana daily count record with (18) owls, all in northern Lake Co. He found eight nests (also a state record), six of which contained one or two youngsters. The final total included five adults and 13 owlets.



**Great-horned Owl at Highland Rookery, Lake Co., on 11 April 2020. Photo by Matt Kalwasinski.**

## **DIURNAL RAPTORS**

Northern Goshawk:- Brendan J. Grube, Kyle Wiktor, Kim Ehn, and KJB identified an immature at the Green Tower Site on 3 April. This is Indiana's first Goshawk report since October 2018. An even more astonishing bird was seen at this site on 23 May (Kyle Wiktor, John C. Kendall, et al.), which provided Indiana's latest spring record (although there is a 1948 June record).

Mississippi Kite:- It was a record spring for this kite with 53 reported (STYM=15.1). The peak count of (7) was logged twice: the first occurred 14 May when Jeremy Ross tallied them in Pike Co and the second was recorded by David Ayer at Lincoln S.P. on 24 May.

## **FLYCATCHERS**

It was a wonderful spring for flycatchers with the mean POI/species of 288%. Every species was reported in numbers well above their STYM.

Alder Flycatcher:- A record 200 Alders were scattered across 32 counties this spring (STYM=71.6). The season's largest count was the (6) that Ryan J. Sanderson logged at Eagle Creek park on 23 May.

Willow Flycatcher:- The singing bird that Gary Dorman found at Muscatatuck N.W.R. (Jennings Co) on 28 April, provided Indiana's fourth earliest record.

Vermilion Flycatcher:- Beth Brown photographed an adult male in LaPorte on 2 April. This is Indiana's sixth record and only the second for the spring season (both in April).

Western Kingbird:- The first bird returned to the Evansville Airport nesting site on 3 May (Logan Harlan). Single kingbirds flew past the Green Tower Site: on 18 May (John C. Kendall) and on 23 May (Kyle Wiktor).

## VIREOS

It was a phenomenal season for vireos as every species had POI values above 200% and four had POIs above 300%

Bell's Vireo:- This vireo is quite rare on the lakefront; consequently the singing bird that Michael A. Topp logged in the Hammond Sanctuary on 16 May is quite noteworthy (TYM=0.25).

Blue-headed Vireo:- Spring of 2020 yielded a record flight of 510 (STYM= 133). David Ward recorded the largest daily count with (8) at Fox Island Park on 20 May.

## CORVIDS

Common Raven:- Lightening does strike twice... Last year on 13 March Kyle Wiktor observed Indiana's first raven in almost 70 years at the Green Tower Site. Then on 16 March of 2020 Kyle videotaped another Raven flying past this same location. Amazingly, on 19 March (2) vocalizing birds flew in together and landed in trees along the south end of the blowout, only to be chased away by crows. On 4 April one appeared again: this time it arrived from the southwest and perched

briefly in the pines south of the bathhouse, then continued eastward.

## SWALLOWS

Swallows fared quite well this spring with every species reported in numbers well above their STYM.

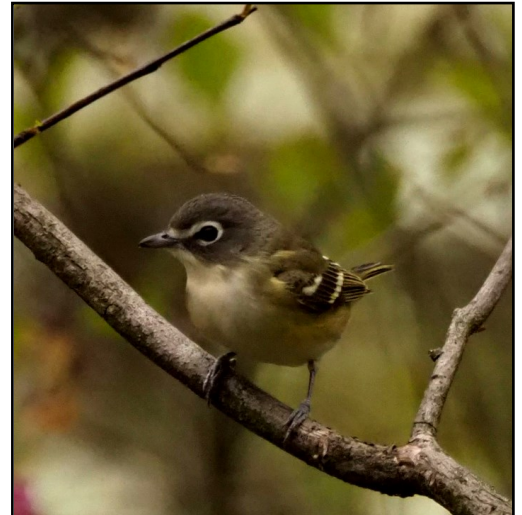
Purple Martin:- A male, seen by Ian Wiist in Evansville on 19 March, provided Indiana's third earliest spring arrival date. Following Ian's bird a spate of early Martins (Indiana's fourth through seventh earliest records) were reported the following day.

Cliff Swallow:- Indiana's all-time earliest record was logged at the Hengeveld's residence (east end of Lake Lemon) on 18 March.

Red-breasted Nuthatch:- Exceptionally rare this spring with only six individuals reported (STYM=123). This is the lowest spring total since a single Red-breasted was reported in the spring of 2003.

Brown Creeper:- It was a record spring for this species with 2695 individuals reported (STYM=831). The peak daily count was (22) that Kyle Wiktor logged in Dunes State Park on 15 April

## WRENS



**Blue-headed Vireo at Lincoln State Park, Spencer Co., 19 April 2020. Photo by David Ayer.**



**The seasons only photographed Red-breasted Nuthatch on 16 May 2020 in Marion County. Photograph by Tina Rosier.**



Unbelievably, every species was reported in numbers at least three times the STYM, and the Carolina's numbers exceeded six times the STYM. Incredible flight.

Blue-gray Gnatcatcher:- Ian Wiist photographed (1) at Lake Gibson on 20 March, which tied Indiana's second earliest record.

### **THRUSHES**

Remarkably, every thrush species was reported in record numbers for the spring period.

Veery:- Gordon L. Chastain found a record early Veery (by 3 days) at the Holcomb Estate (Indianapolis) on 4 April. Oddly, the next three earliest spring Veery records all occurred in the northern tier.

### **WINTER FINCHES**

Pine Siskin:- It was an exceedingly poor spring for this small finch with only five reported (TYM=783). Kyle Wiktor logged the season's high count with (4) at the Green Tower Site on 7 April.



### **LONGSPURS**

Smith's Longspur:- The (500) that Dan Miller conservatively estimated near Wingate (Montgomery Co) on 11 April, tied Indiana's fourth largest count. The lakefront's only report consisted of a flock of (8) that flew over the Green Tower Site on 2 May (Kyle Wiktor et al.).

**Smith's Longspur in flight at Kankakee Sands, Newton Co., 20 April 2020.  
Photo by Lila Fried.**

### **SPARROWS**

Single Le Conte's and Harris's sparrows were reported: otherwise every species was reported in numbers exceeding the STYM.

Lark Bunting:- Bruce Glick confirmed the identification of a male near Millersburg, LaGrange Co on 21 April, but the landowner reported that the bird had been present for ten days. It was subsequently seen and photographed by many: it was last reported on 2 May (fide Leland Shaum). This is Indiana's seventh record.

Nelson's Sparrow:- This sparrow is quite rare in the spring; consequently the (2) that Matt S. Kalwasinski logged at Grant Street Wetland on 18 May are noteworthy (TYM=0.55).

### **BLACKBIRDS**

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- Three adult males were reported this spring (STYM=7.75). Annie Aguirre found the first in rural Elkhart Co on 12 April, providing that county's fourth record. Another flew past the Green Tower Site on 21 April (John C. Kendall & John K. Cassidy). This was the fifth record for the tower. And finally, Walter J. Marcisz found a singing male at DuPont (Lake Co) on 7 May.



**One of many shots of the photogenic Lark Bunting in Lagrange County. Photo by Michael Topp on 22 April 2020.**

Orchard Oriole:- The (30) Orchards that Caleb Putnam et al. logged at the Green Tower Site on 15 May tied Indiana's fourth largest count.

## **WARBLERS**

Northern Waterthrush:- Ethan Wiist photographed an all-time early migrant at Howell Wetlands Park, Vanderburgh Co on 9 March. The next earliest spring arrival occurred on 28 March 2009.

Golden-winged Warbler:- The extraordinary 15 May flight yielded an Indiana record count of (16). This total resulted from the 12 logged during the Green Tower Site count, plus four more found in Dunes State Park (Caleb Putman, et al.).

Blue-winged Warbler:- The bird that Jeremy Ross logged at Maxey Marsh Trail on 8 April, provided Indiana's second earliest spring record. The following day Bert Harrison had one spend most of the day in his South Bend backyard, which is now the state's third earliest spring record.

Swainson's Warbler:- Ethan Wiist found a singing bird in Igleheart Park, Evansville, on 24 April. The bird lingered throughout the day and was observed by many. This is

Indiana's sixth Swainson's Warbler record.

Nashville Warbler:- Indiana's earliest spring migrant was found in Lincoln State Park on 29 March (David Ayer) and also provided Indiana's first March record.

Hooded Warbler:- On 9 April Keshava Mysore identified (1) in South Bend, providing the state's third earliest spring record.

Kirtland's Warbler:- John C. Kendall found a singing male in Warsaw on 3 May. This marks the third consecutive spring in which this rare warbler has been reported in the state (STYM=0.35).

Cape May Warbler:- Perhaps the season's most astonishing report consisted of the (202) Cape Mays that (Caleb Putnam et al.) tallied during the 15 Green Tower Site count. This total is almost four times the previous maximum of 60 birds.

Blackburnian Warbler:- The (35) birds that Caleb Putnam's group logged at the Green Tower Site on 15 May constituted a record high tally for the lakefront. However, Caleb also added one more to this count in Dunes State Park, giving a total of (36). The latter total constitutes Indiana's second largest.



**6<sup>th</sup> state record Swainson's Warbler in Evansville, Vanderburgh Co., 24 April 2020. Photo by Ethan Wiist.**



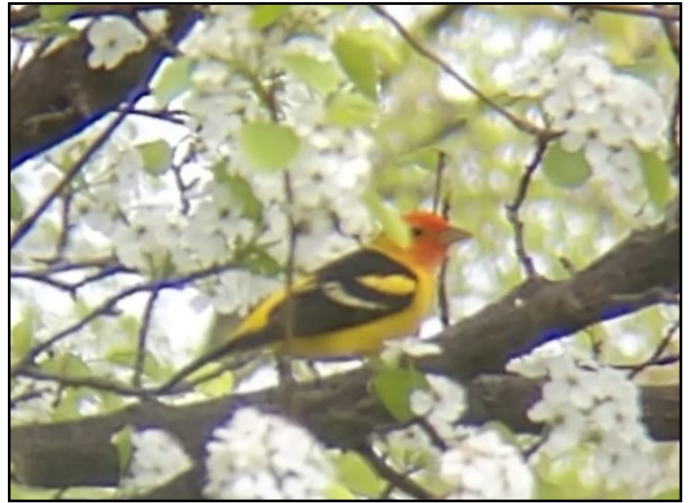
**One of over 200 flyby Cape May Warblers on 15 May 2020 at Indiana Dunes State Park, Porter, Co. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**

Prairie Warbler:- On 26 March Gerald Heath found a singing bird at New Pekin (Washington Co), which provided a new early record for Indiana. The next earliest date was logged in Bloomington on 30 March 2012.

Wilson's Warbler:- The one that Brendan J. Grube found at Kingsbury FWA on 18 April constitutes Indiana's second earliest record. The all-time earliest spring arrival occurred on 16 April 2004 in the Hammond Sanctuary.

Scarlet Tanager:- An Indiana record count of (70) was set during the 15 May flight at the Green Tower Site (Caleb Putnam et al.). Indiana's previous maximum of 65 also occurred at the Green Tower on 16 May 2002.

Western Tanager:- A western Tanager was photographed in DeKalb Co on 30 April (fide Jeffrey J. McCoy). On 3 May Sam Plew posted photos of the bird on eBird. An additional bird was hosted at a private Valparaiso residence, Porter Co., on 21 May.



**Western Tanager in Dekalb County, 03 May 2020. Photo by Sam Plew.**

Explanation of abbreviations Season totals are frequently compared to average seasonal counts over the past 20 years, including the present year. This value is abbreviated "STYM" and refers to the twenty-year mean for the entire state. The "TYM" indicates the 20-year mean for the lakefront.

A migration parameter called the POT, designates the percentage that the season total comprises of the Twenty-year mean. The following equation calculates this parameter:  $POT = 100 \times (Total / STYM)$ . Here "Total" refers to the total number of individuals, of a given species, reported during the season. Example: if the Palm Warbler season total were 140 and the STYM was also 140 the POT=100%. However, if only 70 Palms were reported for the season, the POT would drop to 50%.

In considering the STYM and POT parameters keep in mind that observer effort has not been constant over the twenty-year interval, indeed observer effort has increased significantly over the past two decades. This means that low values should be examined closely as they well may reflect significant declines.



# 2020 Global Big Day Summary

**Matt Kalwasinski, Munster, IN**

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On Saturday, May 9, 2020, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology held its annual Global Big Day, which is a celebration of International Migratory Bird Day via a massive citizen-science project. This was the 6<sup>th</sup> year that the event was held to encourage birders to submit their sightings via Cornell's eBird site, which compiles and uses these observations to power science, outreach, and conservation efforts around the world. It is also a day to enjoy the birds around us; in one's backyard, a local patch, or in a designated important bird area. The event gives a snapshot of all the birds seen in the world on one day, and it is all compiled through the individual checklists submitted by birders.

Worldwide, 6,531 species were recorded with the 718 documented in the United States. As for Indiana, our state ranked 19th in the country with 236 species.

With the termination of the Big May Day Bird Count, the Indiana Audubon Society decided to support this great event, and with the efforts of birders across the state, it was the first time Indiana has cracked the top twenty. It was also the most species recorded in Indiana over the past six years. Although we can always hope for more species, we were extremely proud of the effort. Over 1,700 individual checklists were submitted, which is over two times the amount from 2019. With this increased effort, nine species were recorded for the first time in Indiana for this event (*Surf Scoter, Whooping Crane, Marbled Godwit, Willet, Lesser Black-Black Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Neotropic Cormorant, Little Blue Heron, and Monk Parakeet*).

Gibson County topped all counties with 152 species, with Vigo and Tippecanoe close behind with 150 and 148 respectively. Eighty-three of the 92 counties in Indiana reported data, and a goal for the future of this event would be to get checklists from every county in the state. The complete results for Indiana in 2020 can be found at [https://ebird.org/region/US-IN?yr=BIGDAY\\_2020a](https://ebird.org/region/US-IN?yr=BIGDAY_2020a).

Throughout the six years of this event, Indiana has recorded 267 species, which does not include the hybrid Brewster's Warbler that has been documented during two of those years. 186 species have been recorded each year with 26 species only being documented once. Below is a chart showing how Indiana has ranked over the years.

Date	Rank	Species	Checklists
5/9/15	21	222	443
5/14/16	24	223	671
5/13/17	24	220	580
5/5/18	22	233	736
5/4/19	24	226	725
5/9/20	19	236	1738
Average	22.3	226.7	815.5

Although the individual species count might not change much over the coming years, we hope to continue to be in the Top 20 and increase the number of checklists submitted each year. Because the more checklists that are submitted, the more data that can be looked at and used for conservation efforts.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Global Big Day. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic, people were able to watch and count birds at a variety of locations, and we are already excited for 2021!

# The Indiana Dunes Morning Flight Madness of 15 May 2020

**Brad Bumgardner, Chesterton, IN**

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Spring birding is always a hobby of hit or miss. On some days you get lucky and find lots of our feathered friends that you have looked forward to seeing all winter, while others can be a complete bust. That is the joy in birding. You never know what you are going to see. On any given day in May, the diversity and abundance of birds can feel overwhelming, particularly to a new birder. This can be felt particularly at some of the state's greatest hotspots. Whether you are traipsing through knee high grasses at Goose Pond Fish & Wildlife Area or elbow to elbow watching rare migrants at Eagle Creek Park, birds are everywhere to enjoy come May.

Indiana holds one special birding hotspot that performs like no other. For three short months, a funnel of birds passes by the Indiana Dunes State Park longshore tower (formerly known as the Green Tower, but do not look for a green colored structure today)

The tower is a site that rivals no other place in Indiana for bird diversity and magnitude. The single tower observation point observes more species by the end of spring migration than any other Indiana birding hotspot, and the total list of species is on par with the best birding sites around the state. All of this, while standing on single, stationary platform.

Like any other birding, there are slow days, with brutal north winds from Lake Michigan that sand blast at your face. There are also good days when hundreds of birds fly by in the spring. Then, there are spectacular days, when the hundreds become thousands, and the swooping and diving of birds around you becomes a sensory overload. On 15 May 2020, as would be expected on a warm morning in mid-May, conditions looked excellent for a good morning of birding along the Indiana Dunes lakefront. Little did birders present realize it was about to become a fantastic morning.

The overnight on May 14<sup>th</sup> brought mild and cloudy conditions, a light southerly wind that bounced from SE to SW, temperatures fluctuating in the low to mid 60s (°F), and periods of rain showers with occasional, brief downpours. Large thunderstorms had developed south and west of the Indiana Dunes after sunset, but quickly broke apart as they crossed the state-line. What resulted was



**Longshore bird tower at Indiana Dunes State Park as seen on the paved sidewalk approach.**



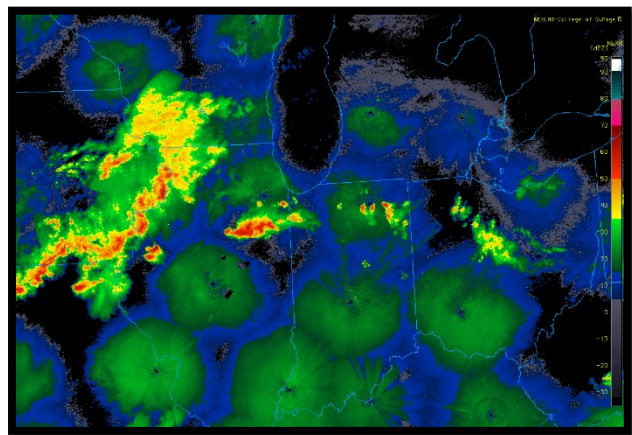
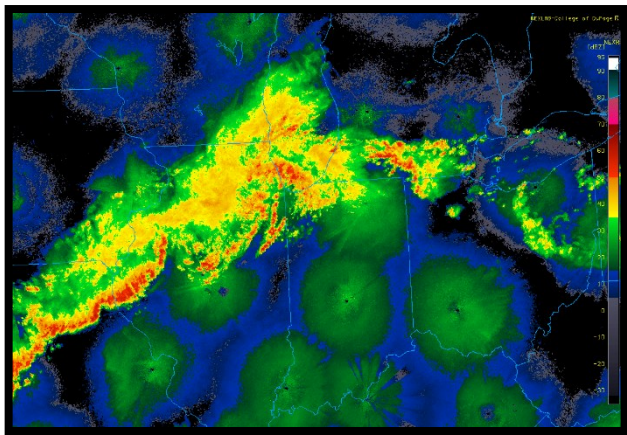
**Magnolia Warbler over the Longshore Tower, May 15, 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**

intermittent periods of light rain, downpours, and calm conditions, all alternating hour to hour. RADAR images (Figure 1) show that despite the rain, a strong influx of migrants was winging their way northward in between the rain events. Additional rain arrived later in the night, creating a wall of strong storms that draped over Lake Michigan for several hours.

Early on the morning of May 15<sup>th</sup>, I awoke pre-dawn at the nearby Springhouse Inn, and prepped for what was likely to be a morning of wet birding and documenting what thousands of people would be missing as the COVID-19 pandemic had cancelled the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival that was to be occurring this particular weekend. Moments into consciousness, the fire alarm went off in the hotel, waking everyone staying overnight. Fortunately, a large percentage of hotel guests were birders. Thus, the fire alarm proved a good excuse to get out in the field immediately, as it was apparent from outside in the drizzle that an arrival of new birds had indeed occurred. Nashville Warblers, Swainson's Thrushes, and Baltimore Orioles could be heard in nearby trees before daybreak. I was joined shortly after in the Indiana Dunes State Park with another Indiana Audubon birder, Richard Garrett. Both Richard and I had traversed the flooded park roads to catch the morning dawn chorus in the back-dune shelter areas (Wilson Shelter and Duneside Shelter). Immediately upon getting out we were treated to a grounded Common Nighthawk sleeping in a nearly bare oak tree. Warbler song was all around us. Quickly we racked up a dozen warblers in one parking lot, including singing Blue-winged Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, and numerous Black-throated Green Warblers. We did not enjoy the shelter area long before getting a phone call from famed dunes area birder Brendan Grube. His instructions were simple. "Get to the tower, there's a major bird flight going on now."



**Cloudy and windy conditions greeted counters at the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15, May 2020. Photo by Brad Bumgardner.**



**Figure 1: Composite reflectivity RADAR images from overnight 14 May 2020-15 May 2020. Image one was taken at 02:25 AM CDT (local time) showing a large curtain of strong storms blocking northbound bird migration. Image two was taken at 05:55 AM CDT, showing a break in the rain showers.**



When Brendan calls to report an influx of birds, it means business. Brendan Grube has been an important member of the Dunes area birding community for many years, coming from a family dynasty of great birders. His early work on the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower revolutionized what we know of today as the longshore flight, or morning flight. Coupled with the powerful statistics and understanding of migration, Dr Ken Brock has been able to document the amazing migration from the Indiana Dunes in what today is known as the Grube-Magnitude Index.

After a single day of birding, how do you best quantify the magnitude of flight witnessed? Enter the Grube Magnitude Index. Developed by Dr. Ken Brock, and later refined through many permutations, it essentially produces a magnitude score based on the total diversity of birds seen in a morning, while also considering the total individuals seen. For total individuals seen, each species is compared to the mean average of previous counts, creating an index point for the 60 most common longshore tower migrants at the Indiana Dunes State Park. The species chosen for the Grube Magnitude are, for the most part, well-recognized longshore migrants. An effort was made to avoid species that breed near the Dunes State Park longshore tower site (e.g., Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Eastern Towhee, and Field Sparrow), as there is always uncertainty about whether these are local birds or migrants.

Standards were calculated from each species mean using the below equation. The advantage of this approach is that indexes of the less common species more closely match their flight numbers (i.e., they are not overpowered by the standard), thereby emphasizing flight diversity.

$$\text{Std} = \log_e(4^{\text{mean}})$$

Obviously, there are other parameters not mentioned. One such limits a single species score to 10, thus a single record flight from one species will not skew the total index score. A computer program uses the given date and location to search database files for each of the above species. The number of each species is divided by its corresponding standard; these quotients are referred to as indexes. The sum of all indexes involved in the flight is the Grube Magnitude Index score. The Grube Magnitude Index for 15 May 2020 is represented in Figure 2.



**Golden-winged Warbler over the Longshore Tower, 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**

SPECIES	NUMBER	RUBE MA	SPECIES	NUMBER	RUBE MA	SPECIES	NUMBER	GRUBE MAG
MODO	6	0.1357	BGGN	6	0.4317	BPWA	15	3.9894
CHSW	90	2.0595	EABL	8	0.5229	BAWW	25	10.0000
RTHU	12	2.1314	AMRO	8	0.0500	AMRE	3	1.2931
BEKI	1	0.3058	CEDW	250	0.4808	SCTA	70	10.0000
RHWO	18	3.4417	TEWA	50	10.0000	CHSP	7	0.3911
RBWO	6	1.0050	NAWA	8	3.4935	RBGR	38	5.4363
GCFL	4	1.9231	YEWA	10	2.9240	INBU	275	7.8348
EAKI	175	2.9167	CSWA	5	3.0120	BOBO	88	5.9060
BHVI	2	1.4388	MAWA	10	4.6512	RWBL	75	0.0500
YTVI	2	1.0309	CMWA	202	10.0000	COGR	20	0.0500
WAVI	6	2.1661	YRWA	350	2.3810	BHCO	25	0.2273
REVI	5	2.5907	BTGW	12	6.3492	OROR	30	5.1546
BLJA	100	0.2941	BLWA	35	10.0000	BAOR	450	7.7990
PUMA	4	0.8316	PIWA	4	0.6678	HOFI	5	0.1080
TRSW	5	0.0600	PAWA	250	9.7276	AMGO	88	0.3667
CLSW	15	1.2500	BBWA	50	3.0120		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>149.8909</b>

**Figure 2: Total Grube Magnitude Index Score for 15 May 2020, showing each species individual score. Data courtesy Dr. Ken Brock.**

Getting  
Friday,

back to  
May

15<sup>th</sup>. Upon arrival at the tower, it was migration bedlam. Already on site were Caleb Putnam and Stephanie Beilke, who had chosen this day to do a big day. However, the amazing flight taking shape had convinced them to stay, as a diversity of bird could be seen without leaving the platform deck. What was clear was that a massive overnight migration took place, with many warblers, vireos, and thrushes hitting a wall of rain and putting down in the Dunes area. Additionally, thousands of neo-tropical migrants simply chose to continue their migration right into dawn. Chip notes of warblers, ranging from 20 feet off the ground to several hundred could be seen streaming westward. The cloudy conditions made it difficult to identify most to species. Likely 10% or less were identified all morning.

Even with the four of us on the tower, we were severely short-handed, as simply identifying the warblers was such an overload, that getting accurate counts on some of the more common species simply fell to the wayside. This included likely hundreds of swallows and swifts, Baltimore Orioles, and kingbirds. Certain species had dedicated counts made, as they were clearly making a record-breaking flight. Additionally, species intermixed with warblers with distinct calls, such as the harsh zip calls of Indigo Buntings, were counted with concerted effort.

By far the most impressive warbler on the move May 15<sup>th</sup> were Cape May Warblers. Caleb's skillset of capturing birds in flight with a camera assisted with some of the identification of high-flying warblers overhead. Cape May Warblers, and their distinctive yellow neck, are still visible in flight, even in poor conditions. With the added light gathering and ISO compensations from a camera, several other warblers were identified that would likely not have been known, even with the most proficient warblers in flight identifier.

The morning's flight likely paled in comparison to the amazing Tadoussac Bird Observatory record flight of an estimated ½ million warblers on 25 May 2018, in what was described as a river of warblers. Such utterances were made that the day was the "greatest birding day of my life" by the observers. Funny how the same exact thing was proclaimed at the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020.

While the final estimates were not anywhere near a million warblers, certainly thousands of warblers went by. Perhaps even tens of thousands. What we know of that was identified consisted of state record counts of several species, as well as some Dunes area record counts. Some amazing totals



**One of over 200 Cape May Warblers to fly past the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**



**Indigo Bunting at the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**

included (12) Golden-winged Warblers, (25) Black-and-white Warblers, (35) Blackburnian Warblers, (250) Palm Warblers, and (350) Yellow-rumped Warblers (Myrtle). However, the real show stealer, the Cape May Warbler, shattered logarithmically the previous record. Over 200 Cape May Warblers (202) winged westward over the Longshore Tower that morning. Both males and females could be seen, with a few briefly landing in the nearby cottonwoods. Their abundance was staggering they alternated in abundance with more typical “common” warblers at the tower site, such as Palms and Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Not to be outdone, the morning’s oriole, bunting, and tanager movement was a separate feast to behold. Alone, these species would have taken headline if it were not for the warbler movement. To see (70) Scarlet Tanagers in a single day, yet alone a lifetime, is a goal for anyone. Baltimore Orioles moved in the dozens past the tower, with every 10 or so revealing an Orchard Oriole trying to slip past.

All in all, over 100 species of birds were witnessed on the morning of Friday, May 15, 2020. It may go down as the single greatest birding day that this group of birders witnessed. But as migration is a promise to return, one only must wait until the next season for the same prospect of another spectacular day of birding.

*Editor’s Note: To learn more about the Indiana Dunes Longshore Flight Survey, visit the eBird.org hotspot at [ebird.org/hotspot/L209156](http://ebird.org/hotspot/L209156) 4. To read the daily blog visit [indianadunesbirding.wordpress.com](http://indianadunesbirding.wordpress.com).*



**Cape May Warbler (female) over the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**



**Canada Warbler over the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**



**Blackburnian Warbler over the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**



**Blackpoll Warbler (female) over the Indiana Dunes Longshore Tower on 15 May 2020. Photo by Caleb Putnam.**



# Indiana Christmas Bird Count Summary 2019

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For the second straight season Indiana's Christmas Bird Count featured the discovery of two remarkable rarities; this year it was a Vermilion Flycatcher and a Western Sandpiper. Incredibly, both of these CBC firsts were found on the same count - Western Gibson County! Other great finds included the state's seventh Western Grebe, the tenth Swainson's Thrush, and the first White-winged Crossbill in seven years.

Nine species had record high totals this season - Trumpeter Swan (80), Redhead (1,579), Red-necked Grebe (3), American White Pelican (101), Great Egret (7), Red-shouldered Hawk (365), Barn Owl (8), Red-bellied Woodpecker (2,406), and Winter Wren (68). Species found in low numbers this year were Red-breasted Nuthatch (12), Lapland Longspur (103), Snow Bunting (77), Purple Finch (18), and Pine Siskin (20).



**Documented Vermilion Flycatcher on Gibson County CBC, 14 December, 2019. Photo by Dan Collins.**

Western Gibson County had the highest species total again with an impressive 109. Other circles to top ninety species included Oakland City (94) and Sullivan County (93). Sadly, missing from this group is the Goose Pond count that failed

to report their data this year. Forty-four counts reported data in Indiana this season (down from fifty-three last year), which included 797 field observers and 133 feeder watchers (both totals were slight increases from a year ago). A total of 1,904 party hours, 265 hours of feeder observation, and 107 hours of nocturnal birding resulted in the discovery of 147 total species. These totals were also a bit higher than last season, with the exception of the species total, that was down by six.

Several circles enjoyed good goose counts. The best Greater White-fronted Goose totals came from Sullivan County (3,665), Gibson (1,600), and Terre Haute (743). By recent standards, the Snow Goose total (39,024) was low; the highest totals came from Gibson (30,717), Evansville (4983), and Sullivan County (1,549). Two circles had Ross's Geese - Gibson (13), and Terre Haute (1). Tippecanoe (117) and Pokagon (97) had this year's highest Mute Swan totals. The bulk of the season's record eighty Trumpeter Swans were provided by Oakland City (51). It was also a good year for Tundra Swans (132) with fine counts from Eagle Creek (46) and Gibson (34). Duck counts of note included Gibson's 458 Gadwall and 115 Northern Pintail. Elkhart (23) and Oakland City (12) had the best Canvasback totals this season. It was an amazing year for Redhead; most of the record high 1,579 Redhead total was provided by Dunes West (915), Elkhart (290), and the Dunes counters (104). The Dunes count also added two Surf Scoters, while Tippecanoe's single bird was a nice "inland" find. All twenty-six White-winged Scoters were also added by the Dunes count. Black Scoter went unreported for the first time in seven seasons. This year's three Long-tailed Ducks came from the Dunes (2) and Gibson (1).

Ring-necked Pheasants were scarce, only being reported by three circles. The best Wild Turkey counts came from Elkhart (112), Ohio River (73), and Terre Haute (62). Three counts had Red-throated Loons - the Dunes (51), Dunes West (1), and Lake Monroe (1). Sullivan County's sixty-eight Horned Grebes was more than half of the state's total (114). Red-necked Grebe is always a good CBC find; this season three circles reported this handsome grebe - Whitewater (2), Oakland City (1), and Patoka Lake (cw). Even more impressive was Lake Monroe's Western Grebe, Indiana's seventh CBC record. Gibson (146) and Sullivan County (38) added most of the 196 Double-crested Cormorants.

A new American White Pelican record was created singlehandedly by Gibson's 101, far surpassing the previous best (12). Seven Great Egrets was also a record high, with an impressive four by Sullivan County, a pair for Ohio River, and one for Gibson. Muncie (2) and Gibson (1) added the season's three Black-crowned Night-herons.

Raptor highlights included a Knox County Osprey, Golden Eagles from Willow Slough (2) and Pigeon River (1), and a record year for Red-shouldered Hawks (365). Rough-legged Hawks were scarce (51), with only Willow Slough (20) finding more than six. The lone Virginia Rail was found on the Dunes count. Several circles had big Sandhill Crane totals, including Eagle Creek (5,203), Muscatatuck (3,500), and Whitewater (2,300). Whooping Cranes were added by Gibson (4) and Eagle Creek (1).



**Four Great Egrets in Sullivan County, 20 December 2019. Photo by Steve Lima.**

Gibson counters discovered the season's only Least Sandpiper as well as one of two birds vying for "bird of the season" honors - Indiana's first CBC Western Sandpiper. Two counts contributed the bulk of the "large gulls" this season - Elkhart and the Dunes. Both of these counts contributed single Lesser Black-backed Gulls and Glaucous Gulls. The active landfills in the Elkhart circle produced 2,822 of the Herring Gull total (3,265). The Dunes count also contributed all twelve of this season's Great Black-backed Gulls.

A new record Barn Owl total was set with eight; remarkably they were all found on one count - Oakland City. Double-digit Eastern Screech-owl counts were achieved by Lake Monroe (21), Spring Mill (10), and Elkhart (10). The Dunes count had the season's only Snowy Owl and Northern Saw-whet Owl, while the lone Long-eared Owl belonged to Willow Slough. The Red-bellied Woodpecker count (2,406) established yet another new record high. Lake Monroe had an impressive sixty-four Pileated Woodpeckers. Both Merlin (10) and Peregrine Falcon (11) had good totals this year.

The second bird laying claim to "bird of the year" was also an amazing Gibson find - a Vermilion Flycatcher, another state CBC first. Sadly, Loggerhead Shrikes have become tough to find in Indiana, so it was nice to see one on two counts this year, Pike County and Spring Mill. Seven Northern Shrikes represented a typical year.

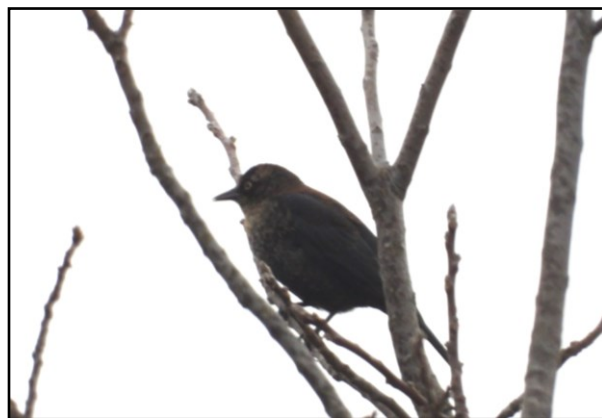
Once again Terre Haute, with 15,716 American Crows was the main contributor to the state total (28,910). Eagle Creek reported a single Fish Crow and a nice count of 595 Horned Larks.

Red-breasted Nuthatch was a “no-show” for most counts. The state total was only twelve, with the highest count coming from the Dunes with only seven birds. Elkhart (50) and Topeka (30) had very good Brown Creeper counts. The sixty-eight Winter Wrens was also a new record high, with the best count coming from Elkhart (13).

South Bend’s Swainson’s Thrush represented the state’s tenth CBC record, and the first in nine years. Ohio River had a big American Robin count (3,167), while the Dunes and Lake Monroe had single Gray Catbirds. Oddly, all sixty-five American Pipits this season came from one count - Elkhart. It was another poor year for Lapland Longspur (103); Topeka’s fifty-five was the only count with more than thirteen. The seventy-seven Snow Buntings was only slightly better than last season’s disastrous total (11). In fact, only two counts had any Snow Buntings - South Adams County (75) and Eagle Creek (2).

The only warbler species this season (other than the expected Yellow-rumped) was Common Yellowthroat. Single Yellowthroats were found on the Evansville, Dunes, and Richmond counts. It was a good year for Chipping Sparrows; the seventeen chippies were added by Muscatatuck (7), Ohio River (6), Greenfield (2), Gibson (1), and Whitewater (1). There were two big contributors to the season’s ninety-three Savannah Sparrows - Oakland City (54) and Gibson (22); there were no other circles with more than four. Six Lincoln’s Sparrows was the highest count in twenty-eight years, thanks to Sullivan County with an impressive four birds, and singles from Big Oaks and Lafayette.

It was a big year for blackbirds on the Evansville count; they reported 31,670 of the season’s 37,682 Red-winged Blackbirds and 775 of the 916 total Rusty Blackbirds. It was another poor year for winter finches. Only eighteen Purple Finch were counted, the highest total was South Lake County’s ten birds. Pine Siskin (20) was also elusive, with only four circles tallying small numbers. The lone winter finch highlight was South Bend’s White-winged Crossbill - the state’s first in seven years.



**Rusty Blackbird on 28 December 2019 in Clay County. Photo by Logan Lakins.**



