

Newsletter for the Indiana Audubon Society

CARDINAL

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Limberlost Field Trip

April 8, 2017

Falling Springs Warblers Trip

April 22, 2017

IAS Spring Festival

April 28-30, 2017

Indiana Dunes Birding Festival

May 4-7, 2017

Please visit the IAS website for more information

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WILSON'S SNIPE COVER PHOTO:
MARK WELTER





IN THE NEWS...



Passenger Pigeon Historic Marker Dedication April 3 @ 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm EDT

Join the Indiana Audubon Society, DNR Division of Nature Preserves, and the Indiana State Historic Sites for a dedication of a new historic marker commemorating the last known Passenger Pigeon taken from the wild. This event occurs at the Whitewater Canal State Historic Site on the 115th anniversary of that date.

Known for flocks that darkened the sky, the Passenger Pigeon was once the most abundant North American bird. A population in the billions as late as 1860 was nearly zero by 1900. Communication and transportation advancements enabled market hunters to kill unprecedented numbers for food and sport. Species became extinct when the last captive bird died September 1, 1914.

Before extinction, vast numbers of Passenger Pigeons inhabited Indiana's forests as they migrated through the state to the southeastern U.S. in the fall and north in the spring. Nesting colonies spread over miles often attracted amazed onlookers and hunters. The last verified Passenger Pigeon in the wild was shot about five miles from here near Laurel April 3, 1902."



Mary Gray Loses an Old Friend • by Carl Wilms

Many visitors have walked the Tulip Poplar Trail at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary and enjoyed the mature forest located in the southeast corner of the property. A majestic Red Oak has been a prominent feature throughout the history of Mary Gray, and before. Located on a hillside and adjacent to the trail that leads in and out of the merging creek valleys, the tree had provided

abundant shade and food for animals for at least 160 years. You may remember its presence. This handsome tree fell during a storm in February and traversed the trail and creek at its base. A sense of the tree's massive size can be conveyed by the four tanks of chainsaw gas required to cut just a narrow path! While cutting this tree, I wondered about the animals it fed, the people it inspired (Native Americans through IAS members), the nests that it held, and the history it could relay.

What? A 2017 Hummingbird Festival? • by Carl Wilms

As many of you are aware, the summer of 2016 was a milestone season for banding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (RTHUs) at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. Amy Wilms and her crew banded more than 600 individual birds! That number does not include recaptures. During banding events, many members of the community (and from as far as Ohio) came to watch in awe as the 3-5 gram feathered gems were processed and released. Some entire families journeyed to Mary Gray. The #2 residence's back porch was filled on some occasions!

These events planted the idea of extending a larger invitation to a larger community! Discussions have now led to the concept of planning a Hummingbird Migration Festival to be held at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary on Saturday, August 26, 2017. This is the time of year that the RTHUs are heading south and the numbers at the Sanctuary's feeders are incredible.

While the details of the event are still in the planning stages, a successful festival will depend on ample volunteers to assist in organizing: parking, trail guides, admissions, vendors...and the list goes on.

We have high hopes! The planning committee would LOVE to hear if you are able to assist in the design and/or implementation of this exciting event. Please contact Carl Wilms at 765-827-5109 or email carl.wilms@indianaaudubon.org.



MEET A MEMBER

By Brad Bumgardner



Shari McCollough

Mom, Photographer, IAS Board Member, MGBS Committee Member...and "Chicken Lady." Meet IAS member Shari McCollough!

Tell us a little about yourself.

I'm a "stay-at-home" Mom (who is constantly on the road) near Crawfordsville, where I tend to 1 adult male (Larry), 5 children (3 girls, 2 boys: aged 13-27), Holland Lop rabbits, 2 male llamas, 75 adult chickens, and 100 selectively bred chicks.

Chickens...what gives?

Chickens have been present all my life. Formerly as a source of eggs and meat, but in the last 15 years, they have become a source of "eggs and show." Raising show chickens developed my keen eye for subtle differences in markings with the birds' legs, eyes, wings, colors, dimensions, and behaviors – features that are directly associated with bird watching in the field. My interest in non-chicken bird watching only started recently. *(Check out her starring role in the CMT movie "Chicken People," available on Netflix)*

What drew you into watching wild birds?

Since I was little, I have had a love of nature and wanted to take photographs of it. I had an early interest in taking pictures of birds outside the house, and later learning their names while reviewing the images. About 4 years ago, I began seriously matching bird field marks, behaviors, and flight patterns to bird names. I frequently referred to Cornell's allaboutbirds.org website for assistance. I soon wanted to expand my search beyond the home while blending photography with my new passion for birds. My enthusiasm for both interests is sometimes overwhelming, but the passion to learn and document provides ample determination.

Where is your favorite Indiana birding destination?

The Lye Creek Burn Nature Preserve is just a jig-jog away from my house, and my dear friend Clint Murray (80 year-old proprietor & caretaker) is an inspirational companion who freely shares his property and knowledge. The 80-acre property is predominantly wetlands (whose wetness fluctuates with local farmers' groundwater removal), but also has some grassland and forest. The springtime lures a wonderful collection of shorebirds, as the mudflats are very attractive.

What is your dream birding destination if money was no object?

Honduras, Galapagos, Papua New Guinea! I probably wouldn't sleep the whole time.

Editor's Note: Shari also enjoys visiting the IAS Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. When asked how many pictures she takes in a usual visit, she explained, "Probably about 500...maybe I keep half. I want to catch the bird. The picture must catch the bird. Behavior... singing... bathing... displaying... field marks. The picture has to catch it all to be a good one." When asked how many of the 250 pictures actually get posted or shared, she said, "One?" Many of Shari's photos grace the IAS web page, the Birding in Indiana Facebook page, and her personal Facebook page. Special thanks to Carl Wilms for assisting with this issue's Meet a Member.

BIRDING IN THE INDIANA STATE FORESTS

By Kim Ehn

Indiana has 12 designated State Forests, located mostly in the southern half of the state. Totalling 152,000 acres, they offer hunting, fishing, boating, camping, horse and mountain bike trails, and other recreational opportunities. Nine had timber sales in 2016, and trails have been relocated because of tree harvesting. In the Indiana Senate, the "Old Forest Bill" (SB 420) was introduced earlier this year to require the DNR to designate at least one undivided area comprising at least 10% of each State Forest as an old forest area. Timber management would be prohibited in these old forest areas. There is some discussion about previous Department of Forestry land designations and a mistrust that the state is allowing destruction of old forest areas in favor of revenue-producing activities like timber sales.

I checked online resources and consulted birders about each forest to find out about the trails, maps, and checklists of birds entered on eBird. In the 2016 Indiana Recreation Guide, two forests were labeled as having 'exceptional birding': Greene-Sullivan SF, which only provides an online Horse Trail map, and Salamonie River SF, which provides a written description but no map of trails.

Clark SF, with 25,000 acres, offers trails for hiking, biking and horse riding. There have been no eBird reports from there. The extensive Knobstone Trail has 32 of its 59 miles in this forest.

Ferdinand SF, with 7700 acres, is one of only 4 State Forests not named after the county in which they are located (DuBois County). It is listed as a hotspot on eBird with 117 species reported. Five hiking trails totaling 8.8 miles connect roads, two small lakes, a campground, and a fire lookout tower. Kathy McClain is the top birder here with 104 species observed, including a high count of 18 Golden-crowned Kinglets in April 2016. "I enjoy going to Ferdinand SF any time of the year, but especially during spring migration. I usually walk the Foxy Hollow Trail which is always good for Ovenbird, Worm-eating Warbler, and Louisiana Waterthrush. Also in May & June, you can find Scarlet and Summer Tanagers," she said.

Greene-Sullivan SF straddles the Greene/Sullivan county line. This eBird hotspot boast 171 species. Waterfowl, waders, birds of prey, and a variety of warblers have been found here. A horse trail map can be found online.

Harrison-Crawford SF, at 24,000 acres, includes the 25-mile "Adventure Hiking Trail" and the Blue River. 96 bird species have been reported here, according to eBird. John Schaust had a one-day high count of 50 species in May 2014.

Jackson-Washington SF has a Skyline Drive that has had 84 species reported on eBird. Larry McIntosh counted 34 species in 30 minutes along a quarter mile in May 2016. Knob Lake has ten trails that start in its area. 75 species are attributed to Knob Lake, including a high count of 10 Wood Thrush in May 2016 and at least 16 different warblers.

Martin SF has had just a few checklists reported during the months of April, September, November, and December. The Martin Lake Trail, Arboretum Trail, and Education Trail are mentioned. These checklists include reports of all seven Indiana woodpeckers: Downy, Hairy, Red-headed, Red-bellied, Pileated, Northern Flicker and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Morgan-Monroe SF, at 25,000 acres, is just west of Brown County. The 42-mile Tecumseh Trail starts here. Six locations within the forest are listed as Hotspots on eBird. Jerry Downs has been visiting this state forest annually for more than 10 years. In May 2010, he listed 28 species, a high of 36 species in 2011, and has continued every May since then.

Owen-Putnam SF features a mountain bike trail in Owen County as an eBird hotspot, but only includes 24 species, counted by one person on two separate visits (February & April). An online map of the 6300 acres is available.



Immature Bald Eagle by John Velasquez, Salomonie Lake, 2016

Pike SF is listed in eBird as the Pike Unit of Ferdinand SF. The Patoka River runs through this property of 4900 acres. Vireos, Flycatchers, and Warblers like the area. In May 2012, 30 Indigo Buntings were counted by Amy and Noah Kearns, and in May 2016, Mandy Mahurin and Sherry Burnett reported a Mississippi Kite.

Salamonie River SF is located in Wabash and Huntington counties. A dam created the adjacent Salomonie Lake, which is managed by DNR and split into state park and state recreational areas. The state forest was created as a demonstration area for the reclamation of eroded riverside land. The Civilian Conservation Corps reforested several

hundred of the 850 acres. There were no timber sales in 2016. No online map of trails was available, but Salomonie State Park has an online map. The Indiana Recreation Guide lists this area for exceptional birding. "I like the Salomonie State Forest. The beach area of the state park is good for gulls and shorebirds in February through March. Near the nature center, the road headed toward the water has warblers, swallows, orioles and other migrants in May through September," contributed John Velasquez, who has birded this area since 2008.

Selmier SF, in Jennings County, is the smallest designated state forest at 355 acres. Frank Selmier planted pine, Black Locust, Black Walnut, American Sycamore, and Tulip Tree from 1921-1934. His estate donated the land adjacent to the Muscatatuck River to the state for recreational use. No timber harvesting was conducted in 2016. There are no eBird reports from this location, and there was no map online.

Yellowwood SF is 24,000 acres with a 133 acre lake, and is located in popular Brown County. Four timber sales were allowed in 2016 and four combined with Morgan-Monroe SF. It has one of the highest eBird totals of all the state forests at 179. In April 2016, four Wild Turkeys were seen during a Wild Turkey and Ruffed Grouse survey with no grouse reported. A Saw-whet Owl banding station operates here in the fall under the direction of Susan & Jim Hengeveld. Jerry Downs is the top eBirder for the area, having seen a total of 126 species. Dawn and Ryan Slack have birded the Lake Trail. "It goes around the north end of the Lake, offering views of the marshy upper end, a large beaver dam, and a mature pine plantation that has breeding pine warblers," Ryan said.

Friends in Feathers by Gene Stratton-Porter • Celebrating Its 100th Anniversary **IAS Book Review by Terri Gorney**

The fact that the book is still in print after 100 years speaks volumes. "What I Have Done With Birds" first appeared over five issues of the Ladies' Home Journal magazine in 1906. It was published in book form in 1907. Six chapters were added and it was published again as *Friends in Feathers* in 1917. Gene Stratton-Porter wrote about the birds of Geneva, Indiana. The one exception was the Great Blue Heron which she saw on a vacation to Michigan. Today, she could easily see this bird in Geneva.

Each chapter in the book represents hours of careful observation of a bird species. This winter, I decided to see if I could figure out where Gene took her photographs of birds and their nests. By using her words, old maps and Google Maps, it was not that difficult. Geneva has not changed that much since Stratton-Porter's day. Most of the birds photographed were on the grounds of the Limberlost Cabin, on the Porter farm, or within three miles of the cabin. The exception was the King Rail, which was seven miles from the cabin; she went out there seven days in a row in order to photograph the female on the nest. That meant a total of 98 miles by horse-drawn wagon. During this time period, Gene would load four cameras into the wagon, along with other paraphernalia, and set off on a birding adventure – and she brings you along through her writings.

I think others will enjoy this book, as the joy of birding is timeless and her observations are as relevant today as when they were made more than 100 years ago. The Limberlost gift shop sells a reprint paperback version of *Friends in Feathers* for \$33.75, and you can still find used first or early editions of this book on sale online. It is also available as an e-book for Kindle.

NEW BIRDING TRAIL FOR MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY

By Matthias Benko

Birding has been a passion of mine for almost six years now. Two years ago, when it came time for me to start planning my Eagle Scout Project, I knew that I wanted to do something that would help birds thrive. At that point, I had been a member of the Indiana Young Birders Club and the Indiana Audubon Society for a few years, so I was well aware of the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. Right away, I knew it would be the perfect place for my project.

I was left with only one small issue: what was I going to do?

My original plan was to design an informative pamphlet about the bird life at the Sanctuary and install trail marker posts that would correspond to numbers on the pamphlet. After analyzing my plan and pitching the idea to my Scoutmaster, it was decided that the markers should be visually more interesting and useful, so instead they would be functional birdhouses mounted on conduit pipe poles with steel predator baffles. Shortly thereafter, I found a birdhouse design on the Internet that required only one cedar plank per house. The design was simple and straightforward, which would be perfect to give to a group of Boy Scouts to build.

After my project was approved, I began planning the birdhouse-building workshop. The workshop proved a success: nearly forty birdhouses were completely or almost completely assembled during this daylong event. After making sure all the birdhouses were structurally sound and the roofs were painted (with the help of the Indiana Young Birders Club), my Dad and I constructed the mounting systems and attached numbers to the birdhouses.

Phase 2 of my project was to design the pamphlet that would accompany my birdhouse trail markers. My Dad and I had to make a few trips out to the Sanctuary over the summer so that I could survey the trails for bird species. After the research was complete, I selected locations and started writing the content for the pamphlet. This took multiple revisions over about three months. When the writing was completed, I was extremely lucky to have Mr. Scott Arvin, a professional graphic artist, design a gorgeous pamphlet for me. I could not have been happier with the finished product!

Twenty-five of the forty birdhouses were installed over two trips to Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. The other fifteen were given to the Sanctuary's resident caretakers, Carl and Amy Wilms, as spares in case something were to happen to the houses that were installed. The project took about five months from start to finish. After nesting season, I cleaned out all the birdhouses and was able to see which had been successful. It turned out that birds used approximately half of them, which was really great, but a quarter fell victim to mud dauber and paper wasps, and another quarter were left unoccupied. Hopefully, next season the houses will see a higher ratio of birds to wasps!

I would like to thank the Indianapolis Zoo and Indiana Audubon Society's Mumford and Keller Grant program for funding my project, and I would also like to express my appreciation to my parents, Boy Scout Troop 174, Carl and Amy Wilms, the Indiana Young Birders Club, and Scott Arvin for making this project possible. Next time you go to Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, make sure to check out my birding trail!

SPRING FESTIVAL AT THE MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY

April 28-30, 2017

Join us at the IAS Spring Festival!

The Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary welcomes everyone to enjoy a weekend of birding, learning, and great fellowship with friends. With more than 700 acres, the MGBS is the flagship property owned by the Indiana Audubon Society, Inc. Spring Festival participants can walk the many trails, enjoy welcoming back the migrating birds, and celebrate Spring!

Friday, April 28, 2017

7:30 PM – Join Carl and Amy Wilms for a social hour. Participants will have the opportunity to catch up with friends and meet some new ones, enjoy the nighttime sky, and sample local cheeses made in Connersville.

Saturday, April 29, 2017

7:00 AM – Breakfast at the Barn. Join the Sanctuary Committee for a hearty breakfast! Carl and the gang will cook up some of his famous cottage cheese pancakes, with bacon and sausage on the side!

8:00 AM – Birding at the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary – Warblers are here! Join us after breakfast to enjoy seeing the new arrivals!

9:00 AM – The Big Sit with Amy Wilms (and we'll band a few birds, too)! This is our time to sit around the porch at Brooks Hall and enjoy the local and migrating birds that pass through. We also might band a hummingbird or two!

10:00 AM – Fighting the Invasives. Join Dawn Slack on a journey to learn more about invasive plant species and how the MGBS is battling them!

10:30 AM – IAS Board Meeting (meet in Brooks Hall).

Noon – Lunch on Us! The MGBS Sanctuary Committee will serve up lunch for everyone in attendance. (Included in your registration fee).

1:30 PM – Bees: Their Connections. Bill Cummings will offer a hands-on demo of beekeeping and how bees connect to the MGBS. This is a fascinating look into the world of bees!

3:00 PM – The History of the Indiana Audubon Society by Jeff Canada

4:00 PM – IAS Membership Meeting

5:30 PM – Dinner at Brooks Hall

6:30 PM – Hummingbirds 101. Let's talk about hummingbirds! Did you know that the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary is researching these jewels of the sky? Find out how many we have banded and learn about how to keep them coming back to your location! Carl and Amy Wilms will share their knowledge about these awesome birds.

Sunday, April 30, 2017

7:00 AM – Breakfast at the Barn. Join the Sanctuary Committee for a hearty breakfast! Carl and the gang will cook up some of his famous cottage cheese pancakes, with bacon and sausage on the side!

8:00 AM – Bird walk at the Sanctuary

Registration Information

\$35 Adults, \$10 Youth

Register online at www.indianaaudubon.org under Activities.