



Newsletter for the Indiana Audubon Society

# CARDINAL

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## Upcoming Events

- **Eagle Field Trip**  
January 18
- **Dominican Republic**  
February 2014



*Red-shouldered Hawk photo by Kyle Arvin*



Photo by Mike Maxwell

## Lake Michigan Field Trip

Saturday, November 23, Indiana Audubon Society president, Brad Bumgardner, led a pre-winter field day along the Lake Michigan lakeshore. This year's field trip was scheduled later than typically done, and the weather was proof of that! With morning temperatures below freezing, and winds already from the north and building to over 30 knots, it certainly felt like winter in the dunes. By lunch time, thick snow was coming down along the eastern portions of the lakefront. Many non-lakefront birders saw their first snow of the year.

Birding was difficult throughout the day. It's always a coin flip where to bird in this weather. It's also harder as many of the good lake birds are a gamble as to when and where they may show up. The sedentary style of lake watching is not for everyone, especially with freezing gale force winds in your face! As is typical, many birds get seen by only a few members and not everyone will see every good bird seen during the day.

The morning began with a lake vigil from atop the pavilion at Dunes State Park. The roof top provides an excellent 30 foot vantage point over the lake. It proved to be a good morning for a few waterfowl species. Most notable was a record count of Redheads. The group saw over 100 of them, but others on the lakefront would count over 1,000 over the course of the day. Other ducks seen from atop include Common Goldeneye, Lesser Scaup, Bufflehead, lots of Red-breasted Mergansers, and small numbers of all three scoters. As typically happens, we were the sacrificial birders, as a juvenile Black-legged Kittiwake would fly by after the group took a break back in the warmth of the park nature center.

A drive through Beverly Shores would find very little birds in the high winds. Green-winged Teal were hiding in the open waters, but many of the wet areas were frozen tight already. Our sought after bird was seen by a few members just before leaving... a Northern Shrike. By lunch time, dense snow was coming down and visibility was around ¼ mile. After lunch, the group would spend the remaining birding time from the comfort of the Portage Lakefront Park pavilion. More mergansers and redheads would be seen, including a Common Loon in the river harbor.

All in all, it was a memorable experience for those involved, if not a big, rich birding experience. Any day at the lakefront is an interesting day in the field.



## In Focus

Two boys attending Fayette County School's afterschool program's monthly visit to the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary learn how to focus binoculars under the instruction of Carl Wilms. It was delightful to hear comments from boys and girls as they gained familiarity with these wonderful binoculars provided in memory of Mary Gough, former biology teacher in New Castle, and very active member of the Sanctuary Committee with her husband Clifford (former Sanctuary Chairman). The students frequently claimed to be able to see the various targets picked out for the focusing lesson. But when they were actually able to focus on the objects, their excited voices revealed they were then able to clearly focus on the distant objects. Although birds were scarce during this outing, the students enjoyed looking at rocks in the creek and walnuts hanging in the air. Funds provided by the Mumford/Keller Grants and Scholarship program are making monthly visits to Mary Gray possible this year.

Other students were engaged in leaf identification, spotting birds visiting the feeder station at Brooks Hall, learning about snakes, and taking a hike along Wildflower Trail. Our next visit will engage students in owl pellet dissection after a program about owls. Over 60 students were in attendance during the November visit.



## Dominican Republic 2014

We still have room for 3 more people! Sign up now.

Contact: Chuck Mills [cmills@wowway.com](mailto:cmills@wowway.com)

Dave Fox [davefoxy@gmail.com](mailto:davefoxy@gmail.com)

Brad Bumgardner [bumgbj01@hotmail.com](mailto:bumgbj01@hotmail.com)

Registration is under activities at [IndianaAudubon.org](http://IndianaAudubon.org)



Photo by Dave Fox

# SNOWY WINTER

If you love Snowy Owls, the current winter in Indiana is your place to be! Birders in many parts of the state are just getting a taste of a true owl invasion this winter. Simply put, this is the largest incursion of Snowy Owls into the state that we have ever witnessed. That alone is a bold statement. Is it possible that previous invasions were even greater, but our instant communication and social media allow sightings to really spread better than they would have 20 years ago? Yes, possible, but still, most sightings would have been heard about, even if months late.

So how many owls has the now famous owl invasion brought? As of this writing, over 60 Snowy Owls have been logged in the state. 2/3 of these have been restricted to the lakefront areas of Lake, Porter, and LaPorte Counties. These sightings have been cross referenced with other nearby sightings and are scrutinized with closely to get the most accurate portrayal of this year's incursion. If age and sex can be determined, it is added to the record.

Not only are bird enthusiasts and the general public getting a once in a lifetime experience by seeing so many of these magnificent owls, but researchers stand to gain a wealth of information also. We are learning now that areas of the high arctic, particularly northern Quebec had an outstanding year in terms of Snowy Owl prey. Lemmings were stockpiled at nesting sites and the owls responded by laying many eggs and successfully fledging them all. Now that many young owls are here, owl banders are switching from night shift banding to day shift to attempt to band and study these great white ghosts from the north.

Project SNOWstorm, as it's being called, has multiple facets that will seek to capitalize on this massive event to generate important data about these birds. This is being done via banding, GPS telemetry, specimens, and a photo database. Owl banders in the Indiana Dunes area are mobilizing to attempt to band a few of these owls to add to the huge dataset potential this winter. Some surprising data already being collected this

year shows that many of these Snowy Owls are not starving or emaciated, as is generally thought when so many are driven from the far north. The fact that so many are immature, with few adults tells us that the irruption is not likely food related, or we would be seeing more adults coming down too. Annick Gionet Rollick, from The Owl Foundation is reporting that only one of six birds coming in is emaciated. The others are in good shape (aside from vehicle collisions). That's good news to hear for these Snowy Owls. Perhaps we'll see a return spring flight then?

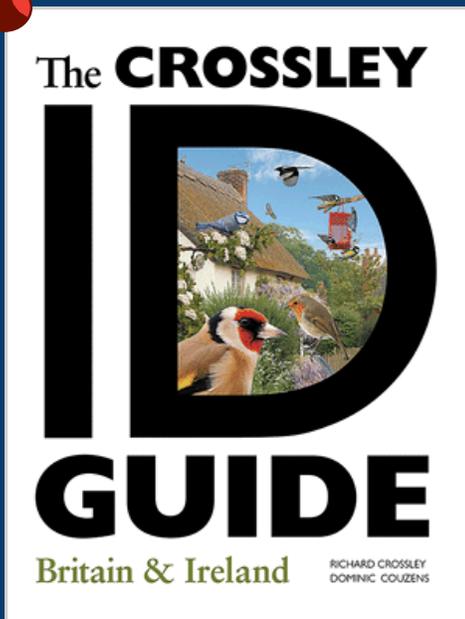
That's not to say that these owls don't have their problems. Snowy Owls are well known to being susceptible to aspergillus. Their bodies just aren't exposed to this in the colder climates. Insect parasites, such as lice, can infest a bird and make life more difficult for them.

Human threats are the most serious and one source of stress for these magnificent birds that we can do something about. Getting out and approaching a wild Snowy Owl is just an all around bad idea. If the owl has to move or fly away from you, then you are too close. This is compounded at sites where many people are visiting an owl. What is perceived as a onetime disturbance may be repeated several times a day. There are great photographers taking amazing pictures with giant lenses that look more like WWII guns than cameras, then there are less than ethical photographers that will move ever closer to try to get a better picture. Birders should have no hesitation to tell someone if they are too close or to call out individuals giving other birders and photographers a bad name. They may not be starving, but certainly don't need the extra stress for no good reason.

So certainly enjoy these sightings. Go see a Snowy Owl or two. Take your friends out to see them for Christmas. But do so respectfully and do report your Snowy Owl sightings if you happen to see one. Ebird.com is a great place to submit your own Snowy Owl reports.

## WELCOME IAS NEW MEMBERS

Joyce Gottschalk	Jonathan Monk	David Lindsey	Jason Gill & Melissa Maple	Geoff Haase	Patty Hauri	Dawn & Mike Grogan	Dan Collins
Tim Jones	Michelle White	Robert Carper	Daniel & Kathryn Wilson	Bill Edrington	Brian & Elaine Wilson	Patty Hughes	Bruce Glick
Kyle Rush	Allan Crist	James & Linda Kolb	Shawna Baker	David & Mary Ann Carmony	David Rupp	Michael Watson	Pam Baker
Jonathan & Shannon Childress	Lynn Matthews	Katie Spicer	Richard Keerns	Janette Carson	Susan Zwierko	Michael Gearhart	Pokagon State Park
Laura Hrusovsky	Anthony & Valerie Wendle	Sue Benner	Jonathan Renshaw	Valerie Vessely	Ep Ipswich Library	Lauren Kenly	Ted & Tedra Hemingway
Julie Brown	Stacy Street	Scott Brehm & Amy Foster	Connie Allman	Todd Rankin	Mark Welter	Cookie Ferguson	Ed Dewitt
Linda Crawford	Cindy McDonald	John Pohl	Ronald Allman	Kai Soder	Larry Haugh	Jeffery Coleman	Neal Miller
Dr. Grace Fowler	Jim & Jennifer Gunn	Christopher Newman	Seth Loe	Sein Smith	Warren Bilkey	John Harley	Kathy Abretske
Kirk Roth	Robert Cummins	Gary Harlan	Madison Pursiful & Isaac Le Masters	Connie Griswold	David Tapscott	Rita Marlow	Dennis Roth
Mark Harper	Susan Cox	Carol Ryan & Bob Timm	Connor Helser	Ryan & Dawn Slack	Jacob Lutz	Kathryn Henman	Steve Bell
David James	Ben & Rita King			Kimberly Ehn	Joshua & Emily Jackson	Sarah Fowler	Ray Helmuth



Books from Princeton University Press [press.princeton.edu/birds/](https://press.princeton.edu/birds/)

**The Crossley ID Guide:  
Britain and Ireland**  
**Richard Crossley & Dominic Couzens**

- The most user-friendly guide to the birds of Britain and Ireland
- A close look at more than 300 regularly occurring species
- Award-winning Crossley ID Guide design
- Lifelike images of birds from near to far
- A celebration of the British and Irish countryside
- A teaching and field guide and essential reference
- Concise and compelling text by Dominic Couzens and Richard Crossley

*This book continues the great work of the Crossley ID Guide series. The incredible photography and helpful text make this an easy choice for anyone travelling to Britain and Ireland.*

*Scott Arvin, Cardinal Editor*