

# THE Warbler

INDIANA YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

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# MY INDIANA BIG YEAR **PART 2**

by Jonathan Bontrager

While my big year began with an abundance of bird species and lifers, the latter months proved more challenging. The more species I found, the harder it became to find more species.

For most of the summer, finding year birds was nothing like it was during spring migration. As an example, a trip to southern Indiana on June 10<sup>th</sup> to search out several target birds did not yield much. Despite this, however, I did find the uncommon Least Tern, a lifer for me. Its colony was on a fenced-in island at Tern Bar Slough.

On Independence day, I searched Goose Pond primarily for a Black-billed Cuckoo and both Bittern species. I missed them all. So, my dad and I headed south for a bird that nests in the area. I had success there when I found a Loggerhead Shrike, which was exciting – especially considering that I was unaware of its exact location. I also observed eight breeding warbler species that day, surprising for July!

In late August, my dad and I went north to Lafayette for two southern species. Just as googled announced “you have arrived,” we were surprised to see one of them in a dead tree in the suburban area where they were reported, Mississippi Kite! Actually, there

was a family of three Kites, which allegedly bred up there. Our next stop was Celery Bog. Before entering the preserve, we crossed a bridge that went over its lake, and once we did, I had already caught a glimpse of my target, a flock of Snowy Egrets!

After a failed search at the sod farm in Lebanon for shorebirds, I got a chance to return with my dad. First, we made a

WHILE LATER COMPARING MY FIELD NOTES TO BIRD GUIDES, I WAS DELIGHTED TO DISCOVER THAT I HAD MY FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH A **YELLOW RAIL.**

brief stop at Eagle Creek Park, where I photographed a distant “gull.” It wasn’t until later that I realized what I had actually seen: a Black Tern, year bird #238! Once at the sod farm, my search began just as on my first trip there, scanning the mud between the sod, until another

bird appeared on my camera’s screen: *my first ever Buff-breasted Sandpiper!*

On September 18th, I traveled north for a Brant. It didn’t take long for me to spot the little black goose among the Canada Geese. That afternoon, I attended a pleasant bird walk in the dunes with Indiana Young Birder’s Club (North). Though I didn’t get any FOY birds, one of

the leaders told me where I could find Brewer’s Blackbirds. So after the walk, my mom took me to the spot, arriving, in time to witness a large flock of them just before sunset.

When my dad and I went to Goose Pond in October, American Avocets, Glossy Ibis, and Cattle Egrets had been seen that very day. Sadly, I missed all three. I headed back to the car along a gravel road, reminding myself that Goose Pond is filled with extensive wetlands – over 7,000 acres of it to be exact. Thus, while disappointed that I missed my targets, I was not entirely surprised.

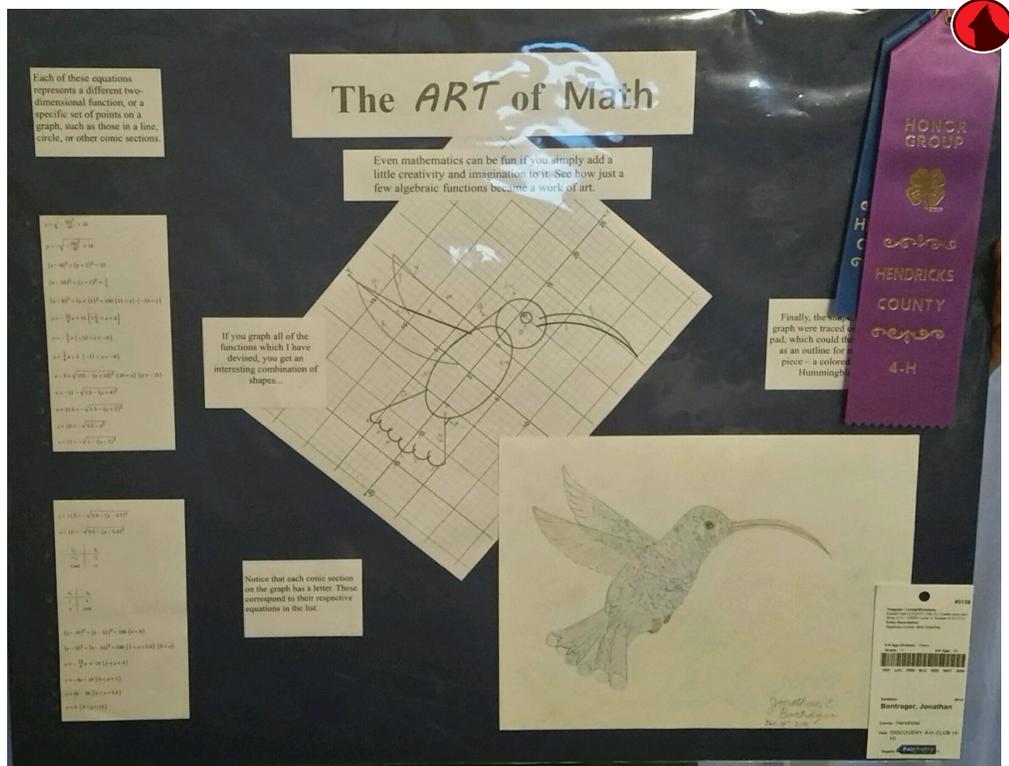
Surprise! In a flurry of feathers, from the short weeds by my feet jumped a little round bird, which then plopped into the reeds in the ditch, never to be seen by me again. In the two startling seconds in which the bird was in flight, I saw a rail. It had white

primaries. I tried to spot it again, but despite that I knew its exact location, the little patch of aquatic vegetation in the ditch seemed more like a black hole. It had disappeared as quickly as it made its appearance. While later comparing my field notes to bird guides, I was delighted to discover that I had my first encounter with a YELLOW RAIL.

Around that time, a Clay-colored Sparrow was reported to be – of all places – in downtown Indianapolis. The trip was most memorable indeed, and the little green patch amidst skyscrapers was a perfect example of a migrant trap. I got excellent looks at Lincoln's Sparrows, an Ovenbird, and even an American Woodcock! After about an hour of searching, I found the Clay-colored Sparrow.

In November, my dad took me camping at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. Little did we know, the Inland Bird Banding Association was holding their annual conference there that weekend. The Wilms, who are residents of the property, let me get up-close looks of an owl banding operation and accompany expert birders the next morning to scope out a Little Gull! Seeing Saw-whets for the first time was amazing, and although we never found the Gull, I found my lifer Black Scoter!

During the previous winter, there was a Pacific Loon at Eagle Creek Park, which I did not see. Much to my delight, it was reported again in December 2016. After scanning a while, I didn't know if I had found it or not. Despite the differences



between the Common and Pacific Loon, it is not like one is yellow and the other is blue! When I got home, I noticed a Loon in one of my photos that looked a little different. The head was *slightly* rounder. The bill was *slightly* shorter. "Could it be?" I thought. It was. I had just seen my 300th lifer, the Pacific Loon!

From January through early April, I spent a great deal of time birding and traveled to fields seemingly everywhere for Lapland Longspurs-- but to no avail. In November, I was at it again, searching and researching, but still failing. On December 13<sup>th</sup>, I was greeted by snow. Since they are easier to find after a fresh snow, we searched the nearby countryside. There, in between the familiar peeps and jingles of the Larks, I heard a particular rattle call for the first time in person. I looked into the field. At last, there they were! It was an exciting moment indeed.

A trip to Terre Haute in December proved productive, as we found scores of waterfowl, including a Ross's Goose, flocks of hundreds of geese, a very late Palm Warbler, and more. Even after reviewing my photos several times, I kept finding new birds, such as Greater white-fronted Geese. It is still possible that, among the massive flocks in my photos, is a Cackling Goose, which I otherwise had not found.

On Christmas eve, enroute to visit family, I had the opportunity to check a tree in a Pulaski county corn field, where a Golden Eagle had been reported over a week earlier. Contrary to what I expected, I was shocked

4-H poster that appeared at the Hendricks County Fair last July. It started as a project for his math class.

to see the it in the exact same tree that it was seen in over a week earlier! During my last trip to the lakefront, shortly thereafter, I was hoping to see any one of the many lakefront species which had previously eluded me, but I uncovered no new birds. I now know how difficult lakefront birding can be, but I nevertheless keep trying.

For my final trip of the year, as I had for the past 360 days, I consulted eBird, which led me to the Goose Pond area once again. On this beautiful day, I was particularly targeting Tundra Swan, Northern Shrike, and Merlin. We enjoyed many species, and I found a Tundra Swan, though not the Shrike. Come evening, the setting sun and Short-eared Owls made it seem too late to find a Merlin. But even at this last moment, and despite low light, my prayer was answered. Of all the places in 7,000 acres of wetland, a Merlin was perched just within my sight. That day, I had observed 60 species.

In 2016, I set off to find as many birds as I could. My goal? 200 species. The result? A magnificent tour of our great state, spanning 37 counties; time spent bonding with family, and friends new and old; a wealth of information learned, invaluable experience earned; and a deeper appreciation for all birds gained, regardless of whether it is a Blue Jay or a Brant. For me, it was not simply a Big Year of birding. It was a leap year in learning.

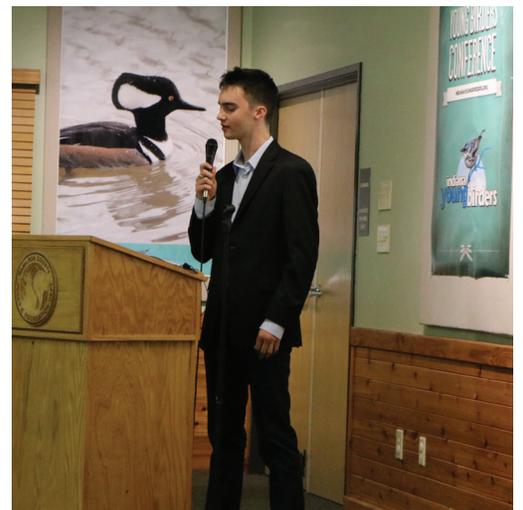


Jonathan accepted this award on behalf of the IYBC birdathon team



OUR 2017 CONFERENCE  
IN AUGUST WAS A  
HUGE SUCCESS.

HERE ARE A FEW PHOTOS FROM THE EVENT.





## THANKS AGAIN TO OUR 2017 CONFERENCE SPONSORS

**CERULEAN WARBLERS** - \$500 OR  
GREATER

INDIANA AUDUBON SOCIETY  
MR. CANARY



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First, a HUGE continued thanks to everyone for your patience as we have worked to put-together this edition of The Warbler. We know that we have not been all that consistent over the past 18 months but, we as volunteers remain dedicated to the importance of helping to ignite passion for birds and nature to Indiana's youth!

With this in mind, it is important to note that although our club is designed to share the passion for birds and nature among Indiana's youth, there is a lot of work behind the scenes that must be done to maintain continuity of such a great organization. And, we have some fantastic adult supporters!!! But, we could use more help!

You may be asking yourself, "what can I do to help?" Well, there are a number of things actually but the first step is simply offering to volunteer. Below is a small list of things where we could really use some support:

Newsletter support. Most specifically, soliciting articles from known young birders and nature-lovers on any topic in nature. Do you know a kid in Indiana who loves birds or nature? If so, ask them if they would like to write a 1-2 page article for the IYBC newsletter.

Field Trip Leaders and Organizers. Would you be willing to organize, promote, and host an IYBC field trip in Indiana that is family-friendly? If so, please contact us. The more trips we have on the calendar, the more opportunities we have to get kids in Indiana engaged in birding and nature.

Conference Presenters. Our conference is our keystone event that provides an awesome opportunity for young naturalists to present on the topic they love most. Do you know a young naturalist that would enjoy presenting at our conference in August? If so, please let us know.

Conference Volunteers. We can always use more help promoting the conference to grow attendance, volunteers for setup, activities, and helping on conference day.

This list is only a few of the keys areas where we could use the most support. If you are reading this, you are either a young birder or, passionate about the importance of encouraging our youth to be engaged in nature. Whichever you are, we can use your help!

If you are interested or, have an idea to share, please contact us at [iybc@indianaaudubon.org](mailto:iybc@indianaaudubon.org).

Happy Birding!

Chad Williams  
Adult Chair, Indiana Young Birders Club



# 6th Annual Indiana Young Birders Conference!

**August 18, 8:00 am - 4:00 pm EDT**  
**2018 Indiana Young Birders Conference Presenters & Program Leaders!**



Teodelina



Ceth



Jonathan



Matthias



Carbon



Juan



Lorenna



Catalina



Serena



Evan



Luis



Keegen

## INDIANA YOUNG BIRDERS GUIDE GIVEAWAY

The Indiana Young Birders Club is excited to offer young birders, nature lovers, teachers, scout leaders and naturalists that educate youth in nature, a chance to win a **FREE FIELD GUIDE** to birds. We want these guides to be in the hands of our future conservation leaders, and of the adults who encourage them.

### QUALIFICATIONS

- Be a young birder or nature lover (18 years or younger).
- Be an educator intending to use the guide to increase his/her students' knowledge of birds.
- A parent or guardian whose child is enthusiastic about birds and intends to use the guide to further encourage his/her children in nature.

### HOW TO APPLY

- **Ages 11 and Up** 250-350 word letter or essay stating why you want the guide, what you love about birds, and how you will benefit from the guide and/or what program you plan to use the guide for.
- **Under age 11** 100-200 word letter or essay stating why you want the field guide. If you are an educator, naturalist, scout leader, etc. you must clearly state how you will use your guide to impact young birders/naturalists.

Attend one of our events or apply online at [www.indianayoungbirders.org](http://www.indianayoungbirders.org).

Register at [indianayoungbirders.org](http://indianayoungbirders.org)



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### **SPECIAL THANKS**

The Indiana Young Birders Club would like to thank the following people and organizations for their support:

**Indiana Audubon Society**

*Interested in writing for our newsletter? Do you have a picture or drawing you would like for us to share? Or, would you like to blog about some of your birding adventures with us on our blog site? If so, please email us, we would love to hear from you. [iybc@indianaaudubon.org](mailto:iybc@indianaaudubon.org)*

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*The IYBC is a community for young birders across the State of Indiana to come together and support birding as a sport and to promote conservation initiatives that help sustain bird populations throughout the Americas.  
email: [iybc@indianaaudubon.org](mailto:iybc@indianaaudubon.org)  
website: [www.indianayoungbirders.org](http://www.indianayoungbirders.org)*

