

THE Warbler

INDIANA YOUNG BIRDERS CLUB

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American Kestrel Photo by Severin Arvin





MY INDIANA BIG YEAR

PART I

by Jonathan Bontrager



Inspired by many people’s big year stories, when I got word of the Audubon’s 2016 Indiana Bicentennial Birding Big Year Challenge, I had already launched my own. So this only accelerated my enthusiasm. With a goal 200 species, it wasn’t just a year of finding lots of birds, but a big turning point in my learning curve as a birder.

One thing I learned is that it is best to chase rarities before regular species. In January, I went to look for the Green-tailed Towhee at Tern Bar Slough. The problem was that the habitat is huge, and I had no idea where to look! I learned a new birding lesson: do your homework first! We returned to the area on February 26, and since my dad and I enjoy camping, we stayed at Harmonie State Park. That evening, I heard an unusual noise. After a moment, I realized that it was the nasal “peent” call of the American Woodcock, a life bird! Once I got near, the Woodcock was performing an amazing aerial dance, sometimes swooping just a few feet in front of us. The experience was breathtaking! The next morning, we headed straight to Tern Bar Slough in search of a rarity; only this time, I knew exactly where to look. Finally, after four trips to that location we met another birder, who enthusiastically pointed us toward the flock of sparrows. I anxiously searched the flock, and at last, there it was. . . the Green-tailed Towhee!

In March, comparing eBird data from locations across the state, I decided to visit the Willow Slough area due to its great potential for year birds. The habitat was dotted with common birds, but we were genuinely amazed when we pulled up to a flooded field on the edge of the property. It was teeming with birds, the water filled with hundreds of ducks, comprised of 10 species. I was ecstatic to find a flock of 600 Rusty Blackbirds feeding on the mudflats—another new species for me. Later on, I also got great looks at my first-of-the-year (FOY) Short-eared Owl, Northern Bobwhite, and a surprise flyover flock of American White Pelicans! In late March, my dad and I enjoyed camping and birding at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. I had mixed expectations since eBird showed few reports from the area, yet the habitat is good. You can imagine my delight when I found 6 year birds, including two lifers: American Pipit and American Black Duck.

On April 1st, I set off to find a bird that I knew little about. I was searching at Marian University just before sunset, when I heard the beautiful song of a Winter Wren suddenly ringing out of the brush. I jumped

in surprise. My dad said he had never seen me more excited about a bird.

Just days later, on a field trip with Amos Butler Audubon, our search for Smith’s Longspurs proved successful. It was a great morning, though bitter cold for April, and my first time at “The Burn.” Afterwards, my dad and I headed to Goose Pond, where I found a lifer, Black-necked Stilt, and a few more year birds.

After studying many birdsongs through the winter, my identification skills were put to the test on a day in late April, in Bloomington, where the first spring migrants were trickling in. The woods were filled with birdsongs when, for the first time in my life, I heard loudly and clearly, “Beeee Bzzzzzz!” a Blue-winged Warbler! At Beanblossom Bottoms Nature Preserve, every twist and turn around the boardwalk offered something new in the various habitats, as I was literally finding FOY birds left and right, such as Warblers, Vireos, and

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Tanagers. The best surprise was a sound resonating through the marsh which I had never heard before or since—the almost haunting, descending whinny calls of the elusive Sora. It was a surreal experience. By the end of this exciting day, I had found 12 year birds.

A trip to Jackson-Washington State Forest was the golden day of my big year. I woke at the crack of dawn after sleeping under the stars. The morning of May 7th was unforgettable. Just a simple walk around the campgrounds and the little Knob Lake yielded over 60 species, including 12 FOY’s! Just some of the amazing birds whose songs filled the woods that memorable morning included Gray-cheeked Thrush, Summer Tanager, Ovenbird, Golden-winged Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Orange-crowned Warbler. That afternoon, a trip to Muskratutuck FWA made my day, year, and life lists much longer (including Yellow-breasted Chat, Sedge Wren, and Bobolink), and Whip-poor-Whils back at camp that night ended the day at 23 year birds—the most FOY’s in a single day during my big year.

Just stepping out onto my deck in the morning is often quite rewarding. Despite the suburban habitat, this yielded 24 of my 2016 year birds. While mostly common ones, I also observed the local Fish Crows fly over a few times, and heard my FOY Lincoln’s Sparrow sing.

In the spring, I jumped at the opportunity to join an Amos Butler Birdathon team. We spent the morning at Eagle Creek Park, where the earliest risers were Robins, Song Sparrows, and Catbirds. By first light, all kinds of birds were all appearing. We found dozens of species throughout the park, including Henslow’s Sparrow, Cliff Swallows, Kentucky Warblers, my first Mourning and Worm-eating Warblers, and more. From there, we headed to Stillwater marsh in Bloomington, where we enjoyed a slough of birds, most notably a perfect view of a pair of Long-billed Dowitchers. Our last stop of the afternoon was a road on a knob deep in the woods, where we added Cerulean Warbler, Summer Tanager, and

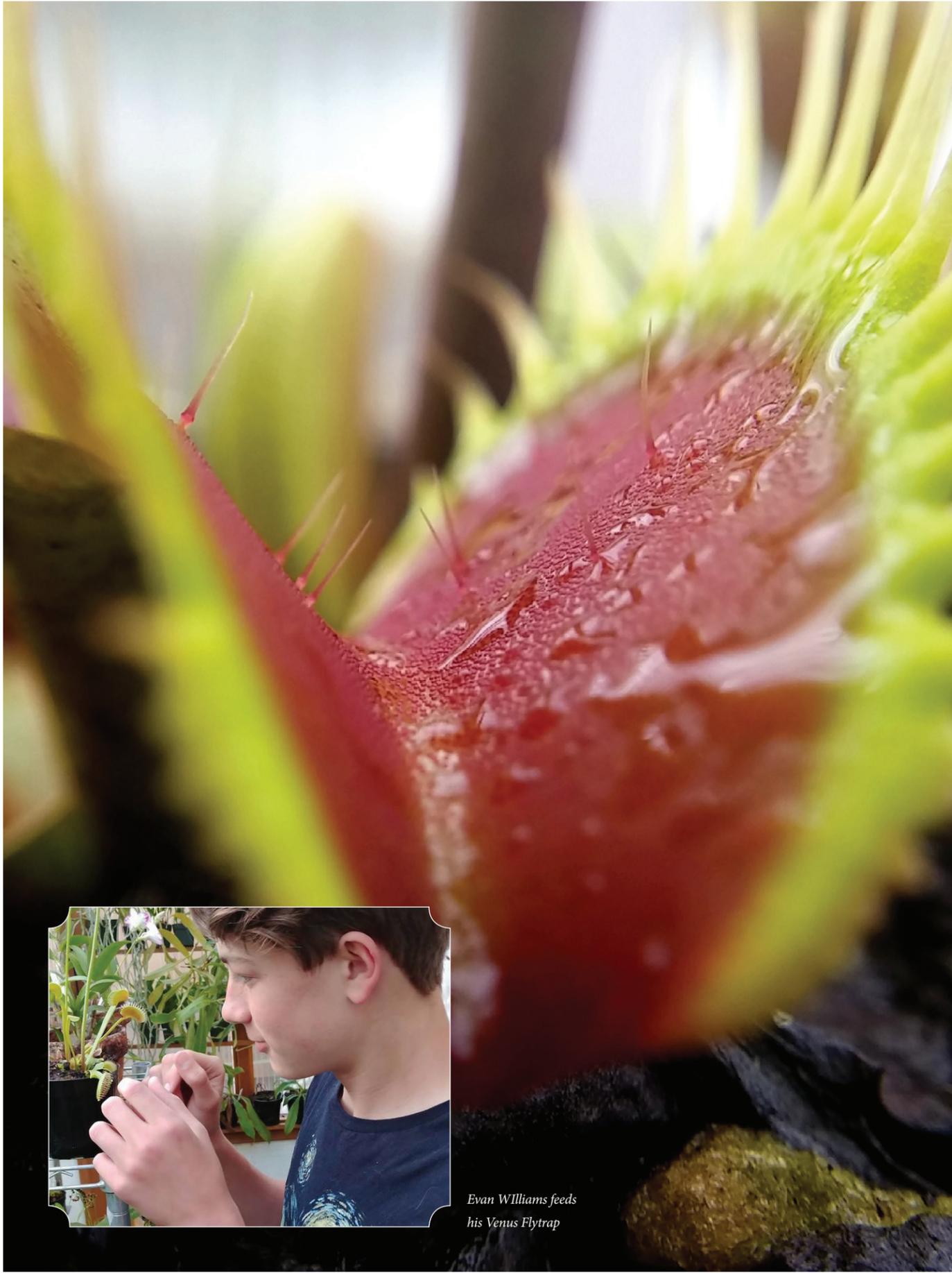
Ovenbird to our day list, putting us at about 105 species. It was my first birdathon, an additional 9 species to my year list, and a great day of birding!

In early June, I enjoyed a superb day of birding with my friend Henry, an Illinois Young Birder. A diversion from our original plan to bird in the Dunes, we decided to head toward the Willow Slough

area. At Kankakee Sands, we were greeted by droves of Dickcissel, great numbers of Grasshopper Sparrows, hordes of Henslow Sparrows, masses of Meadowlarks, and more. At Willow Slough, we successfully located my year list targets of Lark Sparrow, Bell’s Vireo, and Marsh Wren, and found an exciting lifer and nemesis for Henry: a Kentucky Warbler! At a nearby country road, we spotted an Upland Sandpiper, a lifer for both of us! At that same magical spot, I found two lifers, Western Meadowlark and Vesper Sparrow. The day was truly a highlight in my big year!

Not quite half way through my year, I had learned a lot, gained many lifers, and had already passed my goal of 200 species. As the year progressed, so did the challenge of finding new birds, and those I had yet to see became increasingly dominated by the most elusive species.

To be continued . . .



THE FANTASTIC FLYTRAP!

by Evan and Chad Williams

Last fall, I did a presentation at the Indiana Young Birders Conference titled the Fascinating Venus Flytrap! The presentation was so much fun that I decided to write a short article for The Warbler too!

The Venus Flytrap (*Dionaea muscipula*) is the world's most popular and fascinating plant. This amazing plant is actually native to North America and grows within a radius of 75-90 miles of Wilmington, North Carolina. It was brought to public attention by then North Carolina Governor Arthur Dobbs in 1763. It got its name from first being called "Fly Trap Sensitive" combined with its scientific name which is "Dionaea muscipula". The name "Dionaea" comes from the Greek Goddess of Love "Dione" a mythological reference to Venus. The other part "muscipula" means "mouse trap". All things combined, you can see where the name may have come about. But, that's enough history; let's go into what makes this plant so cool!

The Venus Flytrap catches its prey by first luring it to the trap. It does this in two ways – by color and by secreting sweet nectar. Once the insect is lured to the trap and begins to drink the sweet nectar, it will rub against any of the 6 trigger hairs inside the trap (3 on each inside lobe). When the insect rubs against 1 trigger hair 2 times or 2 separate trigger hairs within 20 seconds, SNAP! The trap closes within a fraction of a second over the prey! As the prey struggles inside the trap, the trap further tightens over the insect. Ultimately, the plant will form a seal around the insect and release a digestive juice that will break down the insect and absorb it for food! After about 3-5 days, the trap will reopen in preparation for its next meal.

Growing the Venus Flytrap is actually pretty easy IF you follow some very important and easy rules!

The Venus Flytrap LOVES the sun and lots of it. Keep it in full sun at least 4-6 hours per day.

If possible, keep your plant outside on a porch or patio during the active growing season.

While actively growing from March – September, keep your plant in a tray of distilled or rainwater at all times. Keep the tray filled about 1/3 the way up the pot. Flytraps do not recover well from drying out!

Do not use any type of mineral water including tap water or well water.

Only grow your plant in Sphagnum Peat Moss. Venus Flytraps hate soil with minerals! And, they love the moisture that peat moss retains.

If your plant is outside on the porch, it will catch its own insects. But, you can feed it too! Just be sure to only feed it insects that will fit inside the trap.

Venus Flytraps are perennial plants in North and South Carolina and enjoy some winter rest. In October, place your plant in an unheated garage or a very chilly windowsill preferably facing north. You can also place your pot (with damp soil) in a zip lock freezer bag at the bottom of your fridge. Keep it in this location until spring and around March. At this time, you can bring it back into a bright windowsill. In April or May, you can place the plant back on the porch.

If the plant is mature enough to bloom, you may see a flower spike begin to grow, usually in late April or May. However, blooming can drain your plant of energy so; I recommend you cut off the flower spike when it is about 1 inch tall. This way your plant can put all of its energy into its new season of traps!

Lots of light, lots of water, and some rest in fall and winter. Do all of these things and your plant will do great!

Sadly, this amazing plant is also in trouble. It has two major threats – habitat destruction and poaching! Because it has a natural range along the coast of North and South Carolina, it lives in an area where humans also like to vacation. Because of this, much of the land where the Venus Flytrap grows is being drained to build vacation homes and other buildings. Poaching is also a concern because dishonest people will dig up the plants in hopes to sell them for a less than \$1 per plant. Thankfully, it is now a felony in North Carolina to poach this plant!

You can help protect this awesome plant and other Carnivorous Plants by supporting organizations such as the Nature Conservancy which make protecting important habitats a priority. If you are ever in North Carolina, you can visit a great Nature Conservancy property called "Green Swamp" which is home to the Venus Flytrap and a number of other cool Carnivorous Plants. But remember, only look and don't touch! If you see anyone digging up a Venus Flytrap, call the local police!

You can purchase tissue-cultured or seed-grown plants from a number of vendors online by searching "Venus Flytrap".

Evan Williams is in 7th grade, has 3 sisters, 1 brother and two nieces. Evan loves Carnivorous Plants and together he and his Dad run a hobby business called Indiana Insectivores to promote excitement for these incredible plants. Evan also enjoys swimming, running cross country, playing basketball, and throwing discus. He also loves spending time in nature and is a member of the Indiana Young Birders Club.



Evan Williams feeds his Venus Flytrap

THE OWL STRIKES

by Colin Dobson

We took a trip to Northeast Minnesota this winter. One of our main goals was to see a Great-gray Owl, which we went to Sax Zim Bog on the first full birding day. We arrived at an area where one had been seen just after dawn with no luck. Even when someone saw one seconds before we got to a spot. That was very disappointing. We wandered around other parts of the bog seeing birds like both wintering Grosbeaks, crossbills, Redpolls etc. we were driving down admiral road, where one had also been seen as well. I was looking at my side, not paying attention to the other side of the road. Then I hear my grandma basically scream "There's an owl",

which it was on the other side of the road. We stopped and watched it for awhile. We flagged down some and they saw it as well. They moved on and we stayed in the general area. After awhile sitting in the car, the owl flew close and landed near by, allowing us to get great looks. Then, it got up, flew towards us, then landed on the ground right next to my side of the car. We watched it stare into the snow when all of a sudden, we see it's head go under the 10 inches of snow. Seconds later, it pulled out a mouse (I believe). After awhile, we watched it eat the mouse while and eventually it moved on. It will be an experience that I will never forget!

INDIANA YOUNG BIRDERS 100 GUIDE GIVEAWAY

The Indiana Young Birders Club is once again 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.

INDIANA DUNES BIRDING FESTIVAL AND IYBC

Kimberly Ehn

IYBC co-sponsored, with the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, Youth & Family Day at Indiana Dunes State Park on June 7th. Over 100 families received fun bags, and 7 Kauffman Field Guides were given out. Bluebird boxes and recycled bird feeders were made and at least 35 people went on the beginning bird hikes!

Matthias Benko presented a great program about his visit to Daphnine (sp) Island and the Velasquez family helped with a hike and the IYBC booth. Also helping at the IYBC booth were North Chapter families: Aitchison, Wyse, and Harter-Rue.

UPCOMING EVENTS for the North Chapter with all IYBC members invited include Sunday afternoons in Porter County, from 2-4pm (CT):
JUNE 25 at Great Marsh Trail, Beverly Shores;
JULY 16 at Coffee Creek Watershed, Highway 49;
AUGUST 6 at Cowles Bog (IDNL), Highway 12.

For more information, contact **Kim Ehn** at kmehn@comcast.net

OTHER IYBC EVENTS

JUNE 24 Goose Pond

AUGUST 19 Conference

SEPTEMBER 10 OJ and Blue Jays

OCTOBER 21 Family Birding at Salamonie Reservoir

NOVEMBER 4 Saw whet Owl Banding Behind the Scenes

Email iybc@indianaaudubon.org for more information.
See updates on the IYBC Facebook page.

5TH ANNUAL INDIANA YOUNG BIRDERS CONFERENCE!

Saturday, August 19 at 8 AM - 4 PM
at Cool Creek Park & Nature Center

We are SO excited to announce that August 19, 2017 will be the 5th Annual Indiana Young Birders Conference at the Cool Creek Nature Center in Carmel, IN! Stay-tuned for registration details in early summer! Mark you calendars now as you will not want to miss this amazing day!!





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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

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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
website: www.indianayoungbirders.org*

