

Indiana Audubon Society
CARDINAL

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The Magic of
**SAW-WHET
OWLS**

[pg.9]

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The *Cardinal* Newsletter is a bi-monthly publication of the Indiana Audubon Society. Its purpose is to share stories and conversations so that members and the birding community beyond can stay meaningfully connected both to birds and to the people dedicated to their protection.



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Special Access to Mary Gray Birding Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

► Be a part of Indiana Audubon Society! Sign up at: Indianaaudubon.org/membership

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR YOUNG BIRDERS

We are incredibly excited to share with you our 2018 award recipients.



Indiana Young Birder of the Year
Ceth William



Indiana Fledgling of the Year
Elizabeth Breidenbaugh

We're proud to see the passion demonstrated by all our young birders at the Indiana Young Birders Conference this August!

► Discover more about the club at facebook.com/indianayoungbirders



MEET A MEMBER

BILL SHARKEY

Q TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF? WHERE ARE YOU FROM? FAMILY?

I love to learn and birding teaches me a good deal every day. My shorebird addiction developed soon after retirement last July, and listing is attractive to me as an old data junkie. Birds drive my passion but eBird provides the gas.

I grew up in a big family in central Illinois. My Mom and Dad are avid birdwatchers but are not birders. I have been married 29 years to a dedicated non-birder and we have three young adult children - next-to-last tuition check written today! All the kids are employed or have jobs pending graduation. First Prothonotary Warbler spotted by my oldest as I walked him to first grade class, first Burrowing Owl spotted by my youngest on our recent Utah adventure - maybe someday they will get hooked.

I've also been active as a board member on the Indiana Golf Foundation, transitioning from my board role to more and continuing hands on Junior Golf volunteer opportunities, and I serve the State Fair and Fairgrounds on a volunteer financial impact committee. I've done both for years, as both foster continuous learning for me.

Q WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MEMBERSHIP FEATURE?

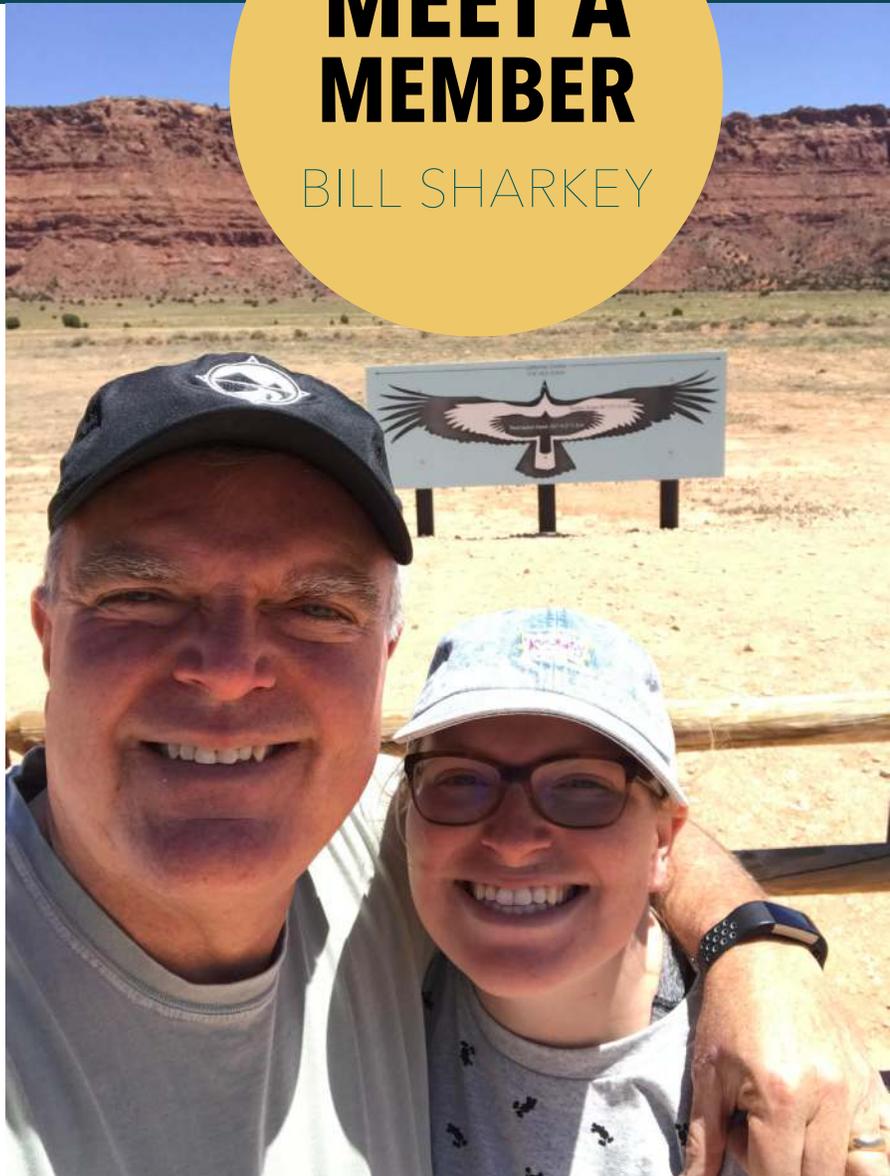
I joined IAS after getting exposure to the members in the field and through Facebook. The help and guidance provided, particularly last summer, has made me a better birder and helped feed my addiction. Supplement that with field trips to learn important Indiana birding locations away from my comfort zone, and joining was a no-brainer. I am very happy with the organization and its "birds first" approach.

Q WHAT ARE YOU MOST HAPPY TO SEE IN THE FIELD OF BIRDING?

I had largely birded by myself during the first 20 years of my experience. As I dove in head first after retirement, I was immediately struck by the breadth of age of the birders I encountered - so many hobbies are aging. We are very fortunate to have so many talented young birders in this area. They are fine passionate folks and add immensely to my enjoyment of birding - there is a future and with a future there is focus on the needs of the birds.

Q BESIDES BIRDING, WHAT OTHER PASS TIMES OR INTEREST DO YOU HAVE?

I was once a decent golfer - now I stroll the levees. I do, however, watch my kids play golf - my daughter is entering her final season playing for Franklin College. It's fun college golf - not too competitive but an enjoyable walk in the woods. I also spend a good deal of time walking for fitness. I use that time to work on my birding by ear - and I need plenty of practice!



Q FAVORITE BIRD?

Standing in the early morning rain last year, I finally (with no small help from other birders) got a good clean view of "Connecticut Joe," the Connecticut Warbler - years of searching and expectations were not disappointed.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE BIRDING DESTINATIONS, BOTH STATEWIDE OR WORLDWIDE, AND WHY?

Goose Pond in Indiana - after years of city work, I find the levees a place of solace and great birding to boot. I simply love the place - even with the <expletive> ticks. I love birding anywhere in the West. Mountains are a sweet thing to a central Illinois boy! From Utah to Arizona to Oregon - get me there and I will find new birds among the landscapes I love.

Fall Festival

POKAGON STATE PARK OCTOBER 19-21

Join us for a fun-filled weekend of birding excitement amongst the lakes and wetlands of northeast Indiana. The historic Potawatomi Inn at Pokagon State Park serves as a perfect backdrop for fall birding in Indiana's "101 Lake County." This is a perfect opportunity to network with other birders, enjoy programs from some of Indiana's (and other states') top birders, or simply relax in one of Indiana's oldest state parks. This location is also conveniently close to Michigan and Ohio, so folks from out of state can join the fun. Whether you are a big lister or a casual bird watcher, this festival offers something for everyone!

This year's event features an exploration for owls, a look at tropical birding in Central America, information on attracting winter finches, bird banding demonstrations, and the best birding that Steuben County has to offer. Be sure to add the Saturday night keynote dinner to your registration – Kim Kaufman, director of the famed Black Swamp Bird Observatory, will be our special guest, delivering a presentation exploring the connections between birds and people.

Make plans to join us!

Register: Visit indianaudubon.org to register now for this great weekend at Pokagon.

Lodgings: The **Potawatomi Inn** allows birders to experience nature at its finest, while enjoying restful comfort with its spacious guest rooms and banquet facilities. The IAS special code has expired, but you can still call 1-877-LODGES1 to make a reservation.

Prefer to camp? Visit camp.IN.gov to reserve a spot.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

All times are Eastern Daylight Time

Friday, October 19

- 4-8 PM REGISTRATION OPEN
[INN MAIN LOBBY]
- 7-8:30 PM OWL PROWL
[INN SUN DECK]
- 6-9 PM INFORMAL SOCIAL TIME
[LONIDAW LOUNGE]

Saturday, October 20

- 7:30 AM-12 PM REGISTRATION OPEN
[INN MAIN LOBBY]
- 7:30 AM-10 AM PIGEON RIVER BIRD TOUR
[INN ENTRANCE]
- 7:30-10 AM CEDAR SWAMP BIRD TOUR
[INN ENTRANCE]
- 7:45-10 AM TRINE SRA/WING HAVEN BIRD TOUR
[INN ENTRANCE]
- 9-9:30 AM CRITTER FEEDER FILL
[POKAGON NATURE CENTER]
- 9:30-10:30 AM FAMILY BIRD WALK
[POKAGON NATURE CENTER]
- 10:45-11:45 AM TROPICAL BIRDING ADVENTURES
[JIMMERSON LAKE ROOM]
- 12-2 PM BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING
[JIMMERSON LAKE ROOM]
- 2-3 PM FALL FEEDER FINCHES & HOW TO FIND THEM!
[JIMMERSON LAKE ROOM]
- 3:15-4:15 PM AFTERNOON BIRD WALK
[INN ENTRANCE]
- 5-6:30 PM KEYNOTE SOCIAL HOUR
[SNOW LAKE ROOM]
- 6:30-7:30 PM KEYNOTE DINNER
[SNOW LAKE ROOM]
- 7:30-9 PM KEYNOTE PRESENTATION & MEMBERSHIP MEETING
[SNOW LAKE ROOM]

Sunday, October 21

- 8-9:30 AM BIRDING WITH THE KAUFMANS
[INN SUN DECK]
- 9:30-11 AM WOODPECKER BANDING
[NATURE CENTER]



STEINER HX 8X42

BINOCULARS REVIEW

BY BRAD BUMGARDNER

Last year, I had the good fortune to hold a pair of Steiner binoculars in my hands. It was my first foray into this top of the range brand of German optics. Those that read my Wildlife XP review knew I was impressed not only with the usual quality indicators such as clarity, durability, and range, but also with the smaller amenities that put the Wildlife XP a step above other binoculars on the market.

I had the opportunity this fall to field test another pair of Steiner Optics – this time, the HX Series of binoculars. These are designed for general outdoor use as well as the birding and hunting markets. I was excited to try them out right away, and I quickly opened the box and removed the binoculars from the plastic and began looking out onto the back deck at the feeders.

“Blurry! Wait, what!?”

In short order, I realized that my patio glass door was quite dirty, and a quick relocation outside revealed that these binoculars pick up everything! What detail! In addition to great clarity, I found the focus knob easily rolled back and forth from close focus to infinity in a matter of half a turn. Manufacturer specifications list 6 feet for the close focus, and I would say that’s about spot on. I was able to use them throughout the day with no vignetting or eye strain by the end of the day.

When you first pick them up, the nitrile rubber armor feels different than other high-end binoculars. Though not as “squishy” as the Wildlife XPs, it still feels good in the hand, and the coating is designed to resist oils and other chemicals, and will not harden with age as other types of rubber can sometimes do.

While researching the HX series, I found that the body of these binoculars uses a polycarbonate material that replaces the traditional aluminum, resulting in reduced weight without sacrificing durability. In fact, these binoculars are rated to withstand a 12 g impact force.

The HX series offers a similar neckstrap and attachment to that found on the Wildlife XPs, and there is a lot to like about the Clic-Loc system for snapping in the straps to the binocular body. No more feeding through tiny straps that slip out at inopportune times. This is a great feature that Steiner offers.

Additionally, the eye cups are completely adjustable, so if you don’t prefer the side cups that block out light, you can easily fold them down. There are also twist adjustments for those of us who wear glasses. The focus wheel is highly sensitive, taking you from close focus to infinity with just a small turn of the dial.

If you’re looking to invest in a great pair of optics, but the price tag of the Wildlife XPs is out your range, you’d do very well to consider the Steiner HX. They’re a pair of binoculars that will stand the test of time. Of course, you could just win them in the IAS Fall Membership Drive this month and be the envy of other Hoosier birders! 🍁



STATS AT-A-GLANCE

PRICE: Retail at \$999.99. With a little online sleuthing, you may find them as low as \$800.

DIMENSIONS: 7.1 in x 5.6 in

WEIGHT: 44.1 oz

PURGING: Nitrogen

MATERIAL: Polycarbonate

FIELD OF VIEW: 241 ft at 1000 yds

MINIMUM FOCAL DISTANCE: 6 ft

GEARED FOR WINTER

BY ANNIE AGUIRRE

Dont' let the harsh elements or plummeting temps give you the birding blues. Here's my top 3 gear must-haves to help you battle the worst this winter:

1

RAVPower Portable Charger



Fun fact: Cold temps drain your phone's battery FAST. Combine that with eBird, Sibley, Google Maps, and any of your other go-tos apps, and your cell's battery life is doomed. Before you begin your next winter excursion, invest in a charger.

► I recommend **RAVPower**. My battery, the 16750mAh model (\$35 on Amazon), charges my phone 3x faster than my outlets, can be used over 7 times before needing a recharge, and has endured a serious beating (i.e. multiple drops on pavement, in puddles, and knee-deep snow). It's so good, my boyfriend stole my backup one.

2

Stance Socks

Another fun fact: I'm pigeon-toed (yes, the feral kind). I also have high arches, and narrow feet – all which lead to agony when combined with extended outings in clunky winter boots.

► My remedy: **Stance Trek Socks** (\$24 on Amazon). While steep in price, these babies pay off by halving foot fatigue on hikes thanks to anatomical cushioning (i.e. a left and right sock for each foot). They are also designed for hikers, so they have moisture-wicking merino wool, reinforced stitching on the toes, and other fancy things. Also, one of them is named after a place I grew up in Oregon, so trust me, it's legit.



3

Reusable Handwarmers



Oh eBird, you cruel mistress...making me yank off my glove to change "jinco" to "junco" on my phone...Great, now my hand is numb...

► Whether you're an eBird app lister or not, it's inevitable – your hands are gonna get cold. Instead of using the throwaway kind, try the **Body Comfort Click Activated Heat Packs** (\$13 on Amazon - or cruise ebay for cheaper offers). These things are pretty nifty for a few reasons. One: They heat up instantly thanks to a bizarre reaction that causes the gel in them to crystalize (which is fun to watch). Two: you can reset them by boiling them, so hurrah – savings! Three: Some of them smell fancy.

a morning with the BLACK RAIL

BY CAROL GOODALL

I had an incredible adventure on the morning of July 9, 2018. I woke up at the crack of dawn and couldn't get back to sleep, so I decided to get over to LaGrange County, where a Black Rail had recently been reported at an Amish farm. This rail is very tiny and secretive, and is almost impossible to get a look at. It is a real rarity and species of concern for Indiana. It has always been a bucket list bird for me, so I was anxious just to hear it. I got to the farm and signed the birding guest book there. I was their 143rd visitor! The owner was putting away his buggy and doing his chores.

This was the second rarity I had chased on an Amish farm in LaGrange County, and both times, the farm owners have been the most gracious hosts.

I proceeded down the cow path and managed to get across the creek on the slippery rocks without falling into the water. I reached the field where the rail had been reported and I heard its kee-kee-kerrr call almost immediately. I was thrilled! I thought I would give myself an hour to try and hear it again, so I waited. In the meantime, the farmer let his cows go to pasture and they meandered by. There were also abundant other birds around me. This farmer has a special property. In my short time there, I heard the usual cast of expected birds, including American Robins, Eastern Bluebirds, and Mourning Doves, but I was also serenaded by Warbling Vireos, Eastern Phoebes and flyby Cedar Waxwings.

Before I knew it, my hour was up and I hadn't heard the rail again, but once was sure better than nothing! As I was contemplating getting back across the creek, I glanced that way and spotted four River Otters slithering across the cow path. "What?!" I had never seen an otter in the wild. I rushed over and tried to position myself in the middle of the creek to get pics, but I didn't get there fast enough.

"Well, now I can't leave!" I told myself. I decided to give myself another half hour to see if the otters reappeared.

Too soon, my time was up. I needed caffeine, so I started the precarious trip back across the creek. When I was halfway across, I realized there were three horses behind me; I hadn't even heard them approach! Fortunately, they let me finish crossing, then followed. Once we were all across, they started nuzzling me. I was shocked, as horses have always been skittish around me. As I was enjoying my lovefest with the horses, I glanced back across the creek and one of the otters reappeared! This time, I was able to get a very quick video.

“ This rail is very tiny and secretive, and is almost impossible to get a look at. It is a real rarity and species of concern for Indiana. ”



This was definitely a day that will live long in my memory. My life is pretty amazing! 🍀

► Editor's Note: Check out a video Carol Goodall captured of the Black Rail on the IAS Youtube channel. Visit: <https://goo.gl/65FCuA>

THE CASSIAR COMPLEX

DETANGLING JUNCO SUBSPECIES BY NICK KIEHL



The Dark-eyed Junco is a common backyard bird throughout Indiana during the winter months; it is found in a wide variety of habitats and is a favorite at bird feeders. However, many birders don't realize that this species is in fact comprised of 15 subspecies which can be grouped into several broad categories, including:

The **Slate-colored**, the default type in much of the eastern United States.

The **Oregon Junco**, with its bold hooded appearance and buffy pink flanks, is far less common in Indiana but occurs annually and is frequently on the radar of junco-seeking birders.

A third type, the **Cassiar Junco**, is less well known by Indiana birders, in part because of its muddled taxonomic past, confusing appearance, and a general lack of published information about its identification and distribution. This article will attempt to address some of those issues and clarify the situation from an Indiana perspective, hopefully encouraging birders throughout the state to look more closely at the "snowbirds" at their feeders while gaining a better appreciation for the intraspecific variation found in birds.

The **Cassiar Junco** has variably been considered by ornithologists to be a subspecies of Dark-eyed Junco or an intergrade population between Slate-colored and Oregon. Current thinking seems to point toward the latter, but genetic research is needed.

Named after the Cassiar Mountains where it was first described in 1918, it breeds in British Columbia, central and western Alberta, and southern Yukon Territory. The winter range is poorly known, with records scattered throughout the United States but most concentrated west of the Rocky Mountains. Its status in Indiana is difficult to determine because relatively few birders have heard of Cassiar Junco, and even fewer actively look through junco flocks in an effort to find one. Based on eBird reports, banding data from nearby states, and conversations I've had with other birders, Cassiar probably isn't all that rare in the state, but is certainly underreported. The appearance of Cassiar is confusing, because as an intergrade population between Slate-colored and Oregon, they can look similar to either parent or show a variety of intermediate features. There is ongoing debate whether Cassiar should be considered a true subspecies rather than a "hybrid swarm" – similar to the "Olympic Gull" situation in the Northwest. Therefore, it's often best to refer to juncos showing intermediate characteristics as "Cassiar-type" birds to indicate the uncertainty that exists in defining the boundaries of this confusing group.

Identification of adult male Cassiar is usually straightforward – it appears intermediate between Oregon and Slate-colored, typically with an obvious dark gray or blackish convex hood, grayish flanks sometimes showing a little pink, and a brown or gray back. However, 1st cycle males, and females of all ages can be much more difficult (and at times impossible!) to ID with certainty. They differ from female Slate-colored in having brighter pinkish-orange flanks and a more convex hood curving up slightly at the sides of the breast rather than curving down or forming a straight border. Oregon females are more contrasting overall, usually lacking any gray in the flanks and showing a more obvious demarcation between the hood and the back.

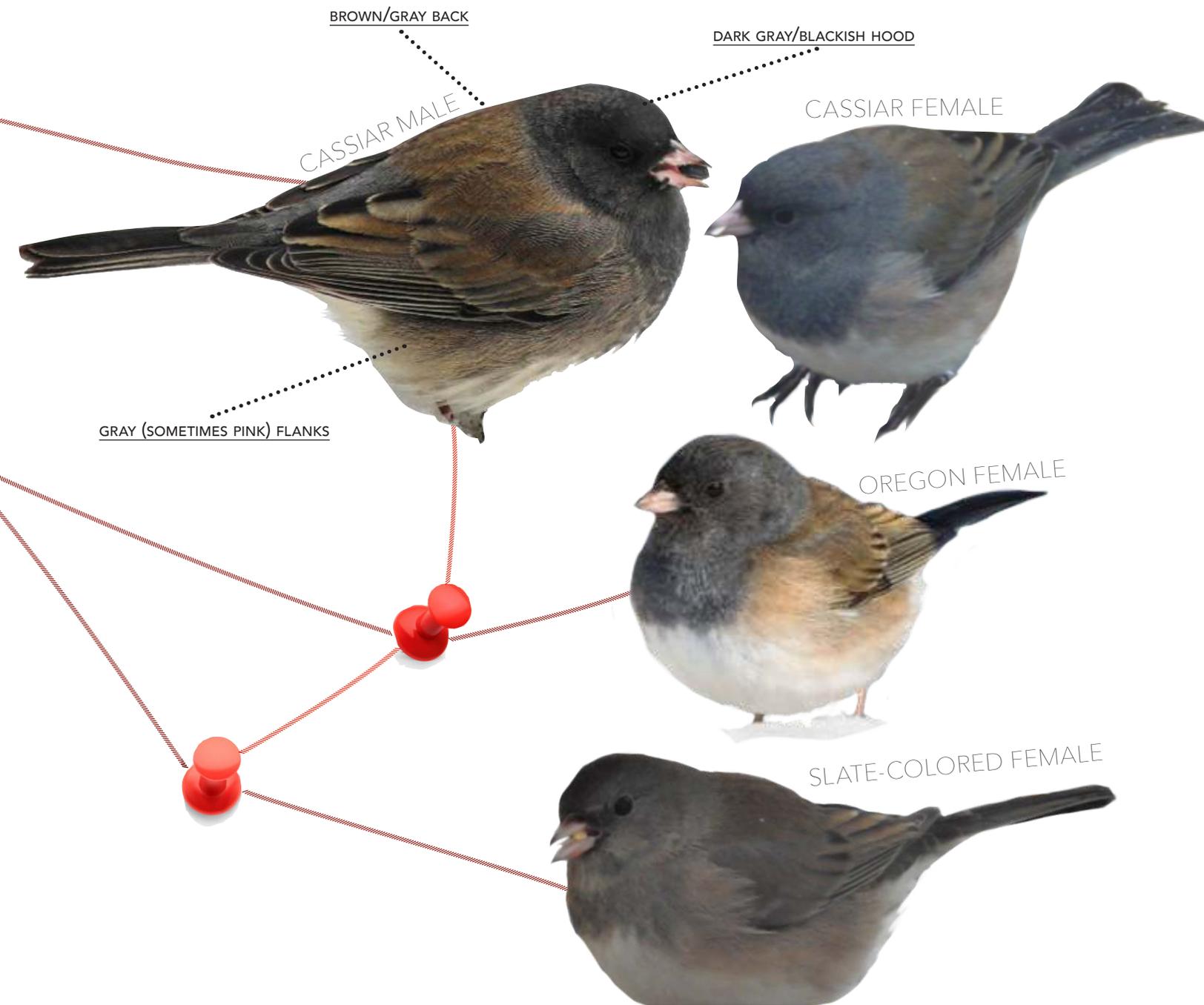
"Cassiar-type" juncos are extremely variable, with identification made more complicated by hybrids, backcrosses and other combinations between Slate-colored and Oregon. Not all juncos can be assigned to a particular group or subspecies, and that's okay! There's no shame in calling a confusing bird a Dark-eyed Junco and moving on, and sometimes that's the best and most accurate thing to do.

So how should you go about finding a Cassiar Junco? First, find a flock of juncos this winter that will allow close study — feeders are perfect. Next, forget about trying to identify birds to regional groups, and instead focus on the variation present within the flock. Notice the differences between males and females, and that each bird looks a little different from the one next to it. Remember that the vast majority of juncos you see will be Slate-colored, so understanding the limits of variation within that group is essential to picking out something less common, like an Oregon or Cassiar. Sketching and taking written notes might be time consuming, but they are excellent tools for fine-tuning your observation skills and noting details of shape and pattern. You'll quickly realize that female Slate-colored can be very brown with a fair amount of buffy color to the sides, but still lacks a hooded appearance. Check enough junco flocks, and sooner or later, you'll find an Oregon or Cassiar. Males can be surprisingly easy to spot, but the females will require closer study. The final step is to report your sightings (preferably with photos) to help birders and scientists alike better understand Cassiar's distribution. eBird is perfect for this (choose "cismontanus" for Cassiar), and Facebook groups like "The Junco Complex" allow birders to discuss identification and share pictures of interesting juncos. So when the winter birding doldrums set in this year, be sure to grab your camera and set out to find some juncos!

Good luck and good birding!

► * Editor's Note: eBird users can list the Cassiar type by entering it on lists as "Dark-eyed Junco (cismontanus)".





References and Further Reading

ONLINE RESOURCES

"The Junco Complex"

Facebook group

A great resource with lots of junco photos

oceanwanderers.com/JuncoID.html

Excellent forum discussion

LITERATURE

Dwight J. 1918. *The geographical distribution of color and of other variable characters in the genus Junco: a new aspect of specific and subspecific values.* Bulletin of the American Museum of Natural History 38.9: 269-309.

Sibley D. 2000. *The Sibley guide to birds.* New York (NY): Knopf.

Wright, R. (2013). *The Junco Called Cassiar.* [online] The Nebraska Bird Review. Available at: goo.gl/tJRFUS



Close Encounters with Saw-whet Owls

It's no secret birders love owls. Yet there's something about Saw-whet Owls – those tiny birds bursting with adorable attitude – that birders REALLY love. And whenever folks get to talking about must-see birds, Saw-whets are always at the top of the list. However, finding one can be nearly impossible. Their incredibly secretive and nocturnal nature, combined with their ability to camouflage themselves within dense pine branches makes seeing one in

the daytime very difficult for even the most experienced bird nerd. Given that, you can imagine that science on these amazing and diminutive owls is lacking. Fortunately, Indiana Audubon and Project OwlNet have helped expand our knowledge of both migrating and wintering Saw-whet Owls throughout the state for over a decade. Now, you have a chance to learn the knowledge we have gained as part of our special fall migration study of Saw-whet Owls.



START TIMES FOR EACH STATION ARE AS FOLLOWS

(all times are local for that station):

INDIANA DUNES: meet at Dunes State Park Nature Center at 6 pm.

MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY: meet at the MGBS Brooks Hall at 7 pm.

PURDUE UNIVERSITY: Meet at the Martell Wright Forestry Center at 7 pm

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY: Meet at the Whitetail Tree Farm at 5:30 pm. Participants can also meet at the Cooper Science Building at 5 pm to carpool.

Indiana Audubon is pleased to co-host a special night with the owls on Saturday, November 10, around the state. On this night, participants may choose from one of FOUR owl banding stations running in Indiana to learn about the amazing migration of our smallest owl, and watch the banding process of these spectacular birds. Participants may choose from the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary station, Indiana Dunes station, the Purdue Martell Forest station, or the Ball State Whitetail Tree Farm station. All participants should dress for the weather, as you may be outside at

certain times depending on the station. You also need to register on the Indiana Audubon events page, as these stations will fill to capacity and space is limited.

The banding demonstrations are free, but donations are

highly encouraged to support future owl research operations in Indiana. The Mary Gray and Indiana Dunes stations have special Project Owl-net T-shirts for sale for \$15 while supplies last. Some stations offer owl adoptions to help fund the project. 🍂



There is no registration fee for this special event. For more information about the banding stations, please visit Project Owl-net or contact Brad Bumgardner at bbumgardner@indianaaudubon.org.

Learn more at indianaaudubon.org/events

See a gallery full of owldorable pics at indianaaudubon.org/birding-research/northern-saw-whet-owl-research



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AND CAPABLE
IS NOT A
CONTRADICTION.**



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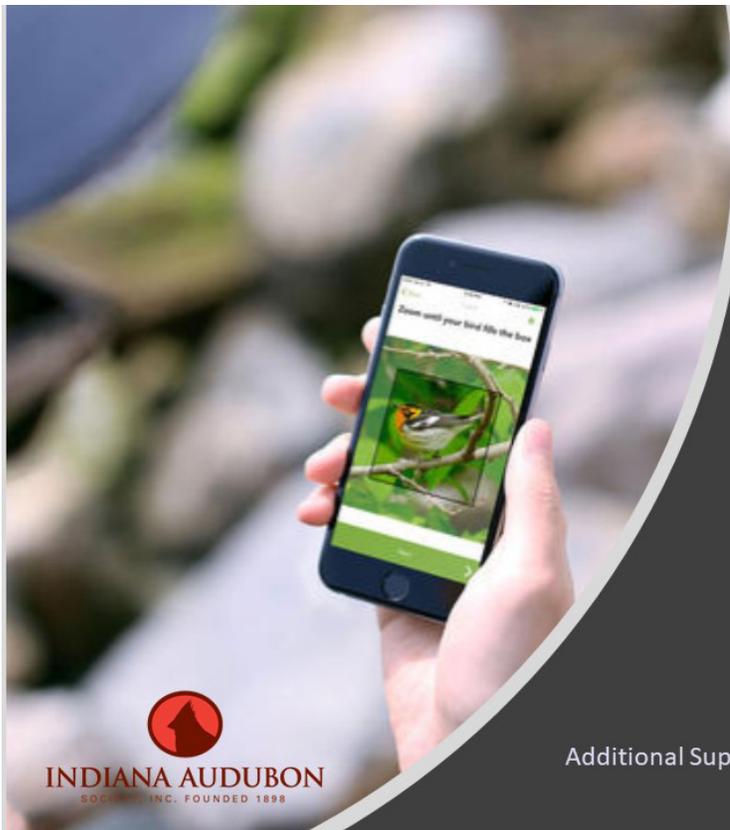
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eBird 101

An intro look at birding with **eBird**, the real-time, online checklist program that has revolutionized the hobby and knowledge of our backyard birds.

Sunday November 18, 3pm-5pm:
*Fort Harrison State Park Main Office
Indianapolis*

Saturday December 8, 3pm-5pm:
*McCormick's Creek State Park Nature Center
Spencer*

Additional Support Provided By:



The **Cornell** Lab  of Ornithology