

Indiana Audubon Society
CARDINAL

NEWSLETTER • DEC–JAN 2018-19 • Vol.49 No.6



*Chasing
Chickadees*

[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.



MEMBERSHIP PERKS	Individual	Family	Contributing	Cardinal Club	Life	Library	Fledgling	Student
Access to bi-monthly & quarterly newsletters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mailed printed copies of bi-monthly & quarterly newsletters			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Complete access to Birds of North America Database	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Discounted Field Trips & Programs	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Special Access to Mary Gray Birding Sanctuary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓

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

WINTER OWLS, FINCHES, AND MORE! Northwoods Tour Planned for Early 2019

Join fellow IAS members for a two-day winter excursion into the heart of the Northwoods in early 2019 encountering wintering owls, finches, and other breathtaking birds of the boreal forest.

IAS Executive Director, Brad Bumgardner, will be leading a return to our perennial favorite birding sites in the Michigan Upper Peninsula. The eastern "UP" features both pine and spruce forestland, but also areas of extensive agriculture that make it the hotspot for wintering Snowy Owls coming down through the boreal forest. Trip counts of Snowy Owls are often in the double digits! Additionally, the region is known for hosting an abundance of other northern specialties, such as Pine Grosbeak, Common Redpoll, and Bohemian Waxwing. The two-day UP adventure will take place February 1-3, 2019, and can be reserved online for as low as \$189 for IAS members. Don't miss out on this soaring winter adventure with IAS. Reserve your spot today!



► Visit indianaudubon.org/events to register for the trip





CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

DEC 14, 2018-JAN 5, 2019

The Christmas Bird Count is the nation's longest-running citizen science bird project. Hundreds of Indiana birders participate each year to assist scientists and researchers in understanding trends in wintering bird populations.

Though Christmas Bird Counts are officially organized by the National Audubon Society, Indiana Audubon sponsors several bird count circles throughout the state. IAS members are encouraged to participate in as many counts as possible during the Dec 14-Jan 5 window each year. A summary of Indiana results is provided each year in the Indiana Audubon Quarterly.

► **FIND A CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT NEAR YOU!**

Visit: indianaudubon.org/christmas-bird-counts-in-indiana



UPCOMING TRIPS & EVENTS

Join Indiana Audubon for an assortment of field trips and workshops being offered this winter. Visit indianaudubon.org/events for more information or to register for any of these upcoming activities.

DEC 8: EBIRD 101 WORKSHOP

MCCORMICK'S CREEK [SPENCER, IN]

JAN 26: EAGLE CREEK WINTER BIRDING FIELD TRIP

EAGLE CREEK PARK [INDIANAPOLIS, IN]

FEB 1-3: WINTER SNOWY OWL UP TRIP

UPPER PENINSULA [ST. IGNACE, MI]

FEB 9: SOMERVILLE MINE RAPTORS & MORE TRIP

PATOKA RIVER NWR [OAKLAND CITY, IN]

INDIANA DUNES BIRDING FESTIVAL

2019 KEYNOTES & HEADLINERS

The Indiana Dunes Birding Festival is happy to announce the upcoming year's keynote speakers and special headliners that will kick off each day of the 5th annual event, to be held May 16-19, 2019.

Festival Keynote



Laura Erickson

Laura's Best Bird EVER!

How I went looking for birds and found joy, love, and redemption

SAT 5:30-9:30 PM | SAND CREEK COUNTRY CLUB

Festival Headliners

Joel Greenberg

Changing Bird Life of the Chicago Region

THU 11:30 AM-12:30 PM
INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER

Jim Carpenter

The Joy of Bird Feeding

SAT 11:30 AM-12:30 PM
INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER

Tim Gallagher

In Search of the Cuban Ivorybill

FRI 11:30 AM-12:30 PM
INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER

Amy Wilms

The Secret Lives of Hummingbirds

SUN 11:30 AM-12:30 PM
INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER

MEET A MEMBER

RHIANNON THUNELL

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

I was born in North Carolina, but my family moved to Indiana when I was pretty young. We have lived in the same house in Greenwood for more than 15 years now. I still live with my parents but am planning to move out fairly soon. My dad is a veterinarian, which helped spark my love of animals. I remember sitting in his clinic and watching surgeries, which I thought was the coolest thing. We have always had many pets around, including dogs, cats, and many domestic birds whose numbers always seemed to be increasing. We first got chickens when I was 10, starting with just a few chicks. Now we have about 70 chickens, ducks, turkeys, guinea fowl, and pigeons. I also have a pet European Starling that I rescued from the gutter of our house when he was a chick. Even though he was a starling, I couldn't just let him die, so I raised him on canned dog food. He lives in a cage at our house now and has learned to mimic the calls of my other birds. He has not learned to speak yet, but he will sing sound effects from Star Trek and Star Wars. No one else in my family is a birder. However, my whole family likes to spend our vacations in nature, and we always visited parks when I was growing up, so I got to bird all over the country.



Q HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN AN IAS MEMBER & WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE MEMBERSHIP FEATURE?

Surprisingly, I have only been an IAS member for less than a year. I won my membership for free when I won the bird calling contest at the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival by imitating the call of the Laughing Kookaburra (my greatest accomplishment in life...just kidding). This summer, I was somewhat stunned when Brad Bumgardner asked me if I would be interested in serving on the IAS board, a position which I am serving now. My favorite thing about being a member of IAS is the community of birders all over the state it has helped me connect with, the friends I have made, and all the opportunities I will have as a board member.

Q DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BIRD?

Yes! When I was young, my favorite bird was a predictable one, the Northern Cardinal. Currently, my favorite bird is the Southern Cassowary. I always tell people that they look like dinosaurs. Plus, their feathers look like black silk, their eggs are bright green, their faces are bright blue and red with a large helmet called a "casque." What's not to love? Cassowaries do have a reputation for attacking and even killing people, but as with most predators, these attacks mostly happen when birds get habituated to being fed by humans, or when they are harassed. My second favorite bird is the critically endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper. I have created ceramic sculptures of both of these birds. Someday I hope to be able to see both of these birds in the wild.

Q WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE BIRDING DESTINATIONS—BOTH IN & OUT OF THE STATE?

My favorite birding destination in Indiana is Eagle Creek Park. I have been birding there for almost ten years. I attended an ornithology camp there as a teen, which inspired me to keep learning about birds and follow my passion. And of course, the birding is always excellent. My favorite birding destination outside the state must be Magee Marsh, Ohio, during spring migration. There's nothing like seeing the warblers at eye level, so close you can feel the wind off their wings. My other two all-time favorites are the Everglades and Barrow, Alaska.

Q WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR NEW BIRDERS GETTING INTO THE HOBBY?

My advice to new birders is to take some time to learn your field guides and to study them at home. It pays off! Also, if you're serious about birding in the long term, learn to bird by ear. I recommend the Peterson Guide to Birding by Ear and More Birding by Ear. Those CDs worked for me, and I was able to learn a lot of the common bird calls. Birding by ear is great because you can hear birds all around you, but you can only see the ones in front of you. 🍁

FALL MEMBERSHIP & WINNERS & AWARDS

Thank you to everyone that participated in the IAS Fall Membership Drive! We're happy to give away \$2,000+ in prize baskets.

We are blessed to have such a passionate membership who cares and supports the birds in Indiana. Your member support is leveraged with grants and donations to continue our mission of supporting the birds.

Thanks again to our sponsors. We hope you can check out Wild Birds Unlimited (Valparaiso and Schererville) Premier Optics in Middlebury, Indiana State Park Inns, Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, Indigo Birding Nature Tours, and Steiner Optics for your future needs.

THE WINNERS!

- **Birders Essential Gift Baskets**
 - Matthew Bowman, North Salem, IN
 - Lina Rifai, Noblesville, IN
- **Steiner HX 8x42 Binoculars** (\$950 value!)
 - Allisyn Gillet, Bloomington, IN
- **Goose Pond Birding Package**
 - Barbara Jablonski, Indianapolis, IN

EARL BROOKS AWARD

Presented to Indiana Educator & Photographer, Joni James

Dr. Earl Brooks (1883-1968) was an editor and Past President of Indiana Audubon, and served as the executive director of Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary from 1946-1959. He authored the 1945 book Common Birds of Indiana. In 1969, the IAS Board of Directors established the Earl Brooks Award to honor his dedication and work. This award is presented annually to a deserving Hoosier "for advancement of conservation of natural resources in Indiana."

The Awards Committee, with approval from the Board of Directors, bestows the 2018 Earl Brooks Award to Joni James. A trained raptor rescue volunteer, Ms. James also coordinates Breeding Bird Atlas surveys and nestbox monitoring, as well as assisting with Indiana Marsh Bird Monitoring for the Department of Natural Resources. She is certified as an Interpretive Guide through the National Association for Interpretation, and as an Advanced Master Naturalist through Indiana DNR.

Her credentials and experience as a birder and nature photographer are only outdone by her impact on conservation through her writings and Heron Watch Nature Program presentations. She is the author and illustrator of the book, Dancing with Herons: Bearing Witness to Local Natural History. Her wish is to generate a greater awareness of and connection to nature and local natural history by her example and teaching.

MUMFORD & KELLER GRANT/ SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Russell E. Mumford (born 1922) is a past President of Indiana Audubon, as well as an author, teacher, and biologist. He received the first PhD in wildlife science from Purdue University. Charles E. Keller (born 1929), also an author, was editor of Indiana Audubon's publications for 25 years. In 1984, they co-authored Birds of Indiana. In 2010, the Mumford and Keller Grant/Scholarship Program was created to honor these men and their work that has promoted the Society's mission. The program awards funds to individuals and organizations seeking funding for activities related to Indiana's natural resources – particularly Indiana's avifauna – that promote the Indiana Audubon Society's mission. This year, generous funding was received from the IAS-sponsored Indiana Dunes Birding Festival's silent auction. There are nine 2018 recipients (one award was previously announced this spring).

1. Indiana Birding Trail. \$450. Audubon/DNR Steering Committee. Creation of thematic logo for media advancement. This trail will offer 60 statewide birding locations for beginner and intermediate birders.
2. Birds, Skulls, & Feathers. \$265. Indiana Young Birders Club - North Chapter. Educational interactive materials. The activities provided will engage young birders at booths and monthly events.
3. Workshop at Natural Encounters, Inc. - Contemporary Animal Training & Management. \$1000. Jemma McElroy. This state-of-the-art hands-on course will update the skills of the Assistant Manager at Eagle Creek Ornithology Center.
4. Motus Receiver. \$1200. Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. Funds will cover operation and costs of registration of the Motus Station at MGBS.
5. Field Guides for Farm Kids. \$215. Amy Kearns (DNR). Twenty Kaufman field guides will be distributed to farm youth to encourage birding as a way to preserve habitats for birds like the Loggerhead Shrike.
6. Birding Eco-Tourism Interpretive Signs. \$400. Juan Diego Vargas. Lifer Nature Tours and National System of Conservation Areas of Costa Rica will place signs that describe the conservation of the area and the migration story of birds from North America.
7. Indiana Birds of Prey in the Classroom. \$300. Mark Booth. A live birds of prey program will be offered to an IAS member for the school classroom of their choice.
8. The Value of Small Birds. \$100. Pat Knight. Funds given to encourage production of an educational PowerPoint presentation to groups in northern Indiana.

BALD EAGLE ENCOUNTERS THIS WINTER

..... BY APRIL RAVER

Winter brings snow and cold that bites your nose and freezes your toes, as well as dark, dreary days and long nights that have most of us not looking forward to the season...but thanks to a program started by the Indiana Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program in 1985, birders have a reason to look forward to winter! It is during this season that hundreds of Bald Eagles visit the state to roost and fish along our open waterways.

Bald Eagles historically nested in Indiana, but their numbers declined drastically due to hunting and use of pesticides. By the 1980s, they had been extirpated from the state as a breeding species. In 1985, the Bald Eagle Reintroduction Program was started, and during the next four years, 73 eaglets were obtained from Wisconsin and Alaska and brought to Indiana. They were raised on a 25-foot nest platform at Monroe Lake until they could hunt and fish on their own. Most Bald Eagles return within 50–100 miles of where they fledged, and it wasn't long until some of these eagles returned to the area to build their own nests. Indiana's first Bald Eagle nests in this century were found in 1991 at Monroe Lake and Cagles Mill Lake. Since then, the number of eagles nesting and wintering throughout the state has continued to grow.

Today, more than 300 Bald Eagle pairs nest in the state of Indiana! In the winter months, hundreds more join them to fish and roost along our open waterways.

Want to beat the winter blues watching Bald Eagles this winter? There are several great opportunities planned around the state for you to learn all about eagles and observe them in their natural habitats. 🍂



INTERESTING FACTS

- One of the first eaglets brought over from the re-introduction program in 1985 continues to nest and be seen around Lake Monroe.
- C43 was removed from a nest in Whitestone Harbor, Alaska on July 22, 1988 making her 30 years old!

Eagle-eyed Events

Some of the best places to view Bald Eagles in Indiana include **Salamonie & Mississinewa Reservoirs** in Central Indiana, **Turkey Run State Park** in Western Indiana, and **Lake Monroe** in Southern Indiana. While you can visit these locations on your own, all of these sites also offer eagle viewing trips and events for the public.

Mississinewa Lake kicks off eagle season with a **Sunrise Eagle Watch** on **January 12**. Attendees are invited to watch as the eagles leave their roost along the Mississinewa River at sunrise before attending a breakfast and program to learn more about Eagles. Nearby, **Salamonie Lake** offers two evening eagle watching programs on **February 9** and **10**. Attendees will meet at **Salamonie**

Lake Monroe for a program about eagles before caravanning to the roost site to watch the Eagles fly in for the night. To sign up, call Upper Wabash Interpretive Services at (260) 468-2127.

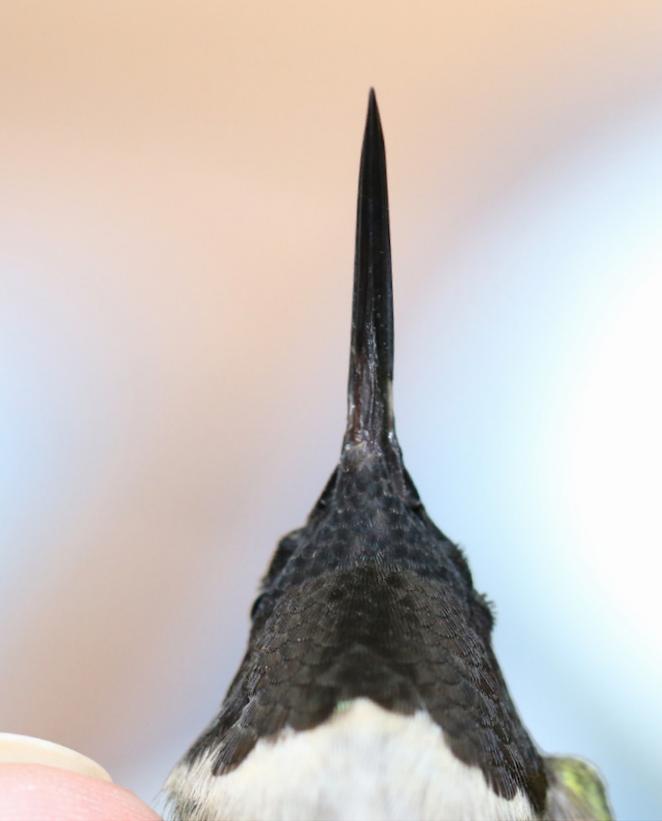
Indiana Audubon Society is offering a **Winter Eagle Watch Field Trip** to visit the **Salamonie/Mississinewa** area as well on **January 26**. The trip will be led by IAS Board Member April Raver and will visit a local nest site, fishing sites, and the Eagle roost to watch eagles fly in for the evening. Sign up at indianaaudubon.org/events to reserve your spot.

Turkey Run State Park will hold its **Eagles in Flight Weekend** **January 25–January 27**. This fun-filled weekend gives attendees the opportunity

to visit Eagle roosts, nest sites, and local hunting grounds along with many programs and other activities throughout the weekend. **Turkey Run State Park** can be reached at 765-597-2635.

Monroe Lake will offer a **Bald Eagle Driving Tour** during the afternoon of **January 26**. Participants will get the opportunity to view wintering and nesting eagles that call **Monroe Lake** home during the winter. More details will be available in early December. You can reach the park office at 812-837-9546.

Take the opportunity this winter attend one of the several eagle-watching events offered throughout the state, or take a trip on your own to go out and take in the spectacle of our beautiful Bald Eagles!



A RTHU male gets examined by Amy as she demonstrates the banding process.

A HUMMDINGER OF A HUMMER FEST

BY CARL WILMS

Several years ago, Amy Wilms was asked to help band hummingbirds at the Strawberry Plains Audubon Center in Mississippi. I was eventually asked to join her to remove birds from traps and deliver the gems to the banding tables. The Strawberry Plains event had thousands in attendance and served as the inspiration for IAS's first Hummingbird Migration Celebration (HMC) held at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary (MGBS) this past August.

First, it is essential to acknowledge that a small army of volunteers is needed to make these types of events a success! And the IAS volunteers were wonderful in dedicating their time to fill needed positions and ensuring the HMC ran smoothly. We can't list all of the more than 40 people that volunteered, but they are sure in our hearts.

The HMC works with the IAS Mission as an outreach and education festival in addition as a fundraiser for the MGBS Endowment and the IAS Executive Director's position. The love of Ruby-throated Hummingbirds (RTHU) is almost universal and many non-birders love RTHUs, feed them, and call MGBS with questions about their status and how to feed them properly. With this in mind, the HMC team began to develop the concept for the festival in January of 2018 and set to work weaving the program together. This process involved having volunteers contact sponsors, speakers, concession workers, port-o-pots, parking lot attendants, registration workers, transport drivers, and more.

The events eventually included: Bats of Indiana; Anatomy of Birds; Hummingbirds 101; Birding in Indiana; Bird Walk; Nature Walk; Turtle Time; Native Plants & Sales; Live Birds of Prey with Mark Booth;

Butterfly Walk; Childrens' Activities; Connersville Art Association; Live Music; Songbird and Hummingbird Banding; various vendors; Markle Barn concessions; and an acknowledgement of Connersville's acceptance into the IAS Birdtown program. All but one of these programs were led by volunteers.

Visitors to the event parked in the fallow field next to the entrance of MGBS and had the option of walking through the forest (part of Wildflower Trail) to enter the festival grounds, or they could ride a transport wagon down MGBS's entrance tunnel of trees.

The planning team hoped to entice at least 100 paid visitors to the festival, with people under 18 years of age being admitted for free. We wanted to keep our expectations reasonable. We were thrilled to have over 270 paid registrations. On top of that, the IN Tourism Guide had incorrect dates for the HMC posted in their publication (visitors who came on the published dates were provided a RTHU banding demonstration on our back porch).

Naturally, there are improvements being planned for 2019, but all-in-all the HMC was a success! With new volunteers joining returning ones, we hope to bring more people in contact with the outdoors and raise more than the \$4000 that we raised this year. 🍁



IAS member and Scout leader, Josh Hill directing traffic at the MGBS entrance.



Transport loads inside MGBS.



Reading tent next to the children's activity area.



Long-time friend of MGBS/IAS, Mark Booth, shares his love of birds with his Peregrine Falcon.



once a strip mine, now a hawk's time

BLUE GRASS FISH & WILDLIFE AREA

BY JIM CAMPBELL

Though its name implies Kentucky, this hidden gem lies in far southwest Indiana. A former strip-mining site prior to its preservation, the Blue Grass Fish & Wildlife area covers approximately 2,532 acres and features 28 pits and lakes (600 acres of water).

Blue Grass FWA occupies the western edge of what was once known as the Ayrshire Mine property, a 6000-acre tract which was mined by Amax Coal Company from 1973 to 1993, but now consists of grasslands, scattered lakes, cattail marshes, plots of planted trees, and two cemeteries. The land that would become Blue Grass FWA was purchased by the State of Indiana in the late 1990s. Re-vegetation was carried out using herbaceous cover and woody species planted in clumps and strips. Currently, some other areas of the mine property are being developed for homes and row crops.

NOTABLE SPECIES:

The habitat afforded by the Ayrshire Mine and Blue Grass FWA area provides breeding opportunities for several endangered and threatened species in Indiana, along with herons, shorebirds, common waterfowl, and other wading birds. There is a Great Blue Heron rookery adjacent to the mine, making this a regular bird in the area. American Bittern is relatively easy to find during spring migration (late April through May) and is present in small numbers during the breeding season. They can be heard in a variety of places and are most often seen flying over the grasslands. Although they have not bred in the area, Great Egrets can usually be found in spring through fall, peaking in late July through August. In some years, Cattle Egrets can be quite common, and Little Blue Herons are often found in the

late summer and fall. Black-crowned Night-Herons breed on the property and can be seen standing along pond edges or flying across the property in the evening. They typically arrive in April and remain through the breeding season. Rails, including Sora, Virginia Rail and King Rail, are routinely found during migration (April–May) and have all nested in the area. Look for them where cattails are interspersed in the grasslands. It should be emphasized, however, that “rail stomping” is prohibited, as this would entail leaving the public roads.

During the winter months, Blue Grass FWA provides excellent opportunities for observing birds of prey, particularly from November through March. During these months, Northern Harriers and Rough-legged Hawks can be seen in abundance. Short-eared owls have also historically nested on the property.



Among the songbirds, species of interest include Blue Grosbeak, Bell's Vireo, and Henslow's Sparrow, which can be found in small numbers during the summer breeding season. Other grassland birds, such as Dickcissel and Grasshopper Sparrow, also have good populations in the area.

Along with the species mentioned above, other noteworthy species seen in past years on the property include: Red-necked Grebe, Western Grebe, Least Bittern, Fulvous Whistling-Duck, White-winged Scoter, Sandhill Crane, Barn Owl, Marbled Godwit, and Swainson's Hawk.

SITE ACCESS:

Birding the Ayrshire Mine property consists of driving along the paved roads and pulling off to the side to stop and bird. The area runs about four miles long from north to south, and three miles wide from east to west.

Visitors may walk on foot along the roads, however, access is restricted to the public roads only. Off-road access is strictly prohibited on the Ayrshire Mine property. The area is patrolled, and birders may be stopped and questioned.

Blue Grass FWA is open to the public and birding is permitted within the public access areas.

Pigeon Creek Bottoms is another good birding site located

nearby, and can be reached by taking Boonville/New Harmony Road through the mine property. Unfortunately, the reclaimed mine property on the east side of the creek is inaccessible, as it currently has no public roads.

Typical Time to Bird Site: 1-2 Hours

RESTROOMS:

There are no restrooms available on the property – the closest are at the corner of Stevenson Station Road and Highway 62.

DIRECTIONS:

From the North or West

Take Interstate 69 south into Vanderburgh County; take exit #15 east onto Boonville/New Harmony Road. After approximately 0.5 miles, you will enter the mine property. The reclaimed areas are obvious, and all persons are advised to stay on public roads.

From the South

Heading east from Evansville on SR 62, look for Stevenson Station Road approximately 3-4 miles east of I-69. There is a Busler's convenience store at this intersection. Turn left (north) onto Stevenson Station Rd., go through a 4-way stop sign, cross Pigeon Creek, and continue and up a hill. The road will enter the mine property at this point. 🍁



BOOK REVIEW BY ALLEE FORSBERG

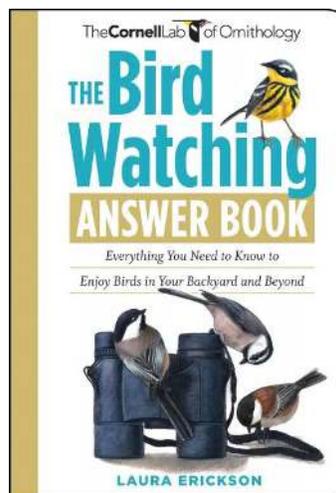
HAVE QUESTIONS? SHE'S GOT ANSWERS

THE BIRD WATCHING ANSWER BOOK *Everything You Need to Know to Enjoy Birds in Your Backyard*

By Laura Erickson • Illustrated. 400 pp. Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Storey Publishing, LLC.

Laura Erickson draws on her extensive bird knowledge to answer some common questions on our minds and occasionally surprises us with answers to questions we never thought to ask. Since the late 1980s, she has been producing an independent public radio show called "For the Birds" and, among many other pursuits and honors, has written nearly a dozen books about birds.

Formatted in Q&A style, *The Bird Watching Answer Book* contains topics ranging from backyard feeding to birding gear to bird behavior. The book reads well from cover-to-cover, but also lends itself to sampling topics based on interest and inquiry. Each section is relatively brief, making the book very accessible, but covers topics thoroughly and points the reader toward further resources where necessary. While many subjects are geared toward beginning birders, I still found the overall interest level to be high. In addition to the general bird knowledge provided by the book, I had a special appreciation for Laura's ability to blend in lesser-known facts and trivia, such as why do we often see Northern Flickers on the ground?



Laura explains that they snake their long tongues down into anthills to feed on ants. Then she goes on to add that John James Audubon tasted every bird he ever painted, and highly disliked the ant-flavored flicker! Both facts delivered an "aha!" moment for me, and I have gone on to share these facts with others.

Having met Laura this past winter, I found the book to have an easy style that feels a lot like sitting down to chat with her. While it provides a

little something for everyone, I highly recommend this book to birders hoping to expand their general knowledge base, or to beginners as a resource to get started. 🍁

CHASING CHICKADEES

BY BRAD BUMGARDNER

You don't have to walk far into an Indiana woodland to find the sprightly and curious chickadee. They capture the imagination and awe of both birders and non-birders alike. Their behavior inspires both curiosity and amazement as these tiny winged geniuses, weighing no more than two nickels, eke out a life in the Indiana winter.



Indiana is a great place to study the underappreciated problem of chickadee ID. Our state is home to the two main species that occupy the eastern United States, and provides the setting for an emerging story of hybridization and climate change affecting range expansion and retraction.

Separating Carolina and Black-capped Chickadees in the field can be an exercise in agony for those that attempt it. More often than not, we birders rely on field guide range maps to tell us which species is to be expected where. Knowing where each occurs is important, but to truly master chickadee ID, we need to delve much deeper.

For the majority of the state, Carolina Chickadee is the default. This southerner enjoys a large range that includes the Ohio River northward, past Indianapolis, to a dividing line that roughly follows the shoreline of the Wabash River. If you live in Lafayette, you have Carolina Chickadees. Following the river upstream, you'll find the range extend north of the river twenty miles or so, and by the time you reach Fort Wayne, Carolina Chickadees will have extended all the way to northern Allen County.

Their northern cousin, the Black-capped Chickadee, dominates the northern part of the state. Those living in NW Indiana, and the area extending east through South Bend, all the way to Pokagon, will enjoy the slightly larger Black-capped. For the most part, if you're away from the boundary line that divides the territory of the two species, you can safely ID your chickadees without too much work.

Differentiating the two species in areas where overlap in territory exists can be a bit more troubling.

The first thing to note with any chickadee is the coverts. Think of coverts like shingles on a roof. As their name implies, coverts cover other feathers and provide extra insulation and aerodynamics. Above the secondary and primary feathers lies a series of wing coverts. The coverts covering the primary feathers are aptly named the primary coverts. For the secondaries, there are a series of

three covert levels: greater, median and lesser. Those closest to the flight feathers are the greater coverts, and that's where you want to look first. Black-capped Chickadees have distinct white edging on each greater covert. When closed, these covert feathers combine to create a distinct white patch on the wing. Look closely at a Carolina Chickadee, and you will notice that this patch is absent; the coverts are gray like the surrounding feathers.

Some field guides and online references will tell you that a close inspection of the "bib" of a chickadee can be used to identify it to species. The theory being that a finer, clean cut bib is a sign of Carolina, and a blurry, less distinct bib line means a Black-capped. But so far, that is only a hypothesis; it has not been borne out in any research and isn't used as an ID criteria by ornithologists or bird banders.

One of the easiest ways to identify a chickadee is by voice. While both chickadees will give the signature "chick-a-dee-dee-dee" call, the true songs of each species are very different. The Black-capped has been described as "hey sweetie" or "cheese-burger," while the Carolina has a distinctive "fee-bee, fee-bay." The four-part Carolina Chickadee song is slightly higher pitch than the Black-capped and has clear separation in notes, compared to the more rapid Black-capped song. As an interesting side note, birders are now beginning to understand that the number of "dee dees" heard after a chickadee alarm call equates to the perceived threat level.

Two to three "dee-dees" may indicate a mammalian predator, or perhaps a human, whereas a longer, "chicka-dee-dee-dee-dee" may indicate a high-level avian threat, such as Cooper's Hawk or Northern Goshawk.

Now just when you think you have everything figured out, nature starts throwing curveballs. Here are a few complicating factors to consider as you wrestle with the ID of your chickadee

Black-capped Chickadee Irruption

For most of the year, Black-capped Chickadees have a pretty consistent range. Every bird you see well above the dividing line is going to be Black-capped. However, data from banding shows that southward movement can happen in the winter. In some years, Black-cappeds can move as far as a few hundred miles into the range of Carolinas. This is not as consistent as winter finch irruptions, but does happen once a decade or so. Go farther north, and clear migrations of Black-capped Chickadees can be seen in



BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE

the spring, as the far northern population heads back north after enjoying a more relaxed, and milder winter in the southern part of their range. In some counts at Whitefish Point, more than 200 chickadees have been seen migrating in a single spring day.

Likewise, some Black-capped Chickadees can wander well out of their range during the winter months. This includes a confirmed bird banding report from east-central Indiana a few decades ago. But winter notwithstanding, any Black-capped Chickadee report in the Indianapolis area or southward should be considered a mis-ID, or at the very least, suspect. The best conclusion here is that these irruptive movements do not show an apparent pattern, and do not appear to be connected to the irruptive movements of other northern birds. In the end, Black-capped do what Black-capped do!

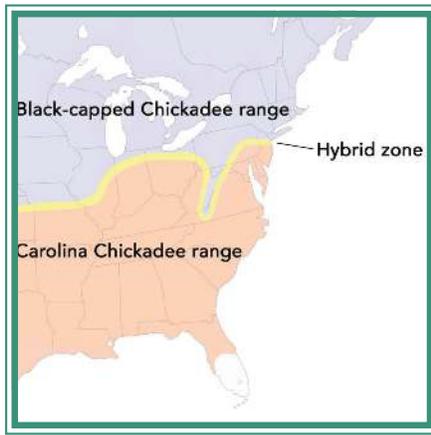
Climate Change Expansion

Just as Black-capped Chickadees show occasional movement for a non-migratory species, Carolina Chickadees are showing a clear northward expansion believed to be related to changing weather and climate patterns. Milder winters are allowing hardy Carolina Chickadees to withstand more northerly climates, and they are invading into traditional Black-capped territory.

In some areas of the country, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has documented that this northward expansion can be as much as a half-mile per year, and matching the trend of warming winter temperatures.

Anecdotal observations in the Fort Wayne area historically shown Carolina Chickadees on the south side of town, and Black-Capped Chickadees on the north side. A decade or so back, it was fairly easy for a birder to see both in Fort Wayne

by visiting a site on the north end, like



Fox Island County Park, for a Carolina, and then heading to a southern site, like Metea County Park, for a Black-capped.

Today, Carolinas are found throughout Fort Wayne, and are even knocking on the door of adjacent DeKalb County.

The take-away here is that if you are in a traditional Black-capped territory anywhere near the boundary, you should listen and study your chickadees closely. This includes areas such as Rochester, Winamac, Warsaw, and Kendallville. This expansion has not been as dramatic on the western side of the state, where vast prairie and agricultural land has likely slowed any movement due to habitat constraints.

The Dreaded Hybrid Chickadee

To compound things further, it has now been documented that love knows no boundaries when it comes to chickadees. Just as we humans have difficulty telling our chickadees apart, apparently, so do they! In a narrow strip through northern Indiana, averaging just 20 miles across, hybrid chickadees are being documented.

Telling a hybrid from a pure chickadee can be frustratingly difficult, but bird banders are noticing the differences. Slight variations in wing and tail length may go unnoticed through binoculars, but they are evident when a bird is in a bander's hand. Birds that measure a quarter-inch larger than Carolina, yet lack the white in the coverts shown by Black-capped, are being seen in areas such as Logansport. Simple evidence of hybridization. Other researchers around the country are using genetic analysis to reveal the true hybrid zone, and show how quickly this zone is changing. Examining the percentage of Black-capped or Carolina genes in areas of the zone reveals that female Carolina Chickadees

are leading the charge northward – likely young hatch year birds dispersing from their natal territories. Females on average move .6 miles the first year of their life before settling down. That's about twice as far as males travel.

Fortunately, nature finds ways to keep things in check. New studies specific to the hybrids find that the caching and relocation of hidden seeds is better with pure birds than with hybrids. Basically, hybrid chickadees aren't as smart. This difference may be subtle, but on a cold winter day up north, slight advantages can mean a lot for survival of the fittest. In a recent study by Lehigh University, the learning and memory capacity of hybrid chickadees in Pennsylvania was measured. Concealed food was hidden in rubber pockets. After locating the food by random chance, the birds were given the opportunity to return to the same locations to find the hidden food. Hybrids performed worse across all testing periods. Quite simply, they would try and then give up. Meanwhile, pure Black-capped and Carolina Chickadees showed a higher success rate and performed similarly to each other.

While there may be natural forces that limit the effect of hybridization, the steady northward expansion of the Carolina Chickadee may eventually push the Black-capped Chickadee out of the state entirely within a few decades. Time will tell.

The more we learn about these two fascinating species, the more we realize how complicated the lives are of these winged sprites that bring joy to so many feeder-watchers and birders in our state. There is massive trove of chickadee literature available for those who are intrigued by these birds and would like to know more. A good place to start is Cornell Lab's Birds of North America Online database, which all Indiana Audubon members have free access to.

The more you know, the more you can appreciate these special birds. Learn their traits, ranges, behavior, and lives, and you will be able to correctly identify most chickadees you see. You just need to be ready to occasionally throw up your hands and admit when you can't tell if your bird is one species or the other. Apparently, the chickadees have the same problem from time to time, too.



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