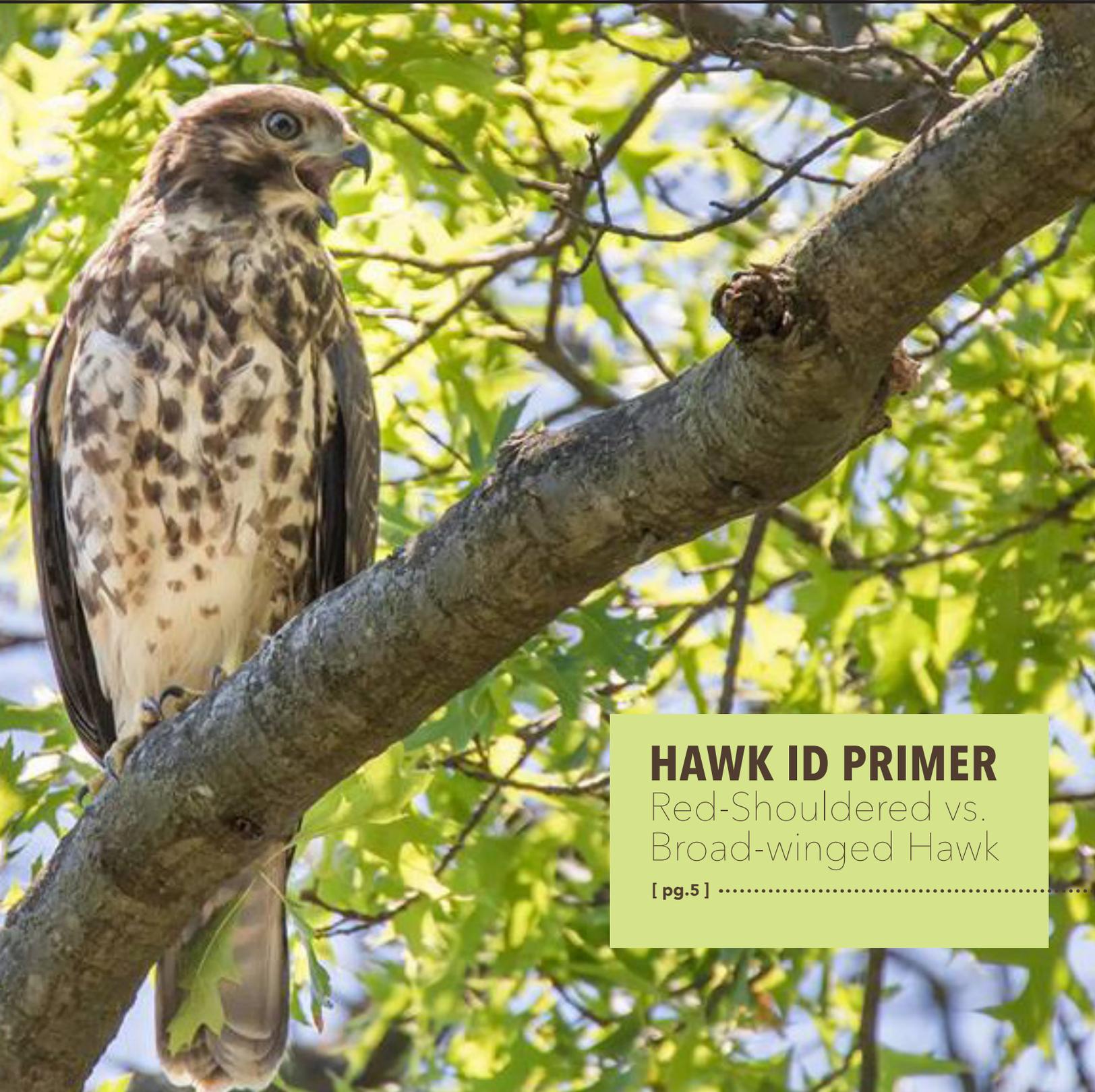


Indiana Audubon Society
CARDINAL

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HAWK ID PRIMER

Red-Shouldered vs.
Broad-winged Hawk

[pg.5]

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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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THE BIG COUNTY BIG YEAR CHALLENGE!



The IAS Big County Big Year Challenge 2018 has finished and was a great opportunity for Indiana birders to celebrate their local birding patches in 2018!

To be eligible for prizes, you had to beat the species target number set for that county. More than 100 birders were eligible for prizes at the end of the contest. Congratulations to the following winners:

- Kristina Knowski Commissioned Art Piece: **Heath Harlan, Evansville**
- Indigo Birding Nature Tours Scheduled Tour: **Whitney Yoerger, Zionsville**
- Indigo Birding Nature Tours Scheduled Tour: **Brian Lowry, Scottsburg**
- \$50 Wild Birds Unlimited Gift Card: **Sam Plew, LaGrange**
- Indiana Audubon Society One Year Membership: **Lindsay Grossmann, South Bend**

Thank you to our sponsors for helping to put on this year's special birding event. They include: Kristina Knowski Arts, Indigo Birding Nature Tours, Sassafras Audubon Society, and the Robert Cooper Audubon Society.





UPCOMING TRIPS & EVENTS

Join Indiana Audubon for an assortment of field trips and workshops being offered this spring. **Visit indianaudubon.org/events** for more information or to register for any of these upcoming activities. Additional events are listed on the website—many fill early!

MAR 9: SUMMIT LAKE WATERFOWL TRIP SUMMIT LAKE STATE PARK [NEW CASTLE, IN]

MAR 16: KANKAKEE WETLANDS WATERFOWL TRIP KANKAKEE FISH & WILDLIFE AREA [NORTH JUDSON, IN]

MAR 23: BIRD SOUNDS ID WORKSHOP FORT HARRISON STATE PARK [INDIANAPOLIS, IN]

APR 20: EARLY WARBLERS TRIP FALLING SPRINGS BIRD SANCTARY [FRENCH LICK, IN]



HUMMINGBIRD MIGRATION FESTIVAL

Mark your calendars now for the second annual Indiana Audubon Hummingbird Migration Celebration, to be held at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary on Saturday, August 10, 2019! This one-of-a-kind event will feature bird walks, presentations, live hummingbird banding, a vendor marketplace, native plant sale, live birds of prey, and more! Pre-sale tickets will go on sale in early June. Plan to join hummingbird enthusiasts from around the Midwest for this amazing day at Mary Gray!

INDIANA DUNES BIRDING FESTIVAL

Registration opens FEB 24 for all Indiana Audubon Society Members!

The 2019 Indiana Dunes Birding Festival is fast approaching! The 5th annual event, May 16-19, promises to bring more programs, more field trips, and more of everything that more than 700 participants have come to grow to love! In total, nearly 150 individual tours, presentations, and workshops will welcome birders to the Indiana Dunes region this year.

The 2019 festival will feature the return of Dunes Birds in Art, a special month-long exhibition from local and regional artists. The Migration Marketplace will showcase bird-related vendors, including optic dealers, bird feed stores, and artists, on Friday and Saturday of the festival. Birds and Brews also returns, with

the 4th Annual Bird Calling Competition set for Friday night at The Spa Special Event Center in Porter. This year's Saturday night keynote presentation will feature legendary birder and writer, Laura Erickson. Have you ever had such a perfect look at a bird, or watched it in such perfect circumstances, that you thought it had to be the best bird ever? Laura Erickson has found herself saying exactly that on many occasions, from special encounters with abundant chickadees to her one and only glimpse at one of the rarest birds on the planet, the Horned Guan. Some of the birds she's seen in her travels to four continents made the grade, but so did some of the

special individuals she's seen in her own backyard. Sometimes looking for the "best bird ever" can open our minds and hearts to much, much more.

Trips and workshops fill fast, and being an Indiana Audubon member allows you to not only register early, but at a discount!

If you're an Indiana Audubon member, you will receive a special discount code in your email inbox before February 24. Registration goes live at 9 am! Learn more at indunesbirdingfestival.com



A KICKA\$\$ KISKADEE ADVENTURE



By Heath Harlan

**Editor's Note—On Sunday, December 16, DeAnn Dyson, a bird enthusiast from Noble County, photographed an unknown bird in her backyard, and posted it to social media that evening. Within minutes, Indiana birders quickly ID'd it as the state's first ever Great Kiskadee, a bird more common in Central America and Mexico. In the following days, a mass of migration of birders were fortunate enough to descend upon the pastures, wetlands, and scrubland around the Dyson property to view this amazing bird. Here is one birder's story...*

It was an early day for a northbound adventure to see the state's first Great Kiskadee. At 12:30 am local time I picked up passenger number one, Bob Meier, and we then headed north to pick up passenger number two, Sean Verkamp, near I-69. Next, we continued north to meet with our additional party member, Kevin Cornell. We had already driven several hours and were only at the halfway point. We traveled a couple more hours to a gas station within minutes of the kiskadee stake-out for a little breakfast before sun rise. After a quick bite, and a short jaunt up the road we made it to the pinned location and pulled up behind the first car near the accommodating homeowner's driveway. We parked and met many other birders along the roadside who were just as excited.

Having arrived in time to make sure we didn't miss it on its morning routine out of its roost, we waited and quickly met up with Jeff "Magic" McCoy as he was the most familiar with the usual path of the bird, the neighboring homeowners, and had been graciously meeting people at 8am to offer his assistance in locating the bird. After a few minutes of conversation, most of us made our way to the patch the bird often visited. We could recognize a dead tree from previous kiskadee photos. So, there we stood and mingled, told bird stories and met with other bird folks. A real reunion of the Hoosier birding family. There seemed to be a steady flow of onlookers and arrivals until a total of around 30 people eventually stood waiting.

As some of the last we're arriving, McCoy and a few others in our growing entourage heard the call and a quick wave was given! The bird had made its morning arrival. This was only heard by a couple people in the party and a visual could not be obtained. Many eyes strained to find it and we all continued to wait to hear or see the bird. After maybe another hour of no sightings some folks we're starting to get hungry and food called. We decided to come back later that afternoon and check for other species in the nearby areas to add to our list.

While away Sean checked alerts and reports to find out we indeed had just missed the bird fly across the highway! This was both bad news and good news since we knew it would be coming back to roost later that evening and was on its predicted path as it has been the past few days prior. After searching for other northern species, we made our way back to the kiskadee location with well over an hour before sunset. This time

when we arrived there was a small group of Amish locals with bicycles and only two cars. We were surprised but we're intent on continuing our search that we drove so far for. Just like in the morning, we took our positions out in the pasture and waited for the bird's fateful return. After an hour of checking off more species that we hadn't seen in the morning, Sean called out that it was being observed by the road. Bob and I were the furthest from the road, and we were deer in headlights on whether to make our way down the driveway or head back through the swampy muck towards Sean who was getting a visual and taking photos right then and there! We were just not quite within visual range of the bird as we were a good 100 feet away from Sean. He signaled that the bird flew over him into the wooded patch that was between us. Bob and I peered in to the patch and we're able to hear its loud "weeep" call.

Other birders were beginning to gather and that was the last sight and sound that we had of the bird. We were excited to hear the bird and see Sean's pictures but as for me and Bob we would have liked to have seen the bird as others in the parties were also able to photograph it, we were just not that lucky. We at least got to hear the bird immediately after Sean lost it in the woods. This was, however, satisfying as our group still had the longest drive in Indiana to get back home! We had already started in southern Indiana just miles from the Kentucky border and we had birded our way up here and seen a Welcome to Michigan sign while driving around for snowy owls, and here we had to drive almost 6 more hours to get home. After failing on every bird that we attempted to see or hear that day, finding of the kiskadee made the drive so much more bearable and rewarding! We could not have been happier to see and hear that bird after such a long day. It was nice to also meet so many helpful individuals from homeowners to bird enthusiasts. As a bonus we did enjoy the small donkey herd in the nearby field.

The day was an adventure and it was a win. Not to be outdone, we spent our last birding effort later that evening trying to find a saw whet owl seen earlier that morning much closer to our homes but alas we dipped yet again. After that, Sean was delivered safely to his drop point and eventually Bob to his residence too. It was a solid 24-hour bird chase! We had all taken turns napping that day and were all past our bedtimes, but we were mission focused, and we came out with a win for the day! The kiskadee was not a lifer for me, as I had photographed one in Texas already, and Sean had also seen them on his travels. For Bob, however, it was a lifer. As it stands, we were all part of this first state record for this far away from home rarity. Bob had heard from the homeowner that he was wanting a little more privacy for the holidays and was hoping this was going to end. Fortunately, the bird was consistent for those really wanting to see the bird. Only time will tell if the homeowners and this lovely bird will continue to cooperate. But, for this Indiana birder, it was an opportunity and experience of a lifetime. 🍒



meet a **MEMBER** LINA RIFAI



Q TELL US A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF. WHERE DO YOU LIVE? FAMILY? WORK?

I currently live in Noblesville, but was born and raised in Vienna, Austria. I lived in a small village in the Alps in the western part of Austria for a few years, as well. After high school, I lived in Jordan for a while, where I did research on reptiles, amphibians, birds, mammals, and scorpions. I am the only one in my family in the U.S. My brother, sister-in-law, and niece live in Thailand, and the rest of my family is in Austria. I am the only one in my family in any biology related field.

I have a Ph.D. in Behavioral Ecology and am an Associate Professor at Indiana University–Kokomo. I love photography, scuba diving, camping, and I ride a motorcycle most of the year (I also teach MSF motorcycle classes). I am the one that hangs over a cliff and nearly falls down, not to get a selfie, but a good look at this Griffon Vulture that is sitting somewhere below (and then just to find out it was circling over my head the whole time).

Q WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN BIRDING?

It might have been my first real pet, a budgie, that got me to pay attention to birds in general. However, the first time I looked into the face of a wild Barn Owl while I was living in Jordan, got me hooked. It was love at first hiss, and led to my very first research project and published paper. I started paying more attention to birds. When I moved to the U.S. and started with my Ph.D. program at the University of Louisville, my advisor was not only a behavioral ecologist, but also an ornithologist. Through her, I learned about the birds in the U.S., started banding American Robins for part of my dissertation research, and went on many bird watching trips with her in the region.

Q WHAT DO YOU FIND MOST INTERESTING TEACHING STUDENTS ABOUT BIRDS?

Every year, I find myself focusing a little more on a different topic. I find that nearly every topic I cover in ornithology class is something completely new to most students. It is easy to forget how little most people know about birds, when you are so involved with them yourself. My favorite and most interesting thing about teaching this class, is not just that I learn something new every time myself, but how new nearly every aspect of ornithology is for these students. I love to teach about bird anatomy, their unique respiratory system, bird intelligence (which always surprises students), and about their different mating behaviors (I actually use birds as examples in any class that I cover the topic of sexual selection). The two most interesting things for me in terms of student reaction have been how fascinated students are when they not only discover that there are way more birds in Indiana than they thought, but why and how far these birds can migrate. Most students start the semester only knowing a few bird species, but by the end, are able to identify more than 100 birds by sight and about 20 by sound. Since students also have to keep a field journal and draw 1-2 birds a semester, I discovered that we have quite a lot of artists in our classes!

Q WHAT'S YOUR TARGET BIRD YOU'D MOST LIKE TO SEE IN 2019?

Since I don't always get a lot of time to go bird watching, I always have a long list of birds I would love to see. If I had to choose one, I would love to see a wild Barn Owl in Indiana (still have not seen a wild one in the U.S.) somewhere.

Q DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BIRDING AREA IN INDIANA? OUTSIDE OF INDIANA?

In Indiana, Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge. Outside of Indiana (but close!) would be Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest in Kentucky. 🍁



ID PRIMER

BROAD-WINGED By Nick Kiehl VS. RED-SHOULDERED

Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks are fairly common birds of prey in Indiana, and present a fun identification challenge for birders of all skill levels. Both are medium-sized hawks of forested habitats that are less likely to visit backyard feeders compared to Sharp-shinned and Cooper's Hawks.

APPEARANCE

Adults of these two species should be easy to identify given a decent look. Red-shouldered has orange barring on the breast and belly, with orange (red?) shoulders visible from the side and behind. The Broad-winged's barring is more brown than orange, and it has a shorter tail with thicker and fewer white bands compared to Red-shouldered. Immatures are where the challenge begins. An immature Broad-winged has sparser streaking below, concentrated on the sides of the throat and breast, and usually (but not always) has a plain white area on the center of the breast. An immature Red-shouldered has heavier and more evenly distributed streaking, including on the throat

and center of the chest. If you can see the wing, look for the diagnostic checkered pattern on the secondaries in Red-shouldered (see image). A good field mark for immature Broad-winged is the thicker dark band toward the tip of the tail. A final thing to keep in mind is that perched Broad-wingeds are more compact and "squat" looking compared to Red-shouldered, partly because of their shorter legs and tail. For more images of these species, check out the Hawkwatch International website, hawkwatch.org. They even have a free raptor ID app for smartphones!

IN FLIGHT

Distinguishing these two species in flight can seem like a daunting task, but many of the same field

marks visible on perched birds are also helpful when they are flying. When you see a soaring raptor, try to focus on both the color pattern and the shape of the wings and tail. Look for the presence or absence of a pale crescent in the outer portion of wings (see images), the thickness of the tail bands, and the pattern on the secondaries and underwing coverts - heavily marked in Red-shouldered vs. mostly plain in Broad-winged. The translucent crescent across the primaries on Red-shouldered, visible from above and below, is an especially good field mark (but beware of molting Broad-wings) that can often be seen from a distance. Even when you can't see field marks, there are reliable differences in shape that should allow you to identify most birds in flight. Broad-winged is a smaller, compact hawk with a fairly short tail, stocky body, and in adults, a clean black outline along the edges of the wing. The wings are only moderately broad and come to a point at the tip. Red-shouldered looks lanky in comparison, with a longer tail, longer and more evenly broad wings out to the tip, obvious "fingers," and wrists that are pushed farther forward than in Broad-winged. Practice watching hawks without binoculars to force yourself to key in on their different shapes. Also remember that Broad-winged Hawks like to move in flocks during migration, but you won't usually see more than two Red-shouldered Hawks flying together.

DISTRIBUTION AND HABITAT

Broad-winged Hawks spend the winter in Mexico, Central America, and northern South America, and are unlikely to be seen in Indiana between November 1st and April 1st. They breed in heavily wooded habitats, especially in the southern half of the state, but are generally uncommon. They are much less likely



to be seen in small woodlots and open country compared to Red-shouldered, except during migration when they can be seen flying over just about any habitat. Peak migration for Broad-winged, when Indiana birders are most likely to see them, is mid April to mid May in spring, and late August through the end of September in the fall. Red-shouldered is present year-round, but you

“ Practice watching hawks without binoculars to force yourself to key in on their different shapes. ”

may notice some local movements and an influx of migrants from farther north in the winter.

They breed in deciduous woodlands, especially in riparian areas and near lakes and ponds.

VOICE

Broad-winged Hawk gives a distinctive high pitched kee-ee whistle that is higher and more piercing than the descending keear calls of Red-shouldered, which are often given several times in a row. Check the Macaulay Library or xeno-canto.org online to listen to recordings of their calls.

CONCLUSION

Using multiple field marks and understanding the status and distribution of these two hawk species in Indiana will greatly simplify identification. Focus on the tail and wing patterns in addition to the amount of chest streaking to fast-track the ID process. Most importantly, if you feel frustrated about identifying Broad-winged and Red-shouldered Hawks or any other bird, remember that it’s okay to forget the field marks and just enjoy watching them! 🍂



SUMMIT LAKE

A Waterfowl Watching Mecca

**Editor's Note: The following guide is an excerpt from a written publication by Steve Pancol, originally featured on the Indiana Audubon website. As a result, species occurrence and site logistics may have updated information. For current data, please visit ebird.org/hotspot/L212401 and in.gov/dnr/parklake/2967.htm*

Summit Lake State Park consists of 2680 acres of grassland, brush, thickets, deciduous woods, mudflats, and marsh, along with the 800-acre Summit Lake for which it is named. The park annually attracts some of the largest concentrations of migrating waterfowl in the entire Midwest away from the Great Lakes.

SPECIES ABUNDANCE

Waterfowl: Twenty-five species of waterfowl regularly occur here, with over total species recorded over the years. Most of the waterfowl at Summit Lake tend to concentrate in the Nature Area, except for the loons and deep-diving ducks. Waterfowl are most abundant October through early December and again March through early April. November tends to be the peak waterfowl month at Summit Lake, although good numbers tend to stay through the winter if open water remains available. Waterfowl will remain at Summit Lake throughout the winter if open water is available.

Quality waterfowl species found at Summit Lake include Ruddy Ducks, which amass in the deeper waters of the lake from October through early May. Ruddy Duck numbers usually exceed 200 in mid-winter. Northern Pintails, Canvasbacks, and Redheads are present October through March, occurring both on Summit Lake and at the Nature Area. Lesser Scaup can be found late October through April on Summit Lake and at the Nature Area. Greater Scaup can also be found at these locations November through mid-April. Hooded Mergansers are

reliable late October through April on the lake and at the Nature Area. On average, about 100 Snow Geese overwinter annually at Summit Lake. These birds can be found at the Nature Area and on the islands inside the park from November through March. In the last couple years, Greater White-fronted Geese and Tundra Swans have overwintered in the park also. Look for the Greater White-fronted Geese October through March. They are usually found resting with Canada Geese on shore or on the lake islands. The Tundra Swans are present November through January, mostly on the lake but occasionally at the Nature Area marshes. Late December through March, small numbers of Common Mergansers can be found on open water in the deep part of the lake near the dam.

Specialty Birds: Noteworthy birds found in the park in years past include: Eared Grebe, Trumpeter Swan, Red-necked Phalarope, Eurasian Wigeon, Long-tailed Duck, Surf Scoter, American Bittern, Merlin, King Rail, Ruff, Western Sandpiper, and both Laughing and Franklin's Gulls.

BIRDING AREAS

Typical Time to Bird Site: 2–8 Hours

The Nature Area: Unquestionably, Summit Lake State Park is best known for the waterfowl habitat found in the Nature Area. It consists of the three marshes/ponds east of CR 500 E on CR 750 N, and the section of Summit Lake on the west side of CR 500 E.

Islands: When visiting, one should pay attention to the small islands located

within the lake and marshes. Rare birds usually choose these islands as resting areas during migration. Two of these islands can be viewed inside the park from the Sunset Shelter. Another small island is in the marsh on the east side of CR 500 E, near its intersection with CR 750 N.

The three most important islands, however, can be viewed only from the Dam Access Road. You will need to get permission from the park manager to bird the lake from the dam (see notes on "Access Restrictions")

Grasslands: The grassland areas are the second biggest draw of the park, attracting raptors in the winter and nesting grassland species in the spring and summer. Grassland habitat is pervasive both inside the park and along the perimeter county roads.

TRAIL ACCESS

There are six separate areas of deciduous woodlands around the park, all of which attract migrating passerines and nesting species. Access to these areas include: Prairie (Trail 1) - 1.25 mi, Campground (Trail 2) - 2 mi, (Beach Trail 3) - .9 mi, the campgrounds, the park entrance, and along CR 750 N. Trails 1-3 include grasslands, open brush, thickets, deciduous woodlands, and lake habitat.

Accessibility: One of the finest attributes of this park is its easy accessibility to the physically challenged. The lake can be birded for hours without even getting out of the car! With a window-mounted spotting scope, you can scan the lake from five different locations within the park, as

well as one location along CR 500 E and two along CR 750 N. All the Nature Area marshes can be thoroughly covered in this way, as well.

Trails 1 and 2 are very wide and well-maintained. Wheelchair access is possible, especially if the chair has inflatable, motorized wheels. The Beach Trail (located right next to the parking lot) provides quick access and easy hiking. Another strategy for those who do not want to attempt the trails is to pull up beside one of the numerous "mini-woodlots" along the county roads which border the park. A word of caution though: when stopped, please be sure to pull your car completely off the road. The use of emergency flashers or a right turn signal is recommended when moving slowly or stopped. Do NOT stop on the road at the bottom of a hill unless you are

pulled completely off to the side of the road.

Access Restrictions: You MUST receive permission from the park office to bird the Dam Access Road. The park manager will tell you where to park and how to access the dam. Request a note stating that you're a birder WITH access permission and attach it to your car windshield; otherwise, you may be confronted by a Conservation Officer. The DNR property outside of the park gates also has restricted access. Most grassland, marsh, and lake birds can be seen or heard without leaving the county roads. Permission should be obtained from the park manager to walk out into the fields.

Special Considerations: Insects - During the summer months, mosquitoes and biting flies will drive you out of the

woods. Birding the lake and grassland areas is still possible, however.

Restrooms: There is a heated restroom open year-round at the North Boat Launch. Restrooms are also available at Sunset Shelter, but are not heated and do not contain running water. Additional facilities are located at the campgrounds and the park office, the latter being accessible to the public only during normal business hours.

Lodging: Summit Lake has 125 Class A campsites equipped with flush toilets, hot water, and showers. Occupancy is limited to two weeks. If you plan to camp, please be sure to call ahead for reservations as the campground sites are often sold out. Motel lodging is available in New Castle.

GENERAL SITE INFORMATION

Location: 5993 N. Messick Road New Castle, IN 47362 (Henry County)

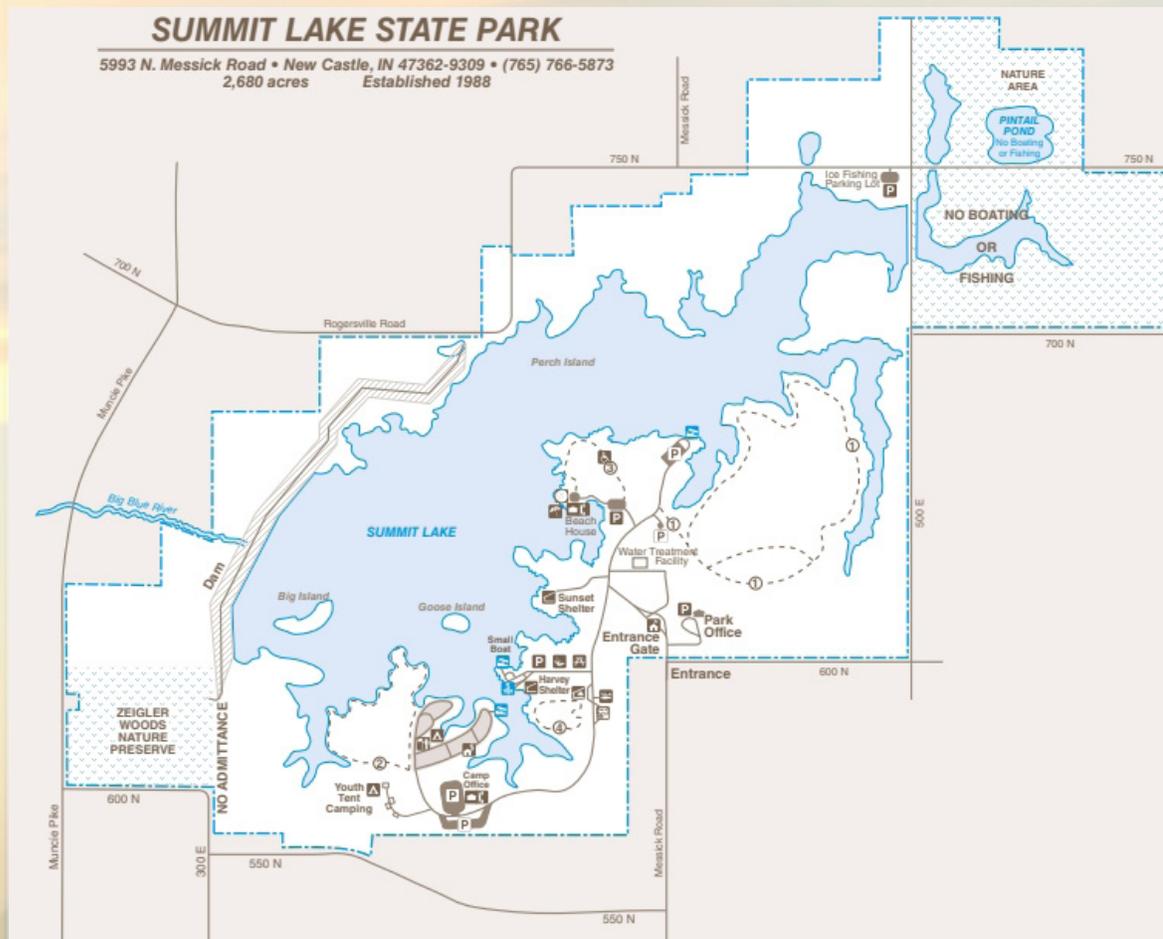
Property/Ownership: State of Indiana/Indiana Dept. of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks

[Note: Many of the grasslands and meadows adjacent to the perimeter roads (on County Roads 600 N, 500 E & 750 N) are also considered state park property.]

Park Hours: 7 a.m.–11 p.m. (Daily) [Note: the Nature Area and surrounding county roads are available for birding in addition to park hours.]

Fees: Standard State Park Admission (see the IN DNR website for current annual rates)

Phone: (765) 766-5873



WINTERS WITH WHOOPING CRANES

BY DANIELLE WILLIAMS, WHOOPING CRANE OUTREACH PROGRAM ASSISTANT FOR THE INTERNATIONAL CRANE FOUNDATION

For many birders, seeing their first Whooping Crane is an unforgettable experience. They can tell you the date, the weather, the time, and the exact wetland or field in which they first spotted the striking white bird. When you do finally see one in the wild, it is easy to understand why. Whooping Cranes stand an impressive five feet tall, their remarkable size and bright white plumage making them visible from miles around in the open fields and marshes where they spend their days. A closer look reveals that their spotless white feathers are interrupted only by a patch of bare red skin on the top of their head and a black mustache stretching back from their bill. In flight, black wingtips are visible. When they call – an impossibly loud sound reverberating through a specialized looped trachea – it feels as though you are listening to a creature from another time. Seeing a wild Whooping Crane used to require hours of driving or a boat ride to experience. Now, we can see Whooping Cranes right here in Indiana for several months out of the year. So how exactly did we end up with these beautiful winter visitors?

Historically, Whooping Cranes would have been a relatively common sight through much of North America. They spent the breeding season in Canada and the upper Midwest and the winter in Texas, Mexico, and the Carolinas. They were never as numerous as their smaller cousin the Sandhill Crane, but likely numbered somewhere between 3,000-10,000 individuals prior to European settlement of North America. By the mid-1900s, they had been nearly wiped out by habitat loss and unregulated hunting. In 1941, the species was down to just 20-30 individuals, most occurring in one wild population that migrated between Wood Buffalo National Park in Canada and Aransas National Wildlife Refuge on the coast of Texas. It seemed likely that the Whooping Crane faced the same fate as the Passenger Pigeon, the Carolina Parakeet, and so many other species that had been driven to extinction. In a matter of decades, they would fade from living memory.

Fortunately, a combination of legislation, human intervention, and simple good luck saved the Whooping Crane. A fire crew accidentally discovered the long sought-after breeding grounds by spotting the big white birds on their nests from the air in 1954. The US Fish and Wildlife Service established a captive flock of Whooping Cranes to create a safeguard against extinction. Whooping Cranes were part of the “class of ‘67,” a list of species classified as federally endangered before the Endangered Species Act was even passed, which gave the wild birds extra protection. The wild population began to grow. In

captivity, scientists developed methods to ensure that young cranes imprinted correctly and did not get too accustomed to human contact.

Despite all this success, a problem remained. The only wild population migrated between two relatively small geographical areas. If something catastrophic happened at the breeding grounds in Canada or the wintering grounds in Texas, no Whooping Cranes would be left in the wild. So, efforts began to reintroduce populations of Whooping Cranes to other parts of the United States. Early efforts to reintroduce Whooping Cranes in Idaho and Florida failed for a variety of reasons. Luckily, biologists are persistent. A group of organizations formed the Whooping Crane Eastern Partnership in 1999. The partnership, of which the International Crane Foundation is a founding member, hoped to introduce a migratory population of Whooping Cranes to the eastern United States. In 2001, with the help of Operation Migration, the first cohort of Whooping Cranes migrated behind an ultralight aircraft from Wisconsin to Florida.

Today, this eastern population numbers just over 100 individuals that spend their summers in Wisconsin as planned, usually near their original release site. However, as birds often do, the cranes began to surprise us. They weren't winging their way down to Florida where they were originally led. Instead, they began stopping considerably farther north, a behavioral change known as shortstopping. Areas that had been used as stopovers in previous migrations became wintering grounds. The cranes were changing their migration habits before our eyes.

Biologists are not entirely sure what causes the cranes to stop farther north. One possible driver behind shortstopping is a climb in average winter temperatures in the Midwest. Milder winters keep the shallow wetlands where the cranes roost ice-free for larger parts of the year, meaning that the birds don't have to travel as far south to find suitable habitat. Staying farther north allows them to save the energy that would have been used on the long flight to Florida. It also keeps them closer to the breeding grounds, allowing them to arrive on territory and begin breeding at an earlier date. However, warming temperatures alone are not enough to account for the rapid shift we are seeing in migration habits.

Another possible explanation for shortstopping might be food availability. In the winter, Whooping Cranes can often be found in agricultural fields feeding on waste grain. In areas where wetland habitat is situated in the middle of vast agricultural landscapes, food is abundant. Easily accessible food sources



like corn allow the cranes to offset the energetic costs of keeping warm. Therefore, it is no surprise that a large proportion of the eastern population has started spending their winters in Indiana, where corn is readily available.

We might see more Whooping Cranes spending the winters in Indiana in the coming years. Cranes are very social creatures that learn their migration patterns from other cranes. In recent years, biologists have made use of this by releasing juvenile cranes near wild adults so the adults can lead them on their first migration. This technique is now the only way the International Crane Foundation introduces captive-reared cranes into the wild population. The adults that have started wintering here will likely teach their "adopted" chicks the same route, leading them from the breeding grounds to southern Indiana. Wild-hatched chicks could also be led to Indiana in this manner. If the cranes pass this migration route down through future generations, it could become firmly rooted in the population's knowledge base.

This process is already in action, as two wild-hatched chicks spent the winter of 2018/19 in Indiana. They were two of six chicks that successfully fledged in the wild this year, a record for the Eastern Migratory Population. The cinnamon-colored juveniles followed behind their parents, learning the best places to find corn and safely roost for the night. Once or twice, they were even spotted practicing the dances they will use

to bond with their future mates. When they reach sexual maturity in a few years, they may very well lead their own chicks to winter in Indiana, as well.

So, that magical moment when a birder spots their first Whooping Crane may become even more commonplace in Indiana in the coming years. To make the moment just as enjoyable for the cranes, the International Crane Foundation asks that observers stay in their vehicles when possible, and not approach closer than 100 yards. On foot, viewers should maintain a distance of 200 yards. From these distances, the cranes will likely remain comfortable, allowing you to observe a range of behaviors such as foraging, preening, and if you're lucky, maybe a joyful dance shared between mates. For your own safety, please only park in designated parking areas and do not trespass on private property, or closed areas of public property, in order to get a closer look at the birds.

Want to learn more about cranes and their habitat, and celebrate the wildlife that calls the marsh home? Consider attending the Marsh Madness Festival, held March 1-2 at Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area. This event offers a variety of educational presentations, displays, and opportunities to enjoy the property. For more information, visit friendsofgoosepond.org. For more crane information, including how to support the International Crane Foundation, visit savingcranes.org.

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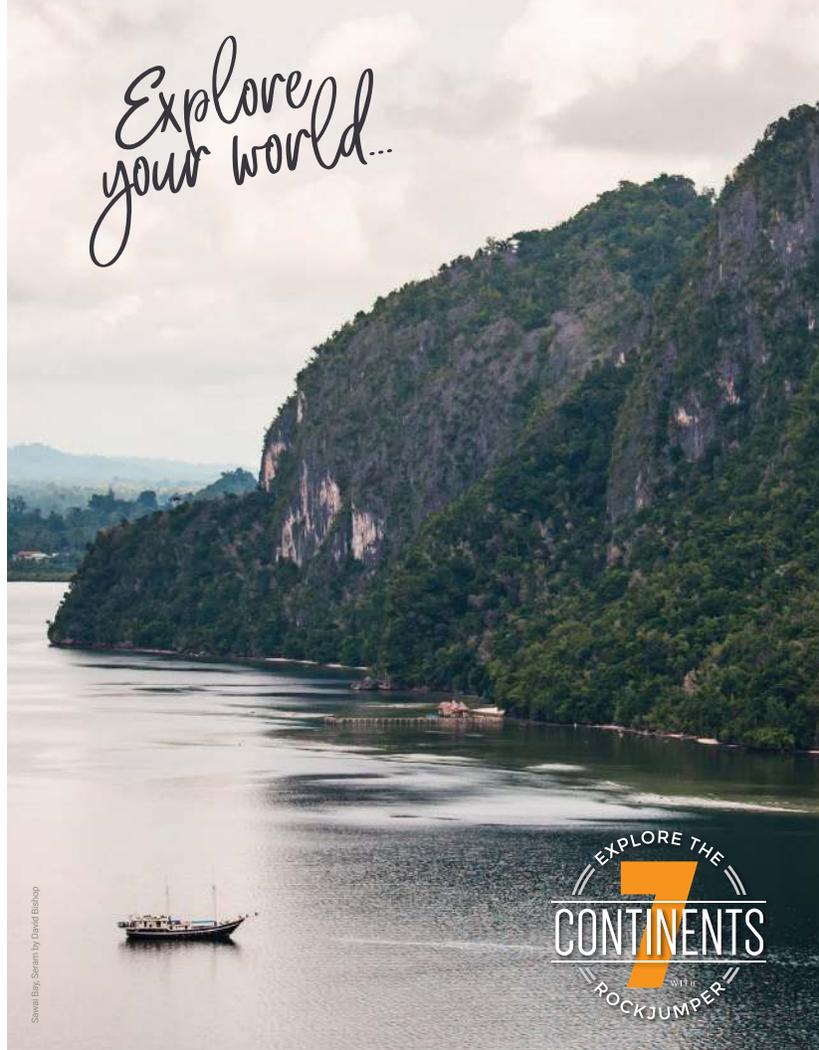
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