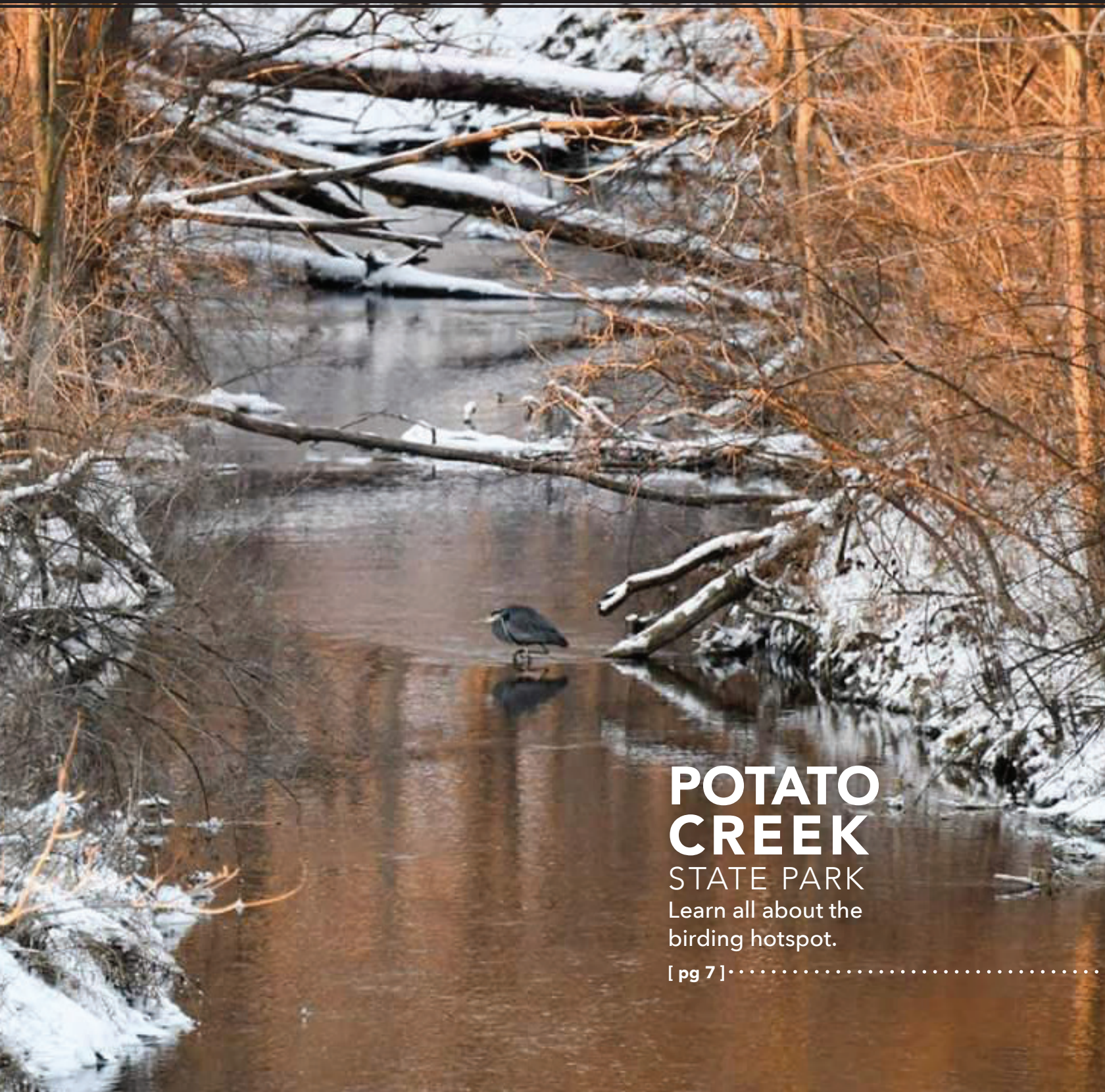


Indiana Audubon Society

CARDINAL

NEWSLETTER • OCT–NOV 2019 • Vol.50 No.5



POTATO CREEK

STATE PARK

Learn all about the
birding hotspot.

[pg 7]

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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.



On the cover:

Great Blue Heron at
Potato Creek State Park
by Carol Goodall

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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	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
15% discount on all IAS online store merchandise				✓	✓			
Register a friend to any IAS field trip at member rate				✓				
➤ Be a part of Indiana Audubon Society! Sign up at: Indianaaudubon.org/membership								



UPCOMING TRIPS & EVENTS

Join Indiana Audubon for an assortment of field trips and workshops being offered this spring. **Visit indianaaudubon.org/events** for more information or to register for any of these upcoming activities. Additional events are listed on the website. Many fill early, so sign up now!

OCT 12: SPARROW SEARCH AT THE BURN TRIP

LYE CREEK BURN, CRAWFORDSVILLE [CRAWFORDSVILLE, IN]

NOV 9: AUDUBON'S NIGHT OF THE OWLS

STATEWIDE [IN]

NOV 16: AN EVENING WITH SANDHILLS AND SAW-WHETS

INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER [CHESTERTON, IN]

NOV 23: UNIVERSAL MINES FIELD TRIP

UNIVERSAL STRIP MINES [VIGO/VERMILLION COUNTY, IN]





CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

This year marks the 120th annual Christmas Bird Count. The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is a long-standing program of the National Audubon Society, with over 100 years of community science involvement. It is an early-winter bird census, where thousands of volunteers across the U.S., Canada, and many countries in the Western Hemisphere go out over a 24-hour period on one calendar day to count birds.

To participate, circles should be registered with the National Audubon as an official count circle,

with a dedicated compiler. While Indiana Audubon doesn't organize the count, we do try to provide Hoosier birders with the full list of active counts and where birders can participate during the entire Christmas Count season, December 14-January 5.

If you're conducting an official Christmas Bird Count this holiday season, be sure to send your count details to Brad Bumgardner at bbumgardner@indianaaudubon.org for inclusion in our bird counts page.



WINTER OWL TRIP JAN 1-FEB 2

Back by popular demand, Indiana Audubon Society is pleased to offer an amazing trip to the North Woods in search of wintering owls and other specialty birds of the boreal forest.

The trip will visit the eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan, where annual Snowy Owl numbers make seeing these amazing arctic birds a near certainty, with many years witnessing a dozen or more of these giant white owls. Other specialties often encountered include Bald Eagles, Sharp-tailed Grouse, Bohemian Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, and Common Redpolls. This year's Winter UP trip is scheduled for January 31-February 2.

This trip fills fast every year with waiting lists, so book now while space is available!

➤ **REGISTER TODAY:** indianaaudubon.org/events



BIRD BANDING WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS

On a sunny September weekend, birders gathered to explore the science of songbird banding in a behind-the-scenes Workshop at Mary Gray Birding Sanctuary.

The days were filled with banding tools, Pyles books, and enthusiastic birders ready to learn. A big thanks to everyone who signed up, and to the banders for sharing their expertise and experience!





SAW-WHETS STATEWIDE

Everyone loves owls, but Saw-whets hold a special place in our hearts! The tiny owl that bursts with attitude is always on the top of the list whenever folks get to talking about must-see birds. However, finding one can be near impossible! Their incredibly secretive and nocturnal nature, coupled with their ability to camouflage themselves within dense pine branches, makes seeing one in the daytime very difficult for even the most experienced bird nerds. Given that, you can imagine that scientific information on these amazing, 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 more than a decade! Now YOU

have a chance to experience the knowledge we've gained, through a special fall migration study of the Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Indiana Audubon is pleased to co-host a special "night with the owls" on Saturday, November 9. On this night, participants may choose from one of FIVE owl banding stations around Indiana to learn about the amazing migration of our smallest owl, as well as watch in 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, the Yellowwood Station, or the Ball State Whitetail Tree Farm station. Participants need to register online on the Indiana Audubon events page, as these stations will quickly fill to capacity, and space is limited.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

All times are local based on station site

INDIANA DUNES STATION 6 PM CST

INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER [1215 S.R. 49, CHESTERTON]

The presentation will begin at 6 p.m., with any owls captured to be banded immediately after.

MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY STATION 7 PM EST

BROOKS HALL [3499 S BIRD SANCTUARY RD, CONNERSVILLE]

The presentation will begin at 7 p.m. inside Brooks Hall, with any owls captured to be banded immediately after.

YELLOWWOOD STATE FOREST STATION 7 PM EST

[772 SOUTH YELLOWWOOD ROAD, NASHVILLE]

Pre-registered participants will meet inside the Yellowwood State Forest and be guided into the banding area via forest roads at 7 p.m. (EST). Access is extremely limited, and participants will receive a full set of instructions via email prior to the night. Participants should be prepared for the weather and bring drinks and snacks as all activity occurs outside.

PURDUE MARTELL FOREST STATION 7 PM EST

WRIGHT CENTER [1007 N 725 W, WEST LAFAYETTE]

Pre-registered participants will meet inside the Yellowwood State Forest and be guided into the banding area via forest roads at 7 p.m. (EST). Access is extremely limited, and participants will receive a full set of instructions via email prior to the night. Participants should be prepared for the weather and bring drinks and snacks as all activity occurs outside.

BALL STATE STATION 5:30 PM EST

MUNCIE [LOCATION & REGISTRATION DETAILS TO COME]

The banding demonstrations are free, but donations are highly encouraged to support future owl research operations in Indiana. Some stations offer owl adoptions to help fund the project. There is no registration fee for this special event.

➤ **LEARN MORE:** indianaaudubon.org/events



3 BILLION BIRDS GONE

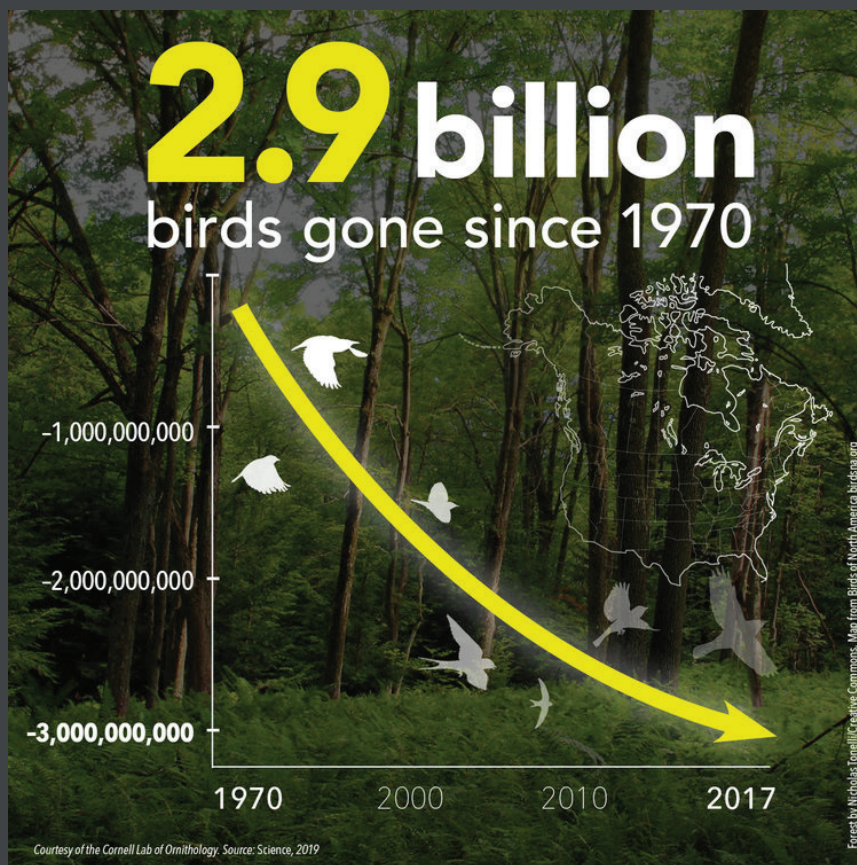
In a devastating new story recently published, 3 billion fewer birds exist in North America today than in 1970. While scientists have known for decades that certain kinds of birds have struggled as humans (and bird-gobbling cats) encroach on their habitats, a new comprehensive tally shows the staggering extent of the loss. Nearly 1 in 3 birds — or 29 percent — has vanished in the last half century, researchers report September 19 in *Science Magazine*.

The numbers paint a grim picture. Most habitats

and species have experienced tremendous losses, especially migratory birds. Grassland species fared the worst, with 700 million individual birds across 31 species, including meadowlarks, have vanished since 1970, a 53% drop. Our beloved little brown jobs, the sparrows, saw the largest drop of any group of birds. Nearly a quarter, or 750 million, have disappeared over the past five decades. Even invasive species like starlings, which are highly adaptive generalists, experienced massive losses, with their populations declining 63 percent.

The study used Radar tracking of bird migration to measure the density and overall abundance of birds to record the decline over the last few decades. The numbers of decline aren't a random number pulled out of the hat, but a statistical analysis of overall biomass in the sky during migration periods.

While the exact reasons weren't specified for the declines, much work has already been done to identify some of the biggest threats to birds. These include habitat loss, outdoor cats, and pesticide use. 🍁



➤ To read more about this recent report, visit 3billionbirds.org





meet a **MEMBER** JEFF TIMMONS

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

I have been married for 25 years and my wife tolerates my birding well. I have a 13-year-old daughter who likes to bird when the target is easy and does not require extended travel. I live in Lapel, but I work in Indianapolis.

Q WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN BIRDING?

My grandfather Clayton Wiggins was big into birding as well as a bird bander. My brother Mike and I took several trips with my grandfather for birding. We also helped a lot with the bird banding. I am forever grateful for the experiences he was able to share with my brother and me.

Q YOU'VE BEEN ACTIVE IN THE BIRDING SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS. WHAT ADVANTAGES DO YOU SEE WITH THIS NEWER MEDIUM?

Anyone that is not using social media as well as other birding apps is missing out. The social groups are great for learning about birds, as well as helping with identification and location.

Q FAVORITE BIRDING AREA? (INDIANA & OUTSIDE INDIANA)

Goose Pond is probably my favorite birding place in the state. It can be very hard to figure out how to bird the property, but you never know what may show up there. My favorite place to bird outside the state is anywhere that I can find a new bird that I have never seen.

Q PHOTOGRAPHY HAS BEEN A JOY OF YOURS – WHAT DOES IT BRING TO YOUR BIRDING HOBBY & WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED ABOUT BIRDS?

Bird photography was very hard at first. To me, it took even more patience to wait to get a photo of a bird. I finally figured out that you need to find a happy balance in order to be a birder and photographer rather than one or the other. Move on if the birds in an area are not cooperative, or you end up wasting all your time trying to get photographs. I like to photograph birds mostly for the educational aspect – I find that a lot of people have no idea that there are so many birds even in the state of Indiana.

POTATO CREEK STATE PARK

FARM FARMLAND TO PARKLAND

BY TOM STANKUS
& TIM CORDELL

The popular north-central Indiana birding destination of Potato Creek State Park became a reality on June 6, 1977, when the six-square-mile area was formally dedicated. The park's 327-acre Worster Lake is named in honor of Darcy Worster, an early park supporter. When it first opened, much of the land at Potato Creek was recovering farmland – the vast overgrown fields attracted Bobolinks as well as Grasshopper, Henslow's, and Vesper Sparrows. As succession progressed, however, these birds gradually disappeared. Now, through an aggressive plan to re-establish the land to the pre-settlement days of the early 1800's, prairies, savannas and wetlands can be seen again at Potato

Creek. Some new wetland areas are located near the Visitor Center, while savanna areas, planted with prairie grasses and forbs, and additional wetlands are located along the main road going west and around to the north side of the lake. As you drive around the lake, look for hawks, Turkey Vultures, Eastern Bluebirds, Eastern Meadowlarks, sparrows, Willow Flycatchers, Yellow Warblers and swallows during the warmer seasons. Waterfowl and wading birds may also be visible. A walk down Pear Road, in the northwest section of the park, will take you to more prairie and wetland restorations.

For birders visiting, there are two productive areas at Potato Creek to view waterfowl, wading birds, and shorebirds – particularly during migration. The first site is the **West Boat Launch** and fishing pier located next to the Whispering Winds Picnic Area. Located on the south side of the lake, this site is easy to access by car and allows a quick scan of the water – a luxury during the colder months. The second area is comprised of the entire eastern tip of the lake, which must be accessed on foot. To reach this area, park at the **Porter Rea Cemetery** parking lot, walk north toward the lake,

and then follow Trail 4 eastward along the lake's southern edge. It has been found that birding the lake from its southern shore often keeps the sun at your back. In all, 31 species of waterfowl have been seen on Worster Lake.

The best trails to see warblers and other migrating passerines include the **Bicycle Trail** and **Hiking Trails 1–4**. These trails access most of the habitat types found in the park, including mature woodlands, early successional areas, wooded streams, ponds, grasslands, and the lake. Thirty-two species of warblers have been sighted in the park – most observed from these trails. Hawks, owls, woodpeckers, flycatchers, vireos, and warblers represent some of the nesting bird families found here. The **Horseman's Campground** area contains successional fields, three good-sized mature wooded areas, a few ponds, and a section of Potato Creek itself. This variety of habitat attracts many species of birds, including Wild Turkey. Horseback riders have the right of way on the horse trails, so try to stand aside and remain quiet as they pass. Horse traffic can be quite heavy from late spring through fall.





The **Swamp Rose Nature Preserve** is in the northeast corner of the park near Trail 2. Although this area has no foot trails through it, good birds can be found in the general area around the preserve. Just to the east of Swamp Rose – outside of the park on Oak Road – Virginia Rails have been seen and heard during spring migration. Additionally, Red-shouldered Hawks have nested in this area, and beavers have been seen here and along Trail 4 closer to the lake.

The **Bicycle Trail** is asphalt and is handicapped-accessible. Be aware, however, of a steep slope near the north end of that trail. There are handicapped-accessible picnic facilities in the Orchard Shore Picnic Area, and accessible restrooms in most areas of the park. The swimming area, fishing piers and boat ramps are also handicapped-accessible. Part of the north side of the lake may be birded by car during the colder months. Early morning is the best time to bird Potato Creek because there's generally less traffic. Obtain a bird checklist at the Visitor Center, gatehouse, or Nature Center as you enter the park. As a reminder, please use your car flashers and stay on the road when driving in the park.

In recent years, Potato Creek has become an excellent location to observe Ospreys nesting on special platforms set up on the lake. Bald Eagles have also started nesting on the property, often competing for food and territory with the Ospreys, which arrive first. Potato Creek State Park was designated as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society and BirdLife International in 2006, due to the important habitat it provides to a variety of birds. 🍁

Typical Time to Bird Site: 2–8 Hours

SPECIALTY SPECIES

Red-shouldered Hawks nest in the northeastern section of the park from the Trail 3 area to the Swamp Rose Nature Preserve. March through June is typically the best time to find these birds.

Ospreys can be observed diving into the waters of Worster Lake from March through September. There are two nesting platforms that have been successfully used. One is at the west end of the lake, easily seen from the park road, and one at the eastern end of the lake just off of Trail 4.

Common Loons are typically found in the deeper parts of the lake from March through April and again from October through November.

Pileated Woodpeckers are permanent residents that nest in the Horseman's Campground area and along Trails 1 and 3. Additionally, they are often seen along the Bicycle Trail and Trail 2. These birds tend to be easier to find March through November.

Yellow-throated Warblers have nested sporadically in a grove of

Sycamores along Potato Creek near the service area. Late April through June is the most reliable time to encounter this species.

Northern Shrikes often winter along the main park road just east and west of the entrance road. When present, they usually can be seen perched in isolated trees from late December through February.

NOTEWORTHY RECORDS:

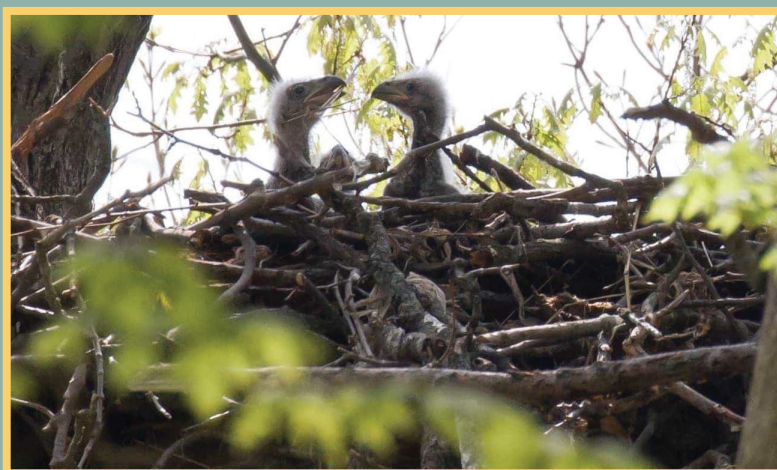
American Bittern – found in the restored wetlands at the west end of the park.

Sandhill Crane – have nested in the park since 2001. They are very secretive and difficult to find.

Bald Eagle – have recently begun nesting in the park.

Brown Creeper – have nested along Trail 3 near Potato Creek, but can be difficult to find.

Evening Grosbeak – watch for these and other winter finches periodically at the Nature Center Feeders. Most recently sighted last winter, 2018-19.





CERTHIA AMERICANA **BROWN CREEPER**

BY SARAH MCKILLIP

With winter approaching, I look forward to adding more Brown Creepers to my trip lists. Delicate, Easter-egg sized birds, Brown Creepers are the only tree creepers found in North America. In wintertime, Brown Creepers become more common in Indiana as they migrate south from their northernmost breeding range in Canada, occupying all forms of woodlands. Settling in for the season with woodpeckers, chickadees, titmice, nuthatches, and Golden-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers require close observation, but can luckily be found in local parks, suburbs, and various other deciduous habitats with a scattering of mature trees.

So, how do you go about finding a Brown Creeper in your local “patch”? Nature-writer Pete Dunne humorously points out in his *Essential Field Guide Companion* that the Brown Creeper “never forages on the ground... [it] hitches itself up tree trunks like a

hyper-active jerky woodpecker. The whitish flecked-and-brown or grayish brown upperparts replicate sun-dappled bark.” Cornell’s *All About Birds* website further explains the speckled bird’s curious features and behavior: “The Brown Creeper spends most of its time spiraling up tree trunks in search of insects. It holds its short legs on either side of its body, with the long, curved claws hooking into the bark, and braces itself with its long, stiff tail. Both feet hop at the same time, making the bird’s head duck after each hop. Because of its specialized anatomy, the Brown Creeper rarely climbs downward: once high in a tree, it flies down to begin a new ascent at the base of a nearby tree.”

Those with acute hearing or good listening skills may also detect the Brown Creeper through its song or call. National Audubon Society’s web page on the Brown Creeper describes the vocalizations as “a high-pitched, lisping tsee; song a tinkling, descending

warbler.” Dunne mentions a nickname given to the bird, based on the song’s pattern: “Meadowlark of the Woods.”

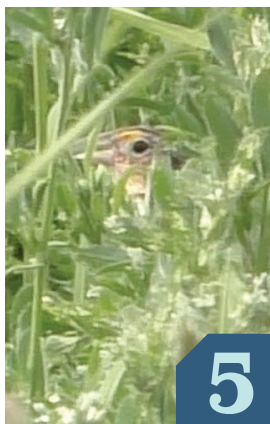
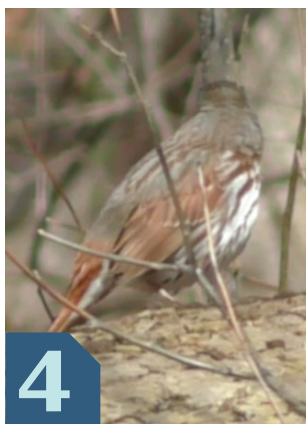
And what of the Brown Creeper’s conservation status? According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, “Brown Creeper populations were stable or slightly increased between 1966 and 2015.” Cornell University’s *All About Birds* website lists the Brown Creeper as a species of low conservation concern. However, Cornell and National Audubon both caution that habitat fragmentation and deforestation is a threat to creepers, destroying their preferred woodland habitats. National Audubon also stresses that climate change is affecting current breeding and wintering ranges, noting the Brown Creeper as a “climate endangered” species.

So the next time you find yourself outside on some chilly winter morning, remember to search for one of these tiny marvels, determinedly making its way up a tree trunk. 🍁



BIRD ID QUIZ ANSWERS

Last issue, we challenged *Cardinal* readers to step up and show off your sparrow ID skills. While many of our readers were hesitant to identify, we had 5 brave birders who tackled the 8 little brown bird challenge. Thanks Matthew Igleski, Cathy Meyer, Michelle K., Allee Forsberg and Laura Gilbert for sending in your IDs!



1 **Swamp Sparrow**
Melospiza georgiana

2 **Henslow's Sparrow**
Centronyx henslowii

3 **White-crowned Sparrow**
Zonotrichia leucophrys

4 **Fox Sparrow**
Passerella iliaca

5 **Grasshopper Sparrow**
Ammodramus savannarum

6 **Song Sparrow**
Melospiza melodia

7 **Savannah Sparrow**
Passerculus sandwichensis

8 **Lincoln's Sparrow**
Melospiza lincolnii



Indiana Audubon Fall Membership Drive 2019

Join, renew, refer, or gift a membership during the membership drive through October 13 and be entered into a drawing for one of two \$500 Audubon birding baskets brought to you by our partners Premier Optics and Wild Birds Unlimited.

You'll also be entered win in our bonus drawing of a free **LIFE** membership*, a \$675 value!

Each Birding Basket Includes:

- Vortex Crossfire 8x42 Birding Binoculars from Premier Optics
- Vortex baseball cap, t-shirt and lens cleaning kit
- One basic registration to the 2020 Indiana Dunes Birding Festival
- 2020 Indiana Dunes Birding Festival T-shirt and lens cleaner
- One basic registration to the IAS Spring Gathering at Mary Gray!
- One basic registration to the 2020 Hummingbird Migration Celebration
- One basic registration to the 2020 IAS Fall Festival
- Indiana Audubon Society T-shirt
- *The Joy of Bird Feeding* by Jim Carpenter
- Kaufman Field Guide to Birds of North America

Vortex Crossfire
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Learn more at indianaaudubon.org/membership

*Life membership includes digital and online access to IAS publications

