

Indiana Audubon Society

CARDINAL

NEWSLETTER • OCT.–NOV. 2023 • Vol.54 No.5



Production Team

Executive Director
Brad Bumgardner

Editor & Graphic
Designer
Whitney Yoerger

Contributors

Brad Bumgardner
Mona Clayton
Rena Cohen
Sonny Cohen
Jared Emmack
Jason Jablonski
Joni James
Robin Janson
Amy Kearns
Will Keller
Libby Keyes
Shari McCollough
Caleb Putnam
Ryan Sanderson
Mike Timmons

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:

Sandhill Crane
by Jason Jablonski

JOIN —OR— RENEW TODAY

INDIVIDUAL \$30
BASIC BENEFITS FOR 1 ADULT

FAMILY \$40
SIGN UP THE FAMILY FLOCK

CONTRIBUTING \$50
ENJOY BENEFACTOR BENEFITS

CARDINAL CLUB \$100
EXCLUSIVE PRIVILEGES & BEYOND

LIFE \$675
BECOME A LIFER WITH IAS

LIBRARY \$100
A PARTNERSHIP WITH PERKS

FLEDGLING \$5
AGES UP TO 11

STUDENT \$20
AGES 12-18

MEMBERSHIP PERKS								
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	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
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 summer and early fall. Visit indianaaudubon.org/events for more information or to register for any of these upcoming activities. Additional events are listed on our website, and many fill early! Register online today.

OCT. 10: Building Birder Skills 2.0: Lighting for Bird Photography [Virtual, Zoom]

OCT. 14: Limberlost Swamp Fall Field Trip [Geneva]

OCT. 14: October Big Day Hikes with ILPA [Various Locations]

OCT. 19: Saw-Whets & S'Mores: Indiana Dunes [Porter]

OCT. 21: Owl Prowl at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary [Connersville]

OCT. 27: Indiana Dunes Owl Banding: Behind the Scenes [Porter]

NOV. 3: Saw-Whets & S'Mores: Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary [Connersville]

NOV. 18: Jasper-Pulaski Sandhill Crane Open House [Medaryville]

NOV. 18: Owl Prowl at Celery Bog Nature Area & Prophetstown SP [West Lafayette]

DEC. 2: Owl Prowl at McCloud Nature Park [North Salem]



DISPATCHES FROM MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY

Making Headway on the Wildlife Blind

The new accessible birding blind across from Brooks Hall is progressing at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary. When completed, the new blind will allow visitors to get up close and personal with birds and wildlife. The blind will include native landscaping, bird feeders, water features, and new interpretive signage to identify the resident and seasonal bird species.

This project is made possible by the generosity of the Efroymson Family Fund at the Central Indiana Community Foundation, which has also supported some of Indiana Audubon's 125th anniversary legacy projects.



Prescribed Burn in September

The Sanctuary's prairie underwent a prescribed burn in early September to mark the end of the growing season, with the help of volunteers and the supervision of Glenwood Volunteer Fire Department and Bentonville

Fire Department. Prescribed burns are critical in clearing invasive plants and tree saplings, resulting in a healthier prairie in the subsequent year.

Growing season burns can reduce tall, overpowering grasses like great bluestem while restoring shorter blooms favored by pollinators. Furthermore, unlike spring or fall burns, burning while plants are still green produces a variety of safe havens for insects and animals.

Follow [@marygraybirdsanctuary](#) on Facebook for more updates.



All photos by Libby Keyes

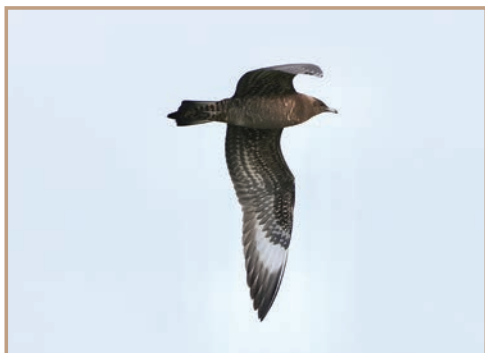


Photo: Parasitic Jaeger by Will Keller

WATERBIRD SURVEY DATA

In late August, Indiana Audubon launched its first Lake Michigan Waterbird Survey. Will Keller, this month's Q&A spotlight and recent Kalamazoo College biology graduate, is our waterbird counter. He will collect data from Marquette Park through Nov. 25.

Read about Will's discoveries via his blog posts at indianadunesbirding.wordpress.com.

MATCHING GIFT PROGRAM: DOUBLE YOUR IMPACT

What do Starbucks, Home Depot, BP, Microsoft, and Salesforce have in common? They double or even triple their employees' charitable contributions. Some also provide donations when employees volunteer. It's called a **Matching Gift Program**, and it's a wonderful opportunity to amplify the impact of your support to Indiana Audubon's conservation efforts to help birds and their habitats, as well as Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary.

Here's how it works:

- **Check Your Eligibility:** Contact your HR department to see if your employer offers a matching gift program. By checking the box on the IAS donation page, a field will appear that let's you search for your employer's participation.
- **Complete the Necessary Forms:** Check the instructions on signing up. Typically, it's a straightforward online submission. However, depending on the employer, you may be required to make the donation through a certain portal.
- **Double Your Impact:** Once your donation is verified, your employer will match your contribution—doubling the impact of your generosity.

TIP: On our giving page (indianaaudubon.org/donate), check the box next to "Get my company to match my donation" to if you would like your employer to match your contribution.

If you join the Matching Gift Program, you can increase your impact on Indiana Audubon's conservation efforts without any additional out-of-pocket expenses. We encourage you to explore this option with your employer and to take advantage of this opportunity to magnify your support for our mission. Your kindness and commitment inspire us every day—and with your help, we can achieve even more.

Questions? Contact Mona Clayton at development@indianaaudubon.org.

meet the **WATERBIRD COUNTER** WILL KELLER



Photo: Caleb Putnam

Q HOW DID YOU GET YOUR START DOING FIELD WORK?

I have been a steward of land since I was a kid. In 1956, my grandfather and his brothers purchased roughly 400 acres of farmland in Barry County, Michigan, which is now a late successional forest. As a boy, I enjoyed birding these woods and flipping logs for salamanders, but I also pulled garlic mustard and cut back Autumn olive and multiflora rose. In college, I spent a season as a land steward for the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy.

The following summer, I worked as a field technician at the Michigan Natural Features Inventory collecting data on American Goshawk (formerly Northern Goshawk), Red-shouldered Hawk, Barred Owl, and Golden-winged Warbler, to name a few. I also participated in a grass-land bird habitat monitoring project, which became the basis for my senior thesis at Kalamazoo College.

Q WHAT MOST EXCITES YOU ABOUT THE LAKE MICHIGAN WATERBIRD SURVEY?

Miller Beach is a famous and historic location for lake-watching and waterbirds. The amount of jaegers, Sabine's Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and otherwise pelagic species that occur at this location is staggering compared to the rest of the western Great Lakes. As the southern terminus of the lake, Miller Beach has a geographical advantage that funnels waterbirds to this one point, resulting in this phenomenon.

I mean no disrespect to west Michigan birding, but I suspect I will have several days this fall that top my best day ever birding the lakeshore in Michigan. There is no feeling quite like scanning the horizon and realizing you have stumbled upon one of these rare pelagic species. Since this is the first ever official count at Miller Beach, I'm excited to see what the duck flight looks like compared to other waterbird counts of the Great Lakes region.

Q HOW WAS YOUR FIRST DAY AT MARQUETTE PARK?

My first day counting had some nice north/northeast winds, which resulted in an early flight of Double-crested Cormorants and Bonaparte's Gulls, as well as Common and Forster's Terns. My second day had winds out of the southeast and predictably had little to no active migration, but still I had the first rare bird of the count: a beautiful juvenile Little Gull, the smallest gull in the world.

Q WHERE DO YOU SEE THE HOBBY OF BIRD-ING GOING WITH TECHNOLOGY?

As with everything, the power of artificial intelligence is completely unknown, but the ability of apps like Merlin Bird ID from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology will only get better. I see software like Merlin playing a very useful role in data gathering because it reduces the effort needed for data collection, entry, and analysis. Devices placed one time in very inaccessible locations could reveal species composition in ecosystems that are hard to survey and poorly understood. That being said, at the moment, Merlin can only suggest possible IDs, so birders should be careful and take every Merlin suggestion with a grain of salt.

Social media like Facebook and Discord have vastly altered the way birders and ornithologists communicate as well. From rare bird alerts to identification discussion groups to photo sharing pages, we have more at our fingertips than any generation preceding us. I think social media will continue to grow our beloved hobby because it is now easier than ever to connect with others and gain knowledge from experts.



Sandhill Cranes at Jasper-Pulaski FWA. Mike Timmons

Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area: **A CRUCIAL STOPOVER FOR SANDHILL CRANE MIGRATION**

By Brad Bumgardner

As Indiana Fish and Wildlife areas go, Jasper-Pulaski may not be the most creative in name, straddling the border between both Jasper and Pulaski County. However, don't let that deter you from this hidden gem in northwest Indiana. "JP," as it's known locally, is both rich in breathtaking natural beauty and remarkable ecological significance. While this expansive refuge is home to various wildlife species, it truly shines as a crucial stopover point for the emblematic Sandhill Crane (*Grus canadensis*) during their annual migration.

While much of the property is quite suitable for many other breeding and migrating birds, much of that is overshadowed by the massive crane gathering in the spring and fall. Jasper-Pulaski is a critical stopover point along

their incredible journey, with up to 30,000 individuals counted during peak years and ideal weather conditions. There are so many cranes that the Indiana DNR's Outdoor Indiana magazine once declared Jasper-Pulaski among the top 20 bucket list experiences for every Hoosier. It only takes one visit to comprehend the captivating phenomenon that has intrigued birders, scientists, and nature enthusiasts for decades.

To revel in the phenomenon, one must also revel in the bird. Cranes bring ancient symbolism, an amazing migration, and a majestic appearance that draws thousands to see them each year. Though sometimes confused with herons, their tall, gray plumage is capped by a distinctive red crown. Their flight is also distinctive from herons, as their neck is

“There are so many cranes that the Indiana DNR’s Outdoor Indiana magazine once declared Jasper-Pulaski among the top 20 bucket list experiences for every Hoosier.”

completely stretched out, whereas a heron flies with it crooked.

To understand why cranes love Jasper-Pulaski so much, you need to explore the historical plat maps of the area. The area that is now Jasper-Pulaski did not have a history of cranes previously. No large gatherings took place among the mosaic of swamps, floodplain forests, and savanna patches. The area that is now Jasper-Pulaski, and the surrounding area, was fertile soil for agriculture, and much of the habitat was converted prior to the 1930s. During the 1930s, Jasper-Pulaski was designated as a game farm and preserve. Hunting started on the property in 1958, and in 1965, the area was designated as a fish and game area. In 1972, the name was changed to Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area. Many of the old marshes and swamps were converted back from agriculture.

Large scraps and potholes were created that would become the wetlands that the cranes roost in during spring and fall migration.

Without knowing it, Jasper-Pulaski and the adjacent corn fields provide a perfect combination of an abundance of food during migration and plenty of habitat to stretch their legs. This combination culminates in the migration phenomenon: the largest gathering of Sandhill Cranes east of the Mississippi River. The best time to observe these birds is late October through November, especially a few days after a cold front passes up north.

Today, Jasper-Pulaski Fish and Wildlife Area remains an important site for both wildlife conservation and outdoor recreation, attracting visitors from all over the country to witness the incredible spectacle of thousands of Sandhill Cranes during their migration. It stands as a testament to the importance of preserving natural habitats for the benefit of both wildlife and humans. Witnessing the grandeur of Sandhill Cranes at Jasper-Pulaski is not only a remarkable experience, but also a powerful reminder of our duty to protect the planet’s incredible biodiversity. 🍁



UPCOMING EVENT

Experience the majestic migration of Sandhill Cranes on at our Jasper-Pulaski Crane Open House on Nov. 18.

bit.ly/crane-open-house

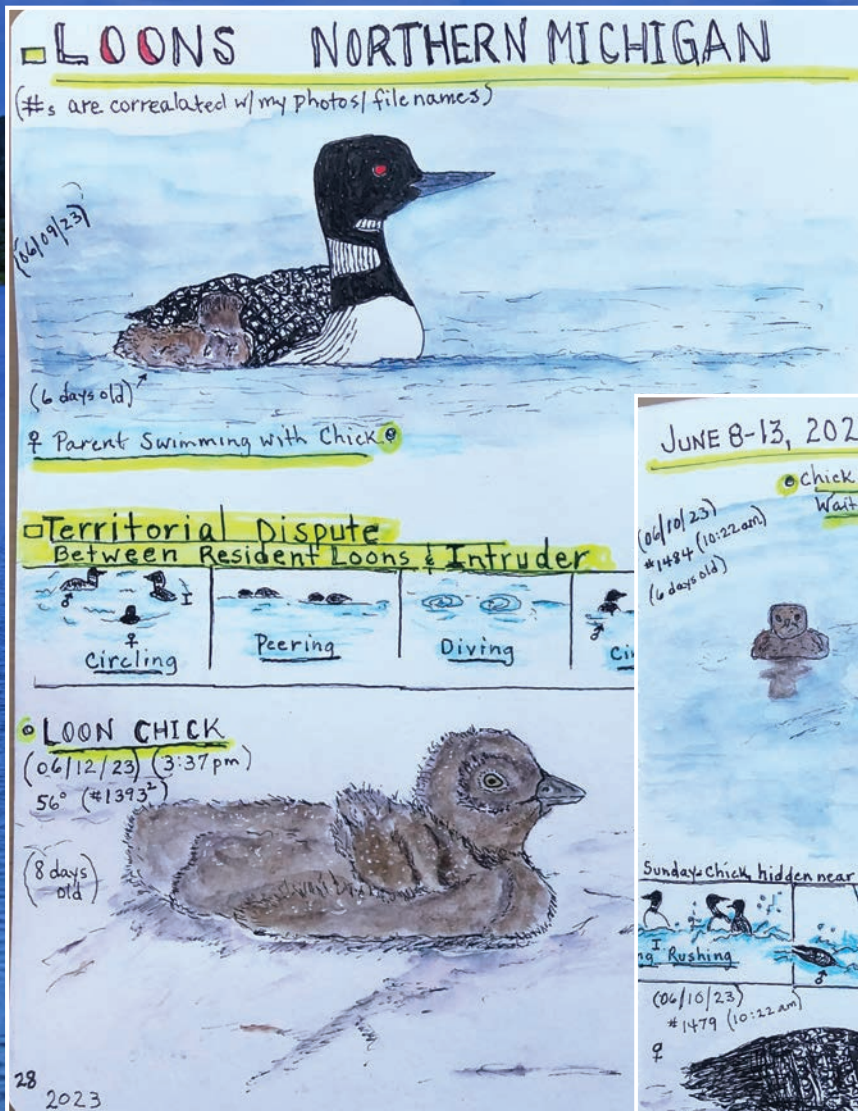
Brad Bumgardner is the executive director of Indiana Audubon and a former head naturalist for the Department of Natural Resources at the Indiana Dunes State Park.



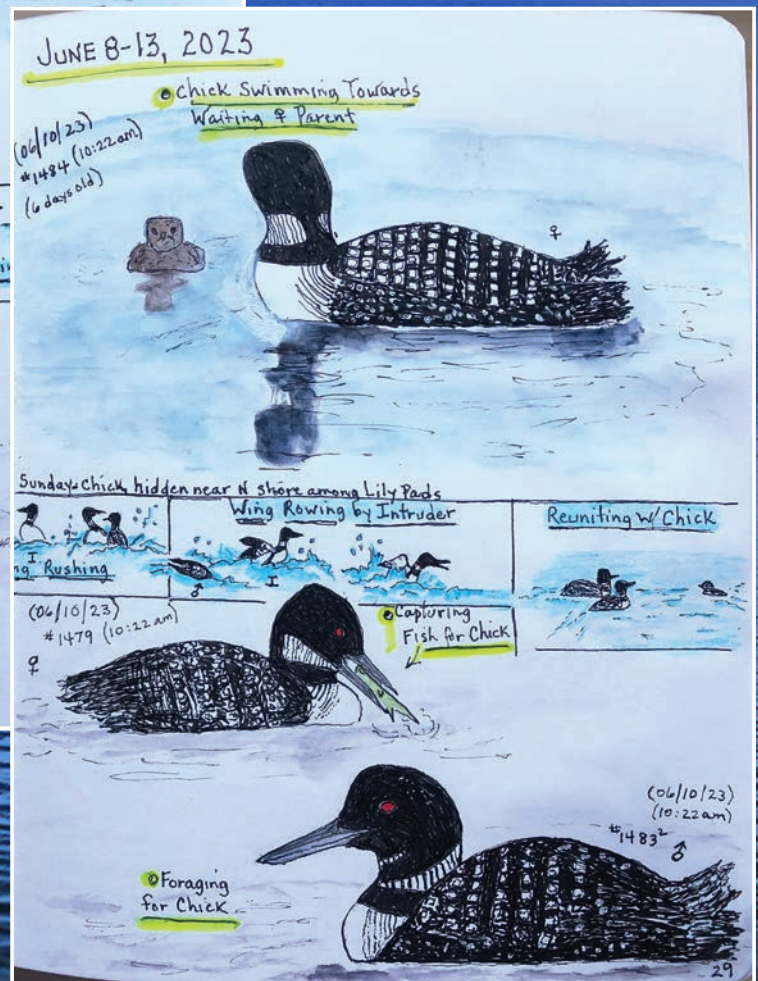
Photos (L-R): Shari McCollough and Ryan Sanderson

FIELD NOTES FROM A NATURALIST

Nature journaling involves using words, pictures, and numbers to record your observations, connections, and experiences with nature on paper. It is not about being an artist. Observation, curiosity, and creativity are skills that you can develop. There is no wrong way to do it – *just have fun!*



"Here are observations of Common Loons with their Chick made in Northern Michigan in June. It has the interesting experience of observing a territorial dispute. ... I was hesitant to send a non-Indiana page, but it really is all about attention, observing behaviors, and documenting them—regardless of location." —Joni James



Questions about this series or nature journaling?
 Email Joni at heronwatch0@gmail.com.

INDIANA BIRDING HIGHLIGHT

HOVEY LAKE FISH & WILDLIFE AREA

BY AMY KEARNS

Hovey Lake Fish & Wildlife Area (FWA) offers a very unique birding experience. The property is located at the confluence of the Ohio and Wabash rivers. This 7,400-acre property consists of an extensive river bottomland ecosystem including oxbow lakes, bottomland hardwoods, open marshes and cypress sloughs.

These unique habitat types offer Indiana birders the feeling of being in the deep south while remaining in Indiana. Throughout the property, there several mowed lanes, mowed levees, and other trails that offer good access for birding opportunities. Hovey Lake FWA serves as a critical migration stop for many waterfowl and shorebird species during the fall and winter months. During the springtime, a wide variety of migratory songbirds can be viewed on the property as well.

Hovey Lake FWA is a great site to see a variety of waterfowl during migration. A pair of eagles reliably nests in a snag every year; their huge nest is easily visible from land and can be watched and photographed from a distance without disturbing the birds. Wading birds such a Great Egret are reliable in summer; search among them for a rare Snowy Egret or Little Blue Heron August through September. Red-headed Woodpeckers are abundant, along with the more common woodpecker species.

Although American Crows are common on this property, pay close attention to crow vocalizations and you might pick out a Fish Crow giving its distinctive “uh-uh” call. Rusty Blackbirds, a species in



Photos: Jared Emmack (top); Prothonotary Warbler by Ryan Sanderson (bottom).

steep decline, can be found on the property winter through early spring. Swampy areas with nesting cavities are home to numerous Prothonotary Warblers in summer.

A wide variety of raptors can be seen at Hovey throughout the year, including Osprey, Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Harrier, Cooper's Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, and American Kestrel. Barred Owls are common in this area. 🍁

TIMING

Typical Birding Time:
2–4 Hours

Best Times to Bird:
All seasons can be rewarding depending on the birds of interest. Though late winter through spring are the most popular times.

GETTING THERE

Hours: The park is open 24 hours a day

Address: 8401 Highway 69 S., Mount Vernon, IN 47620

Parking: An abundance of parking lots are available throughout the property.

SITE LOGISTICS

Admission: N/A

Ownership: Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish & Wildlife Area

Restrictions: During the winter months, including December–February, some marsh levees and mowed trails may be closed to avoid conflict with the waterfowl hunting season. For further information on property specific regulations, visit on.IN.gov/hoveylakefwa.

Accessibility: Most travel is along access

roads, which are not paved.

Nearby Amenities: The closest town to Hovey Lake Fish and Wildlife Area is Mount Vernon. Mount Vernon offers two hotels for overnight lodging, as well as several food options. Other local attractions in Posey County include Twin Swamps Nature Preserve and Harmonie State Park, which both

offer excellent birding opportunities.

CONTACT INFO

Website:
wildlife.in.gov

Phone Number:
(812) 838-2927

eBird Hotspot Link:
ebird.org/hotspot/L340082



At Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area, Illinois birders (and one familiar Indiana Audubon face) gather for a group photo. *Sonny Cohen*

92 SPECIES IN 42 HOURS

Illinois Birders Visit Goose Pond

By Rena Cohen

After getting snowed out of a trip to Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area to see the duck migration spectacle a few years ago, Illinois Audubon Society's Lake-Cook Chapter opted to "duck" the snow this year by visiting in the spring. With Indiana Audubon's Richard Garrett as our leader, 15 Chicago-area birders made the trek south in late April and were rewarded with 92 species in 42 hours, including several that rarely show up on our home turf.

The fun began shortly after 6 p.m. on Friday, April 28, with a stop at 5S, one of Goose Pond's central wetland units. Common Yellowthroats and Henslow's Sparrows serenaded

us as we walked, but the stars of the show were the shorebirds. Six Black-necked Stilts, 16 Short- and Long-Billed Dowitchers, more than a dozen Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and several other species were feeding just yards away, clearly visible even without a scope. Two immature Bald Eagles that appeared to be courting emerged from the trees as we left.

Saturday began with a magical visit to the Main Pool West area. We arrived just before dawn with a heavy mist over the water and birdsong filling the air as we gathered along the levee. Not long after the haze lifted, a Virginia Rail vocalized nearby, emerged from the reeds no more than two feet in front of us,

and continued picking at the same small patch of dirt for 20 or 30 minutes. It was seemingly oblivious to the fan club lined up close enough to touch him.

Other notable sightings at that location during two visits ranged from dozens of American Golden-Plover glowing in full breeding plumage on the tern island to a lone Blue Grosbeak that Richard improbably heard from his truck over the noise of the unpaved road as we were leaving the property. Richard screeched to a halt, we all jumped out of our cars, and the grosbeak obligingly landed in full view – not once, but twice. Both species would light up the rare bird alert in Chicagoland.

The same is true of the juvenile Swainson's Hawk we saw hanging out in a field and five Black-bellied Whistling-Ducks that greeted us in a small pond behind a house. Both of these beauties turn up on eBird lists in our area just once or twice a year, if at all, and any Swainson's Hawk sighting is usually just a quick flyover at one of our two local hawk watches.

Other highlights of the trip included two separate stops at Goose Pond's "Double Ditches," yielding more than 20 whinnying Soras that had probably just arrived, as well as excellent visuals of both bittern species.

"It was a weekend of great birding and great company for Chicago birders with dramatically different habitats."

An American Bittern was flying over the wetland to our left as we pulled up on Saturday. It reappeared several times during the two hours we spent there that day, and briefly landed in a visible spot on Sunday for those lucky enough to be standing a few feet away.

(That, unfortunately, did not include me.) Not long after, Richard's superhuman ears picked up the "coo-coo-coo" of a Least Bittern, and he quickly found the bird buried in the reeds where all of us strained to see him through our scopes for the next 30 or 40 minutes.

Those of us with the energy for evening birding added three owls to our trip lists, including a Barn Owl that burst from a barn as darkness fell on Saturday and a heart-stopping seven Short-eared Owls that crossed the grassy meadow in front of us a few minutes later.

We missed the Smith's Longspurs that apparently departed for points north a few days before our arrival and the Chuck-will's-widow that showed up two or three days after our visit. Even so, it was a weekend of great birding and great company for Chicago birders with dramatically different habitats and a desire to get a jump on spring birding while waiting for migrants to make the 250-mile journey from Linton, Indiana, to our home base. We hope to reschedule our snowed-out Goose Pond duck migration trip in a year or two, but please, no blizzard! 🍁

Rena Cohen has served as president of the Lake-Cook Chapter of the Illinois Audubon Society, the state's largest chapter, since 2008. In 2015, she received a Chicago Audubon Society Environmental Award for her contributions to Chicago-area birders.



Robin Janson, a birder from Marion County, Indiana, photographed the Swainson's Hawk on the same day as the Lake-Cook Audubon group visited the property. *Robin Janson*



ADVERTISE
WITH INDIANA
AUDUBON

For more information about The Cardinal
and advertising rates, please visit
indianaaudubon.org/the-cardinal.

Saw-whets & S'mores
NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL BANDING

INDIANA DUNES NATIONAL PARK ● MARY GRAY BIRD SANCTUARY
VARIOUS DATES NOV. 3, 4, 10, 11


PROJECT OWLNET

Register to see the owls at indianaaudubon.org/events.

