

Indiana Audubon Society

# CARDINAL

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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:

LeConte's Sparrow  
by Mark Welter

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AGES 12-18

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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! Sign up at: <a href="http://indianaaudubon.org/membership">indianaaudubon.org/membership</a>							



## 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](http://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.

**DEC. 14–JAN. 4:** National Audubon's Christmas Bird Counts [Statewide]

**DEC. 27:** Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary Christmas Bird Count [Connersville]

**JAN. 1:** First Day Hike at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary [Connersville]

**JAN. 12-14:** Board of Directors Retreat [Rockville]

**JAN. 23:** Feathered Focus: Migration at Miller Beach with Will Keller [Virtual, Zoom]

**JAN. 27:** Winter Eagle Watch Field Trip I [Salamonie Reservoir]

**FEB. 2–4:** Winter Snowy Owl UP Tour [Mackinaw City, MI]

**FEB. 3:** Winter Eagle Watch Field Trip II [Salamonie Reservoir]

**FEB. 16–19:** Winter Sax-Zim Bog Owl Tour [Meadowlands, MN]



### CHASING MELODY

The Chasing Melody Project, a collaborative initiative between Indiana Audubon, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources, and global partners, is set to kick off in spring 2024.

Your collective support not only helps launch the project but also underscores your strong commitment to the birds and ecosystems in our region. Your names will always be recognized as crucial contributors to this effort, and we anticipate a positive impact on understanding Wood Thrush migration—ensuring their melodious song resonates for generations.

A heartfelt **thank you** to each individual donor and our partner organizations whose generous contributions have brought this project to fruition.

#### Individual Donors

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Learn more about  
the project at  
[indianaaudubon.  
org/chasingmelody](https://indianaaudubon.org/chasingmelody).



Wood Thrush | Jason Jablonski





### NATURE ACCESSIBILITY AT THE SANCTUARY

If you've visited Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary in recent weeks, you might have noticed (and heard) some big changes on your drive in, all thanks to a generous grant from the Efroymsen Family Fund. Our smaller picnic shelter, located across from Brooks Hall, is undergoing a transformation into our new accessible birding blind.

In the past, our offerings of accessible outdoor spaces have been limited. This new birding blind aims to change that, providing a welcoming place for all to visit, sit, and enjoy nature. We've made modifications this year to the structure itself to enable people to view visiting birds

without startling them. Additionally, a new parking pad and path have been added, along with the beginnings of a bird feeding area. Looking ahead, we hope to add a water feature, more native plantings, and nature-inspired bird feeders and structures to attract and engage birds in the space.

We hope that you're able to visit soon and enjoy the new view! —Libby Keyes

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



All photos by Libby Keyes



### DIVE INTO THE WORLD OF FANTASY BIRDING

We're launching a Fantasy Big Year competition in 2024! Each day or week, choose your favorite Hoosier birding destination and receive credit for every REAL bird reported to eBird. Compete, strategize, and chase after coveted prizes as you reach milestones throughout the year.

New to Fantasy Birding? No worries! Check out our Indiana Big Year Tutorial game, and start practicing this December. If you log 50 species this month, you could snag a complimentary Indiana Audubon membership and a cozy winter beanie.

Join the fun, share your discoveries, and plan your 2024 Fantasy Big Year with fellow birders on the Indiana Birding Discord's Fantasy Birding Channel.

Join the tutorial game:

[fantasybirding.com/index.php?g=735](https://fantasybirding.com/index.php?g=735).

Learn more about the Discord server at [bit.ly/in-discord-guide](https://bit.ly/in-discord-guide).



### THANK YOU TO CHESTERTON FEED & GARDEN



This fall, Chesterton Feed and Garden Center held an in-store round-up fundraiser to support our Northern Saw-whet Owl research at the Indiana Dunes banding station. With the kind-hearted contributions from their customers, they raised a total of \$935.66, further rounded up by Chuck Roth to \$1,000.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone in the Chesterton area who participated in the round-up! Chesterton Feed and Garden continues to be an outstanding partner and advocate for birds and conservation.

*Photo: Brad Bumgardner and Chuck Roth at the Garden Center. Courtesy of Chesterton Feed and Garden Center.*

## ELEVATE YOUR IMPACT WITH IRA QCDs

Are you ready to elevate your charitable donations while preserving your financial future, enjoying fantastic tax benefits, and navigating age withdrawal restrictions? Discover the world of Qualified Charitable Donations (QCDs) and experience the magic of giving through your IRA.

What is a QCD? Starting at age 70 ½ or older, you can donate any amount up to \$100,000 annually from your IRA directly to a qualified charity, such as Indiana Audubon, without incurring income taxes on the funds. In the year you turn 73, you can use QCDs to satisfy all or part of your Required Minimum Distribution.

By directing your charitable contributions directly from your IRA to Indiana Audubon through a QCD, you're supporting the conservation of our beautiful state's natural treasures and reducing your taxable income. It's a win-win situation that enables you to give back to the community, lower your tax burden, and retain more money in your pocket.

Questions about QCDs? Contact IAS Development Committee Chair Mona Clayton at [development@indianaaudubon.org](mailto:development@indianaaudubon.org).

## EMPOWER OUR MISSION WITH A YEAR-END GIFT

Help us take flight into 2024 with a year-end gift! Your tax-deductible donation to Indiana Audubon fuels our growth and mission, backing crucial initiatives like Project OwlNet, the Secretive Marshbird Survey Project, the Adopt-A-Shrike program, the Lake Michigan Waterbird Survey, and more.

Thanks to generous supporters, we have a \$10,000 matching pool – and **every donation is doubled until Dec. 31**, doubling your impact on Indiana's bird conservation.

Your gift, in any amount, means the world to us.

Make a gift online at [indianaaudubon.org/donate](https://indianaaudubon.org/donate).





# FIELD NOTES FROM A NATURALIST

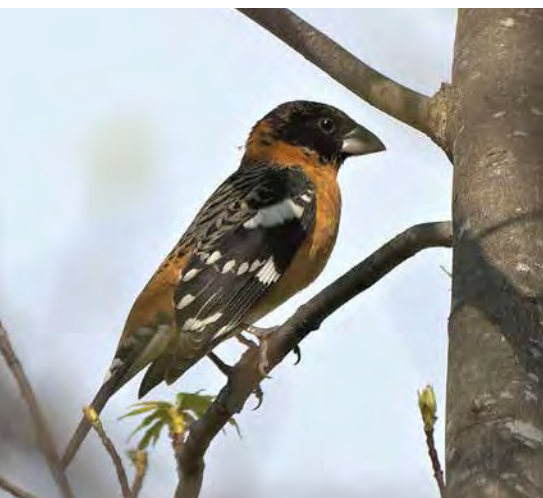
By Joni James

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!*



Questions about this series or nature journaling? Email Joni at [heronwatch0@gmail.com](mailto:heronwatch0@gmail.com).





**THIS PAGE:** Short-eared Owl at Bear Run Mines on Jan. 1, 2023; Ruff in Hancock County on May 16, 2023; and Black-headed Grosbeak in Hancock County on April 15, 2023.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Limpkin at Lake Lemon on May 31, 2023. Swainson's Hawk at Goose Pond Fish and Wildlife Area on April 29, 2023

All photos by Mark Welter.

# 10 BIG TIPS

## FOR AN

# Indiana Big Year

By Mark Welter

A “**Big Year**” by definition is attempting to see as many bird species as possible within a specific area over the course of a calendar year. For Hoosier birders, doing an Indiana Big Year has become synonymous with joining the “300 Club,” but seeing 300 or more species in the state within a single year is a goal that fewer than 35 people have actually achieved. In December of 2022, I stated that one of my birding goals for the coming year was to beat my previous personal best species count of 279. My friends repeatedly reminded me that 280 was *awfully* close to 300, and eventually my resolve crumbled, and I decided to give this Big Year thing a shot. Here, I have put together some tips that I hope will be useful to any of my fellow birders considering doing their own Indiana Big Year.

**1 Start in December.** One does not simply wake up on January 1 and decide to do a Big Year. If you want to be successful, you need to make a plan, and the earlier the better. I started by making lists of the various species to focus on in each quarter of the year, as well as a list of “anytime” birds, and my special “problem children.” I also set a number of goals to hit throughout the year to help keep me focused and on-task.

**2 Hit 100 in January.** This is *critical* if you are doing a Big Year! Knocking out a lot of species early will set the pace for the rest of your year, plus you have a good chance of picking up rare birds that may be continuing from the previous winter.

**3 Spend time, money and miles.** Joining the 300 Club is both time-consuming and expensive. You have to go where the birds are, and for some birds that means putting in *a lot* of windshield time. I don’t mind driving, but gas is *expensive*. So if I’m going to take a big trip, I like to maximize my time in the field seeking out as many targets as possible to make the effort worthwhile. Of course, Murphy’s Law says that a day or two after a long-distance trip, a rarity will show up in the *exact same place* and you’ll have to go right back. Saddle up!

**4 Use your tools.** Birders today have a wealth of resources to assist in planning and conducting a



Big Year. eBird is invaluable for keeping up with sightings, checking out new locations, and generating lists of potential target species for trips. Also, keep up with the various Indiana birding social media pages and chat groups; rarities will often be reported in these venues long before they hit eBird (if they do at all). Finally, let your network of birding friends (you do *have* one, right?) know you are doing a Big Year, and ask them to kindly pass information along if they run into good birds while they are out in the field.

**5 Focus on the hard birds.** Indiana's official checklist includes more than 420 species. In any given year, somewhere between 320 and 340 species are reported. There are probably 50 to 100 species on which you will want to focus the majority of your Big Year efforts. Any species that shows up that doesn't have Indiana as part of its range map, you *gotta* chase. Then there are birds that show up in Indiana annually, but only in a very specific time window and/or location. You have to make a special effort to go get them, too. Finally, there are the "problem children," which are your own personal nemeses. Concentrate on these more difficult species, and trust that you will pick up the easier ones along the way.

**6 Don't forget the easy birds!** During a Big Year, every bird is a number. The bulk of the regular species may in fact fall into place as you are running down the harder ones, but don't take anything for granted. You'll want to make sure you "sweep" all the expected woodpecker, waterfowl and warbler species... and pick up a Starling, House Sparrow and Rock Pigeon along the way.

**7 Bird. Every. Bird.** You never know where a rarity or target species may be hiding! Scan large flocks thoroughly, looking for anything that stands out as different—there may be a Western Sandpiper in that flock of Semi-palmateds. Also, look closely at individuals of the "expected" species to make sure they are what you assume—that large, dark raptor you dismissed as an immature Bald Eagle may just turn out to be a Golden!

**8 Stick with it!** You're going to have misses, and they are going to hurt. Some of them badly. Nobody likes doing the "drive of shame" after an unsuccessful chase. But a Big Year is a marathon, not a sprint. You will probably have multiple opportunities at many species (even some of the hard ones) throughout the year. Also, beware the mid-year slump! You may find that you have "run out" of birds around the end of May. Your needs alert and your rare bird alert will essentially become the same. You will be bored. You will have to make long trips to chase down single species when they pop up. But this is a GOOD thing; it means you're in the home stretch! Keep a positive outlook, and keep grinding.

**9 Celebrate the milestones.** Don't focus on how far you still have to go, but rather on how far you've come! Did you smash that January 100? Get your first-ever warbler sweep? Shout it from the rooftops! Posting about your Big Year milestones on social media will not only result in positive feedback from your fellow birders, but it will create a de facto journal of your efforts that you can look back on fondly in the future – and that other 300 Club aspirants might use when planning their own Big Year.

**10 Have fun.** Birding is our way to temporarily escape the worries and responsibilities of our everyday lives, and we should be enjoying it! If the Big Year grind gets to be too stressful, take a break. Sometimes, you might just need to go out birding. Focus on spending some quality time with the birds that are present, rather than trying to see or hear everything you possibly can. If you are a photographer, concentrate on getting some awesome images of whatever birds you come across. Then, once you are refreshed, re-centered and ready... hit the gas again. 🍂



Mark Welter joined the Indiana 300 Club on Sept. 16, 2023, with Eared Grebe. He would like to thank everyone who contributed advice and encouragement throughout his Big Year effort.



# SPOTLIGHT

## MANNY MAJORINS

By Rachel Brent

### Q WHAT SPARKED YOUR INTEREST IN BIRDING? HOW DID YOU GET STARTED?

The birds themselves sparked my interest in birding. Growing up I had no birding mentors or friends, but I had always been fascinated in the features and colors of the birds in my backyard when I lived in California. I often saw Western scrub-jays and White-crowned sparrows before I moved to Indiana. I also grew up watching many animal TV shows and documentaries.

### Q SHARE A MEMORABLE BIRDING EXPERIENCE OR ENCOUNTER THAT STANDS OUT TO YOU.

One really memorable encounter happened this summer when my family and I were on a boardwalk in Virginia while on vacation. There was a small stream about four meters from my location, an Osprey that had been observing suddenly overhead suddenly dove for a fish. It came out with a good sized fish about half a foot long. This experience was very special and rewarding!

### Q ARE THERE SPECIFIC BIRD-RELATED BOOKS OR GUIDES THAT YOU'VE FOUND HELPFUL OR ENJOYABLE?

My favorite bird guide is "Sibley's Guide to Birds of North America." One other book I found very interesting and informative is "Good Birders Don't Wear White: 50 Tips from Americans Top Birders."

### Q WHAT BIRD SPECIES DO YOU FIND MOST FASCINATING—AND WHY?

I really love bill adaptations, like the pileated woodpecker (my favorite bird) and the black skimmer.



*Photo courtesy of Manny Majorins, used with permission.*

### Q ARE THERE ANY BIRDING GOALS OR SPECIES YOU HOPE TO ENCOUNTER IN THE FUTURE?

I have an entire board filled with pictures of birds I really want to see. Three of my most wanted are Least Bittern, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and American Woodcock.

### Q WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED AS A YOUNG BIRDER, AND HOW HAVE YOU OVERCOME THEM?

My parents are very busy most of the time, so it is hard to find time to go birding. I spend my time studying birds instead, practicing bird ID, and listening to bird podcasts. I have overcome some of this challenge by keeping a yard list for the last two years.

### Q WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR OTHER YOUNG PEOPLE INTERESTED IN TAKING UP BIRDING AS A HOBBY?

Take time and enjoy the birds, a lot of birders tend to list a bird and move on. Instead, try to seize the chance to be with the bird, this makes a much more satisfying and enjoyable experience.



# 125 BIRDS, 125 YEARS

To commemorate our 125th anniversary, we challenged you to seek out 125 bird species in 2023 and submit your sightings via our online form to get a free anniversary logo sticker. Here are some of the entries we got, highlighting favorite species and noteworthy memories.



“Piping Plover was such a fun surprise to have in a farm field!”

—JENNIFER MCQUADE

“Hearing Whip-poor-will at Eagle Creek Park.”

—ROBIN JANSON

“The Cinnamon Teal near Demotte. I had seen the reports and stopped to look ... I searched the distant flocks of ducks and shorebirds over and over for about an hour and finally drove back out to the main road. I had seen some ducks land in another fluddle, and when I pulled off the side of the road and looked for that bit of water, I saw the male Cinnamon Teal!”

—CATHY MYER

“Mourning Warbler who sat out on a limb and sang at my one of my local birding hotspots.”

—GAIL SHETLER

“After three years of looking, I finally found a Northern Saw-whet Owl.”

—KURT EMMERT

“Getting a great view of Purple Finches illuminated by the sun, at a nearby preserve in Steuben County.”

—BRUCE MATASICK

“[Eastern] Screech Owl. I am 8, and I was able to call back and forth with in our back yard.”

—PIPER GERLACH

“Bell’s Vireo. [I] had one on my property [from] 2016–2018. Hadn’t seen or heard one since then.”

—JULIE BRUNER



“Upland Sandpiper as my 300th species in Indiana.”

—FREDERICK RUCKERSELDT

“Ruff, [a] long-awaited lifer!”

—ANGELA ARCHER



“Magnolia Warbler at the State Park trail 10 during [the Indiana] Dunes Birding Festival.”

—DENISE GARDINER

“It was a special encounter when I discovered a Least Bittern among the cattails in the lake next to my home. I had just thought again how the habitat was so perfect for one and there it was!”

—JONI JAMES

“Finding the Ruff in Hancock County in May and sharing the find on social media so many other birders got to see the bird that day!”

—JENNY YOUNG

“Limpkin at Striebel Pond in Michigan City, 9/9.”

—CYNTHIA POWERS

# Feathers of Progress:

## Celebrating 125 Years of Legacy

By Brad Bumgardner

I was fortunate to be introduced to birds at a young age, a fascination that carried into my adulthood as a seasonal park naturalist for Indiana State Parks. At some point in those early years, I was given a copy of Aldo Leopold's "A Sand County Almanac," and I began to delve deep into the connections between humanity and the natural world that he so eloquently brought forth in his various essays. Leopold's writings urge us to perceive the land not as a conquered object but as a community to which we belong.

Recently, I revisited Leopold's July notes in "A Sand County Almanac." He detailed his pre-dawn observations from his famed bench, with coffee and notebook in hand. Leopold meticulously recorded the precise order and timing of the dawn chorus, beginning with the first Field Sparrow and progressing from robins to orioles, and eventually the Rufous-sided Towhee by 5:15 a.m. Lacking a tape recorder, his written record was the best the iconic naturalist could do. Can you imagine Leopold's surprise today to witness 800,000+ eBird users armed with the most sophisticated pocket microphone capturing the

soundscape on our landscape, right here and right now, in the world's largest ornithological citizen science database ever imagined? The dreamer laying on their roof hearing distant chip notes has been replaced with AI software trained to tell you how many Swainson's Thrushes flew over your house each night in near real-time.

Aldo was coming of age while the Indiana bird movement was gaining momentum. In 1897, a committee of the Indiana Academy of Science laid the foundation for Indiana Audubon. Interest was high enough that even the Governor, James Mount, participated in the first meetings. However, Indiana's bird goes beyond that, with Jane Hine studying the state's birds in the 1860s, anticipating Leopold's work. By the time the men downstate formed a committee to consider establishing a state ornithology society, Jane's observations and advocacy for "Indiana Bird Law" were already in full swing.

Over the past 125 years, Indiana has witnessed remarkable achievements that have left a lasting impact. This extensive timespan is so long that many may not recall

conservation issues like crow and hawk bounties, the establishment of state parks and wildlife areas, or the once-practiced Christmas Bird Counts that involved shooting every bird in sight. We have the opportunity to reflect on the odyssey that brought us to this significant milestone. As we stand at the crossroads, balancing between the past and the future, we find ourselves on the brink of another 125 years of conservation, discovery, and guiding new generations to discover the spark that birds bring.

As you, the reader, may have already deduced, I was not around for the birth of our organization. Given all the modern conveniences at our disposal today, it's challenging to grasp the hardships that the early pioneers of this society must have faced in terms of travel and the dissemination of information. Not only were computers and the internet nonexistent, but they were forging new territory with the idea of protecting birds. Can you envision the 1898 big year, where observing every bird was also a competition amid relentless persecution through over-hunting and feather collection for various trades?





Looking ahead to 2024 and beyond, I hope to see our level of commitment to the birds of Indiana strengthen through our growing membership. Indiana Audubon's ability to engage with communities relies on your connections and passion, driving conservation, education, and research. You will witness our continued progress in adopting new technology to enhance our understanding of birds not only here in Indiana, but also in migration and on their wintering grounds. This knowledge will empower us with the best science to have the largest impact with our dollars

and reach, creating a better future for these birds, and the next generation that will bring joy from their presence.

Over the last five years, I've had the privilege of serving as Indiana Audubon's executive director. Witnessing the transformation of a bird club into a formidable advocate for wild birds in the Hoosier state has been truly gratifying. Throughout this time, I've seen our membership grow and initiate a diverse range of projects, offering support to like-minded individuals and organizations that align with our vision and goals.

Although I can't claim a tenure of 125 years, I'm genuinely excited about the substantial accomplishments we've achieved in just the last five!

Much like Leopold's dawn chorus, the story of Indiana Audubon is and will be an ever-evolving melody, a symphony of dedication and reverence for the diverse bird life that unfurls beneath the expansive wings of Hoosier time. Thank you for being part of this story, and here's to a happy and safe 2024. 🍁



An Aldo Leopold bench at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, offering a front-row connection to nature's symphony. Photo by Libby Keyes.

**"AS WE STAND AT THE  
CROSSROADS, BALANCING  
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ON THE BRINK OF ANOTHER  
125 YEARS OF CONSERVATION,  
DISCOVERY, AND GUIDING  
NEW GENERATIONS TO  
DISCOVER THE SPARK THAT  
BIRDS BRING."**



# Discover Guatemala's *Avian Treasures*

## IAS Birding Tour Unveils the Beauty of 'Guate'

By Wesley Homoya

Guatemala, sometimes affectionately referred to as "Guate" by those who love and know it well, will welcome IAS birders (perhaps even you, dear reader?) to its varied and verdant lands in February 2025. The "Land of Many Trees," as its etymology alludes, indeed contains vast swathes of bird-rich woodlands, from lowland rainforests to highland cloud forests. Add to these stunning habitats the world-famous Lake Atitlan and Central America's tallest volcanoes and you have some pretty epic landscapes for birding.

The country boasts the highest rate of species endemism in Central America and is home to over 35 Mesoamerican bird specialties. Its role during bird migration is equally crucial, as millions of birds from all four major American flyways depend on its natural areas each spring and fall during their journeys. Take our familiar little friend the Magnolia Warbler (a.k.a. "Maggie"); the majority of its population winters in the Yucatan Peninsula and northern Guatemala. Maggies need us to not only save their habitat in Indiana for migration, but also to protect their wintering grounds in places like Guatemala. Mindful ecotourism can help achieve these conservation

goals, by supporting local communities and nature reserves. I'm thrilled that this tour will also include a donation to Guatemalan bird conservation efforts through the Mumford and Keller Grants and Scholarship Program.

I'll leave you with this: on my last trip to Guate, our group shared a meal prepared by a most gracious family in their rustic home, in a small village called Vega de Volcan. We'd just had some fleeting views of a Horned Guan, hiked some of the more difficult terrain of the tour, and rain was pouring down all around us. Despite these brief challenges, and even though we saw many amazing things during the trip, including over 300 species of birds, one of our fondest memories was this simple, hot meal brought to us by skilled hands and smiling faces. Knowing how important our visit was to them warmed our hearts and melted away any temporary frustrations. It's all about perspective, as I like to say.

### GUATEMALA TOUR

February 1-10, 2025

Led by Wesley Homoya, this tour is organized in collaboration with Natural Selections Tours.

\$4,538.00 per person  
Single supplement: \$250

Photos: Background image by Lukáš Jančíčka from Pixabay; *Resplendent Quetzal* by Francesco Veronesi via Wikimedia Commons; El Quetzal boat, resort, and *Wine-throated Hummingbird* by Wesley Homoya.



Learn more:



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CARDINAL | INDIANA AUDUBON SOCIETY



# Birding Adventures



## DESTINATION BIRDING WITH INDIANA AUDUBON

Join fellow birders for an out-of-state adventure! Whether it's budget-friendly caravanning or pelagic birding, our guides make it an unforgettable experience to enhance your life list.



### WINTER SNOWY OWL UP TOUR

**February 2-4, 2024**

Led by Matt Igleski

- Snowy Owl encounters
- A taste of the species diversity of the Northwoods
- Birding in eastern Michigan's Upper Peninsula area

**\$588 – \$628**



### WINTER SAX-ZIM BOG OWL TOUR

**February 16-19, 2024**

Led by Shari McCollough & Sam Warren

- A bucket list location for observing owls
- Exploring the Bog's enchanting winter landscapes
- More Northwoods specialties

**\$749 – \$789**



### KIRTLAND'S WARBLER FIELD TRIP

**June 7-9, 2024**

Led by Whitney & Jonathan Yoerger

- A visit to the breeding center for North America's rarest songbird
- Exploring various habitats, from Jack Pine Forests to woodlands

**\$449 – \$479**



### CALIFORNIA BIRDING TOUR

**September 8-15, 2024**

Led by Amy Kearns & Austin Broadwater

- A special focus on western specialties
- Exploring the coastal shoreline
- Two full days of pelagic boat birding from Half Moon Bay

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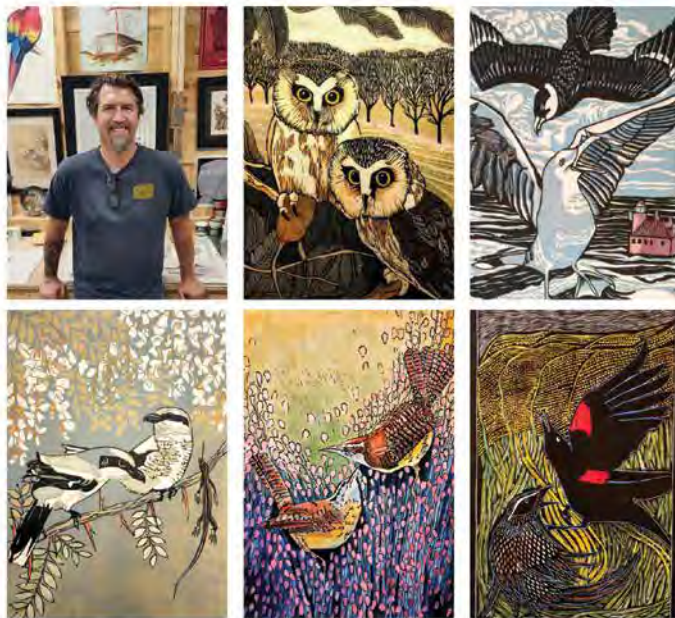
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