

Indiana Audubon Society CARDINAL

NEWSLETTER • FEB.–MARCH 2024 • Vol.55, No.1

CLAY-COLORED SPARROW DISCOVERY

Indiana's first confirmed
breeding record

A LOWER 48 BIG YEAR

A Hoosier professor's 2023
sabbatical adventure



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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:

Clay-colored Sparrow
by Ryan Sanderson

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Electronic bi-monthly & quarterly newsletters	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Mailed copies of bi-monthly & quarterly newsletters			✓	✓	✓	✓	
Access to Cornell Lab's Birds of the World (\$49/yr. value)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Early registration to Indiana Dunes Birding Festival	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
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! 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.

FEB. 13: Feathered Focus: Bird Safe Indy [Virtual, Zoom]

FEB. 16: Tropical Birding Live from Amagusa Reserve, Ecuador [Virtual, Zoom]

FEB. 23: Hoosier Birders' Hour: Feeding Backyard Birds [Virtual, Zoom]

MARCH 12: Feathered Focus: The Secret to Attracting Birds [Virtual, Zoom]

MARCH 16: Flock & Learn: Waterfowl Walk at Eagle Creek Park [Indianapolis]

MARCH 16: Summit Lake Spring Waterfowl Trip [New Castle]

MARCH 16: "What's That Waterfowl?" Young Birders Walk [Indianapolis]

MARCH 23: Kankakee Ducks and More Early Spring Birding [North Judson]

MARCH 26: Indiana Birding: Crash Course [Virtual, Zoom]



WE'RE HIRING!

Indiana Audubon is in search of a dedicated individual to become part of our staff as the **Development and Engagement Manager**. This role is crucial for advancing Indiana Audubon's mission and involves actively contributing to fundraising and development initiatives, ensuring the ongoing success of our conservation, education, and research programs and initiatives. The job posting will be open until Feb. 15 or until the position is filled. Apply today!



Get the details at **indianaaudubon.org/currentopenings** or scan the QR code.



The Sanctuary entrance by Libby Keyes.



Trout-lily at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary by Libby Keyes.



HEALTHY HIKING IN 2024

This year, immerse yourself in nature and improved well-being by exploring the 8 miles of trails at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary in Connersville. Delight in the emotional and physical benefits of the sanctuary as you aim to cover a minimum of 25 miles there this year. Relish the peace, encounter birds and other wildlife, and experience this Fayette County gem while walking, hiking, or running on the trails.

Interested in joining the MGBS Healthy Hiking Challenge? The sanctuary welcomes visitors from sunrise to sunset every day of the year. And feel free to bring your family and friends along for the adventure. Trail maps are available at the kiosk near the shelter across from the centralized parking lot.

While there is no entrance fee to visit, donations are welcome and will help keep the sanctuary open to all visitors throughout the years to come. The sanctuary is not a state park, receives no federal or state funding. Visitor and member donations help keep the Sanctuary the beautiful place that it is.

Take your first step by downloading the MGBS Healthy Hiking Challenge Entry Form at **indianaaudubon.org/hike**.

PREPARE FOR THE DUNES BIRDING FESTIVAL



Get ready for an even bigger and better Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, taking place from May 16-19!

Featuring an exciting lineup of over 180 field trips, programs, and workshops, our festival schedule promises an exhilarating birding experience. Explore the full schedule and plan your festival activities in advance. Easily peruse the schedule or access the guidebook PDF online.

New this year, Indiana Audubon members must renew their membership by midnight on Feb. 28 to secure early access to festival registration. Priority registration for Indiana Audubon members begins at 10 a.m. Central Time on March 1. Secure your spot for the four-day event at just \$65, with options available for youth and single-day participation.

We look forward to celebrating the festival's 10th anniversary with you!

Make your festival plans, mark your calendar for priority registration on March 1, and renew your membership by **midnight on Feb. 28**. View the schedule at indunesbirdingfestival.com/pages/schedule or scan the QR code on the right.



BRIDGING VISION AND ACTION

Indiana Audubon's annual winter retreat, held from January 12 to 14 in Rockville, proved to be a productive weekend for the IAS Board of Directors. Despite the freezing temperatures, the board engaged in fruitful planning sessions, outlining the path for numerous exciting programs, committee tasks, and initiatives at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary and for the organization as a whole, ensuring a promising and eventful 2024. Board members also took moments to enjoy birding from the windows. A sincere **THANK YOU** goes to our dedicated Board of Directors and staff, whose commitment made this weekend especially impactful.



Grant Report

BETHANY LAND INSTITUTE

BY THERESA MURRAY

On April 9, 2022, the Avian Conservation Uganda Society (ACUS) visited Bethany Land Institute (BLI) in Luwero District, Uganda, as part of a pilot program. Dedicated to promoting bird conservation in Uganda, ACUS collaborates with organizations like BLI to advocate for the preservation of birds, habitats, and ecological assets. Established in 2022, ACUS is the largest dedicated regional bird society in East Africa.

Following their visit to BLI, ACUS recommended capacity building for site guides at the institute through the provision of birding education materials, such as guidebooks and binoculars. Given that BLI USA is headquartered in Indiana, we found a partnership with Indiana Audubon and were the grateful recipients of a 2022 Mumford & Keller Grants and Scholarship Program award. This grant facilitated the purchase of 12 sets of Gosky 10x42 Roof Prism HD binoculars for Lazarus' Forest Conservation.

BLI Uganda, inspired by Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'*, addresses environmental degradation through a new integrated educational program for a lifestyle change through education and experience. Lazarus' Forest serves as a unique educational center, allowing experiential learning about conservation, integrated ecosystems, and wildlife. BLI welcomes visitors for guided tours and overnight stays, providing a chance to explore the forest's flora, fauna, and birdlife.

Early this year, I personally delivered the binoculars to BLI in Uganda. What I found on this trip both surprised and delighted me. My first stop was at the home and guesthouse of one of our founders, Fr. Emmanuel Katongole. The guesthouse sits adjacent to the Entebbe Zoo, where birds are free to fly around the area and over adjoining Lake Victoria. I shared the binoculars with him and his staff to explore a bit. Most of them had never seen binoculars before, including his aunt who is well into her 80's. They were in awe of the birds, flora, and even the moon through the binoculars! It was a heart-warming experience.

On to the BLI campus the next day, I delivered the binoculars to our resident Forester and Taxonomist, Chris Mukwaya, who promptly catalogued them into the Institute's inventory. The next day Chris led a class on how to use the binoculars. Our students come from the poor rural areas nearby, and struggle to pay even basic school fees. Equipment such as binoculars are non-existent. Chris led off with basic instructions on how to assemble, care and use them. He emphasized that they were important equipment in conservation, and with his wry sense of humor told the students should they break them, their father would 'have to sell a cow to buy new ones.' The point was made – the students take great care with the equipment. They were taught how to move through the forest quietly so as to not disturb the birds. And then they were off, with the assignment to find 3 common bird species, and bring back

photos of birds he had not listed, using the cell phone adaptors. (Yes, the students have basic cell phones with photo capabilities, but no wifi or smartphones.) One hour later, they returned, assignments successfully completed, followed by a discussion on the varying bird species they discovered. The binoculars are integrated into the curriculum as part of the Forestry Management & Ecological Protection Cycles.

In 2022, ACUS identified 100 bird species in BLI's forest, a number that has since risen to 161. The students are enjoying birdwatching and have created their own club – and their theme is "their life is our life."

We are in the process of building the Lazarus Forest Information Center – an ecological and information center at the entrance to our 300 acre forest. From here, students and tourists check out the binoculars for a small fee to explore the forest. To date, we have had a few tourists, and word is spreading, as I even had an inquiry from a US Audubon Society member who had heard about us and wanted to visit! Interns and students from Wheaton College, the University of Notre Dame, and Duke University visited this summer and had in- depth classes in ecological and forest preservation using the binoculars.

To sustain life on a healthy planet, interconnected ecosystems must be protected. Uganda, known as the "Pearl of Africa," is rich in biodiversity, ranking second richest for mammals in Africa, second for birds in Africa, and seventh for higher plant species in the world. BLI, Indiana Audubon, and similar partnerships worldwide exemplify how conservation efforts can transcend borders.

We are proud to work together in appreciation of the beauty that surrounds us. We invite you to follow our progress on our website (bethanylandinstitute.org) and social media channels, as we continue restoring the ecosystem and educating our students and visitors on the care of our common home. We also invite you to visit us in Uganda, for what we promise to be an enriching experience, for both the visitor and our campus staff and students. 🌿



Editor's Note: This report has been edited for length and clarity.

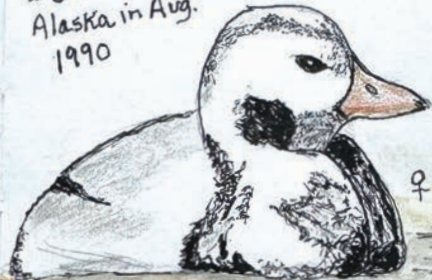
By Joni James

Nov 11/05/2023 Sunday 2:39 pm - 4:50 pm New Lifer: Morgan Co.
Ozark Fish Hatchery Pond


- Walked road birding - Spotted a Long-tailed Duck on a pond. Went back + got my spotting scope. Believe it to be a ♀ + was confirmed by Richard Garrett: New Lifer for me for Morgan Co. + HERE @ Fish Hatcheries. It stayed in the one pond + was there still on next day 11/06 but gone after that.

Long-tailed Duck

• I saw them in Alaska in Aug. 1990



♀ LTDU




L 16.5" (adult ♂ 21")
 (Clangula hyemalis)

- Formerly Oldsquaw
- Dives - swims underwater
- Scarce → Rare here
- Feeds on plants, mollusks, crustaceans.

11/08/2023 Wed 77° SSW 21 DP60° 7:21 5:37
 Cikanda S.F.H

Discovered Midland Painted Turtle crossing one of the grassy levees between ponds on this warm November day.



(Chrysemys picta marginata)

- ♀ larger than ♂
- ♂ Longer Foreclaws + longer pre-anal length w/ vent posterior to the rim of the carapace.
- I did not disturb this turtle in order to sex it.

Midland Painted Turtle

Collaborative Efforts

RESULT IN AN

Indiana First

BY KRISTIN STRATTON

On June 17, 2023, The Dunes-Calumet Audubon hosted a field trip led by Julie Bonnema, with experienced birders Angie Archer and me, among the fifteen participants. It was a beautiful day for birding, filled with old and new birding friends. The day at Kankakee Sands offered perfect weather, with clear skies, a slight breeze, and temperatures in the low 70s.

Julie had a few key locations in mind, each with target birds for the group to observe. Along the way, we encountered some little surprises—two of those being at the corner of where units F, D, G and the Beaver Lake Nature Preserve meet. We stopped there to look and listen for Blue Grosbeaks. I ventured away from the group to unit G to scan and listen while Julie stayed by units F and D to do the same. Upon scanning the restored grassland prairie habitat, managed by The Nature Conservancy, Julie came across a late Clay-colored Sparrow. She called me and Angie over to see it and confirm the identification, saying, “Kristin knows these well.” As I was walking over, I heard the raspy *buzzzz buzzzz* call and confirmed that it was indeed a Clay-colored Sparrow. I snapped one photo of the bird perched with food. Julie, Angie, and I all assisted in helping the field trip attendees see the bird. We were excited because it was mid-June and Clay-colored Sparrows are migrants in Indiana, and spring migration had been over for a few weeks. As we were observing the sparrow perched with a tiny inchworm in its bill, we heard a second *buzzzz buzzzz* call come from the west of unit F. Two Clay-colored Sparrows! That, in itself, is a treat.

We spent a considerable amount of time observing the birds and their behavior. The first bird was perched in the same spot with food, flying down to the same location four times. Julie also witnessed the bird carrying food to the same spot multiple times. Both birds were singing and doing their chip calls. At one point, Julie saw one fly away, and the other arrived with food at the same spot. Angie kept all our eBird checklists that day and logged the Clay-colored Sparrows as breeding birds. At this time, I don’t think any of us had realized that we had discovered the first breeding Clay-colored Sparrows in Indiana. We needed to get the trip moving along and also didn’t want to spend too much time at that spot as to disturb the sparrows. (By the way, we never heard or saw Blue Grosbeaks that day.) On our way to our next spot, we had to abruptly stop for a singing Connecticut Warbler, also a late migrant. That’s a whole different story for another time.

I consulted with Jeff McCoy about our observations of Connecticut Warbler and Clay-colored Sparrow, inquiring if either bird breeds in Indiana. Jeff confirmed that both species were considered late. He also indicated that breeding Clay-colored Sparrows had never been confirmed in Indiana. Upon sharing this information with Julie and Angie, we decided we had better do some more observations. The next morning, Julie and I returned to do a mini “big sit,” but strong south winds altered the weather, keeping all the birds hunkered down and quiet. Despite spending four hours watching and waiting for Clay-colored Sparrow activity, we only heard one *buzzzz buzzzz* song and observed a single sparrow popping up from unit D, flying over and perching in a tree along the road.

A few weeks later, Brad Bumgardner let us know that he had consulted with Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Ken Brock regarding our observations. He clarified that, according to the Breeding Bird Atlas protocol, a bird carrying food is considered a confirmed breeding record. Dr. Brock provided additional context, citing four other summer records in Indiana, including a pair in June 2016 at Kankakee Sands Unit D. Other records include a territorial Clay-colored Sparrow in St. Joseph County in July 1989, Pigeon River Fish and Wildlife Area in June 2011, and again in St. Joseph County in June 2013.

So, on June 17, 2023, Julie, Angie, and I collectively had a hand, eye, and ear in finding the first confirmed breeding Clay-colored Sparrow in Indiana. The Clay-colored Sparrow and Connecticut Warbler sightings came at a time when I lacked confidence, especially in birding. Some great memories happened on that field trip that I will always hold near and dear to my heart. The birds, fellow trip participants, and those we consulted with served as a reminder to stay positive, be mindful, have confidence in aspects of life. This experience reignited my passion for sharing my birding knowledge with others. 🍀



Caught in Action: Kristin Stratton swiftly snapped this photo of the Clay-colored Sparrow carrying food, confirming the breeding sighting.



SABBATICAL WELL-SPENT

THE THRILLS OF A LOWER 48 BIG YEAR • BY DAVID BENSON

“T here’s no way we are going to find this thing.” I was sure of it. The trails were packed with tourists, hiking noisily all over the mountain side, completely oblivious to the possibility of a Sooty Grouse—and that there was such a thing as a Sooty Grouse. “Let’s just keep scanning,” my friend, Maikel Wise, who joined me on this western trip to Rainier, Washington, and the Pacific coast, suggested.

So, we continued scanning the heath subshrubs. Even at a distance, I’ve got a decent shot at picking one out. I’ve been doing research on ptarmigan in Glacier National Park, Montana, for decades and have a pretty good search image for grouse. However, my internal clock was telling me that we needed to cut our losses and move on. We spent way too much time in Seattle traffic yesterday and needed to get to the coast where the majority of my target species were. Sooty was the only species I needed in Rainier. On the other hand, it would be a lifer – I can’t give up too easily! Keep searching...

“Got it!” Maikel exclaimed. “Wait, is that a grouse or a ptarmigan?” Maikel had found the bird in the deep

willows, but not too far from the trail. Getting it in my binoculars, I said, “That’s no ptarmy! It’s a Sooty!” Yes! #468 for the year, and one that I was definitely not guaranteed to get.

I’m a biology professor at Marian University in Indianapolis. I decided to do this big year in early March 2023 when I was granted a sabbatical for the fall. This gave me freedom for a few more fall trips than I would be able to do with my typical class schedule. My travels fit the times I had available. Spring break I went to northern Florida and south Georgia, adding 80 species to the year. Then, in early May I went to Utah to watch my middle daughter graduate from Westminster College. I went a day early so I could bird, adding 32 species. From there, I flew straight to Arizona, primarily birding in the Madera Canyon and the Portal areas for a week. There, I added 90 species and had so much fun. Everyone there is a birder, so if you are missing a target, just ask. I asked about Spotted Owl and was told the exact tree it would be sitting in during the day, along with Red-faced and Olive Warblers and Mexican Chickadees singing nearby. Returning to Indiana during the peak of spring migration and doing my

annual (carbon neutral) birdathon for the Amos Butler Audubon Society with Wesley Homoya resulted in an additional 50 new species.

During my Montana summer I was able to bird in Glacier, of course, but also take day trips a few times around Montana, seeing lots of amazing views, habitats, and birds, and adding 70 species. Because I was already close by, I decided to go straight from Montana to Washington state in mid-September, then take a week in California, mostly in the San Francisco and Los Angeles areas, where I took a second pelagic trip. The first was off Cape Hatteras in May, adding 8 species. This one was out of Half Moon Bay and was super productive. Even though I had spent a lot of effort trying to learn the species that were most common, brown and white birds zipping by the bouncing boat at great speed take practice to identify in the field. Thankfully, pelagic tours include expert spotters on board. All told, the Washington and California trip added 73 species.

In October, my wife Kara and I traveled to south Florida and the Keys, including Dry Tortugas National Park, to celebrate our 30th anniversary. Despite not being a birder, she enjoyed the thrill of adding to the burgeoning year list, bumping it from 542 to 560. Who wouldn't enjoy joining the experts at the Florida Keys Hawkwatch, seeing hundreds of peregrine falcons along with my targets, Short-tailed Hawk and Mississippi Kite?

Thanksgiving found my family in North Carolina with friends. After that, I dropped off the rest of the family at the airport and drove overnight to Cape Cod, spending hours on cold, windy beaches looking, unsuccessfully, for Dovekie and Manx Shearwaters. I loved it, and I found Great Shearwater, Razorbills, and eiders, plus 10 other new species along the Massachusetts and southern Maine coasts.

The last best trip of the year was to Texas, where, thanks to Jeremiah Oden, the Bare-throated Tiger-Heron awaited. Jeremiah had already booked the

required guide to go for the heron on private property south of the border wall, and he graciously invited me, along with Katey Powell and Kyle Wiktor. This was the highlight of the trip with fantastic views of some of the rarest of the rare, like the heron (#600 for the year), Brown Jays (so big that at first glance, I thought they were hawks), Morelet's Seedeaters, Red-billed Pigeons, and Rose-throated Becards. Texas yielded 36 new birds for the year leaving me at 611 for the lower 48.

Among the 611 species I saw in 2023, 75 were entirely new to me. Which was my favorite? For me, often it's the chase more than the bird itself that endears me to it. For example, the Black Rosy-Finch is a beautiful bird on its own. But, the fact that I had to search along the Beartooth Highway, a 11,000-foot high stretch of road in the spectacular mountains just outside of Yellowstone National Park, made this species my favorite of the year. I searched and searched with mind-blowing views in all directions, and when dusk was falling and I'd almost given up hope, I heard one calling outside the car window. A brief hunt located three individuals among the alpine rocks, species #446 for the year.

Over the course of the year, I learned an enormous amount, working hard on tricky identifications, better understanding birds' movements, and simply grasping at a more visceral level bird ecology, which I will be able to pass on to my Marian University students. This crazy goal was the driving, fun force in my life last year, and I highly recommend it! 🍁

David Benson, Ph.D., is Marian University's senior biology professor. He finished 2023 on a high note, ranking 12th for identifying an outstanding 611 bird species across America's Lower 48 states during the 2023 calendar year.

Great Gray Owl (left) and White-tailed Ptarmigan (right). David Benson





Photo courtesy of Leah Baker

meet a **MEMBER** LEAH BAKER



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

I recently moved from Franklin, Indiana, to a cabin in the woods in Nashville, Indiana. I live here with my husband of almost 12 years and a senior brown tabby cat who showed up on our porch shortly after we moved. I have worked for the Indiana State Bar Association since 2017. We shifted to about 75% remote work after the pandemic, allowing me to spend most days working near my feeders and the mature trees that surround our property. I started painting birds and other fauna in 2020. Currently, I am selling some of my work and have recently been accepted to showcase it at B3 Gallery in Nashville. I hope to someday teach a class about nature journaling to inspire people to explore the natural world through creativity. Additionally, I enjoy traveling, backpack camping, and hiking.



WHAT GOT YOU INTERESTED IN BIRDS AND BIRDING?

In my early twenties, a close friend passed away unexpectedly and tragically. I remained close to his family, and his father was using some Native American rituals and lore to navigate the grieving process. Through this, he mentioned that his son's guardian was a red-tailed hawk. Naturally, I started seeing Red-tailed Hawks everywhere. This led me to actively look for them, observing their habits, and, of course, making observations of other species. Before long, my husband purchased my first birding book and a Vortex monocular. I was captivated and delighted by every new species. Eventually, after watching me take photos with my phone and monocular, my husband also gifted me a Sony a6000, and I slowly began documenting in a more intentional way.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO INCORPORATE BIRDS INTO YOUR ARTWORK?

Like many, I felt like I was losing my mind during the early days of the pandemic. Everything was shrouded in uncertainty, and it was very isolating. I needed something to occupy my time. I'm not sure what possessed me to take up painting, but in short order, I enrolled in a fabulous online course with the amazing artist Liz Clayton Fuller through Cornell Lab. The topic was nature journaling. Over the next few months, I took as many courses on painting or natural journaling as I could find, and eventually, the training wheels came off. I started painting birds and nature journaling on my own. Essentially, I said, how else can I bird? And the answer was through artistic study. To me, it's another way to explore anatomy, appearance, behaviors, etc. Painting was my sourdough.



WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE BIRDING DESTINATION, BOTH IN INDIANA AND OUTSIDE THE STATE?

In Indiana, I like birding hotspots that are off the beaten path. I prefer land trusts because they are usually less crowded. Beanblossom Bottoms is my current favorite. I love the variety that wetlands bring. Outside of Indiana, one of my all-time favorite birding destinations is Point Lobos in California. Bird Island houses a huge colony of cormorants, and Black-crowned Night Herons nest in the cliffs. Peregrines and Osprey soar. Oystercatchers, guillemot, Brown Pelicans, quail... it is truly extraordinary where the land meets the sea.



DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE BIRD OR GROUP OF BIRDS?

Raptors have always been my favorite. There is something that is just mesmerizing about their piercing eyes, their athleticism, and their resilience. My current favorite bird is the Eastern Screech-Owl. I was lucky to have a nesting family visit my yard each year when I lived in Franklin. It brought me so much joy to observe them each year.

Guatemala: Go Birding In the Shadow of Volcanoes

February 1-10, 2025

Join Indiana Audubon for an exciting birding adventure in Guatemala, the northernmost country in Central America. Discover the country's rich avian diversity with nearly **750 bird species**, including **35 Mesoamerican endemics**. From lowland rainforests to high-elevation cloud forests, explore Guatemala's stunning landscapes featuring volcanoes, lakes, Mayan culture, and ancient ruins. This tour takes you through misty cloud forests, colonial Antigua, and offers glimpses of specialty bird species like the **Horned Guan**, **Resplendent Quetzal**, and the captivating **Pink-headed Warbler**. Don't miss this spectacular trip to one of Central America's most diverse nations!

INCLUDED IN THE TOUR EXPERIENCE:

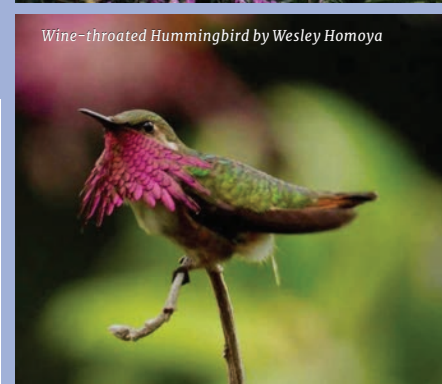
- IAS leader and guide coordinating trip logistics before and during the tour, including all eBird checklist submissions.
- Specialized Natural Selections Driver and local guides.
- Transportation with fuel included.
- All lodging for 10 days, 9 nights in listed hotels.
- All meals, beginning with dinner on day 1 and ending with breakfast on day 10.
- All entrance fees to reserves and national parks.

LEARN MORE



This tour is organized by Indiana Audubon in partnership with Natural Selections Tours.

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





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**INDIANA AUDUBON
MEMBERS REGISTER ON
MARCH 1**

MEMBERSHIP DEADLINE FOR
EARLY REGISTRATION IS
**FEBRUARY 28 AT
MIDNIGHT**

Prothonotary Warbler | Jason Jablonski

