

## Bird the Bird

By Brian Cunningham Eager Birder of Birds

**B**ird the bird. A phrase that my close birding buddies and I say to each other all the time. But, that is a phrase that has confounded many participants on my bird walks. When my daughter heard this phrase, her response was, “What the what?” Yes, bird the bird. If it helps, verb the noun. In other words, really look at a bird before you jump to an identification. You may be surprised at the results.

Did you really look at that bird? Are you sure it is what you thought it was? How do you know?

Of course, you may be a hot shot birder that positively identifies each bird that flits by giving you a nanosecond of a glance and you have a 99% rate of accuracy. But, how do you know you're right? How can you prove what you think you saw was what flew by? We are always getting challenged with the LBJ's (little brown jobbies) or as some know them LBB's (little brown birds), the super similar drab fall warblers, the ducks in eclipse plumage, or even all those gulls and all their multi-year immature plumage stages let alone the similar adult plumages.



Grasshopper Sparrow and Savannah Sparrow.  
 Photos courtesy Amy Hodson.

We see what we expect to see. Our minds play visual tricks on us. We are hard-wired to only understand what we have experienced. This is why little kids don't get as scared when a scary book is read to them versus them seeing pictures or video images of the same scary tale. They can only relate to what they have seen in the past. Have you ever seen a new bird and thought it was a familiar bird and it turns out you don't really know what it is? That is because you haven't seen that new bird yet and your brain is trying to piece together familiar things for you to ID the new thing as something familiar. This is also proven when you look at lots of pictures of a bird you hope to see in person one day; when you do see the bird in real life, your brain knows it immediately. You have been practicing your identification of that bird. You have been verbing the noun.

We see what we are told to see. I once heard a story of a rare bird seen in California. People flocked to see it. Until someone really looked at the bird; studying it for themselves,



Song Sparrow.  
 Photos courtesy Amy Hodson.

instead of looking for the bird they were told they would find, it was proven that the rare bird was a common bird in alternate plumage. Yes, this included a lot of hot-shot birders being tricked. Bird the bird.

If I am standing next to you and you call a bird ID, don't be offended if I ask why you call it that. I want to know what clues and characteristics you used to positively ID the bird. Otherwise, how can I learn for next time?

You may be asking, “So how do you verb the noun?” Next time you see that bird flit by, don't just call it and move on. Bird the bird. Really look at it. Where is it perched or flying? Notice height levels and habitat. How is its posture? What is its silhouette? Does it have noticeable marks or color patterns? Start with the head and move toward the tail. Note specifics and, if you can, jot notes and/or sketches. Only through questions and practice will we be able to become those hot-shot birders. We might as well work together to Bird the Bird.

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# Upcoming Audubon Programs, Events, and Field Trips

All are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted.

## Hoosier Whooping Cranes

**Tuesday, January 8, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm**

**Holliday Park Nature Center, 6363 Spring Mill Road  
Indianapolis, IN**

Join Danielle Williams, Whooping Crane Outreach Program Assistant for Indiana for the International Crane Foundation (ICF), for an informative program about Whooping Cranes in Indiana.

Did you know the tallest birds in North America winter right here in Indiana? Historically, this was not always the case. In this program, Danielle will discuss how the Whooping Crane made its amazing comeback from fewer than 20 individuals in the 1940s to over 800 today. Learn about the creative methods used to bring Whooping Cranes back to the eastern United States, the ongoing challenges associated with this effort, and what the ICF is doing to help these cranes right here in Indiana.

Danielle graduated from Indiana University with a B.S. in Biology before earning her M.S. in Wildlife and Fisheries Science from Penn State.

In 2018 ABAS supplied a grant to the ICF to help promote Whooping Crane Awareness in Indiana. The ICF also received a Birdathon grant in 2018.

To learn more about the ICF and their work, please visit [savingcranes.org](http://savingcranes.org).



*Sandhill Crane photos courtesy of Danielle Williams.*



## Birding The Nature Conservancy Properties in Indiana

**Tuesday, February 12, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm**

**Holliday Park Nature Center, 6363 Spring Mill Road  
Indianapolis, IN**

Join Matt Williams for our February program. As Director of Conservation Programs for The Nature Conservancy in Indiana, Matt will take us on a virtual tour of some of the Conservancy's best properties around the state, and show us photography of some of the bird species that can be seen at these sites. Matt will also tell us a bit about his new book, *Endangered and Disappearing Birds of the Midwest*.

## There's Still Time to Make Your 2018 Year-end Donation!

ABAS members and supporters, you all should have received information about our annual year-end campaign. To those who have already donated, THANK YOU! If you'd still like to donate, send your check to ABAS, PO Box 80024, Indianapolis, IN 46280, or donate right now, by going to [http://www.amosbutleraudubon.org/join\\_donate/](http://www.amosbutleraudubon.org/join_donate/). Consider designating your donation to the Permanent Fund for the long term financial health of ABAS.

Thank you, on behalf of the birds of Indiana and the members of the ABAS. Happy New Year and thanks for all your support in 2018. We are looking forward to exciting programs and events in 2019 and beyond!





*Photo courtesy Jessica Helmbold*

## **Christmas Bird Count for Kids**

**Saturday, January 5, 8:30 am - 12:00 pm**

**Zion Nature Center, 690 Beech Street, Zionsville, IN**

Whether your child is curious about the natural world, loves to go birding or has never birded before, ABAS volunteers will help your child discover birding and might light within them the curiosity for nature. This workshop is great for scouts working on badges. The free event will include a short lesson on the basics of birding; bird watching out on the trails and inside at the feeder station windows; learning how to collect data; followed by snacks and an awards ceremony. Bring binoculars or field guides if you have them. Dress for cold weather and hiking.

Registration is required as space is limited. Register by emailing [naturecenter@zionsville-in.gov](mailto:naturecenter@zionsville-in.gov).

## **Winter Lakefront Field Trip**

**Saturday, January 26, 6:30 am - 6:00 pm**

**Meet at Dick's Sporting Goods  
6030 West 86th Street, Indianapolis, IN**

Join Scott Enochs as he leads you to the Indiana Lake Michigan lakeshore in search of wintering gulls, waterfowl, and any vagrants that may be in the area. The event will take place on Saturday, January 26, 2019. We will meet at the Dick's Sporting Goods located at 6030 West 86th Street at 6:30 am and carpool to lakefront. We will spend the morning and early afternoon visiting various sites around the Indiana lakeshore. Little time will be spent hiking, though some hiking terrain would be considered moderate to rugged. Most of the time will be spent travelling to as many sites as possible to scan the lake. Participants can expect to return to Indianapolis around 6:00 pm. There will be a break for lunch in the Gary/Chesterton area. The event is free and open to the public. Registration is not required, but appreciated. Please contact Scott at 317-850-4801 or [msenochs@comcast.net](mailto:msenochs@comcast.net) if you have any questions.

## **Bird Photography Walk at Eagle Creek**

**Saturday, February 2, 9:00 am - 11:00 am**

**Eagle Creek Park Ornithology Center  
6515 Delong Road, Indianapolis, IN**

Join Amy Hodson on a walk at Eagle Creek Park to photograph birds. All levels of photography are welcome, especially beginners! Don't have camera gear quite yet, but still want to learn? This will be a great opportunity to learn about the basics of bird photography. The group will meet at the Ornithology Center to practice shooting at the feeders. We will then head into the park to look for the famous Barred Owls, Red Fox, and Winter Wrens!

Please RSVP for this event by emailing [info@amosbutleraudubon.org](mailto:info@amosbutleraudubon.org). Registration is required. Although there is no fee for this walk, park entrance fees apply.



*Tufted Titmouse photo courtesy Amy Hodson.*



*Male Hooded Merganser. Photo courtesy Mike Timmons*

### **Call for Photos**

ABAS is looking for great images of Indiana birds and regional birding adventures to share on our Instagram and Facebook feeds. Break out those hard drives and submit your photos to [info@amosbutleraudubon.org](mailto:info@amosbutleraudubon.org) for a chance at exposure!

## Local Bird Hikes

### Cool Creek Park Beginning Bird Hikes

2000 East 151st Street, Carmel, IN  
Walks are 9:00 am to 10:00 am  
January 9, 13, 16, 23, 27, 30  
February 10, 13, 20, 24, 27

Join a naturalist and other guest leaders most Sunday and Wednesday mornings and we will learn together. This is a great opportunity for birdwatchers of all levels. Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the road by Cool Creek, past the Nature Center.

### Eagle Creek Park

6515 Delong Road, Indianapolis, IN  
Every Sunday 9:00 am to 11:00 am  
January 6, 13, 20, 27  
February 3, 10, 17, 24

Meet in front of the Ornithology Center.

### Holliday Park

6363 Spring Mill Road, Indianapolis, IN  
The third Tuesday of the month, start times vary during the year  
January 15, 8:30 am to 10:00 am  
February 19, 8:30 am to 10:00 am

Meet in front of the Holliday Park Nature Center.

### Strawtown Koteewi Park

12308 Strawtown Avenue, Noblesville, IN  
First Wednesday of the month, 9:00 am to 10:00 am  
January 2 and February 6

Meet at the Taylor Center of Natural History. For more information, call (317) 774-2574 or visit myhamiltoncounty parks.com.

## *Donations*

*From Nancy Gruber a gift membership  
for Nicholas Dwenger*

*From Denise Stevens in honor of  
The Drum Family*

*From Robin Hedge a gift membership  
for her father Cloyce Hedge*

## Goose Pond Area Raptor Field Trip Recap

by Scott Enochs

On Saturday, December 8, I had the pleasure of leading two participants to Greene and Sullivan counties in search of wintering and migrating raptors. We departed the Plainfield Kroger shortly after 10:00 am, and after a quick lunch in Linton, were in the field. We began the day in Beehunter Marsh where we observed two large flocks of Snow Geese in the air, a pair of American Kestrels, and a pair of Northern Harriers. On our way to the Goose Pond units, we stopped to view three Whooping and two Sandhill Cranes. While overlooking the Main Pool East, we added 4 Bald Eagles to the day's total. From here, we ventured into Bear Run Mine, where the largest concentration of raptors was located. We counted a few more Red-tailed Hawks, Harriers, and Kestrels, while picking up a dark morph Rough-legged Hawk, and a pair of Red-shouldered Hawks. After spending nearly two hours driving the roads of the mine, we attempted to locate the Northern Shrike I'd seen two weeks prior in the Dugger unit of Greene-Sullivan State Forest. Our consolation was a large raft of Gadwall with a few Northern Shovelers mixed in. By far the most exciting part of the trip was the final hour. We'd received word of a Merlin actively hunting GP10N, an area they frequent. On our way, someone asked me if that was a pair of Snow Geese flying toward us. I replied, "Better. Whooping Cranes." We stopped the car and enjoyed the birds as they flew beside the vehicle a mere 30 yards away. After that brief "distraction", we approached the area the Merlin was said to be. We didn't see one Merlin, there were two. The birds briefly chased one another when suddenly there were three. We spent the next 20 minutes enjoying these feisty little falcons, and were treated with close views. Now it was time for the grand finale... Short-eared Owls. I would have loved if they would have made their appearance a little earlier in the day. Unfortunately, we saw the first one 3 minutes after sunset. One of the four owls flew toward us, along the road, breaking away about 50 yards from the car, allowing a great view in the quickly fading light. It was a great way to end a great day!



*Merlin photo courtesy of Amy Hodson.*



# Social Media, Technology, and Birding

By Amy Hodson

The world of social media has undoubtedly changed the landscape of how birders share their sightings and interact with one another. Pair that with mobile devices that can be used in any corner of the world, and the power is game-changing. In the modern world, information is readily available for nearly every topic, and birding is no different. So what are the biggest game-changers?

For over one hundred years, bird enthusiasts have reached for their favorite field guide when challenged with identifying a bird. Some even proudly display massive collections of field guides for specific regions, families of birds, and countries. While flipping through a field guide will always be one of the best ways to educate yourself, there are new tools available to supplement the learning process. Phone apps like the *Sibley Guide to Birds* are available for download on any smartphone. These applications feature plates, descriptions, and even range maps. Say goodbye to lugging a field guide around while birding!

In addition to phone applications, Facebook Groups have skyrocketed in popularity. The *Birding in Indiana* Facebook group has over 9,100 members. That is a lot of curious eyes around Indiana looking at birds. So if you find yourself confused about an identification, and your field guide just isn't getting you there, all you have to do is post a description or photo to a Facebook group! Within minutes, you'll have other birders helping you through the learning process, and sometimes just providing an identification. Utilizing the birding community in these instances is extremely popular with many new birders.

We all know that birding is more than just knowing what you are looking at. It's actually knowing where to look that is sometimes the most difficult to learn. You should find yourself asking questions like: What habitats do different species prefer? Where do you find those habitats? How often is a species reported in particular regions or locations?

Finding a new birding spot on your own can be exciting, but there are ample tools available to help with locating birds. eBird is probably the most well known way to research what birds can be found in certain locations. This incredible project launched by Cornell University allows for searching by species, location, and even by hotspot! If you would like to know more about this valuable tool, be sure to check out the *Everything eBird!* article from our November/December newsletter.

If you find yourself traveling often, you might want to investigate *HotSpot Birding*. This phone app pulls in your personal eBird data, as well as any eBird sightings around the region

you specify. It puts all of that information into a "target list", which allows you to easily view what birds you need while traveling. Simply click on the species, and a map appears to show you the locations it's being reported. Pick your location and BOOM! Your map application will bring up the directions and you are on your way!

Another aspect of birding that has been greatly affected by social media is how rare bird sightings are shared. Although some still exist, the days of phone hotlines are in the past. Next up were the email lists, and many are still utilized heavily.



Photographers and Spotted Redshank.  
Photos courtesy of Amy Hodson.



spreading the word about rare bird sightings are Rare Bird Alert Facebook pages. All you have to do is "like" the page, set up instant notifications, and whenever someone shares a rare bird, you'll be immediately notified. There are Rare Bird Alert pages for Indiana, the ABA region, and even the world!

In today's fast paced environment, technology is rapidly changing. In just the past year, Subaru released a new feature that has eBird built in their cars. Asking for help from the birding community is easier than it ever has been. And sharing sightings with thousands of birders is as easy as a few clicks.

Thinking back, it's amazing how far technology has taken us in the past 5-10 years. One can't help but wonder what the next big game-changer in birding will be. Whatever that change might be, there is one thing that will never change. The simple bliss of taking a walk with your binoculars in hand.

## Amos Butler Audubon Society Chapter Supporter Membership

### Membership benefits:

- 100% of your dues support local Audubon educational programs and urban conservation projects
  - *Audubon LifeLines*, the chapter newsletter
  - Workshops and entertaining monthly program meetings
- One-year individual membership \$25
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- Two-year household membership \$75
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E-mail (please include) \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to: Amos Butler Audubon Society**

Mail to: ABAS Membership Chair

P.O. Box 80024

Indianapolis, IN 46280

e-mail questions to: [info@amosbutleraudubon.org](mailto:info@amosbutleraudubon.org)

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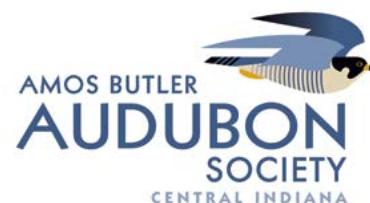
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*Eastern Bluebirds visit a bird feeder in December. Photo courtesy of Donna McCarty.*



*Our mission: To promote the enjoyment and stewardship of the birds of Central Indiana*

Amos Butler Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 80024  
Indianapolis, IN 46280

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