

The Birdathon — Nearly Three Decades of Benefiting Birds

by Donna McCarty, ABAS Birdathon Chair

Thanks to generous donors, another successful Birdathon is benefitting the birds of Central Indiana. While this was not a banner year, donors enabled us to raise the Birdathon bucks necessary to fund all of our grant requests. Our grand total of donations and carryover funds amounted to an impressive \$33,560. But even more impressive, since 1987 the Birdathon has donated a total of \$680,706!

Why Birdathon Donations Are So Important

Our long partnership with the American Bird Conservancy has produced some significant achievements, including the completion last year of the Cerulean Warbler Corridor in Colombia. This year we embarked on an exciting new project with a pressing need — Cruz is in urgent need of protection because of a recently built illegal road that allows poachers and loggers access. The parcel provides high-quality winter and stopover habitat for at least 40 species of neotropical migrants.

Closer to home, valuable data is being gathered on two vulnerable warbler species. Purdue University is conducting a research project on the Worm-eating Warbler, listed as a species of special concern in Indiana. Ball State's project is on the Cerulean Warbler, listed as state endangered. Research data will be used to develop forest management practices benefitting these warblers.

The Indiana Raptor Center will purchase testing equipment to detect the presence of lead in wild raptors. A raptor center in Illinois has found high levels of lead in one out of every three Cooper's Hawks tested.

Community outreach is another important tool for educating the public about the importance of birds. Several of our grant recipients are fulfilling this goal. Central Indiana Land Trust will establish a bird-banding station at Oliver Woods. Marian University continues its habitat restoration at the EcoLab, involving hundreds of volunteers. Keep Indianapolis Beautiful's Springdale Greenspace at the Nowland Oak will transform a vacant lot into community greenspace. Finally, the Jameson Camp will be able to create a hummingbird garden and expand its environmental education program.

Our Teams Worked Hard to Raise Birdathon Bucks

We are especially proud of our Birdathon team fundraising champs, the Bud & Carl's Legacy team. The Noddy Little Gulls and DNR team finished second and third, respectively. Another team, Wild Birds Unlimited, set a new species count record, breaking their previous record of 182 set just two years ago. You can read all about teams' Big Day events online at www.amosbutleraudubon.org; select the Birdathon page.

Bluebird Nesting Boxes Installed at Holliday Park

In the spring of this year we were thrilled to install nesting boxes for bluebirds, Prothonotary Warblers, and Wood Ducks at Holliday Park. Doug Sherow, an Amos Butler Audubon Society (ABAS) Board Director, led the project, which was funded by National Audubon Society. ABAS had applied for a grant in the fall of 2015. Once approved, Doug worked with volunteer Dick Garrett, a member of the Sciencetech Club, to secure nesting box designs and supplies and to have the nesting boxes built. Many hours were spent in Dick's workshop to build 17 bluebird boxes, six Wood Duck boxes, and six Prothonotary Warbler boxes.

In the spring, Doug worked with Adam Barnes, Park Manager and new ABAS Director, to have the nesting boxes installed in the park. Doug also recruited his neighbor, Greg Peterson, another Sciencetech Club member, to assist. By April 15 they had installed eight bluebird boxes, three Wood Duck boxes, and two Prothonotary Warbler boxes in the park. Many of these nesting sites are easy to spot as you walk the trails in the park.

Two bluebird boxes went to St. Peter's United Church of Christ in Carmel, Indiana, as a feature of their 2.5-acre prairie/wetland habitat. ABAS Director Susan Leo is associated with that church. The extra boxes will be going to Cool Creek Park.

Our thanks to the volunteers and the many people they consulted for helping make this project a success.



(Above) Dick Garrett with one of the Wood Duck nesting boxes built in his workshop. (Left) One of the Bluebird boxes installed in Holliday Park.

Upcoming Audubon Programs and Workshops

All programs are held at the Holliday Park Nature Center, 6363 Spring Mill Road, Indianapolis, at 7:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month. They are free and open to the public. Time and place of workshops as noted.

September 13: Gardening for Birds — Creating Habitat in Your Yard

Presenter: Amanda Smith

Join Amanda Smith, Superintendent of Natural Resources and Education for Hamilton County Parks and Recreation (HCPR) and President of the Indiana Native Plant and Wildflower Society's (INPAWS) Central Chapter for a program about what we as homeowners can do to improve bird habitat on our own property. Amanda will help us think beyond our feeders and explore how an ecosystem-focused approach that includes native plants and the insects they support can improve not just the birdwatching opportunities in your yard but also benefit the overall environment.

In addition to her involvement with HCPR and INPAWS, for most of her career Amanda has been deeply involved in environmental education throughout Indiana, especially in Central Indiana. She contributes in many ways to Amos Butler Audubon and has participated in six Birdathons as a member of the Bud & Carl Legacy Birdathon team.



October 11: Gene Stratton-Porter's Birding Legacy

Presenter: Dave Fox

Gene Stratton-Porter is best known as Indiana's most widely-read female author, but her impact on the birding world began in the 1870s and still continues to this day. We'll explore her earliest interactions with birds, the influence she had on the birding community and popular culture of the day, and how she is still making a lasting impact on birding and on our environment. Rare books from her library will be on display, including an AOU Check-list from 1910.



Dave Fox is the Site Manager at the Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site in Rome City and is the Natural History Section Manager for the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites. He has been a life-long birder and nature photographer and is currently a board member for the Indiana Audubon Society, a Friend of Goose Pond, and he serves as the Bird Town Indiana Chairman.

Saturday, October 22: Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge Wetland Birding Workshop

Morning departure time TBD

Bird identification is one thing, but knowing where to find specific species is another. Join Amos Butler Audubon Education Chair, Jessica Helmbold, as she shares her expertise on wetlands and how identifying types of wetlands can help predict where specific species are likely to occur. You'll get a guided tour of Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) and its varied wetland habitats and birds. We will both drive and hike. This workshop will last about half a day, ending with lunch at the Visitor Center (bring a sack lunch). We'll meet either in the Muscatatuck NWR Visitor Center parking lot or come up with a carpool meeting spot in Indianapolis. It's about a 1-1/2-hour drive from Indianapolis to the refuge. We'll determine the start time by polling registrants closer to the workshop date. For more information, please contact Jessica Helmbold at jh_beagle@hotmail.com or call (443) 449-8512.

ABAS Field Trips

Fall Migrant Hike 1: Daubenspeck Community Nature Park, Indianapolis

Thursday, September 15, 8–9:15 a.m.

Join Amy Hodson as she leads you through restored habitats seeking fall migrants including warblers, vireos, and thrushes as well as year-round residents at Daubenspeck Community Nature Park, an urban oasis of nearly 22 acres in Indianapolis. Daubenspeck is a 100% volunteer run, non-profit green space funded by community support and donations. The park has trails, but not all are handicapped accessible. We will meet at the parking lot at 8 a.m. Daubenspeck is located on Ditch Road just north of 86th Street. Registration is requested, but not required, and this event is open to the public. Questions? Please contact Amy at aehodson@gmail.com.



Fall Migrant Hike 2: Central Park, Carmel

Thursday, September 22, 8–9:15 a.m.

Join Amy Hodson as she leads you on a search for fall migrants including warblers, vireos, and thrushes along with year-round residents at Central Park, a birding hotspot along the Monon Trail in Carmel. The park has handicapped-accessible trails, but not all of them are paved. We will meet at 8 a.m. at the main east parking lot, which can be accessed from the Rangleline Road/Westfield Boulevard park entrance, on the right as you head south from 116th Street. Registration is requested but not required, and this event is open to the public. Questions? Please contact Amy at aehodson@gmail.com.



*Swainson's Thrush and Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
photos by Amy Hodson.*

Fall Migrant Hike 3: Eagle Creek Park Indianapolis

Saturday, September 24, 8–11 a.m.

Join Mike Timmons on a hike around Eagle Creek Park in search of fall migrants. The trip will focus on finding migrant warblers, vireos, and thrushes passing through during fall migration. This date should be close to peak warbler migration. Attendees can expect to see a variety of species. It's a good time to come out and work on your fall plumage identification skills. We will be walking on mostly paved surfaces or mowed grass. We will meet at 8 a.m. in the marina parking lot and finish at 11 a.m. Registration is not required but would be appreciated, and the event is open to everyone. Questions? Please contact Mike at zeroskilz@yahoo.com.



*Le Conte's Sparrow and Black-throated Green
photos by Mike Timmons.*

Bird Banding at Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary

Saturday, September 17, 7:45 a.m.

Meet at Meijer, 11351 East Washington Street, Indianapolis

Join Scott Enochs and Amy Hodson as they lead you to the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary for an exciting, up-close bird-banding experience featuring both local breeding and passage songbirds and hummingbirds. The Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary, owned and operated by the Indiana Audubon Society, is located south of Connersville in Fayette County and occupies more than 700 acres. Our host and licensed bird bander, Amy Wilms, and her husband, Carl, have been Resident Managers at Mary Gray for more than 10 years.

We plan to arrive at Mary Gray at 9 a.m., at which time Amy will begin banding. We hope to get close views of a few species of warblers and thrushes in addition to our native cardinals and chickadees. After a couple of hours enjoying Amy showing off the songbirds at Mary Gray, we will spend an hour exploring the property to track down a few species of warblers we might not have seen earlier. Afterwards we will break for lunch (participants should bring a sack lunch or snack as no food is available for purchase at Mary Gray). As if this experience would not be enough, Amy has graciously offered to set up her hummingbird trap, too, and let us enjoy watching her band the local breeding Ruby-throated Hummingbirds before they begin their journey south. You will not want to leave your camera at home for this event!

We will leave the Meijer promptly at 7:45 a.m., so please arrive early. We will leave Mary Gray at approximately 2 p.m. to return to Indianapolis. There is no charge to attend this event, but donations to the Mary Gray Bird Sanctuary will be accepted. **Please note this is a members-only event and that registration is required.** Members interested in registering should email Scott at msenochs@comcast.net. (Not an Amos Butler Audubon member? Visit www.amosbutleraudubon.org to join.) Questions? Please contact Scott at (317) 850-4801 or email msenochs@comcast.net or Amy at aehodson@gmail.com.



Amy Wilms with Northern Cardinal.

Fall Waterfowl Trip: Universal Mine

Saturday, November 19, 8 a.m.

Meet at Target, 10209 E. US 36, Avon

Join Mark Welter for a driving tour of the reclaimed Universal Strip Mines in search of waterfowl. Located on the Vigo/Vermillion County line north of Terre Haute, Universal is an important stopover for migrating ducks and geese as well as for significant numbers of Tundra and Trumpeter Swans. Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, Northern Shrike, and several species of sparrows can also be found here in winter. We will be birding primarily from our vehicles, driving on county roads while scanning the numerous fields and ponds on the property (most of the former Universal Mine is privately owned, and there is no trespassing). We may also look over the "Grand Canyon lake" just across the state line in Edgar County, IL; it can host large flocks of waterfowl when the smaller bodies of water on the property are frozen over. Due to the distances that can be involved in surveying this property, a spotting scope is recommended. Additionally, if you have small two-way radios (such as Motorola), bring them because they are handy for communicating among vehicles. If there is interest and if time allows, we may also visit the nearby reclaimed Chinook Mines and the associated Fish & Wildlife Area, located just east of Terre Haute.

We will meet at 8 a.m. in the Target parking lot at 10209 E. US 36 (Rockville Road) in Avon, just west of the Ronald Reagan Parkway. Participants can expect to be back around 3 p.m. Questions: Please contact Mark at shooter2_indy@yahoo.com.



Tundra Swans and swans and geese photos by Mark Welter.

Birding with Children

by Jessica Helmbold

It seems that children today are far more plugged into technology than into the outdoors. It may seem hard to connect children with birding when video games, online videos, and TV capture their attention more. However, the benefits of introducing your children, grandchildren, or even neighborhood children to birding and the outdoors is far greater than you might imagine. It may take some time, but eventually being outdoors and engaging in birding will add something amazing to a child's well-being and to their soul that no indoor electronics-based activity can.

So how does one introduce a child to nature, to birding more specifically? It doesn't take an expert birder to connect with a child. Sometimes it even requires an expert birder *not* to flaunt his or her expertise when working with children. Keep things simple. If a child is having a connection with nature that has nothing at all to do with birding, that's okay. Giving them the chance to explore the outdoors in whatever ways they find best is a great place to start. As it is many kids don't get to spend enough time outside on a regular basis.

The best place to start is in the backyard

Survey your backyard or theirs and see what is already there. Having recently moved into a house myself, before even putting up a feeder I noticed my yard already had plenty of bird species to enjoy. I love watching their behaviors and wondering what they are doing or thinking. Is that a male cardinal bringing a snack to his girlfriend as a sign of their commitment to each other? Does the jay squawk at me when I get too close to his coveted cherries? These are things that spark my interest, and it doesn't even take binoculars to make these observations.

Let's say it's late fall now and the birds aren't as plentiful in your yard as they were earlier in the year. You could put up a bird feeder to attract them. If it's summer, you could put up a hummingbird feeder. Watch the birds at the winter feeders and you'll see there's a hierarchy. One bird seems to be the bully and gets most of the seed. Most kids can relate to this in one way or another from their experiences at school. You see that birds and humans have a lot in common. Filling the feeders can be a fun activity for a child. It gives them a sense of responsibility, and it lets them see how long it takes after refilling until a bird arrives. This is like mining for gems. Who will be first? The goldfinch or the chickadee?

Want to move away from your yard?

Explore a neighborhood park. Not all neighborhood parks are designed as nature parks, but they certainly all provide opportunities for birding. Even rare species can pop up in neighborhood parks. Once a friend told me there were Sandhill Cranes resting in front of her local Walgreens. You never know where you'll find great birds! Not to mention that teaching kids about rarities makes birding even more fun. It's like mining for gold! A Snowy Owl perhaps? The idea is that you don't need to go far to find a great birding location.

If you want to incorporate technology as a way of connecting with your future young birder, you can introduce them to eBird. They can post their sightings, see how they



rank among other local birders as far as number of species seen, find out where rare birds have been spotted in their neighborhood, and so much more. Once you post a list to eBird, it becomes addicting!

Field Guides and Binoculars

Having a good field guide is also helpful when learning birds. *Peterson's First Guide to Birds* or *Birds of Indiana*, by Stan Tekiela, is a good place to start. You don't need to overwhelm kids with birds for them to learn, just find a good selection of the most common ones. *The Audubon Birds* and *iBird Pro* apps for tablets are also useful. These apps even have helpful keys to help narrow down possible species. If you want suggestions on other fun birding activities, pick up a copy of *Take a Backyard Bird Walk*, by Jane Kirkland, from a library or a bookstore.

And of course there's the matter of binoculars. For a child, their first pair of binoculars need not be the best. I'm amazed at how many children have made toilet-paper-tube binoculars in my nature classes and been so fascinated with them, as if they actually worked. Not saying you need to start that low unless you have a toddler, but the point is, teaching a child to bird doesn't have to cost a lot. A basic pair of binoculars for them is a great place to start. Begin with easy-to-spot birds like bright red cardinals, giant black crows, or bright goldfinches. The common birds often fascinate kids as much as the rare ones do. Imagine, some children have no idea what a cardinal is, so when they see one for the first time, it can be wonderful experience for them. Once your young birder becomes more knowledgeable, move onto harder birds to spot, such as drab brown sparrows or tiny warblers fluttering away in high-up tree branches.

Inspiring the next generation of birders

The point is that inspiring the next generation of birders does not have to be a monumental task. Take them outside, show them a bird, and then sit and let them watch it for a while. If they stop watching, that's okay, let them explore nature however it suits them. Maybe they'll find a box turtle or a colorful caterpillar instead. They will have had a rewarding experience nonetheless. These children are the future of birding and bird conservation. If you love birding, share it with someone young today!

Curiosity Fair

by Jessica Helmbold

Over the weekend of June 11–12, three wonderful volunteers and I represented Amos Butler Audubon at the annual Curiosity Fair at Conner Prairie, an interactive history park in Fishers. The purpose of the event is to encourage kids to play, create, and investigate the mysteries of the world around them. Several themed areas include physics, agriculture, art, environmental science, and creative play. We shared the Wild Indiana tent with the Indiana Wildlife Federation, the Indiana Greenways Foundation, the Hoosier Herpetological Society, and Purdue University's Soundscape Ecology. We each had a role in engaging kids and families in nature. For our part, we had a bird identification game, and we set up a spotting scope and had binoculars available for bird viewing. We were able to see lots of common birds through the spotting scope. I was amazed at how excited the kids were to spot a cardinal or a sparrow! We had the opportunity to speak to many adults, who inevitably took one of our membership cards; I hope we see some of these folks at one of our upcoming meetings. It was a very successful event, and I'm looking forward to going back next year with more ideas to make it even better. I'd like to thank the ABAS volunteers who came out this year: Laura Sexson, Sherri Shahadey, and Nancy Tatum. If you might be interested in helping with this event next year, either before or on the day of the event, please email me at jh_beagle@hotmail.com or call me at (443) 449-8512.

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Indigo Buntings Abound in Parke County

by Alan W. Bruner

I have always been fascinated by how easy it is to find Indigo Buntings singing along the roadsides in late July and early August, when virtually all other summer breeding species that winter south of the U.S. are on the downswing of their breeding season. Moreover, the buntings are singing throughout the hottest part of the day.

On 26 July 2014, I had decided to see how many Indigo Buntings I could find in Parke County in a 24-hour period. On a day shortened by two hours by rain, I had been able to count 441 Indigo Buntings between 7:10 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. It seemed that 500 in a day was quite possible.

On 25 July 2015, Rusty McIntyre and I repeated the count on a hot and humid summer day. Our first bird was heard at 6:02 a.m. and bird #499 was heard at 9:03 p.m. So close to the goal!

On 29 July 2016, Peter Scott, Rusty McIntyre, and I counted Indigo Buntings in Parke County from 6:09 a.m. through 9:11 p.m. The day was very pleasant for July, with considerable fog in early morning and scattered afternoon showers that halted our count for about half an hour. We were very pleased with our final total, which far surpassed our expectations.

We ended the day with 616 Indigo Buntings — all in Parke County — all by a single party of observers — all by car with zero miles walked — and all without the use of any audio equipment of any kind. Overall, buntings were encountered at a rate of >40 birds/hour and 3 birds/mile. The first hour proved to be a tremendous springboard for reaching our total, as 88 bunting were encountered. Our lowest hourly counts were the 11 a.m. and 12 p.m. periods, with 26 and 27 birds, respectively. This was unexpected as our low periods during previous counts were between 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. period.

All species we could identify were counted, but always we concentrated on the buntings and often counted these other species as incidental encounters, quickly moving on to the next Indigo Bunting. In spite of this we had 83 species for the day and a few significant totals.



Indigo Bunting photo by Lynn Miller.

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e-mail questions to: info@amosbutleraudubon.org

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

Amos Butler Audubon Society

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