

Indiana Winter Birding

By Amy Hodson

It's that time of the year again. The temperatures are dropping and the trees are bare. The winter season brings along some wonderful holidays, as well as some wonderful birds.

Snowy Owl is one of those birds. A gorgeous species that never ceases to impress and leave the observer with a memory that is forever imprinted in your mind and heart. The 2021/2022 winter season appears to be shaping up as a good "irruption" year. Scientists believe that irruption years are a result of a strong Lemming population during the summer months. A Lemming is a small mouse-like or vole-like rodent. The larger the Lemming population, the stronger the nesting year is for the owls. Basically, a lot of food means there are a lot of owlets.

Some of those owls will then venture south to find their own hunting territory for the winter. There have been at least THREE separate Snowy Owls reported in the ABAS service area as of mid-December. Be sure to scan those agricultural fields around your neighborhood for one of these arctic beauties!

Winter finches are also a joy to see during the dreary months of the year. Although the Finch Forecast doesn't look overwhelmingly great for Indiana this season, we can still expect to see some birds move into central Indiana. What makes the Finch Forecast tip in Indiana's favor? A lack of cone crops in the finches' normal wintering grounds. When food is scarce in Canada and the northern United States, birds like Evening Grosbeaks, White-winged Crossbills, Red Crossbills, and Pine Siskins will move further south than usual.

Since the cone crops look pretty good in Canada, it isn't expected that there will be a lot of finch movement to central Indiana this winter. We can still expect to see some Pine Siskin flocks around our area, and of course, our favorite "non-finch" species that moves along with the same forecast, the Red-breasted Nuthatch. Red-breasted Nuthatches are already being reported at feeders in central Indiana.

To prepare your yard for the winter, don't forget to stock up on a favorite for many species during the winter months, black oil sunflower seeds. In addition to the black oil sunflower seeds, adding a water source to your yard is a great way to increase the variety and frequency of avian friends at your feeders. A heated bird bath during the middle of February is a welcomed sight for all birds.

Another great addition to your yard in the winter is a brush pile. Gathering sticks and fallen branches into a pile will provide birds with protection from predators while they visit your feeders and newly installed heated bird bath. The more cover they have, the more birds you'll see. Although your neighbors might wonder what you're doing with all of those sticks, your sparrow friends will love you.

If you are brave enough to leave your local patches this winter, there are a couple of prime Indiana birding locations in the winter months. Goose Pond Fish & Wildlife Area will host a number of winter raptors throughout the season including Rough-legged Hawk, Northern Harrier, Short-eared Owl, Merlin, and maybe even a Golden Eagle. It's always a treat to bird Goose Pond in the winter. Lake Michigan can also offer excellent opportunities to see winter waterfowl and gulls. If that sounds like a trip you'd like to make but aren't sure where to start, check out our upcoming Lake Michigan field trip in January.

Get out there and go birding this winter!

If you have some fun sightings, we would love to hear from you. Please feel free to share any sightings and photos from your winter birding adventures with us on Facebook or at info@amosbutleraudubon.org.



(Top) Red-breasted Nuthatch courtesy of Amy Hodson
 (Above) Snowy Owl courtesy of Amy Hodson

LAST ISSUE OF LIFELINES BEING MAILED

Our *LifeLines* Newsletter format is updating. **This is the last issue of our bi-monthly ABAS *LifeLines* Newsletter.** Beginning in March of 2022, we will be providing an updated monthly newsletter that will be delivered right to your email inbox. **All the content you once received by the US mail via the newsletter will now be included in our monthly emails.**

To stay up to date on events, field trips and special articles be sure to **sign up via the form on our website at www.amosbutleraudubon.org/newsletters/.** Scroll to the bottom of that page for the form. You can also contact us at info@amosbutleraudubon.org to be included in the monthly emails.

Upcoming Audubon Events and Field Trips

All are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. Due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, all of these events are subject to cancellation. Please check our website event calendar before attending an event to see if it might have been canceled.

In-Person Monthly Programs

We are pleased to welcome everyone back to our monthly programs at Holliday Park. **We respectfully request that any non-vaccinated attendees wear masks.**



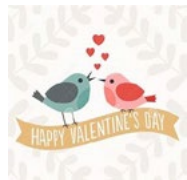
Resplendent Quetzal photo courtesy of Rob Ripma

Exploring Costa Rica

**Tuesday, January 11
7:30 pm to 9:00 pm
Holliday Park
6363 Springmill Road
Indianapolis**

Join ABAS Past President and Sabrewing Nature Tours owner Rob Ripma as he takes us on an exciting journey through the beautiful nation of Costa Rica. Rob will share photos and stories about the wonderful birds and amazing lodges that make this country such an exciting place to explore. From the highlands of the Talamanca Mountains to the remote Osa Peninsula, we'll cover all of the exciting birding regions in Costa Rica.

We respectfully request that any non-vaccinated attendees wear masks.



For the Love of Birds: How Birds Played into the History of Valentine's Day

**Tuesday, February 8, 7:30 pm to 9:00 pm
Holliday Park, 6363 Springmill Road, Indianapolis**

Join Jessica Helmbold, ABAS Education Chair, for her presentation on birds and Valentine's Day. Who created Valentine's Day and when and why did they choose to incorporate birds? Learn about the history of this popular holiday and the role birds played in making it what it is today.

We respectfully request that any non-vaccinated attendees wear masks.

Northern Cardinal courtesy of Amy Hodson



ABAS Field Trips

Limited Numbers on Hikes

Many hikes will have a limit to the number of participants and require registration. Please check the details of each hike and register as appropriate. Priority will be given to ABAS members early in the registration process. It is possible that masks might again be required for field trips and local hikes. Please follow the example of our leaders.

Gulls & Waterfowl at the Lakefront

**Saturday, January 8, 9:00 am to 3:00 pm
Washington Park Beach Entrance,
114 Lake Shore Drive, Michigan City, IN**

Join experienced birders Eric and Tina Rosier as they lead you along the Indiana Lake Michigan lakeshore in search of wintering gulls, waterfowl, and any vagrants that may be in the area. Eric and Tina have been casual backyard birders for most of their adult lives, and since 2017, they've avidly been learning, seeking, and counting as many species as possible, and recording those sightings on eBird. In 2020, with help from the Indiana birding community, they both joined the "Indiana 300 Club" by seeing over 300+ species in the state in a single calendar year.

We'll meet at Washington Park Beach in Michigan City at 8:00 am local time (9:00 am EST). 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 traveling to as many sites as possible to scan the lake.

Participants can expect to return to the Indianapolis area around 6:00 pm EST. There will be a break for lunch in the Gary/Chesterton area.

The field trip is free but is limited to 12 participants and registration is required. Priority registration is available to ABAS members through December 20, 2021. After that date, if any open spots remain, non-members may register. If you wish to carpool to Michigan City, please make that known at the time of your registration and we'll try to accommodate. To reserve your spot on the field trip email Chuck Anderson at chucka1999@aol.com or text Chuck at (317) 767-5438.

Dress appropriately for the weather conditions. Don't forget your binoculars and bring a scope if you have one. If you have any questions, please email Chuck Anderson at chucka1999@aol.com.



Harlequin Ducks courtesy of Amy Hodson

Great Backyard Bird Count Caravan - FULL

Saturday, February 19, 9:00 am to 1:00 pm

5100 East 116th Street, Carmel, IN 46033

If you need an incentive to get outside in mid-winter, join Chuck Anderson, ABAS Field Trip chair and President, as he leads you to three local parks in conjunction with the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) worldwide event. At each park, we will record the species and number of all birds seen and submit that list to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology via eBird. To get more information on the GBBC, go to birdcount.org.

We will meet at 9:00 am in the parking lot at Flowing Well Park, 5100 E 116th St, Carmel. From there we will caravan to Hazel Landing Park, Meadowlark Park, and then to our final stop, Central Park, where restrooms will be available. Participants will be notified in advance if there are any changes to the itinerary.

Make sure you dress appropriately for the weather conditions and don't forget your binoculars.

The field trip is free but limited to 10 participants, and registration is required. Priority registration is available to ABAS members through February 1, 2022. After that date, if any open spots remain, non-members may register. To sign up, email Chuck Anderson at chucka1999@aol.com or text Chuck at (317) 767-5438.

The event is full. You can call Chuck to be on standby.



Barred Owl courtesy of Chuck Anderson

Special Donations

*Employee contributions from
Target and Duke Energy*

A bequest from the estate of Martha Davis

From Dawn Brown in honor of David and Karen Scharf

Lifetime Memberships

All lifetime memberships go to the Permanent Fund. Lifetime individual membership is only \$500 and it is fitting that it goes to the long-run benefit of ABAS. The Permanent Fund principal can never be spent. Similar to an endowment, the goal is that investment proceeds can be spent as the Board of Directors determines. Any donation throughout the year can be directed towards the Permanent Fund as well.

Local Bird Hikes

Due to the ongoing coronavirus outbreak, all of these events are subject to cancellation. Please check our website event calendar before attending an event to see if it might have been canceled.

Masks on Hikes

It is possible that masks might again be required for field trips and local hikes. Please follow the example of our leaders.

Eagle Creek Park

6515 Delong Road, Indianapolis, IN

Every Sunday, 9:00 am to 11:00 am

January 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

February 6, 13, 20, 27

Meet in front of the Ornithology Center.

Holliday Park

6363 Spring Mill Road

Indianapolis, IN

Third Tuesday of each month from 8:30 am

to 10:00 am

January 18

February 15

Meet in front of the Nature Center.

Cool Creek Park Bird Hikes

2000 East 151st Street, Carmel, IN

Every Saturday 8:30 am to 10:30 am

January 8, 15, 22, 29

February 5, 12, 19, 26

Join expert birder Keith Starling. Meet in the north parking lot past the Nature Center.

Cool Creek Park Beginning Bird Hikes

2000 East 151st Street, Carmel, IN

Every other Sunday 9:00 am to 11:00 am

January 9, 23

February 6, 20

**2nd, 3rd, 4th & 5th Wednesday from 9:00 am
to 11:00 am**

January 12, 19, 26

February 9, 16, 23

Meet in the parking lot at the bottom of the road by Cool Creek, past the Nature Center. This is a great opportunity for birdwatchers of all levels.

Strawtown Koteewi Park

12308 Strawtown Avenue

Noblesville, IN

**First Wednesday of each month from 9:00 am
to 11:00 am**

January 5, February 2

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

2021 ABAS Field Trips Review

By Chuck Anderson



Field trip participants at McCloud Nature Park courtesy of Chuck Anderson

In 2021, we were able to get back to regularly scheduled field trips. We did implement priority registration for ABAS members with attendance limits on most hikes. We quickly realized that birders were anxious to return to the outdoors as registration filled up quickly for most outings.

Our first event of the year was a January field trip to the Lakefront ably led by Scott Enochs. Highlights from that trip were sightings of a rare Spotted Towhee and an Iceland Gull in addition to a large variety of waterfowl. February brought our inaugural Great Backyard Bird Count Crawl in conjunction with the Cornell Lab of Ornithology worldwide Great Backyard Bird Count. A group of 9 birders bundled up and caravanned to four local parks where all birds were counted and then posted on eBird. Our most unusual sighting was two late-season Hermit Thrushes.

In March, 36 participants joined Chuck Anderson for an evening Woodcock Walk at West Park in Carmel. The group was rewarded by the calls and fly over of a Great Horned Owl soon followed by the sound of peenting Woodcock and views of their aerial displays and nearby landings. April was our annual outing to The Lye Creek Prairie Burn, aka "The Burn", in search of Smith's Longspurs. While the longspurs were not cooperative, we did see several Soras and Wilson's Snipes, a small flock of Pectoral Sandpipers, and a couple of Vesper Sparrows. Also in April, Wes Homoya led a bird hike at the newly established, and not yet open to the public, Sargent Road Nature Park in Indy. The best bird of the morning was a very accommodating Louisiana Waterthrush.



Short-eared Owl courtesy of Amy Hodson

May marked the beginning of Spring migration and two field trips were planned for the main purpose of viewing warblers and other migrants. Our first field trip was to Sodalis Nature Park where 12 birders were greeted by our leader, Scott Enochs. A total of 68 species were seen that morning including Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Prairie Warbler, both water-thrush species, and a Blue-headed Vireo. Our second field trip was to Muscatatuck National Wildlife Refuge led by ABAS Education Chair, Jessica Helmbold. The most notable sightings were a Yellow-breasted Chat and 6 species of flycatchers.



Kentucky Warbler courtesy of Amy Hodson

We broke for the summer then started the field trips back up in September with the first trip to McCloud Nature Park led by Roger Hedge. This was a park that most participants hadn't been to before. The best birds for the hike were Yellow-throated Vireos and a Gray-cheeked Thrush. Our second field trip was to Eagle Creek Park in search of warblers and other fall migrants. Randy and Lisa Vanderbilt, the field trip leaders, put us on 51 species including 18 warblers. Favorites for the morning were great views of Black-throated Blue Warbler and Golden-winged Warbler.

October began with a field trip to the Lye Creek Prairie Burn in search of fall sparrows and local residents. Laurie Voss led the full complement of 12 birders. A couple of the birders hoping to see "lifers" Horned Lark and Ring-necked Pheasant weren't disappointed as both were seen early on the trip. The best birds of the morning were Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, and seven species of sparrows including a single Lincoln Sparrow. The next outing was to Celery Bog Nature Area to look for migrating waterfowl. The previous year on the same date waterfowl were plentiful. However, this time birding was slow as most ducks and geese had yet to migrate into the area. Nevertheless, we were able to locate seven duck species, a single Greater White-fronted Goose, and several Horned Grebes.

Our last field trip for the year was to Goose Pond Fish & Wildlife Area in November when 14 birders met trip leader Bill Sharkey at noon at the Visitors Center. From there we carpooled to several locations in search of waterfowl, sparrows, and raptors. Bill worked hard to find our target birds and we were rewarded with sightings of Whooping Crane, Short-eared Owls, Snow Geese, and a Rough-legged Hawk in addition to other raptors and several duck species.

In December we set aside field trips in deference to the six scheduled Christmas Bird Counts taking place in our service area. Many of our members take part in one or more of those bird counts.

For 2022 we have a number of field trips already planned including two to three locations that ABAS hasn't visited in a number of years, including Summit Lake State Park and Atterbury Fish & Wildlife Area. As the details of the bird hikes are finalized, they will be posted on our website and in our monthly emails. As we've seen this past year, field trips can fill quickly so to ensure your spot, early registration is encouraged.

Good Birding in 2022!

County Birding Around the ABAS Service Area – Hancock County

By Adam Wilson

Hancock County, Indiana is Marion County's east-adjacent neighbor. Coming from Indianapolis, you will notice the large buildings fade behind you as the corn and bean fields flow over the oncoming horizon. Of course, fields can hold many different species of birds and are worth checking out. However, I plan on highlighting some of my favorite parks, nature preserves, and a few "odd locations" that some newer birders might not even consider.

Parks

Beckenholdt Family Park

Beckenholdt Family Park is Hancock County's most accessible park. The one-mile paved loop trail, accessible facilities, and shelter rental make this location great for all types of gatherings. An accessible observation tower is currently being constructed and should be completed by summer 2022.

ABAS has assisted us with funding a bird housing project at this park as well as a Chimney Swift tower that was erected in 2021. It is soon to have streaming video for the breeding season. This 75-acre park boasts 142 listed species over the last five years thanks to its diversity in habitats.

<https://www.greenfieldin.org/component/content/article/107/164-beckenholdtpark>



Tree Swallow surveys Beckholdt Park, one of the primary species utilizing the nest boxes installed by Adam and Sara Wilson with funding from the Amos Butler Audubon Society's NAS Collaborative Funding. Photo courtesy of Adam Wilson.

Brandywine Park

Brandywine Park is a sports complex covering 60 acres nestled along Brandywine Creek. There are a number of walking trails along the creek, tucked into the wooded area which hugs the west edge of the park. The soccer fields also make for nice feeding for Northern Flickers, Canada Geese, and hunting grounds for local raptors.

<https://www.greenfieldin.org/component/content/article/107/165-brandywinepark>

Preserves

Jacob Schramm Nature Preserve

Jacob Schramm Nature Preserve is a mature woods on 31 acres that seems to arise out of the surrounding farm fields as you drive down County Road 600 West near New Palestine. An easy loop trail takes you through the property, which features American basswood, beech, and hornbeam, along with shagbark hickory, slippery elm, sugar maple, and sycamore trees. This location is very close to the Marion/Hancock County border. This preserve has been protected under the Central Indiana Land Trust since 1999.

<https://conservingindiana.org/preserves/jacob-schramm-nature-preserve/>

Thornwood Nature Preserve

Thornwood Nature Preserve is a 40 acre woodland for nature lovers. The preserve features a number of trails for hiking, a campground (weekends only, a staff member must be present), a diversity of habitats, wildlife, birds, and native flora and fauna. Coming in the year 2022 is a nature center that is sure to highlight local species and information about the preserve and surrounding grounds.

<https://www.greenfieldin.org/component/content/article/107-content/171-thornwood-preserve>

Unusual Locations:

Mount Comfort Airport/Indy Jet

Many Hancock County birders know of Mount Comfort Airport being a great spot to bird in the winter months. There really isn't any place to hike so it makes for good car-birding. Also, the wide-open spaces, as well as a well-maintained seed pile, helps to draw in a number of winter species. Some of the birds that are seen here during colder months are Short-eared Owl, Snow Bunting, Lapland Longspur, the ever-present Horned Lark, Mourning Dove, and European Starling. Four years ago, not just one, but two Snowy Owls showed up on the same day. Maybe we will get one this year!

Shirley Sanitation Ponds

There is not much open water outside of neighborhood retention ponds and industrial parks, which are quickly springing up all around the county. One of the few exceptions is a Wastewater Treatment Plant near Wilkinson and Shirley. The area is fenced off, but you can view a good amount of the water from the south-adjacent road, E 650 N. A wide variety of waterfowl have stopped here over the years. As an eBird Hotspot, this location has racked up just under 100 species. Quite impressive for such a small section of land and water.

If you would like to keep up with what birds are being seen around Hancock County, search for "Greenfield Birders" on Facebook. Many local birders post recent sightings and we offer two bird outings per month at local parks from April through October. Happy New Year and #BirdOn.



(Top) Black-billed Cuckoo at Thornwood Nature Preserve courtesy of Adam Wilson. (Above) Tennessee Warbler at Thornwood Nature Preserve courtesy of Adam Wilson. (Left) Lapland Longspurs at Mount Comfort Airport/IndyJet courtesy of Adam Wilson.

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

Two-year individual membership \$45

One-year household membership \$40

Two-year household membership \$75

Lifetime individual membership \$500

Lifetime membership goes to Permanent Fund

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

E-mail (required) _____

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

Amos Butler Audubon Society

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Rob Ripma, *Past President and Executive Committee*

Ted Meyer, *Treasurer, Executive Committee, Membership Chair, Website Coordinator*

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Additional Committee Chairs:

Donna McCarty, *Birdathon Chair*

Jessica Helmbold, *Education Chair*



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

Visit our website:

www.amosbutleraudubon.org

**Sign up for the online LifeLines at
info@amosbutleraudubon.org**