

2023 BIRDATHON REPORT

*Bluebirds are one
of numerous species
that may be adversely
impacted by
climate change*



Exceeding our goal in 2023

While the 2023 Birdathon saw a smaller grant request than the past few years, our amazing donors and volunteers set out to raise \$29,040 to fund eight different grants ranging from research studies to habitat restoration. Thanks to all of their hard work we were able to exceed that goal and raise \$30,765 which allowed us to fully fund all eight grants and preserve a healthy carryover of nearly \$10,000 for next year's grant requests. This year, we continue to partner with American Bird Conservancy and their wonderful work in the Central Andes Birdscape in Columbia. Keep Indianapolis Beautiful is creating a new green space on the near East Side of Indianapolis. Our long-time partner, Marian University EcoLab, is continuing habitat restoration work. Research studies at Indiana University are focusing on both common species like American Robins as well as how some species are reacting to climate change. Additional research projects at Ball State are continuing the excellent research of Cerulean Warblers led by Dr. Kamal Islam. Finally Camp Utopia was able to offer an expanded camp this year which was well attended and a great success. Twelve teams participated in this year's Birdathon and the Noddy Little Gulls were again the champions for most species seen at 141. The Carbon Neutral Team came in a very close second with 139 species — an impressive feat for a human powered Big Day. Bud & Carl's Legacy Team also tallied 139 species and was the top fundraising team with an impressive \$5,110.50 raised. Be sure to read the tales of their Big Day events as well as those of our other nine teams.

A sincere thank you to all of our generous Birdathon donors and our dedicated volunteers

*from Chandler Roberts, Birdathon Chair, members of
the Birdathon Committee, and the Board of Directors
of the Amos Butler Audubon Society. The funding
of these wonderful projects would not be possible
without your efforts and generosity.*

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Joseph & Mary Gula	April Sterling	
Cara Hasselbeck	Stephen & Susan Nawrocki	

Volunteers who raised Birdathon donations

\$1,000 or more	Keith Starling	Mary Ellen Gadsdi	Wes Homoya
Wendy Kindig	Janet Tuten	Barbara Jablonski	Logan Lakins
Donna McCarty	Laurie Voss	Matthew K.	John Munshower
Randy &	\$500 to \$999	\$100 to \$499	Jenna McElroy
Deb Patrick	Lou Anne Barriger	Mike Bishop	Jeremiah Oden
Chandler Roberts	Dave Benson	Jeanette Frazier	Doug Sherow
Greg Silver	Linda Bishop	Becky Heck	Marty Williams

Corporate Sponsors:

\$2,000 Wild Birds Unlimited. 4040 East 82nd Street, Indianapolis

\$1,500 CRG RESIDENTIAL 805 City Center Drive, Suite 160, Carmel, IN

\$300 Eco Logic LLC, 8695 W. Vernal Pike, Bloomington, IN

Special Contributors:

Janet Tuten, Birdathon Database Curator
Mary Ellen Gadsdi, International Projects Coordinator

1st-Place Fundraising Champs: Bud & Carl's Legacy Team




Team members: (l-r): Fred Wooley, Janet Tuten, Keith Starling and Matthew K.

Planning, Fundraising and Execution

By Keith Starling

The Bud and Carl Legacy Team had another great Birdathon in 2023. Our Birdathon is broken down into three components. Planning, fundraising and execution. Planning is the decision-making phase and consists of determining when we go, early or late with Mother's Day being the midpoint, which direction we take, north starting at the lake front and south being Goose Pond, and which birding spots we visit based on the route taken. These decisions are best made over several breaded cheese tenderloins at Muldoon's in Carmel. Fundraising is done by each individual team member and coordinated by our team member webmaster who maintains our presence on social media and does an excellent job (thanks Patty). The final phase of the Birdathon is execution where we start the clock and bird the state living out the decisions made in the preparation phase.

This year we decided to go early and north with Beverley Shores being the site to experience the dawn chorus. It is always exhilarating to greet the sunrise up on Lake Michigan. A few of the birding spots we visited included Michigan City Harbor, the Indiana Dunes, Willow Slough, Cowles Bog, and Kankakee Sands. We had a great day for sparrows, but a disappointing day for warbler species. The total for the Birdathon was 139 species, just slightly better than our 2022 total.

The postmortem on our Birdathon is still in process but the preliminary findings are that although we may have gone a few days early and need to tweak (not twerk) the birding spots, the Birdathon was as it always is, a great and exhilarating process, bonding with good friends, visiting beautiful parts of the state and raising money to fund grants to enrich our bird populations and the environments birds depend on. 

2nd-Place Fundraising Champs and Species Count Champs: Noddy Little Gulls



Team members (l-r): Jeremiah Oden, Laurie Voss, Wendy Kindig, and Lou Anne Barriger,

It's Always a Challenge but also a Great Adventure


By Laurie Voss

For the Noddy Little Gulls this year, May 9th started with a challenge. How to get into Eagle Creek Park when the ranger's key didn't open the lock at the gate. With ingenuity we got in but too late to get the Whip-poor-will. However, we had a great morning spent in the park getting over 110 birds. Then our team of four traveled on to Prophetstown State Park and Celery Bog. Prophetstown was "profitable" with some good grassland birds, but Celery Bog disappointed again this year; not even a Pied-billed Grebe. Thus, began challenge #2.

The group traveled up to Kankakee Sands to continue our quest for shorebirds, rails, and sparrows. Kankakee did not disappoint, and we were able to get 12 species of sparrows, two rail species, plus other grassland birds. The "scrape" that was so bountiful with shorebirds last year only had three species. But we had a great stop at another small pond. Two of us commented that we had seen a Yellow-breasted Chat and Bell's Vireo there before and stepping out of the car, they responded on cue.

We searched for a Pied-billed Grebe in all water areas and looked for a Black-capped Chickadee (Challenge #3) in all wooded areas down through Willow Slough. No Chickadees anywhere but finally found a grebe in a small pond. Continuing south, as the sun was setting, we stopped in little towns on the way and finally added a House Finch and Eurasian Collared Dove at dusk.

We ended our great adventure where we began—at the gate to Eagle Creek where we heard our last bird, a Barred Owl—number 141.

We want to share our appreciation to our sponsors who generously donated to the Birdathon. Your support and donations encourage us to go out every year. Thank you! 


3rd-Place Fundraising Champs: Team Carbon Neutral



Team members (l-r): Dave Benson, Spencer Goehl, and Wes Homoya

A New Carbon Neutral Record!

By David Benson

This year, team Carbon Neutral, consisting of regulars Wesley Homoya and David Benson and new recruit, Spencer Goehl, hit the road on May 15th in our quest to beat our previous record for the most species identified in 24 hours under human power. Months of intense practice and rigorous training paid off with a stunning total: 139. Our team began the 24-hour adventure strong with 70 species including 16 warblers in the late afternoon at Starkey Park in Zionville adding to that a Lark Sparrow at Overly Warman Park. Then our luck stalled moving on to Browning Marsh and several other spots with only a few (Common Nighthawk, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Great Horned Owl) of the species we were hunting for. The pre-dawn ride to Eagle Creek was a peaceful start to the frenetic morning that was to come. Wesley picked out one warbler after another to reach 29 species including Connecticut, Mourning, and Canada. But what really pushed us into record territory was the waterfowl and shorebird diversity at the north end of ECP such as teal, Semipalmated Plover and Sandpiper, and two species of tern. Thanks to our sponsors for their support of team Carbon Neutral! 

"We want to share our appreciation to our sponsors who generously donated to the Birdathon. Your support and donations encourage us to go out every year. Thank you!"

Laurie Voss, Noddy Little Gulls



Team members: (starting 3rd from left) Deb Patrick, Chandler Roberts, and Dave Benson. Not pictured, Randy Patrick. Two Marian University students, Ryan and Alex, birded with the team for part of the day.

EcoLab Team Too Early for Warblers

By David Benson

On May 2, the EcoLab Team consisting of Chandler Roberts, Debby and Randy Patrick, and David Benson began their 24 hours of birding the Marian University campus in Indianapolis with a great start when Deb Patrick identified a Red-shouldered Hawk. But after an hour or two of seeing all the usual suspects, we had the slowly dawning realization that perhaps we were too early in the season to find many migrants. We did well, ending up with 65 species, but had very few of the migrants we were hoping for. Highlights comprised 9 warblers including Pine and a beautiful male Hooded, lots of sparrows including Swamp and Savannah and a Purple Finch. Thanks to our sponsors for their support of the EcoLab Team! 🐦



Dr. John Munshower,

Community Hospital Team In Memory of Dr. John Munshower

By Doug Sherow

We dedicated our Big Day in May 2023 to our dear friend and birding buddy Dr. John Munshower, who passed away in January not long after our Christmas bird count. We will miss his birding skills and camaraderie very much.

On May 16th, 2023 Doug Sherow, Paul Brandenburg, (our new birding pal), and Greg Steffen conducted our Big Day in May Bird Count. We piled into Greg's car to begin our Great Birdathon Adventure, birding the marina, the loops and seed pile area, as well as around the ice-skating ponds. Greg's best bird of the day was a great view of a Mourning Warbler.

From the Park, we headed south and west on I-70 to the Little Point exit in Morgan County where we birded around the Eminence area looking for grassland species. From there

it was on to the Ravinia Woods State Forest near Paragon finding lots of resident nesting warblers and some migrants. Paul expressed amazement at the variety of species that were to be found along these lightly travelled country roads.

We went south on SR67 to the Lingle Rd. wetlands which was not too productive. Next stop was the White River to check the large colony of over 250 Cliff Swallows which proved to be Paul's highlight of the day.

From the Cliff Swallow site, we headed east, to bird the Morgan-Monroe St. Forest, (MMSF). We found many passerines such as Hooded Warbler and Scarlet Tanager.

After MMSF we spent some time on foot at Riddle Point Park before heading further south to Stillwater Marsh. I commented that my best bird of the day was ferreting out our single American Kestrel.

When we decided we were done for the day, we headed back to Eagle Creek Park arriving about 5 p.m. Time birding about 5-1/2 hours. Transit about 3 Hours. Our mileage by car about 150 miles. On foot approximately 2 miles. The official tally was 107 species — a fine showing for an enjoyable day, and we are all looking forward to next year. 🐦

Team Bishop An Unexpected Raptor

By Michael & Linda Bishop



Team members: Mike and Linda Bishop

On May 10, 2023 we started the day slowly at Eagle Creek Park and after making the rounds, we had a lot of blanks left on our list. We did pick up several flycatchers, swallows and Fish Crow, but our warbler list was

very short. The highlight of our Eagle Creek effort was Olive-sided Flycatcher.

We then travelled toward Goose Pond FWA, picking up several species along the way, including American Kestrel, Red-headed Woodpecker and Wild Turkey. At Goose Pond, we started at the headquarters area and quickly added Dickcissel, Bobwhite, Savannah Sparrow and Grasshopper Sparrow. At the main pool, we added Black-necked Stilts, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and American Bittern. Our bird of the day was an unexpected Swainson's Hawk we flushed from a field south of Beehunter Marsh. On the drive back toward Indy in the dark, we still managed to add Common Nighthawk in Linton and a calling Barred Owl back at home. Despite missing several expected birds, we finished the day with a total of 114 species. Many thanks to our generous sponsors, and Amos Butler Audubon Society for promoting bird conservation. 🐦



Fledgling "ace" birder. Not pictured: team members Barbara, Mike and Wes Homoya.

Brownsburg Railsitters New Species for the Big Sit

By Wes Homoya

The Brownsburg Railsitter's 5th annual "bridge big sit" birdathon was held this year on May 5th, once again overlooking White Lick Creek in Hendricks County. As always, great fun and many smiles were had, birds and stories and facts about ABAS

were shared with passers-by (including an ace fledgling birder as seen in our "team pic"), and of course many avian delights and surprises were enjoyed. Notably, our first bird of the day was a calling Eastern Whip-poor-will (a first for the count), and our last bird of the day was a soaring Bald Eagle (just after another count first, a small kettle of Black Vultures). In all we saw 67 species this year. Another unforgettable experience and opportunity to raise support for some truly important causes. Thank you to all our friends and sponsors for joining us! 🐦

Mud Creek Creepers A New Record

By Ben Miller



Team members (l-r): Ben Miller, Maggie Miller, children Quinn and Ansel, Wes Homoya and Holly Miller

The Mud Creek Creepers 2nd annual birdathon was held this year on May 7th. The team enjoyed a "big sit" style count from a deck (and hot tub) overlooking Mud Creek and its riparian woodlands and wetlands protected by Mud Creek Conservancy in northeast Marion County. Spring migration was just beginning to ramp up and the woods were very active. We missed some usual suspects, but we were still able to blow past last year's total (50 species) with 74 species. With a wide range of birding experiences and expertise represented on the team, ranging from ornithologist to first time birder, the biggest joys came when members were able to see and learn about new bird species for the first time. Everyone got a "lifer" be it a warbler, tanager or nighthawk except for Wes (which is a greater challenge). However, for the first time in many years of birding Mud Creek with Mr. Homoya, he finally managed to avoid intimidating our resident owls into radio silence.

Having been a recipient of an ABAS Birdathon Grant

(Sargent Road Nature Park-Mud Creek Conservancy) in the past, I know just how impactful this effort can be and it's been rewarding to participate from the fundraising side as well. We hope to continue this fun tradition so this great organization can continue funding important projects for bird conservation. 🐦

Las Águilas Arpias Birds and Tenderloins



Team members:
Jeanette Frazier and
Elcira Villarreal

By Jeanette Frazier

This year Team Las Águilas Arpias stayed close to home, birding various locations in Hendricks and Marion Counties on May 8th and 9th. We discovered a total of 80 species primarily in the Eagle Creek Park area. Of note for us were three tern species, two Broad-winged Hawks circling overhead exhibiting great comparison of both adult and sub-adult plumages and an American Bittern. In addition to birding, we enjoyed our Hoosier tenderloins at the east side Historic Steer-In restaurant! We would like to thank all of our contributors for helping us raise funds to support Amos Butler Audubon's mission to promote the enjoyment and stewardship of the birds of Central Indiana. 🐦



Team members:
Logan and Kristina
Lakins

Birdquesters Swainson's Warbler Singing

By Logan Lakins

The Birdquesters continued their run as a two-person duo to end with their highest personal total to date, 135 species. This year's run was defined by some new species for our lifetime Birdathon totals. The day started out with a visit to a small residential pond in Lyons, IN where Black-bellied Whistling Ducks have taken root. We then headed to Greene-Sullivan State Forest to look for a Swainson's Warbler that had been found. Luckily, we ran into Scott Enochs, Ryan Sanderson and Mike Brown (who found the stray warbler) who were already listening and looking for it. We never got to see the bird, but we were happy enough to hear it call multiple times. Yet to be confirmed but we believe this is a species first for the ABAS Birdathon. Once again, thank you to all our family and friends who donated and a bigger thanks to the rest of the teams that continue to raise money for Indiana birds. 🐦

Team Nawrocki Starting the Day with Owls, Ending with Nighthawks



Team members (l-r):
Donna Riner, Aidan
Rominger, Jenna McElroy,
Heather McNamee,
Stephen Nawrocki, and
Susan Nawrocki

By Stephen Nawrocki

Team Nawrocki conducted its 2023 Birdathon on the evening of May 9 and continued throughout the day on May 10. To try something different this year, we decided to focus our efforts entirely on Eagle Creek Park and the immediately-surrounding areas of Indianapolis. This strategy would also allow us to include new park staff members Aidan Rominger and Donna Riner. We started the first evening by relocating some nesting Great Horned Owls in Broad Ripple, then early the next morning we heard a Barred Owl on our way to the park. Once there, we flushed a Whip-poor-will as the sun was rising. From there, our various team members joined and left as their work schedules permitted. We hit the woods adjacent to the Skating Pond first, then hit the Marina and the Beach; thanks to alerts from Don Gorney and Ryan Sanderson, we located a Red-necked grebe, Caspian and Common Terns, Bonaparte's Gull, Mute Swan, and a Common Loon on the water. From there we focused on the woods to the east of the reservoir, picking off 17 warbler species, Chat, and Yellow-billed Cuckoo before noon. Despite the beautiful day, bird activity dropped more than we expected after 1:00 pm, and we struggled to find new species. Because the water levels were high in the park, we moved north into the construction areas along I-65 and picked up four sandpiper species. Our last bird (for the third year in a row) was a nighthawk as we drove through the city. Overall, we recorded 119 species, better than average for our team. Thanks to our sponsors and to Aidan and Donna for joining us! 🐦

Team Wild Birds Unlimited A Day Full of Highlights!

By John Schaust



Team members (l-r): Brian
Cunningham, John Schaust,
and Amy Moore

Our big day started around 6:30 a.m. at the Eagle Creek Marina, and like last year, it would be an understatement to say that the

next two hours were nothing short of amazing. The marina lived up to its reputation again as we tallied 71 species including 17 warblers (including Canada Warbler!) along with multiple thrushes, vireos, woodpeckers, and flycatchers. A highlight was finding a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher putting the finishing touches on its well camouflaged nest.

The remainder of the morning found us birding many of the other Eagle Creek hotspots. The Skating Pond produced a Wilson's Warbler and a nest-building Baltimore Oriole, while other areas in the park gave us great views of Yellow-breasted Chat, Prairie Warbler, Blue-headed Vireo, and numerous other sought-after species.

Not a bad morning — and our hopes were high for an equally productive afternoon. It did not disappoint!

A quick trip along the Exercise Trail produced the ever-elusive Connecticut Warbler along with excellent views of Kentucky and Hooded Warblers.

But the best highlights of the day came at the very end! With all the recent excitement about a shorebird puddle in Johnson County, the decision was made to take a chance and head east. It paid off. We tallied 10 new species including awesome looks (and photos) of Red-necked Phalarope, White-rumped and Spotted Sandpiper and Dunlin among others. The nearby Indianapolis Regional Airport capped off the day with Savannah Sparrow, Horned Lark, and Eastern Meadowlarks.

Our team had a great day with some awesome highlights and a respectable total of 122 species. A tip of our hats to our newest team member, Amy Moore. This was her first Birdathon and she quickly became a valuable (and fun) member of our team!

We would like to thank our families for their support of our passion for birding. And a special thank you to all our wonderful donors. We truly appreciate your support for our team and the important projects funded by the ABAS Birdathon! 🐦

*Congratulations to all of our
2023 Birdathon teams*

Official 2023 Birdathon Team Species Counts

- 141 **Noddy Little Gulls:** Lou Anne Barriger, Wendy Kindig, Jeremiah Oden, Laurie Voss
- 139 **Bud's & Carl's Legacy Team:** Matthew K., Keith Starling, Patty Steffen, Janet Tuten, Marty Williams, Fred Wooley
- 139 **Carbon Neutral:** Dave Benson, Wes Homoya, Spencer Goehl
- 135 **BirdQuesters:** Logan Lakins, Kristina Lakins
- 122 **Wild Birds Unlimited:** Brian Cunningham, Amy Moore, John Schaust
- 119 **Team Nawrocki:** Jenna McElroy, Heather McNamee, Barbara and Stephen Nawrocki
- 114 **Team Bishop:** Mike and Linda Bishop
- 107 **Community Hospital Team:** Paul Brandenburg, Doug Sherow, Greg Steffen
- 83 **EcoLab Team:** David Benson, Debbie Patrick, Randy Patrick, Chandler Roberts
- 80 **Las Águilas Arpias:** Jeanette Frazier, Elcira Villarreal
- 74 **Mud Creek Creepers:** Wes Homoya, Becky McClain, Ben Miller
- 67 **Brownsburg Railsitters:** Barbara Homoya, Mike Homoya, Wes Homoya