

INDIANA DUNES AREA BIRD REPORT: FALL 2011

Kenneth J. Brock- Chesterton, IN

The lakefront's autumn 2011 flight was rather odd. September brought few of the anticipated songbirds and November yielded a dearth of the strong frontal systems that in past years have rendered the eleventh month a birding treasure. Despite these shortcomings, most lakefront birders enjoyed an interesting, but less than memorable, fall migration.

Rarities

Autumn highlights included Barn Owl, Western Wood-Pewee, California Gull, and five Long-tailed Jaegers.

Early Arrivals

Ross' Goose, Cackling Goose, Surf Scoter, Red-necked Grebe, and Sabine's Gull.

Tardy Migrants

Broad-winged Hawk, Northern Parula, Blue Grosbeak, Dickcissel, and Bobolink.

Alternative Lakewatches

For decades Hoosier birders have conducted Lake Michigan watches on days with brutally strong northerly winds; indeed, it is generally agreed that the stronger the north winds the better. That philosophy was tested on 29 October when a group of out of state birders spent much of the day (6:40AM to 1:15PM) at Miller Beach with single-digit west winds and bright sunshine. On that occasion Sean Fitzgerald (IL), Aaron Boone (WI), Caleb Putnam (MI), Tom Prestby (WI), and Curtis Dykstra (MI) generated a spectacular list that included: a Sabine's Gull (one of two for the season), three jaegers, two Red Crossbills, and a Common Redpoll. Are we missing some great opportunities?

The 2011 Fall Migration

Throughout early September large warbler numbers were reported in the southern half of the state (on the 7th Ethan Maynard counted 13 species in Lebanon and on the 8th Amy Kearns tallied 111 warblers of a dozen species in Mitchell). In contrast, relatively few migrant warblers were seen in the northern tier.

Apparently, the strong northerly winds of this period allowed many birds to overfly the northern half of Indiana.

The table below summarizes the lakefront's fall migration by bird groups using a parameter known as the Migration Index (MI, definition appended). Numbers in the table reveal unusually strong flights for hawks and sparrows and woefully feeble movements for gulls, thrushes, and Loons/Grebes.

Group	MI/species	Group	MI/species
Ducks	+0.05	Flycatchers	-0.06
Loons/Grebes	-0.22	Vireos	-0.19
Hérons	-0.13	Swallows	+0.09
Raptors	+0.29	Wrens	-0.10
Shorebirds	-0.10	Thrushes	-0.26
Gulls	-0.28	Warblers	-0.14
Terns	-0.13	Sparrows	+0.32

The Season in Perspective

August

As often occurs in the dog days of late summer, August was warm, averaging about 1°F above normal. The Yellow-headed Blackbirds that nested at the Grant Street wetland were documented 4 August when John C. Kendall photographed a female feeding a fledgling. The season's first movement on Lake Michigan occurred on the 6th, yielding Piping Plover, American Avocet, and Whimbrel at Miller Beach. On the ninth John K. Cassady and John C. Kendall were astonished when an Upland Sandpiper landed in the USX impoundment (this prairie shorebird is exceedingly rare on the lakefront). Saturday the 20th delivered an Avocet plus a nice flock of 15 Willets to Miller Beach. Hoosier Prairie's persistent Western Wood-Pewee was still present on 19 August and the season's first Buff-breasted Sandpiper arrived at Miller Beach on the 23rd. A promising cool front on the 25th produced no movement on Lake Michigan, but a pair of Mississippi Kites, discovered in LaPorte Co, just outside the Dunes area on 26 August, provided a

“Code-10” excitement level. Miller Beach was the center of activity on the 27th when Jeffrey J. McCoy logged the season’s first jaegers, along with four Red Knots, a record early Red-necked Grebe, and an early Sabine’s Gull. On 29 August a perched juvenile Mississippi Kite was photographed near the site at which the previous kites two were seen.

September (first half)

The first two days of September had 90° temperatures plus muggy Gulf Coast humidity. On the 2nd two Olive-sided Flycatchers and eleven warbler species, were seen in the Hammond Sanctuary. An approaching frontal system on 3 September produced a fine day at Miller Beach. Highlights included Hudsonian Godwit, Long-tailed Jaeger, and Whimbrel. On the following two days the lakefront was awash with jaegers; Pete Grube et al., counted at least nine on the 4th. Other goodies reported that day included Whimbrel, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, and Laughing Gull. The 5th was even better with 15 jaegers, a Little Gull, and a record early Surf Scoter at Miller Beach, plus a Long-tailed Jaeger at Dunes State Park. A subsequent study of a Ryan Sanderson photo revealed that one of the 5 Sep Miller Beach jaegers was in fact a juvenile Long-tailed (see Sanderson photo). A mid-day frontal passage on the 13th delivered a Buff-breasted Sandpiper and two more jaegers to Miller Beach. The autumn’s best warbler movement occurred on the 14th, when 21 species, including the season’s first Mourning, were tallied at the Hammond Sanctuary.

September (second half)

The NIMBA Big Sit, conducted at the green tower site on a beautiful 17 September day, yielded 64 species including Cackling Goose, Bald Eagle, and American Golden-Plover. Surprisingly, on the 20th Gene Coleman found a Ross’s Goose in a Hobart Canada Goose flock. Weather for the next week was dominated by a jet stream “cut off,” which generated a stationary “low” over southern Lake Michigan that created rain and cool conditions. A rainy Saturday the 24th yielded a count of 19 warbler species, good vireo numbers, plus a Clay-colored Sparrow. A late season passerine surge occurred on the 28th when 20 warbler species and the season’s first Nelson’s Sparrow occurred in the traps. A fine

cold front that arrived late on the 29th terminated this lengthy “frontless” period. Its arrival brought a Red-necked Phalarope and the season’s first Dunlins. Gale-force winds the following day produced two Red-necked Phalaropes, twelve jaegers, including two adult Long-taileds, at Miller Beach, plus a Laughing Gull at Michigan City Harbor. September temperatures were 2.4°F below normal and precipitation was near average.

October (first half)

The first ten days of this segment were warm with highs above 70°F and many days reaching 80°F. During this interval Chicago established a record number of October sunny days. Accordingly, there were southerly winds, no frontal passages, and little migration. The best sighting was an 8 October Harris’ Sparrow that Penny Starin discovered on the Cowles Bog dike. On the 13th a record late Northern Parula was photographed at West Beach. This spell of pristine weather ended on the 14th when a front with westerly following winds finally arrived, bringing a nice duck flight, a strong passerine movement, and an unidentified jaeger. This segment’s final day yielded a flock of 37 Surf Scoters, along with the following species: Broad-winged Hawk, American Avocet, Lesser Black-backed Gull, and Clay-colored Sparrow.

October (second half)

The second half of October was launched in fine style when Brendan J. Grube found a Harris’ Sparrow at the Kemil Road lot on 16 October. A deep low-pressure cell passed east of the Dunes area on the 19th and 20th, bringing rain and storm-force northerly winds. These roaring gales delivered to Miller Beach an adult Parasitic Jaeger on the 19th and two adults Parasitics, plus two Long-tailed Ducks, the following day. With the assistance of Ranger Kyle Hudick, John C. Kendall photographed an adult Harris’ Sparrow at West Beach on the 21st. A weak hawk flight at West Beach on Saturday the 22nd included a juvenile Golden Eagle, the season’s first Rough-legged Hawk, and an adult Bald Eagle. The autumn’s first Northern Shrike was seen in Beverly Shores on the 25th. The following day a first-cycle Harris’ Sparrow visited at the Brock feeder in Chesterton. October 29 yielded one of the lakefront’s most memorable birding

days. Highlights, among many good sightings, included: Northern Goshawk, Sabine's Gull, jaegers, Short-eared Owl, Long-eared Owl, Northern Shrike, Le Conte's Sparrow, Red Crossbill, and Common Redpoll. On the 31st John K. Cassady photographed two more Shrikes in Beverly Shores. For the month temperatures averaged 2.4°F below normal and precipitation was an inch lower than average.

November (first third)

The absence of significant fronts during this segment resulted in precious few rarities. However, on 3 November Michael Topp and John C. Kendall did record a heavy duck movement along with the season's first Kittiwakes and Harlequin Ducks, plus eight Franklin's Gulls at Miller Beach. The best birds on Saturday the 5th included an adult male White-winged Scoter found by Leland Shaum's group at Miller Beach and a Lesser Black-backed Gull seen by Jeffrey J. McCoy at Michigan City Harbor. On 7 November John C. Kendall tallied the season's largest Pine Siskin count (48), along with three Redpolls, at Ogden Dunes. Expectations were high for a front that passed on the 10th, but the associated flight was minimal. Observations included a Red-necked Grebe and Franklin's Gull at Miller Beach, plus a tardy Sedge Wren migrant at Ogden Dunes.

November (second third)

Weather during this segment was dominated by stiff southerly winds, which stifled bird movement on Lake Michigan; despite this disadvantage, several interesting observations were logged. Amar Ayyash photographed the seldom seen Laughing X Ring-billed Gull hybrid in Indiana waters off Calumet Park, IL on the 11th. Reinforcing the legend of "Magic McCoy," Jeffrey J. McCoy was afield the following day and, much to the delight of a small army of lakefront birders, discovered a Barn Owl near Portage Lakefront Park. On the 14th John C. Kendall photographed an adult California Gull (the season's only report) among the gulls at Michigan City Harbor. Highlights on Saturday the 19th (another south wind day) included Snow and Ross' Geese, a Red-necked Grebe, plus a single Red Crossbill. On the final day of this segment Jeffrey J. McCoy identified a juvenile Parasitic Jaeger at Michigan City Harbor.

November (final third)

On 23 November John C. Kendall found the autumn's only Purple Sandpiper on the Michigan City jetty. Birders afield on the 25th were awed by an unprecedented Snow Goose flight with more than 1700 migrating birds reported by three separate parties. At least five Ross's Geese were among the Snow Goose flocks. Accompanying the geese was a nice passerine movement that included approximately 1100 Snow Buntings and 300 Lapland Longspurs. A very promising front on the 27th generated little movement on the lake; highlights included the fall's best Red-throated Loon count (12) and two Red-necked Grebes. The season's most powerful front arrived on the 29th. The 40+ knot NE winds (Chicago reported 60 knot gusts) delivered a record six Pomarine Jaegers to Miller Beach and Brendan J. Grube found a Little Gull at the Port of Indiana. On the season's final day Patti Topp spotted a Kittiwake during a chumming effort at the Port of Indiana. Overall, November was 4.6°F warmer than average with typical precipitation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Special thanks to Susan R. Bagby for her meticulous proofing of an early draft of this manuscript. Thanks to John K. Cassady, Peter B. Grube, John C. Kendall, Landon Neumann, and Ryan J. Sanderson for sharing their world-class photos.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

GEESE

Cackling Goose:- A record early fall arrival flew past the green tower site (Dunes S.P.) on 17 Sep (Brendan J. Grube & John K. Cassady). The next earliest Cackling Goose occurred 29 Sep 2007.

Snow Goose:- Friday 25 Nov delivered a record flight to the lakefront. The day's reports included (325) at Michigan City Harbor, Beverly Shores Lakefront, and Dunes S.P. (John K. Cassady, Cathy Meyer, & Randall J. Pals); (400) at the green tower site (John C. Kendall), and (1020) at Miller Beach (John K. Cassady & Michael Topp). The

lakefront's previous maximum single party count was 492 at Dunes S.P. and West Beach on 4 November 2005 and the TYM=198.

Ross's Goose:- On 20 Sep Gene Coleman photographed (1) at a small Hobart pond. This is the lakefront's first September record and earliest fall arrival date. Two accompanied a migrating Snow Goose flock that flew southward over Ogden Dunes on 19 Nov (John K. Cassady & John C. Kendall). Associated with the massive Snow Goose flight on 25 Nov Jeffrey J. McCoy & Michael Topp counted two Ross's at Miller Beach and John C. Kendall photographed three at Dunes State Park.

DUCKS

This group fared reasonably well with an average MI/species of +0.05. Except for Harlequins, sea ducks made the poorest showing; Black Scoters and Long-tailed Ducks were unusually scarce. Both the dabblers and bay ducks appeared in typical numbers.

Harlequin Duck:- On 3 Nov a "wave of Harleys" blitzed the lakefront. Singleton flybys were seen at Michigan City Harbor (eastbound male at 8:30 AM, KJB) and Miller Beach: an eastbound imm male at 8:45AM (John C. Kendall) and an adult male in the afternoon (Michael Topp). Surprisingly, there were no subsequent reports.

Surf Scoter:- A subadult male flew past Miller Beach on 5 Sep (Jeffrey J. McCoy, Amar Ayyash, & Steve Doud), establishing a new early arrival date for the state (by 17 days).

Black Scoter:- The fall count of 33 is the lowest fall total in eleven years (TYM=130).

Long-tailed Duck:- Only four were reported for the season (TYM=11.8). Two seen during a 20 Oct lakewatch at Miller Beach (John K. Cassady, et al.) provided the state's sixth earliest fall arrival date.

Ruddy Duck:- A fine count of (38) Ruddys at Miller Beach on 9 Nov (John C. Kendall), elevated the 2011 season total to a fall record 116 (TYM=29.2).

LOONS & GREBES

Every species except Pied-billed and Red-necked Grebes were in negative territory. The average MI/species of -0.22, was also lowered by the absence of Western Grebe and a poor Common Loon flight.

Red-throated Loon:- Fall numbers were unusually low with only 39 reported for the entire season (TYM=59.3). This is the lakefront's lowest fall total since 2000.

Common Loon:- The 585 birds counted this fall is the lakefront's lowest number reported in seven years (TYM=1987).

Horned Grebe:- An early arriving migrant at Miller Beach on 19 Aug (Michael Topp) provided Indiana's fourth earliest arrival date. Remarkably, (2) alternate-plumed birds were present the following day (John K. Cassady, Susan R. Bagby, Randall J. Pals, & KJB).

Red-necked Grebe:- An adult flew past Miller Beach on 27 Aug (Jeffrey J. McCoy), providing the state's earliest arrival date and first ever August record.

Western Grebe:- For the first fall since 2003 this grebe was not reported on the Indiana lakefront (TYM=2.3).

BITTERNS, HERONS & EGRETS

This fall the American Bittern, Little Blue Heron, and Cattle Egret all went unreported on the lakefront. The remaining species fared reasonably well, giving an average MI/species of -0.13.

Snowy Egret:- Matt Kalwasinski found (2) at the Chase St. wetland, Gary on 5 Sep; one was still present on 10 Sep (Edward M. Hopkins).

Little Blue Heron:- Not reported on the lakefront this fall. This small heron has now gone unreported in five of the last six autumn flights. Little Blues may well be in trouble.

Cattle Egret:- Not reported on the lakefront for the second consecutive fall (TYM=0.7).

DIURNAL RAPTORS

It was a fine autumn for diurnal raptors with an average MI/species of +0.29. Of the 14 species reported only the Osprey and Rough-legged Hawk had negative MI values.

Osprey:- Surprisingly, only three birds were reported on the lakefront this fall (TYM=8.4). This is the lowest fall total since 1999.

*Mississippi Kite:- Two unaged birds were observed flying just outside boundaries of the Dunes area (by less than 2 miles) in Coolspring Township, LaPorte Co on 26 Aug (Lynea S. Hinchman). On the 29 Aug Erik Troske photographed a juvenile perched in this same area raising the possibility of local nesting. These observations constitute the first county records and only the second fall reports for the northern tier.

Broad-winged Hawk:- Four different reports yielded 15 birds, which is the lakefront's third highest fall tally (TYM=4.5). The largest count occurred during the 17 Sep "Big Sit," when (9) were logged at the Dunes S.P. green tower site (John K. Cassady, John C. Kendall, et al.). An adult flying over Forsythe Park on 15 Oct (John K. Cassady) provided the lakefront's second latest fall record.

Golden Eagle:- A juv at West Beach on 22 Oct (John C. Kendall) constituted the only report.

Merlin:- Lakefront birders experienced a fine flight with 10 birds reported (TYM=5.4). This is the lakefront's second highest fall count.

Common Gallinule:- It was a better than average fall for this wetland specialist with 15 reported (TYM=9.8). The peak count was (12) at Grant St. wetland on 9 Aug (Randall J. Pals).

SHOREBIRDS

Although the diversity was fairly good, with 30 species reported, the overall shorebird flight was once again below par. A major negative was high water levels at McCool Basin throughout most of the season, which seriously limited habitat availability. The average MI/species was -0.10. Marbled Godwit, Long-billed Dowitcher, and Red Phalarope went

unreported this fall and Golden-Plovers were decidedly scarce. Pleasant surprises included the appearance of an Upland Sandpiper, a Wilson's Phalarope, and a record Red-necked Phalarope flight.

Black-bellied Plover:- Poor numbers occurred on the lakefront with only 28 birds (11 adults, 10 juveniles, and 7 not aged) reported (TYM=56.2).

American Golden-Plover:- Only four were reported on the lakefront this autumn (TYM=15.4). This is the lowest fall total since 2000.

Piping Plover:- A banded juv, seen at Miller Beach on 6 Aug (John K. Cassady, m.ob.), provided the season's only report. This is the lakefront's lowest autumn count since 2001.

American Avocet:- It was a poor autumn for the popular shorebird with only three reported (TYM=8.1). See below table.

Avocet Records

No	Date	Location	Observer
1	6-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K. Cassady et
1	20-Aug	Miller Beach	R.J. Sanderson
1	15-Oct	Mich City	Barny Dunning

Willet:- See below table (TYM=68.3).

Willet Records

No	Date	Location	Observer
11	2-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K. Cassady
4	6-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K. Cassady et
4	13-Aug	Miller Beach	KJB et al.
4	17-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K. Cassady
15	20-Aug	Miller Beach	R.J. Sanderson
4	4-Sep	Miller Beach	Amar Ayyash
2	8-Sep	Miller Beach	Michael Topp

Upland Sandpiper:- On 9 Aug a migrant flew in off Lake Michigan and landed in the USX impoundment (John K. Cassady & John C. Kendall). This is only the lakefront's fourth record in the last dozen years.

Whimbrel:- See below table (TYM=6.8).

Whimbrel Records

No	Date	Location	Observer
1	6-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K Cassady
1	18-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K Cassady
1	20-Aug	Miller Beach	J.K Cassady
2	3-Sep	Miller Beach	J. J. McCoy
1	4-Sep	Miller Beach	J.C. Kendall

Hudsonian Godwit:- On 3 Sep a juvenile briefly landed on a sand spit at Miller Beach (Leland Shaum, John K. Cassady, m.ob.) before departing to the east. Events leading up to this sighting were most interesting. John Cassady had elected to hike down to the USX breakwall where Leland Shaum's group was stationed. As John headed back Leland asked him, "What are the odds of seeing a Hudsonian Godwit?" John facetiously replied, "100 percent." When John was about 200 yards away Leland radioed to inform John that a large shorebird had just landed on the beach behind him (Leland was looking eastward into the sun). John turned around and there, washed in perfect morning sunlight, stood a juvenile Hudsonian that had just arrived. This is the first occasion that this group had ever seen a Hudsonian Godwit land on the beach.

Ruddy Turnstone:- A profusion of migrant juveniles swept past Miller Beach lakewatchers on 27 Aug. The day's total of (46) included a single flock of (22) (Jeffrey J. McCoy, Michael Topp, Randall J. Pals, et al.). This tally constitutes Indiana's second highest fall count.

Red Knot:- The lakefront's only report consisted of (4) juveniles that Jeffrey J. McCoy saw fly past Miller Beach with Turnstones on 27 Aug (TYM=8.1).

Buff-breasted Sandpiper:- There were four reports, all involving singletons seen at Miller Beach: 23 Aug (KJB), 4 Sep (John C. Kendall), 11 Sep (Wes Serafin), & 13 Sep (Brad Bumgardner).

Long-billed Dowitcher:- Not reported on the lakefront for the second consecutive year (TYM=0.8).

Wilson's Phalarope:- On 21 Aug (1) flew into

the USX impoundment (John C. Kendall). This phalarope is quite rare on the lakefront in fall (TYM=0.3) and is almost never reported on Lake Michigan.

Red-necked Phalarope:- The season total of three birds is a record for the lakefront, where this species is the rarest phalarope (TYM=0.35). A frontal passage on the afternoon of 29 Sep carried a juvenile past Miller Beach (John C. Kendall & Michael Topp), providing the third lakefront bird in the last five years. Remarkably, even stronger winds the following day produced (2) juvs at the same site (John K. Cassady, Robert Hughes, Marty Jones, John C. Kendall, Jeffrey J. McCoy, Michael Topp, & KJB).

GULLS

Following the pattern of recent autumns it was another below normal season for gulls. Among the 12 species logged the average MI/species was -0.28. Iceland Gull was not reported and Franklin's and Sabines were quite scarce. The only really positive *Larid* report was an influx of Laughing Gulls that generated the best flight in six years.

Black-legged Kittiwake:- The season's first arrivals consisted of (3) juvs at Miller Beach on 3 Nov (Michael Topp). The only other report was attracted to a 30 Nov feeding frenzy at the Port of Indiana (Patti Topp, m.ob.).

Sabine's Gull:- The two reported this fall is far below the TYM of 7.2. An early juvenile flew past Miller Beach, in the company of a Common Tern flock, on 27 Aug (Jeffrey J. McCoy), tying Indiana's second earliest arrival date. At the other end of the season another juv was seen off Miller Beach on 29 Oct (Sean Fitzgerald, Aaron Boone, Caleb Putnam, Tom Prestby, & Curtis Dykstra).

Little Gull:- The lakefront's first report since 2009 occurred 5 Sep when Jeffrey J. McCoy observed a juv off Miller Beach. A rather pale first-cycle bird was discovered at the Port of Indiana on 29 Nov (Brendan J. Grube). Peter B. Grube obtained excellent flight photos of the latter bird.

Laughing Gull:- Following a long dry spell three were logged on the lakefront this fall. Amar Ayyash photographed a second-cycle bird at Miller Beach on 4 Sep and a juvenile was photographed at Michigan City Harbor on 27 Sep (KJB). A basic adult was seen at the latter location on 1 Oct (Leland Shaum et al.).

Laughing X Ring-billed Gull:- The adult hybrid that has been reported on several previous occasions was photographed in Indiana waters off Calumet Park, IL on 11 Nov (Amar Ayyash).

Franklin's Gull:- Only 13 were reported on the lakefront this fall (TYM=96.4) and (8) of these were seen at Miller Beach on 3 Nov (Michael Topp).

California Gull:- John C. Kendall photographed an adult at Michigan City Harbor on 14 Nov. This is the lakefront's first report in two years.

Thayer's Gull:- The six birds reported this fall constitutes the best autumn flight since 2002 (TYM=4.5).

TERNs

Once again the tern flight was quite feeble. The average MI/species was -0.13 and only the Caspian was in positive territory. For the first time in memory flocks of migrating terns, especially Forster's, failed to regularly accumulate on Miller Beach during the fall flight.

Black Tern:- A juvenile in remarkably fresh plumage was perched on Miller Beach 18 Aug (John K. Cassady et al.). See John K. Cassady photo.

Common Tern:- The lakefront flight was quite poor with only 1927 birds reported; a number far below the TYM of 3800. The flight peaked on 27 Aug when (333) were counted at Miller Beach (Susan R. Bagby, John K. Cassady, & KJB).



The mint-fresh plumage of this juvenile Black Tern is captured in this flight shot. This youngster spent the morning of 18 August 2011 perched on the sands of Miller Beach. It is rare to find this tern resting on the beach. Photo by John K. Cassady.

JAEGERS

The 69 jaegers tallied this autumn constitute the best fall flight since 102 were counted in 2003. Once again September proved to be the big jaeger month with 50 birds reported. The next best month was November, which contributed ten jaegers to the season's list.

An early September hot spell was broken by a front that arrived on the evening of the 3rd. That day and the two following days proved to be extremely productive for jaegers at Miller Beach, with five on the 3rd, 9 on the 4th, and 15 on the 5th. The latter total included seven Parasitic Jaegers and a juvenile Long-tailed Jaeger (Ryan Hamilton, Wes Homoya, Landon Neumann, Ryan Sanderson, and KJB). The next front arrived on the afternoon on 29 Sep. The following day, twelve jaegers (6 Parasitics, 2 Long-tailed & 4 unidentified) were seen at Miller Beach. Interestingly, one of the unidentified birds was a pale-headed, white-bellied bird, which was strikingly similar to the juv Long-tailed that showed up at Eagle Creek Park on 1 Oct.



Juvenile Jaegers

These three spectacular photos provide an excellent study of juvenile jaeger plumages. Ryan J. Sanderson took all three photographs this fall at the Miller Beach Lake Street lot. Flight pictures of this quality are unprecedented for the Indiana lakefront.

Top Picture: This Long-tailed Jaeger flew past the lot during a 5 September blow; it was initially identified as a Parasitic, but the photo clearly reveals the bird's true identity. Visible identification points include two white primary shafts; distinct barring on the upper and under tail coverts of the Long-tailed, and the bill is stouter with more extensive black than that of the Parasitic shown in the center picture.

Center Picture: Parasitic Jaegers are the most common jaegers on Lake Michigan. Consequently, the primary challenge in jaeger identification is to separate this species from the other two. This Parasitic Jaeger photo was also taken on the morning of 5 September. Note the 4+ white primary shafts; the more slender bill (compared to the other two jaegers); broken and disrupted barring on the upper-tail coverts; and the warm tones visible in the pale feather edgings.

Bottom Picture: This Pomarine Jaeger is one of six that swooped past the Lake Street lot on 29 November. This "pose" illustrates the "second under-wing crescent" (extra white area at bases of the primaries) and well developed barring on the tail coverts. Also the short central tail-feather extension is blunt and rounded. Pomarines are also heavier (often pot bellied) than the others jaegers.

All three of these incredible photos were taken by Ryan J. Sanderson.

Annual Jaeger Counts											
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11
Aug	4	2	2	6	11	3*	9	4	12	1	2
Sep	39	19	91	30	33	16	14	34	2	17	50
Oct	31	0	9	14	4	8	15	3	2	3	7
Nov	7	3	0	6	6	24	2	12	1	10	10
Sum	81	24	102	56	54	51	40	53	17	31	69

*Includes one July bird

Pomarine Jaeger:- The six seen at Miller Beach on 29 Nov (Ryan Hamilton, John Kendall, Ryan Sanderson, and KJB) constitute a new daily count record. At 8:45AM Hamilton, Kendall, and Sanderson were hiking toward the beach to investigate a white-winged gull seen earlier when KJB (who was stationed in the lee of the building at the south end of the lot) radioed to inform them that two jaegers were approaching from the west. Both birds passed at close range and were photographed before departing to the east. About 9:00AM a jaeger was seen flying westward a half-mile offshore; this was assumed to be one of the original two that was returning. At 9:13AM a single Pomarine came from the west and flew by at close range; it is assumed that this was the westbound bird observed at 9:00AM. At 10:10AM two more Pomarines arrived from the west; one of these had a couple of missing tail feathers (a feature not seen in the earlier birds). About 11:00AM two additional birds were seen offshore in the direction of Chicago. At 12:12PM they approached sufficiently close for photos, which revealed their identity.

Fall Parasitic Jaegers				
Date	#	loc	observer	age
27-Aug	1	MB	J.J. McCoy	juv
3-Sep	1	MB	J.J. McCoy	juv
4-Sep	2	MB	P.B. Grube	juvs
5-Sep	7	MB	KJB et al.	juvs
5-Sep	1	DP	B.J. Grube	-
13-Sep	1	MB	KJB	adu
30-Sep	2	MB	J.K Cassady	juvs
30-Sep	4	MB	J.J. McCoy	adu
19-Oct	1	MB	Michael Topp	adu
20-Oct	2	MB	J.K Cassady	adu
3-Nov	1	MB	Michael Topp	-
20-Nov	1	MC	J.J. McCoy	juv

Miller Beach =Miller Beach MC=Mich. City Harbor
Beverly Shores=Beverly Shores DP=Dunes S.P.

Parasitic Jaeger:- The season total of 24 birds (see list) is well above the TYM of 17.0, and constitutes the best flight since 2004. The all-time best was the 54 that occurred during the autumn of 2003.

Long-tailed Jaeger:- The five birds reported in September, 2011 constitute the largest fall flight ever recorded (previous maximum was four in 2005). This is the 13th consecutive year in which this rare jaeger has been reported on the lakefront. On 3 Sep an adult flew past Miller Beach about a half-mile offshore (John K. Cassady, Susan R. Bagby, Landon Neumann, Ryan Sanderson, & KJB). Amar Ayyash likely saw this same bird at Miller the following day. On 5 Sep Brendan J. Grube saw a juv briefly land on the beach at Dunes S.P.. The latter is the fourth Porter Co record. A Ryan Sanderson photo of one of the close range 5 Sep "Parasitic Jaegers" at Miller Beach, revealed that it was in fact a juv Long-tailed Jaeger (see Sanderson photo). On 30 Sep (2) adults arrived together at Miller Beach at 8:40AM (John K. Cassady, Jeffrey J. McCoy, John C. Kendall, et al.).

Black-billed Cuckoo:- A rare sight occurred at Miller Beach on 5 Aug when Michael Topp observed a migrant coming in off Lake Michigan.



This fine Barn Owl was photographed near the Portage Lakefront Park on 12 November 2011. It was discovered by Jeffrey J. McCoy and subsequently seen by many, providing the first Porter County report since 29 March 1962. At one point it was chased by a Merlin. Photo by Landon Neumann.

Barn Owl:- A singleton of this rare Dunes owl was seen near Portage Lakefront Park on 12 Nov (Jeffrey J. McCoy, m.ob.). This is the first Porter Co record since 29 March 1962, when Virginia Reuter-skiold found one near the now extinct Bailytown.

Long-eared Owl:- One was seen in the West Beach pinery on 29 Oct (Edward M. Hopkins, John C. Kendall, et al.) and an impressive (5) were seen there on 7 Nov (John C. Kendall). The latter ties the lakefront's second highest count. One was photographed by a BP Whiting worker on 30 Nov (*fide* Matt Kalwasinski).

Northern Saw-whet Owl:- Brad Bumgardner banded one in Dunes S.P. on 2 Oct, which ties Indiana's sixth earliest autumn date. For the season Brad captured 26 Saw-whets.

FLYCATCHERS

It was a poor fall for flycatchers with every species except Olive-sided, Willow, Eastern Phoebe, and Eastern Kingbird reported in below normal numbers. The lingering Western Wood-Pewee significantly elevated the average MI/species to -0.04. Most disturbing among the species with negative MIs were Yellow-bellied and Least Flycatchers (details below).

Western Wood-Pewee:- Remarkably, the summering Hoosier Prairie bird was still present 19 Aug (Michael Topp).

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:- Only two were reported along the lakefront this fall, which is the lowest fall total since 1997 (TYM=6.4).

Least Flycatcher:- The six reported this fall is the lowest lakefront count since 1991, when five were tallied (TYM=18.4).

Eastern Kingbird:- A record tying 65 were reported on the lakefront (TYM=31.3). The peak daily count of (11) was logged at four lakefront sites on 9 Aug (John K. Cassady, Randall J. Pals, & KJB).

Northern Shrike:- A wave of shrikes arrived in late October contributing to fall total of nine birds (TYM=3.6). This is the lakefront's second highest autumn tally, and is exceeded only by the dozen that were counted in 2008.

VIREOS

The lakefront Vireo flight was the poorest since 1999, with an average MI/species of -0.19. Yellow-throated Vireos were shockingly scarce, but White-eyed and Red-eyed numbers were also well below normal.

On a more positive note lakefront birders experienced the season's best vireo movement on 24 Sep with counts of (4) Blue-headed, (5) Philadelphia, (2) Warbling, and (14) Red-eyed at the traps and Beverly Shores.

White-eyed Vireo:- Only three were reported, the lowest fall total since 1999 (TYM=8.0).

Yellow-throated Vireo:- Astonishingly, only two birds were reported this fall, which is the lakefront's lowest autumn total since 1974 (TYM=13.9).



The Blue-headed Vireo is arguably the most attractive member of its genus; after all, it does have blue feet. This individual, the lakefront's fifth latest ever, was in the West Beach pinery on 29 October 2011. Photo by Peter B. Grube.

Blue-headed Vireo:- An overzealous migrant was seen in Dunes S.P. on 5 Aug (Karen Henman & her daughter). This individual provided the lakefront's third earliest fall arrival date.

SWALLOWS

This group fared reasonably well with an average MI/species of +0.09. Only the Purple Martin and Bank Swallow were in negative territory. Cliff Swallows made the strongest showing (see below).

Purple Martin:- Although the season's total of 50, is the best count in three years, it is still well below the TYM of 91.6.

Cliff Swallow:- For the third consecutive year excellent numbers were recorded on the lakefront with 15 reported (TYM=5.7).

Red-breasted Nuthatch:- In keeping with the forecast of few Boreal winter visitors, the season total of nine Red-breasted Nuthatches (TYM=60.7), is the lowest in almost a decade.

WRENS

This group executed a feeble flight with an average MI/species of -0.10. Sedge Wren numbers were the weakest of the lot.

Sedge Wren:- Only 4 were reported for the season (TYM=6.8). A tardy migrant, found in Ogden Dunes on 10 Nov (John C. Kendall), constituted the lakefront's third latest report.

THRUSHES

Catharus thrush numbers were down across the board, generating a basement level average MI/species for thrushes of -0.26. In this entire group only the bluebird and robin were in positive territory. The poorest showings were made by Wood Thrush and Veery.

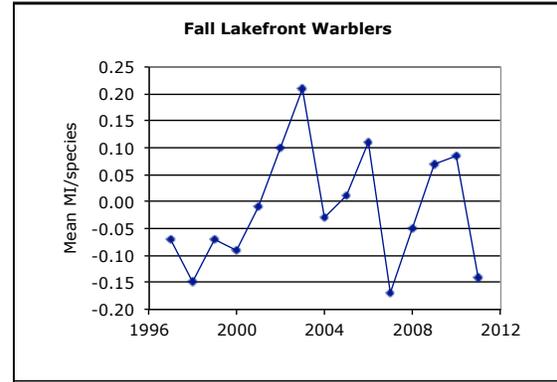
Veery:- Only four were reported on the lakefront this fall (TYM=10.6). This small total ties the lowest fall count since 1984.

Wood Thrush:- For the first fall since 1983 this elegant songster was not reported on the lakefront (TYM=7.4).

WARBLERS

Fall of 2011 brought a poor autumn warbler flight for the lakefront. Three species went unreported: Cerulean Warbler, Louisiana Waterthrush, and Canada Warbler. Of the 29

reported species 15 appeared in below normal numbers, indeed, the average MI/species was a dismal -0.14. This is the lowest value in four years. The poorest showings were logged by Hooded, Golden-winged, and Connecticut. On the positive side Nashville Warbler staged a spectacular flight.



As several large warbler counts were made downstate, it appears that many migrating warblers simply over-flew the Dunes area.

The lakefront's peak count occurred 14 Sep when John C. Kendall recorded 22 species (21 at the Hammond Sanctuary plus a Northern Waterthrush at McCool Basin). This was closely followed by 20 species that John found in the traps on 28 Sep.

Nashville Warbler:- The fall of 2011 may be remembered as "Nashville autumn," as this warbler appeared in unprecedented numbers. This record season yielded a phenomenal 165 birds on the lakefront (TYM=50.1). The previous fall maximum was 94 in 2009. A tally of (35), logged at several lakefront sites on 24 Sep (John K. Cassady, et al.) provided Indiana's second highest daily count. Additionally, John C. Kendall recorded (33), mainly in the traps, on 28 Sep.

Northern Parula:- A tardy first-cycle female migrant was photographed at West Beach on 13 Oct to establish a new late departure date for the lakefront by three days.

Yellow-rumped Warbler:- This normally abundant species provided a fine example of this autumn's poor warbler flight. Only 277 were recorded for the season (TYM=439), which is the lowest fall total since 1998.

Prothonotary Warbler:- The two reported this fall provided the first multiple-bird autumn since 2002 (TYM=0.6). One frequented the Topp's backyard in Highland from 17-19 Aug (Michael & Patti Topp). Steve Sass logged an even later bird in west Beverly Shores on 10 Sep (fourth latest lakefront record).

Ovenbird:- For the seventh consecutive year the fall count of this species was below the TYM. This autumn's lakefront total was 19 (TYM=37.5).

Connecticut Warbler:- An adult female, seen 29 Sep in Merrillville by Bob Zaremba, provided the only season record (TYM=4.5). This is the lakefront's lowest fall count in 19 years.

Mourning Warbler:- Decidedly scarce with only three reported for the season (TYM=9.4).

Hooded Warbler:- Only one was reported; Matt Kalwasinski found it at Hoosier Prairie on 14 Sep. In former years Susan R. Bagby reliably logged this species at Furnessville; however, she is now no longer able to bird in that area.

Canada Warbler:- Not reported on the lakefront for the first autumn since 1976 (TYM=6.4).

Summer Tanager:- Though below last autumn's record flight, the 2011 migration was well above average with 6 birds reported (TYM=2.0).

SPARROWS

Unlike most other passerine groups, the sparrows fared spectacularly. Indeed the average MI/species of +0.32 was the best since 2000. Of the 19 species reported only the White-throated was below average.

Clay-colored Sparrow:- A most interesting bird

was seen in Whiting Park on 15 Oct (John K. Cassady, Michael Topp, Susan R. Bagby, & KJB). This individual had a perfect Clay-colored face pattern, but showed a distinctly gray rump.

Lark Sparrow:- On 14 Oct Carolyn Marsh reported seeing (1) on the Hammond Sanctuary beach. This is the second consecutive autumn in which Carolyn found this rare sparrow (TYM=0.1).

Henslow's Sparrow:- The bird reported at Chellburg Farm (National Lakeshore) in summer, was also heard on 9 and 11 Aug (Penny Starin).

Le Conte's Sparrow:- The season's first Le Conte's was found at West Beach on 28 Oct (John K. Cassady) and the maximum count was (3) at McCool Basin on 29 Oct (Sean Fitzgerald et al.).

Nelson's Sparrow:- High quality photos of a sharp-tailed found in the Hammond Sanctuary 28 Sep (John C. Kendall & Michael Topp), suggested that the bird belonged to the Hudson Bay population (see photo).



Most Nelson's Sparrows observed on the lakefront belong to the brightly-colored prairie race *A. n. nelsoni*. However, this somewhat duller bird shows characters suggesting the subspecies *A. n. alterus* of the Hudson Bay population. Photo taken in the Hammond Lakefront Sanctuary on 28 September 2011 by John C. Kendall.

Fox Sparrow:- On 29 Oct Randall J. Pals counted (30), in two flocks, on the Ly-co-ki-we trail extension in Tremont. Several of these

birds were singing. This tally ties the lakefront's third largest fall count. Randy's contribution, along with several other fine tallies, contributed to a record fall flight for the lakefront with 144 reported (TYM=51.3).

Swamp Sparrow:- A fine count of (86) was made at six lakefront sites on 22 Oct (Randall J. Pals, et al.). This tally constitutes the lakefront's largest fall tally.

White-throated Sparrow:- The season total of 570 represents the lowest fall count in nine years (TYM=784).

Harris's Sparrow:- This autumn brought the best flight since 2003. The season's first arrival, a singleton, was discovered on the Cowles Bog dike 8 Oct (Penny Starin). A first-cycle bird was found at the Kemil Road (w. Beverly Shores) lot on 16 Oct (Brendan J. Grube, Kyle Hudick, Peter B. Grube, Kevin Nevers, et al.). The bird was still present the following day. An adult (the lakefront's first in eight years) was discovered at West Beach on 21 Oct (Kyle Hudick & John C. Kendall). Another first-cycle bird visited the Brock feeder in Chesterton on 26 Oct (KJB).

Lapland Longspur:- Several counts, the largest of which was (150) at the Green Tower site on 25 Nov (John C. Kendall), contributed to the lakefront's second highest autumn total of 246 (TYM=80.9).

Snow Bunting:- A count of (728), in flocks migrating past Miller Beach on 25 Nov (Jeffrey J. McCoy & Michael Topp), provided the lakefront's fifth largest daily count.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak:- This handsome passerine staged a very weak flight on the lakefront, with only 16 reported (TYM=26.0). This is the lowest fall total since 1996.

Blue Grosbeak:- The Miller Beach singing male, present since 19 July, lingered until at least 26 Aug (Michael Topp), providing the lakefront's second latest fall record.

Dickcissel:- Bob Zaremba found a record late bird in Merrillville on 28 Oct. The lakefront's previous latest was 21 October 2000.

Bobolink:- Scott Namestnik counted (4) at the Clay Street wetland, Gary on 28 Sep and (15) on the 29th. The latter is the lakefront's highest fall count in 57 years. One at McCool Basin on 8 Oct (John C. Kendall) provided an all-time late fall record for the lakefront (by five days).

Baltimore Oriole:- Lakefront birders enjoyed a fine flight with 28 reported for the season, which is the Dunes area's second highest fall count.

WINTER FINCHES

Although the winter finch forecast was not favorable, this group made a fair showing on the lakefront.

Purple Finch:- As most occurrences of this finch consist of ones and twos, the flock of (35) that flew over John C. Kendall at the Green Tower site on 25 Nov was quite noteworthy.

Red Crossbill:- The season's first birds arrived 29 Oct with (2) flying along the lakefront at Marquette Park (Sean Fitzgerald et al.) and two singletons at West Beach (John C. Kendall, E.M. Hopkins, & Jeffrey J. McCoy). John C. Kendall saw and heard a singleton fly past Marquette Park on 19 Nov.

Common Redpoll:- A total of six was reported for the season (TYM=30.0). The first was seen feeding on sunflowers with Goldfinch at Marquette Park on 29 Oct (Sean Fitzgerald et al.). This is the lakefront's first record since 17 December 2010 and the first fall report since 27 November 2008.

Pine Siskin:- Fall numbers were modest with only 103 reported (TYM=165). The only sizeable count consisted of (48) at Ogden Dunes on 7 Nov (John C. Kendall).

Convention with numbers To add clarity to the numerical chaos, bird numbers observed on a single day are contained within parentheses, (10). Season totals are written in numerals without parentheses.

Explanation of abbreviations Season totals are frequently compared to average seasonal counts in the "Dunes area" (Calumet Region or lakefront) over the past 20 years, including the present year. This value is abbreviated "TYM" for Twenty Year Mean. The term "STYM" refers to the twenty-year mean for the entire state.

The item "MI" is the Migration Index, a parameter calculated by the following relation: $MI = (Total - TYM) / (Total + TYM)$. Here "Total" refers to the total number of individuals, of a given species, reported during the season. If Total = 0, MI is assigned a value of $-\ln(1+TYM)$ with a minimum value of -1.00 . MI values provide an assessment of the current migration compared to counts over the past 20 years; positive values indicate a better than average flight, whereas, negative MI's reflect a below normal migration. In considering the TYM and MI parameters keep in mind that observer effort has increased over the past decades. Thus, negative MI's should be examined closely as they may reflect significant declines.