

INDIANA DUNES AREA BIRD REPORT: FALL 2015
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Autumn of 2015 was characterized by a generally late migration and a dearth of productive fronts. The combined result rendered the fall migration rather pedestrian (at least until the last half of November). Noteworthy aspects of the flight included a scarcity of jaegers, a White-rumped Sandpiper invasion, and a bumper swallow flight. The autumn rarities list was comprised of Pacific Loon, Cave Swallows, Townsend's Solitaire, and Bohemian Waxwing: all of which arrived in the last half of November.

Weather for the fall 2015 season can be summarized with one word: warm. A very discouraging meteorological feature was that most of the passing cold fronts were followed by westerly (rather than northerly) winds, which rendered them less productive.

Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal		
	Temp (°F)	Rainfall (in.)
Aug	-0.6	-2.74
Sep	+4.4	+1.43
Oct	+2.2	-0.92
Nov	+4.3	+1.34



Highlight of the 19 September cold front was an Indiana record-tying count of American Avocets (count them), which matched the 32 birds that Eugene Muench logged at Lake Gibson back on 30 April 1989. Photo by Amar Ayyash.

Unprecedented White-rumped Sandpiper Migration

The primary North American White-rumped Sandpiper migration crosses the Great Plains in spring and parallels the Atlantic Coast in autumn; consequently, that species is fairly rare in Indiana during the fall migration. Indeed as of fall 2014 the state's 20-year average fall count was 11.1 birds per annum (in contrast, the spring 20-year mean is 27.8) and the largest autumn total ever recorded was 31. This autumn, however, things were entirely different with an unprecedented 674 White-rumped Sandpipers reported across the state (STYM=44.4).

In late September a "blocking high," (a stationary high pressure cell) became anchored in place east of Hudson Bay. This obstructed the normal meteorological eastward flow across Eastern North America, leading to some unprecedented weather events. Most noteworthy the blocking high contributed to South Carolina's disastrous 1000-year flood. The effect in Indiana was a powerful northeast wind that blew incessantly from 29 September through 5 October. This regional wind apparently diverted southbound White-rumped Sandpipers from the Atlantic coast into the Midwest.

The Season's Quaintest Event

On 4 August Brendan J. Grube posted:

“Talking to my brother about his vacation to San Francisco last week, he remarked on an unusual encounter with Quail that him and his boys had. They were taken by the road crossing of young birds with an adult male at each end of the line. Like a Boy Scout troop, they all line up for the march, more like a scramble. And the closing male brings up the rear only when the last young bird has crossed.

Amazing enough for them, it only gets more amazing for me.

The very next evening, when arriving home from a long day, my young son's mother had gotten up from sleep, to parlay a chance encounter she and he had on the porch with a window strike bird.

A hawk had slammed into the large windows and startled the holy crap out of her and him. The hawk had chased a smaller bird into the window and that bird died from its injury. She went to the effort of freezer preserving the bird, and looking through her Sibley Guide to identify the bird. A Quail.

The guide was on the kitchen table opened to the western quail species, and I thought Jen had talked to my brother about his trip and heard his quail story, but she had confidently self-identified her freezer bird as a California Quail, and questioned my better judgment when I laughed off her supposition.

Imagine the sensational whole body experience I felt as a long-time birder, when I opened that freezer case to see a California Quail tucked away in the cold.

What is going on here? I don't know.

Not the end of this story!”

This narrative was accompanied by the following link: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/avocet07/19678263623/>, which shows a handsome male California Quail in a freezer bag.

The table below summarizes the 2015 fall migration by bird groups using a parameter known as the Migration Index (MI, definition appended). Numbers in the table reveal exceptionally strong flights for swallows, raptors, and vireos. In contrast sparrows, wrens, and gulls staged weak flights. The unweighted mean of these MI values is +0.035, suggesting a better than average overall fall flight.

Group	MI/species	Group	MI/species
Ducks	-0.026	Flycatchers	+0.086
Loons/Grebes	-0.046	Vireos	+0.139
Hérons	+0.091	Swallows	+0.425
Raptors	+0.146	Wrens	-0.148
Shorebirds	+0.018	Thrushes	-0.010
Gulls	-0.113	Warblers	+0.055
Terns	+0.102	Sparrows	-0.234

Longshore Flights

Despite the absence of productive fronts, some excellent lakewatches occurred (see below table). The 7 November lakewatch is the third best of all-times based on Pals Flight Magnitude, which takes into account both the rarity and the number of species reported during the flight.

Top Longshore Flights		
Date	Location	Pals FM
7-Nov	Miller Beach	118.95
13-Nov	Miller Beach	80.49
9-Sep	Miller Beach	56.1
29-Sep	Miller Beach	21.3
16-Oct	Miller Beach	21.1
12-Nov	Miller Beach	18.3
11-Sep	Miller Beach	14.1
17-Oct	Miller Beach	13.6
6-Nov	Miller Beach	10.7
13-Nov	Dunes S.P.	10.4

The Season's Log August

This year there were no “good” fronts in the month of August; those that did occur had puny westerly following winds. Ed Hopkins found the fall season's first Piping Plover (an unbanded juvenile) at Miller Beach on 3 August. The following day this plover was joined by a banded juvenile, which had a fascinating history. According to Alice Van Zoeren the egg occupied by this bird, “...was in a nest at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, MI near the mouth of the Platte River (its mother went missing, likely taken by a Merlin). When eggs are abandoned, we have a captive-rearing facility run by the Detroit Zoo at the University of MI Biological Station where they are incubated and raised until they are flying well. They're then released near wild-raised

chicks of similar age. This youngster was released at Manistee, MI.” John and Karen Lindsey saw a flyby Whimbrel at Miller Beach on the 9th. The Lindseys also found fourteen Willets at Michigan City Harbor on the 9th and Michael Topp identified an adult Baird’s Sandpiper at Miller Beach on the 15th. Mike Bourdon discovered a Red Knot at Michigan City Harbor on the 15th and Ed Hopkins logged a Marbled Godwit there the following day. Michael Bourdon found five Avocets at Michigan City Harbor on the 20th. On the 23rd Karen Lindsey found a banded juvenile Piping Plover at Michigan City Harbor and Michael A. Topp sited another banded “Piper” at Miller Beach on 27 August. Excellent warbler numbers were present in the Hammond Marina on the 28th and two Red Knots were found in the shallow water around storage tanks near the Hammond cinder flats on the 29th. Pete Grube photographed the banded Piping Plover at Michigan City Harbor on the 30th, which means the bird lingered for at least 8 days.

September (first half)

On 1 September Carolyn A. Marsh logged eleven warbler species, including a pair of Golden-wings, in the Hammond Sanctuary. The following day M. Penny Starin counted nine Soras (2 adults and 7 juveniles) at McCool Basin. Brendan J. Grube found a Red Knot at Michigan City Harbor on the 4th. On the 6th Matt Kalwasinski discovered a juvenile American Golden-Plover near the Hammond Cinder Flats and Michael A. Topp relocated the summering Snowy Egret on Wolf Lake. Brendan and Pete Grube had a marvelous day on the 8th. They had an American Avocet on the outer break wall at Michigan City Harbor and later found two Little Gulls on the Beverly Shores lakefront near Kemil Road. The latter were quite approachable and Pete, widely admired for his fine photographs, obtained sumptuous pictures. The season’s first decent cold front arrived on 9 September, delivering Little Gull, Sabine’s Gull, and Long-tailed Jaeger to Miller Beach. Two days later Aaron Boone logged the lakefront’s first Buff-breasted Sandpiper, a Red-necked Grebe, and eight Whimbrel at Miller Beach. Also on the 11th Peter E. Scott reported the Chandeleur Gull hybrid at Michigan City Harbor. The weekend of 12-13 September, brought the season’s best warbler days with 22 species in the Hammond Sanctuary on the 13th (John C. Kendall) and 26 species there the following day (Carolyn A. Marsh). Also observed

were additional Whimbrels plus two Parasitic Jaegers at Miller Beach (Landon Neumann) and a Buff-breasted Sandpiper with Killdeer on the lawn at Forsythe Park (Peter E. Scott).

September (second half)

Fine autumn weather initiated this segment. Michael A. Topp found a Whimbrel at Miller Beach and John K. Cassady saw a juv Parasitic Jaeger offshore at Michigan City Harbor all on the 16th. Edward M. Hopkins identified a Clay-colored Sparrow at the Hammond Sanctuary on the 18th. A fine appearing front on the 19th, yielded few lake birds other than an American Avocet bonanza. On that day Mike Bourdon counted eight American Avocets on the Michigan City Harbor beach. Also on this day a state record-tying 32 Avocets were counted at Miller Beach (Amar Ayyash, John Lindsey, Jeff Timmons, et al.). On the 21st Brendan J. Grube logged 13 warbler species, including 20 Redstarts and 10 Cape Mays, at West Beach. M. Penny Starin observed a dark “Peales” Peregrine Falcon at West Beach on the 23rd. Migrating flocks of White Pelican suddenly appeared on the 25th with 24 at Dunes S.P. (Brendan J. Grube) and 21 over Hammond the following day (Robert Guth et al). The month’s final front passed on the 29th and delivered the season’s first Surf Scoter, a Sabine’s Gull, one Franklin’s Gull, and an adult Parasitic Jaeger to Miller Beach lakewatchers.

October (first half)

Following winds of the late September front continued from the northeast through the 5th, but these gales yielded little movement on Lake Michigan. However, these winds did sweep a movement of Pine Siskins into the state, as Michael A. Topp counted 110 at the Hammond Sanctuary on 1 October. Saturday the 3rd, yielded one unidentified jaeger at Michigan City Harbor (John K. Cassady et al), a Clay-colored Sparrow at the Hammond Marina (Jeffrey J. McCoy et al.) and a tardy White-eyed Vireo at Beverly Shores (KJB et al.). However, “bird of the day” on the 3rd was a Five-lined Skink, found and photographed by Randy J. Pals and John K. Cassady at Whiting Park. Upon seeing the photo Alan Resetar (Field Museum herpetologist) stated, “That really is a skink!!!! It boggles my mind that it is from Whiting Park.” He further commented, “The last skink reported in Lake County was about 1899.” M. Penny Starin found an adult White-rumped Sandpiper at McCool on

the 4th and logged 9 White-rumped there the following day. A nice movement on the 6th yielded good warblers, a record late Acadian Flycatcher (John K. Cassady), plus a record high fall Blue-headed Vireo count (Brendan J. Grube). Carolyn A. Marsh logged an American Bittern in the Hammond Sanctuary on 7 October. A modest cold front on the 9th delivered a record early adult Long-tailed Duck and an adult Parasitic Jaeger to lakewatchers at Miller Beach. On the 10th Brad Bumgardner banded the season's first Saw-whet Owl. Highlights on Saturday 11 October included the season's only Le Conte's Sparrow; Jeffrey J. McCoy flushed it from the West Beach little bluestem. On that day M. Penny Starin also logged a flock of eleven White-rumped Sandpipers at McCool Basin. A front on the 13th delivered Black Scoters and 20 Franklin's Gulls to Miller Beach and Brendan Grube logged three Red Phalaropes at Michigan City Harbor.

October (second half)

A rather feeble front on 16 October yielded some surprisingly good birds at Miller Beach: Red-necked Grebe, Red Phalarope, Parasitic Jaeger, and Short-eared Owl. Highlight of a Miller Beach lakewatch on the 17th was a juvenile Sabine's Gull that leisurely flew along the beach flaunting its splendor. On the afternoon of this same day Jeffrey J. McCoy observed a Long-eared Owl fly in off the lake at the Port of Indiana. Matthew Beatty logged a tardy male Black-throated Blue Warbler at the Dunes S.P. Nature Center on the 19th. On the 21st Susan R. Bagby enjoyed watching a Merlin playfully chase crows over the west Beverly Shores marsh. Sam Plew logged the season's first Snow Bunting at Michigan City Harbor on the 23rd. At Dune Acres Richard Hawksworth photographed the season's first Snowy Owl, a rather dark immature, on the 25th. On the 30th Brendan J. Grube logged an unidentified jaeger, the season's first Red-throated Loons, and a Red-necked Grebe during a lakewatch from the Michigan City Harbor lighthouse. Highlights of a rainy 31 October outing included a flock of eight Canvasbacks off Beverly Shores and an alternate-plumed Common Tern that was perched on the Dunes S.P. beach.

November (first third)

The first few days of November were unusually warm with brisk south winds. Taking advantage of this Indian summer, Matt Kalwasinski enjoyed

a first-cycle Franklin's Gull resting on the beach and Michael A. Topp flushed two Short-eared Owls from the Marram Grass at Miller Beach on 3 November. On this same day Pete and Nila Grube saw a nice flock of 60+ Snow Buntings at Michigan City Harbor. Michael A. Topp had an even better day at Miller Beach on the 5th, when he logged two Parasitic Jaegers, two Franklin's Gulls, and another Short-eared Owl. November's first front, albeit quite weak, arrived on the 6th and generated a nice Bony movement of 212 birds at Miller Beach (John K. Cassady & Jeffrey J. McCoy). Remarkably, almost non-existent winds the following day yielded the third strongest longshore flight ever recorded. Highlights of a 7 November Miller Beach count by John K. Cassady, Jeffrey J. McCoy, and Randy J. Pals lakewatch included 264 Snow Geese, all three scoters, 340 Horned Grebes, two Red-necked Grebes, a Western Grebe, and three Franklin's Gulls. During one splendid moment of the watch, a Western and Red-necked Grebe flew past together. On the 9th Brad Bumgardner's banding team netted seven Saw-whets.

November (second third)

During the wee hours of the 12th a front with brutally strong west winds passed through the Dunes. A Miller Beach lakewatch that day yielded a lakefront record 663 Green-winged Teals and 176 Franklin's Gulls, including a single swirling flock of 150 birds. Also on the 12th Amar Ayyash saw two Black-legged Kittiwakes in Indiana waters off Calumet Park, IL. The winds were west-northwest the following day: highlights at Miller Beach included a juvenile Black-legged Kittiwake, 199 Franklin's Gulls, two Red Phalaropes, and a Short-eared Owl. Brendan J. Grube logged the season's first Redpoll at Dunes S.P. on the 13th. Several more were heard at points along the lakefront on Saturday the 14th. Also on the 14th Jeffrey J. McCoy discovered a Western Grebe off the eastern Dunes S.P. beach. The big news on a cloudy 18 November was a record Cave Swallow count at Michigan City Harbor. Brendan J. Grube and Peter B. Grube observed at least 16 flying westward past the harbor (more details in the Species Accounts section). Brendan J. Grube conducted a lakewatch at the "Green Tower" on the 19th, and was rewarded with a Franklin's Gull, four White-winged Scoters, and an adult male Red Crossbill. On that same day Michael A. Topp found a near-shore Red-necked Grebe at Miller Beach.

November (final third)

Birding became quite exciting in this segment. During the night of 20-21 November a major snow storm ripped through the Dunes. Following winds on the 21st were easterly and accompanied by visibility-obscuring snow and mediocre birds. Clear skies the following day brought some pleasant surprises, including the first Townsend's Solitaire in three years, found by Aidan Rominger and Don Gorney at West Beach, the season's second Snowy Owl that Matt Kalwasinski observed perched on a breakwater NW of the Hammond Marina, and a Harlequin Duck that Jeffrey J. McCoy discovered at Michigan City Harbor. Sadly, two days later this rare duck was killed by a hunter. Kristin Stratton discovered a Short-eared Owl at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on the 24th and Randy J. Pals found two there the following day. On the 25th John C. Kendall logged a flyby Red Crossbill at the West Beach pinery and Eric Michael photographed a Pacific Loon at Michigan City Harbor. Highlights of Saturday the 28th included a female Harlequin Duck at Michigan City Harbor, the continuing Townsend's Solitaire, and a calling Bohemian Waxwing flyby that Brad Bumgardner logged at West Beach.

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SPECIES ACCOUNTS

DUCKS

Overall the duck flight was slightly below average with an average MI/species of -0.026, there was, however, considerable variation that occurred between the duck groups.

DABLERS: with the exception of the Black Duck every dabbler appeared above normal numbers; consequently, the puddle duck flight was very strong.

BAY DUCKS: Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, and Ruddy Duck numbers were down, resulting in a below par flight for the divers.

SEA DUCKS: In this group only the Harlequin Duck, with three reported, was above average. The remaining members were all well below average rendering the sea duck flight a near disaster.

MERGANSERS: A deficit in Hooded numbers rendered the merganser flight below average.

American Black Duck:- The 42 reported this autumn is the lowest fall total in six years (TYM=68.3).

Green-winged Teal:- Accompanying the powerful gales of 12 November was a lakefront record flight of (663) at Miller Beach (John K. Cassady et al.). The lakefront's previous maximum was 609, logged at this location on 10 October 1996.

Canvasback:- Only 23 were reported for the season, which is roughly half of the TYM. The peak count was (9) that John K. Cassady saw off Miller Beach on 13 November.

Harlequin Duck:- A hunter killed an adult male 0.5 miles east of Portage Lakefront Park on 16 November (photo available). On 22 November Jeffrey J. McCoy found a first-cycle male diving along the jetty at Michigan City Harbor. Sadly, this bird was also shot by a hunter two days later. The good news is that it was replaced at the Harbor by a female on 28 November (Mike Boudon et al.).

Black Scoter:- Fall of 2015 brought the poorest flight in four years with only 49 reported (TYM=141). The season's largest count consisted of (16) that John K. Cassady logged off Miller Beach on 7 November.

Long-tailed Duck:- Only two were reported for the season (TYM=11). This is the lowest fall total since 2003. An adult male at Miller Beach on 9 October (John K. Cassady) constituted a new Indiana early arrival date for the fall season (by one day).

Hooded Merganser:- The 105 reported this fall 2015 is well below the TYM of 180. The season's peak tally was (21) seen at Miller Beach on 20 November (Michael A. Topp).

LOONS & GREBES

A gigantic shortfall of Common Loons pulled the flight of this group far below normal, giving an average MI/species of -0.046.

Red-throated Loon:- This species had a slightly below average flight with 84 reported (TYM=91).

Common Loon:- For the fifth consecutive year the lakefront’s Common Loon flight was well below the TYM. This autumn some 542 were reported (TYM=1874). The peak count consisted of (82) that KJB et al. counted during a Portage Lakefront Park lakewatch on 28 November.

Pacific Loon:- One with a Common Loon was seen and photographed, at Michigan City Harbor on 25 November (Eric Michael & Nathan Martineau).

Red-necked Grebe:- Aaron Boone found (1) at Miller Beach on 11 Sep, which tied the lakefront’s second earliest fall record. See table for all records (Season total=8; TYM=5.55).

Red-necked Grebe Records			
No.	Date	Location	Observer
1	11-Sep	Miller Beach	Aaron Boone
1	16-Oct	Miller Beach	J. McCoy et al.
1	22-Oct	Miller Beach	G. Stuart et al.
1	30-Oct	Mich. City Harb.	B. Grube
1	6-Nov	Mich. City Harb.	J. McCoy
2	7-Nov	Miller Beach	J. Cassidy et al.
1	19-Nov	Miller Beach	M. Topp

Western Grebe:- See table (Season total=2; TYM=2.05).

Western Grebe Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
1	7-Nov	Miller Beach	J. Cassidy et al.
1	14-Nov	Bev. Shores	J. McCoy et al.

American White Pelican:- It was a good fall for this pelican with 49 individuals reported (TYM=6.85). The peak count was (24) that Brendan J. Grube saw 25 September at Dunes State Park.

BITTERN, HERONS & EGRETS

Despite the absence of both the Cattle Egret and

the Little Blue Heron, this group fared well with an average MI/species of +0.091. Every species except the above absentees had positive MI values.

American Bittern:- A migrant in the Hammond Sanctuary on 7 October (Carolyn A. Marsh) provided the lakefront’s only fall report (TYM=0.65).

Least Bittern:- Three were reported for the season (TYM=0.85). The peak count was (2) at the Grant Street wetland on 1 August (Michael A. Topp).

Snowy Egret:- The summering bird at Wolf Lake lingered until at least 12 September (Peter E. Scott).

Turkey Vulture:- On 9 November Lynea Hinchman counted (8) just south of Michigan City. This is the lakefront’s largest November count, by a factor of four.

DIURNAL RAPTORS

The hawk migration was most impressive, as the average MI/species was a remarkable +0.146. Only one species was reported in below normal numbers: the Rough-legged Hawk.

Bald Eagle:- The 27 reported this fall is a record high for the lakefront (TYM=6.65). The peak daily count was (4) at the Grant Street wetland and Carlson Oxbow Park on 14 August (Robert Guth).

Broad-winged Hawk:- The 20 birds reported this autumn constitute the best lakefront count since 41 were tallied back in 2009 (TYM=6.95). The peak count of (12) was recorded at Miller Beach on 18 August (John K. Cassidy et al.).

Rough-legged Hawk:- Only two were reported on the lakefront this fall (TYM=8.6) and both were at Reynolds Creek Gamebird Habitat Area.

Sora:- The (3) adults and (9) juveniles that M. Penny Starin counted at McCool Basin on 2 September tied the lakefront’s fourth highest fall tally.

SHOREBIRDS

Overall it was a slightly above average shorebird flight with 28 species reported and an average MI/species of +0.018. However, several species appeared in unusually low numbers. Indeed, the Long-billed Dowitcher went entirely unreported (TYM=0.8). Other species reported in significantly low numbers included: Pectoral Sandpiper, Willet, Dunlin, American Golden-Plover, and Baird's Sandpiper. In contrast, the White-rumped Sandpiper, Wilson's Snipe, and American Avocet executed unusually strong flights.

Black-bellied Plover:- This plover was scarce on the lakefront this fall with only 28 reported (TYM=55.0). Indeed the 10 that Aaron Boone et al. saw at Miller Beach on 11 September literally saved the season.

American Golden-Plover:- Once again this plover was quite uncommon with only five reported (TYM=12.3). The season's peak count was (2) that Brendan J. Grube identified at Michigan City Harbor on 6 October.

Piping Plover:- Leland Shaum et al. observed a banded juvenile at Miller Beach on 7 August; this bird lingered through 11 August (John K. Cassady). According to Alice van Zoeren of the Great Lakes Piping Plover Recovery Effort this individual hatched this summer at Gulliver, MI in the Upper Peninsula. Karen Lindsey found another banded juvenile at Michigan City Harbor on 23 August; that individual or one of its siblings, remained at the harbor until the 31st (Peter B. Grube).

American Avocet:- See table (Season total=50; TYM=15.2). The flock of (32) at Miller Beach on 19 September (Amar Ayyash et al.) tied Indiana's highest daily count. Eugene Muench logged the other count of (32) on 30 April 1989 at Lake Gibson.

Avocet Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
2	4-Aug	Mich. City Harb.	R. Zeese
5	20-Aug	Mich. City Harb.	M. Bourdon
1	8-Sep	Mich. City Harb.	P. Grube
8	19-Sep	Mich. City Harb.	M. Bourdon
32	19-Sep	Miller Beach	A. Ayyash et al
2	12-Oct	Miller Beach	S. Fitzgerald



This incredible photo shows a pair of American Avocets at Michigan City Harbor (two of the five present) on 20 August. The male is in the foreground. Photo by Peter B. Grube.

Willet:- See table (Season total=25 ; TYM= 76.5) The above total tied the poorest flight since 1998. The season's maximum tally was (14), seen by John and Karen Lindsey at Michigan City Harbor on 9 August.

Willet Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
1	1-Aug	Mich City Harb	J. Timmons
14	9-Aug	Mich City Harb	J&K Lindsey
1	16-Aug	Mich City Harb	E. Hopkins
3	18-Aug	Miller Beach	J. Cassady
5	22-Aug	Mich City Harb	R. Pals
1	23-Aug	Mich City Harb	J&K Lindsey

Whimbrel:- See table (Season total=14; TYM=7.65).

Whimbrel Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
1	8-Aug	Miller Beach	J&K Lindsey
8	11-Sep	Miller Beach	A. Boone
1	11-Sep	Miller Beach	B. Grube
1	12-Sep	Miller Beach	L. Neumann
2	13-Sep	Miller Beach	J. McCoy
1	16-Sep	Miller Beach	M. Topp

Marbled Godwit:- On 16 August Edward M. Hopkins found the season's only bird, a singleton, on the outer breakwall at Michigan City Harbor (TYM=1.85).

Red Knot:- Two juveniles found in a tank-farm pool near the Hammond Cinder Flats on 29 August (John K. Cassady et al.) were quite unexpected for this location.

Western Sandpiper:- The lakefront's first Western in seven years, a fine juvenile, was photographed at Miller Beach on 29 August (Michael A. Topp).

White-rumped Sandpiper:- On 4 October M. Penny Starin logged a molting adult at McCool Basin and 22 others were observed at various lakefront sites on subsequent days (TYM=1.6). The 23 birds reported this season constitute the lakefront's largest fall total ever recorded, by an enormous margin.



A participant in the unprecedented autumn invasion, this juvenile White-rumped Sandpiper was found strolling on the beach at Michigan City Harbor on 6 October. Photo by John C. Kendall.

Baird's Sandpiper:- Only seven birds, the lowest fall total in nine years, were reported this autumn (TYM=17.1). John K. Cassady logged the season's peak count of (2) at Miller Beach on 25 August.

Pectoral Sandpiper:- Reported in the lowest numbers since 2008, likely due to limited habitat availability. Only 17 were recorded (TYM=58.2). M. Penny Starin logged the season's maximum of (3) at McCool Basin on 2 August.

Buff-breasted Sandpiper:- Highlight of the three reported on the lakefront this season (TYM=3.35), was one on the green lawn of a baseball diamond at Forsythe Park on 12 September (Peter E. Scott, et al.).

Dunlin:- This late migrant was surprisingly scarce with only 135 reported for the season (TYM=342). Indeed the season total is the lowest since 71 were logged back in 2002. The maximum daily count was (85) that Michael A. Topp logged at Miller Beach on 5 November.

Wilson's Snipe:- Suitable habitat at McCool Basin contributed to a record autumn count for the lakefront. The season total of 95 is far above the TYM of 21.7. M. Penny Starin logged the peak autumn count of (25) at McCool Basin on 5 October.

GULLS

The warm autumn weather may have delayed the migration, as gull numbers were down markedly, with an average MI/species on -0.113. The poorest numbers involved Arctic species (Black-legged Kittiwake, Sabine's Gull, and Glaucous Gull).

Black-legged Kittiwake:- See table (Season total=3; TYM= 10.1).

Black-legged Kittiwake Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
2	12-Nov	Ind waters off Cal Park	A. Ayyash
1	13-Nov	Miller Beach	D. Gorney

Laughing Gull:- The lakefront's only report consisted of a flyby at Miller Beach that John K. Cassady identified on 19 September.

Franklin's Gull:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best flight since 818 were logged back in 1998. This year 419 were tallied (TYM=118). The peak count was (199) logged during a Miller Beach lakewatch on 13 November (John K. Cassady, Jeffrey J. McCoy et al.).

Little Gull:- See table (Season total=3; TYM=2.60).

Little Gull Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
2	8-Sep	Bev Shores Lakefront	B. Grube
1	9-Sep	Miller Beach	J. Kendall



Along with an adult this dapper Little Gull was swimming with Bonaparte's Gulls just off Beverly Shores on 8 September. The gray patch in the mantle indicates that this individual is beginning the molt into first-winter plumage. Photo by Peter B. Grube.

Sabine's Gull:- See table (Season total=3; TYM=12.0).

Sabine's Gull Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
1	9-Sep	Miller Beach	KJB
1	29-Sep	Miller Beach	J. Kendall
1	17-Oct	Miller Beach	R. Pals



Juvenile Sabine's Gull at Miller Beach on 9 September. This vocalizing youngster lingered on the beach for an hour allowing birders to fully absorb its elegance. Photo by John K. Cassady.

Glaucous Gull:- The season's only report consisted of a first-cycle bird that Michael A. Topp reported at Miller Beach on 28 November (TYM=2.75).

Kelp X Herring Gull hybrid (the so-called Chandeleur Gull):- A new early arrival date for this gull was set on 11 September when Peter E. Scott's group observed the bird at Michigan City Harbor. Surprisingly on 13 September it appeared at Miller Beach where Mark Welter obtained photos. This is a first record for Lake Co.

TERNs

Lakefront birders experienced one of our better tern migrations with an average MI/species of +0.102. Only the Black Tern was reported in below normal numbers.

Black Tern:- The 2015 fall flight was well below normal with only 259 reported (TYM=708). The season's peak count of (190) occurred at Miller Beach on 9 September (John K. Cassady et al.).

Common Tern:- The 2015 fall flight was the largest since 2003, with 4387 reported (TYM=3825). A fine movement occurred at Miller Beach on 9 September when lakewatchers tallied (2153).

Forster's Tern:- Lakefront birders enjoyed a record autumn flight with 261 reported (TYM=178). The largest movement occurred on 19 September when John K. Cassady logged (49) at Miller Beach.

JAEGERS

In recent years most of the jaegers have appeared in September. This fall the absence of productive fronts yielded the poorest September jaeger numbers since 2009. September's performance reflected that of the entire season, as only 17 jaegers reported this autumn, which is the lowest total since 2009.

Pomarine Jaeger:- A 25 September bird, the season's only report, at Michigan City Harbor (John C. Kendall) tied Indiana's fourth earliest fall arrival date.

Annual Jaeger Counts									
	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15
Aug	9	4	12	1	2	3	9	3*	0
Sep	14	34	2	17	50	36	20	37	11
Oct	15	3	2	3	7	3	13	32	4
Nov	2	12	1	10	10	0	1	2	2
	40	53	17	31	69	42	43	74	17

Parasitic Jaeger:- See table (Season total=11; TYM=20.0).

Fall Parasitic Jaegers				
Date	#	loc	obs	age
9-Sep	3	MB	J. Cassady et al.	juvs
12-Sep	2	MB	L. Neumann et al.	juvs
16-Sep	1	MCH	KJB et al.	juv
29-Sep	1	MB	J. Kendall et al.	adu
9-Oct	1	MB	J. Cassady et al.	adu
16-Oct	1	MB	D. Gorney et al.	adu
5-Nov	1	MB	M. Topp	juv
5-Nov	1	MB	M Topp	adu
MB=Miller Beach MCH=Michigan City Harbor				

Long-tailed Jaeger:- The season's only report involved a juvenile that flew past Miller Beach on 9 September (John K. Cassady, Joel Greenberg, John C. Kendall, & KJB).

Snowy Owl:- The appearance of (1) in Dune Acres on 25 October suggested that we might be in for a good flight; however, that was not the case as only two were reported for the season. Matt Kalwasinski found the second bird perched on a breakwall northwest of the Hammond Marina.

Long-eared Owl:- A rare daytime sighting of this species occurred 17 October when Jeffrey J. McCoy observed one fly in off the lake at the Port of Indiana.

Short-eared Owl:- In addition to the six birds logged during lakewatches, a singleton at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 24 November (Kristin Stratton) and two there the following day (Randy J. Pals), combined to create the lakefront's best fall total since 1999 (TYM=4.65).

Northern Saw-whet Owl:- Brad Bumgardner's operation at Dunes State Park was outrageously successful, as they banded 57 Saw-whets this

season. The peak activity occurred in the first half of November with (6) netted on the 7th, (7) on the 8th, and (6) more on the 10th.

Common Nighthawk:- The lakefront's fall flight was the best since 2011, with 42 reported (TYM=54.8). The peak count occurred at Miller Beach on 3 September when John K. Cassady et al. logged (36).

Merlin:- It was another good autumn for this falcon with 14 reported (TYM=7.55).

FLYCATCHERS

Other than the Alder Flycatcher, which was not reported this autumn, flycatchers fared quite well. Only two other species were reported in below normal numbers: Great Crested and Acadian. The mean MI/species was +0.086. and the Willow Flycatcher appeared in record numbers.

Willow Flycatcher:- It was a record autumn flight for the lakefront with 22 birds reported (TYM=4.65). The peak count was (9) that Robert Guth et al. logged at Beverly Shores and at the Grant Street wetland on 7 August. The latter is a daily fall record for the lakefront and the state's second largest autumn count.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:- A singing bird at the Hammond Sanctuary on 26 September tied the lakefront's third latest fall record (Bob Huguenard et al.).

Acadian Flycatcher:- On 6 October John K. Cassady & KJB identified (1) in Forsythe Park, providing a new latest fall record for Indiana.

Northern Shrike:- The singleton that M. Penny and Jim Starin logged at Beverly Shores on 27 November provided the season's only record. This is the lakefront's lowest fall total in 12 years.

VIREOS

It was a good season for vireos with only the "eyed vireos," reported in below normal numbers. The average MI/species was a hearty +0.139.

White-eyed Vireo:- A tardy migrant in central Beverly Shores on 3 October (KJB, John K. Cassady, & Randy J. Pals), tied the lakefront's second latest fall date. For the season only 5 were logged, which is well below the TYM of 7.3.

Blue-headed Vireo:- It was a record autumn for this vireo with 36 individuals reported (TYM=15.8). The next best fall flight occurred in 2009 when 29 were tallied. On 6 October Brendan J. Grube logged (11) in the Indiana Dunes; this count constitutes the largest number ever recorded in the state during the fall season.

Philadelphia Vireo:- This vireo staged a record flight on the lakefront with 29 reported (TYM=14.6). The peak daily tally was (4) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 12 September (John C. Kendall).



It is easy to see how this rather plain-faced Philadelphia Vireo, in the Hammond Sanctuary on 21 September, might be confused with an Orange-crowned Warbler. Photo by John C. Kendall.

Red-eyed Vireo:- It was a below average flight for this vireo with only 78 reported (TYM=95.4).

SWALLOWS

It was a great season for swallows with all six of the regular species reported in above average numbers. A record Cave Swallow count was a bonus. The mean MI/species was an unprecedented +0.425.

Cave Swallow:- The morning of 18 November brought a heavy overcast, southerly gales at 20+ knots and a temperature of 64°F. As this sounded like Cave Swallow weather, Brendan and Pete Grube headed for Michigan City Harbor. Between 9:00 and 11:30am they counted a minimum of 16 Cave Swallows passing the harbor in groups of 1, 4, 4, 4, 3, all flying westward. This tally constitutes a new maximum for the state topping the previous high count of five, which was also recorded by Brendan.

Cliff Swallow:- A record 44 Cliffs were logged this autumn (TYM=9). The peak daily count was (15) at Miller Beach on 18 August (John K. Cassady et al.).

Red-breasted Nuthatch:- The 15 reported this fall is well below the TYM of 63.9.

WRENS

It was a poor season for wrens as only the House Wren was reported in above normal numbers. The average MI/species was a basement-level -0.148.

Carolina Wren:- Surprisingly scarce. The five reported this season constitutes the lowest fall total since only two were counted back in 1986 (TYM=17.9). This shortfall is quite local, as statewide numbers are well above average.

Sedge Wren:- Only two were reported (both by John K. Cassady) on the lakefront this fall (TYM=7.05)

Marsh Wren:- It was a record autumn for this wren with 45 reported (TYM=17.6). The season's peak count was (11) on 3 August at Beverly Shores (Bob Zarembo).

THRUSHES

An acute Hermit Thrush shortage kept the average MI/species (-0.010) of this group negative. All other members of this group were reported in above normal numbers except for the Wood Thrush.

Swainson's Thrush:- An early migrant was seen in Dunes State Park on 13 August (KJB) to tie Indiana's 13th earliest fall record.

Hermit Thrush:- Surprisingly scarce with only 77 reported (TYM=152). Carolyn A. Marsh logged the peak count of (12) in the Hammond Sanctuary on 17 October.

Wood Thrush:- Only 5 were reported for the season (TYM=7.4).

Townsend's Solitaire:- Following a two-year hiatus this western species returned to the lakefront on 22 November when Aidan Rominger and Don Gorney found (1) at West Beach.

Though frequently difficult to locate, this individual lingered through the end of the season.



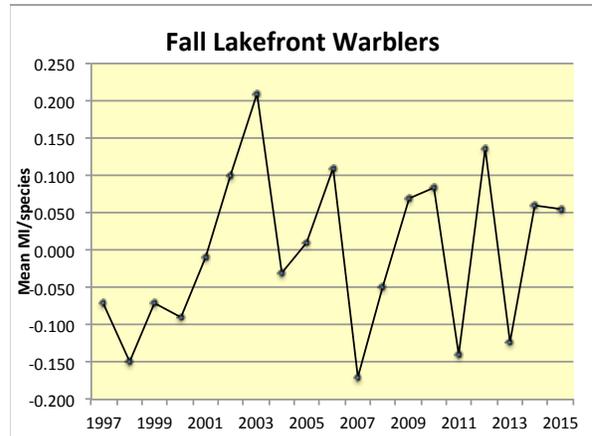
Following a two year absence, the adult Townsend's Solitaire returned to West Beach on 23 November. It was discovered by Aidan Rominger and Don Gorney on the above date. The bird lingered through the season. John C. Cassady took the above shot on 24 November.

Bohemian Waxwing:- On 28 November Brad Bumgardner had a flyby calling bird that flew eastward from the West Beach bathhouse. This is the lakefront's first report since the enormous 2012 incursion.

WARBLERS

Autumn of 2015 brought an admirable warbler flight with 30 species reported. Once again a couple of Dunes breeders (Louisiana Waterthrush and Cerulean Warbler) were missed; otherwise the poorest numbers were recorded for Hooded, Mourning, and Connecticut. However, some 24 of the 30 species logged had positive MI values suggesting a good flight. The average MI value per species was +0.055 (see graph).

An especially fine daily flight occurred on the weekend of 12-13 September. At the Hammond Sanctuary 22 species were logged on the 12th (John C. Kendall) and 26 the following day (Carolyn A. Marsh). The latter included high tallies of 15 Bay-breasteds, 20 Nashvilles, and 50 Blackpolls on the 12th (Peter E. Scott et al.).



Prothonotary Warbler:- Robert Guth et al. reported a singing bird in Beverly Shores on 7 Aug, for the season's only report.

Nashville Warbler:- A tally of (23), including three at Forsythe Park and 20 at the Hammond Sanctuary, on 12 September (Peter E. Scott, Alan W. Bruner, Patsy Steffen, & Tammy Turner), provided Indiana's sixth largest fall count.

Mourning Warbler:- Despite lots of birding effort it was another poor migration for this warbler. Only three were reported, which is well below the TYM of 8.1.

Hooded Warbler:- It was a poor season for this handsome warbler with only a single report: John and Karen Lindsey found (1) on 27 August in west Beverly Shores (TYM=5.7).

Bay-breasted Warbler:- Autumn 2015 brought a record flight to the lakefront with 49 reported (TYM=26.1). The previous fall maximum consisted of 41 reported in 1996. The peak daily count was (16) that Peter E. Scott's group logged in the traps on 12 September.

Blackburnian Warbler:- A record flight of 29 was logged on the lakefront this autumn. The flight peaked on 13 September when Michael A. Topp found (4) in the Hammond Sanctuary.

Wilson's Warbler:- This warbler also appeared on the lakefront in record numbers, with 78 reported (TYM=46.5). The peak count of (16) was logged in the traps on 16 September (John K. Cassady) and ties Indiana's third highest daily count.

SPARROWS

It was a disappointing autumn for sparrows, as the average MI/species was a dismal -0.234. The Vesper, Nelson's and Harris's sparrows were not reported. Of the remaining 14 species only four (Clay-colored, Fox, Song, and White-crowned) were recorded in above average numbers.

Le Conte's Sparrow:- The season's only report came from West Beach where Jeffrey J. McCoy et al. found (1) on 10 October (TYM=3.65).

White-throated Sparrow:- The season's total of 475 is the lowest since 2004 (TYM=905). The peak count was (70) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 6 October (John K. Cassady).

Blue Grosbeak:- A singing male at Miller Beach on 3 September (Jeffrey J. McCoy), provided the lakefront's first September record.

Dickcissel:- M. Penny and Jim Starin found a male and a juvenile at Mnoke Prairie (National Lakeshore) on 16 Aug (TYM=0.65).

Baltimore Oriole:- Only 10 were reported on the lakefront this fall, which is the lowest autumn total since six were tallied back in 2007 (TYM=15.3).

WINTER FINCHES

The fall of 2015 was clearly not a winter finch autumn. Although a handful of Red Crossbills

and a smattering of Redpolls were reported, of all the winter finches only the Pine Siskin appeared in above average numbers.

Purple Finch:- Reported in below normal numbers. The season total was 24 (TYM=54.7). Doug Overacker logged the season peak count of (6) at Dunes State Park on 6 November.

Red Crossbill:- Only three were reported for the season (TYM=12.2). On 19 November Brendan J. Grube had an adult male fly past the Dunes State Park Tower, Edward M. Hopkins identified a flyby at the West Beach pinery on 23 November, and John C. Kendall had a flyby at the latter location on 25 November.

Common Redpoll:- A singleton flew over Dunes State Park on 13 November (Brendan J. Grube) to provide the season's first record. For the fall flight a total of 26 were reported (TYM=38.7). The peak daily count was (9) that Michael A. Topp saw fly past Miller Beach on 14 November.

Pine Siskin:- For the season some 391 Siskins were reported (TYM=235). A significant movement occurred in early October as Michael A. Topp counted (110) flying over the Hammond Sanctuary on the 1st and Jeffrey J. McCoy logged (165) at that location on the 3rd. These birds were flying eastward in flocks of 20 to 30 individuals.



This flock of White-rumped Sandpipers was part of an extraordinary autumn invasion across the Midwest. John K. Cassady's fine photo, which reveals how these birds got their name, was taken at McCool Basin on 6 October.

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 not been constant over the twenty-year interval, indeed observer effort has surely increased over the past decade. This means that negative MI's should be examined closely as they may reflect significant declines.