

INDIANA DUNES BIRD REPORT: SPRING 2017

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During the spring of 2017 several hundred visitors enjoyed the third annual Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, which despite stormy weather proved quite successful. The season's top birds included Swainson's Hawk, Fish Crow, Hudsonian Godwit, and "Audubon's" Warbler.

The warm winter weather continued through April. Indeed, the thermometer reached 81°F on 24 March. Higher than normal precipitation inundated most shorebird sites.

Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal		
	Temp (°F)	Rainfall (in.)
Mar	+1.6	+1.51
Apr	+4.8	+3.05
May	-1.2	-0.40

Who Would Have Thought!

The 129th Street mitigation site, located at the south end of Wolf Lake, is a frequent stop for birders primarily to see the Snowy Egret that has summered there for four years. In addition to the Snowy, birders typically log an occasional duck, a Great Egret, or a few shorebirds during migration. However, on 31 May along with a friend Libby Keyes elected to bird the site at the wee pre-dawn hour of 4:30AM and hit the jackpot. In addition to the Snowy, they logged two American Bitterns, plus singletons of the following species: Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Virginia Rail, and Common Nighthawk.

Longshore Flights

Once again Brendan J. Grube manned the Dunes S.P. Bird Observation Platform (Green Tower—I have given up on finding a different name). Watches began in late February and continued (weather permitting) through most of May. A significant number of bad weather days negatively impacted the effort, as no counts broke into the top 20 Grube Magnitude flights. The season's top day, which occurred on May Day, had a Grube Magnitude of 44.70. It featured 3466 birds, including: 921 Chimney Swifts, 76 Purple Martins, 76 Eastern Kingbirds, 98 Cliff Swallows, 44 American Pipits, and 9 Bobolinks. The season's "best birds" included Swainson's Hawk, Fish Crow (a first for the lakefront), and an "Audubon's" Warbler. A number of high species counts was also logged during the lakewatch season.

Group	MI/species	Group	MI/species
Ducks	-0.102	Flycatchers	+0.251
Loons/Grebes	-0.222	Vireos	+0.163
Hérons	+0.092	Swallows	+0.284
Raptors	+0.128	Wrens	+0.346
Shorebirds	-0.165	Thrushes	+0.148
Gulls	-0.257	Warblers	+0.171
Terns	-0.362	Sparrows	+0.127

The Spring Flight

The adjacent table summarizes the 2017 spring flight by bird groups using the Migration Index (MI- definition appended). These data suggest that water birds fared poorly, whereas land birds did remarkably well. Keep in mind, however, that land bird numbers benefited from observations by the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival attendees and the numerous longshore flight watches. The un-weighted mean

of all group's MI values is +0.043, suggesting that the overall flight was near average.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Ross' Goose:- Carolyn A. Marsh found (2) at Whihala Beach on 8 March, a first for this location.

Trumpeter Swan:- A group of (4) Trumpeters spent much of May at Grant Street wetland. One was still present at the season's end.

DUCKS

It was not a good season for ducks, as 13 of the 25 expected species were reported in below normal numbers. The Harlequin Duck and Black Scoter were not reported this spring. Other poorly performing species included Long-tailed Duck, Surf Scoter, and American Black Duck. At the opposite end of the spectrum the Canvasback and Gadwall were logged in fine numbers.

American Black Duck:- The five reported this spring constitutes the lowest season total since 2011 (TYM=17.9).

Gadwall:- For the sixth consecutive spring this dabbling was reported in triple digit numbers, with 395 tallied for the season (TYM=134).

Canvasback:- On 12 March Ethan Gyllenhaal logged (154— counted by ones) on the Indiana side of Wolf Lake, providing the lakefront's third largest daily count. Ethan's tally also generated a record spring total of 195 (TYM=49.4). One at Wolf Lake on 27 May (Michael A. Topp) constituted the lakefront's third latest spring record (though June records exist).

White-winged Scoter:- It was a fine spring for this sea duck with good numbers reported. The peak daily count was (41) at the Green Tower site on 26 March (Brendan J. Grube). One lingered at Michigan City Harbor until 9 May (Jeffrey J. McCoy).

Surf Scoter:- Only two were reported for the spring Season, which is the lowest count in six years (TYM=11.1).

Long-tailed Duck:- The season's only report consisted of a singleton that Brendan J. Grube observed during the 6 March longshore flight at the Green Tower. This is the lakefront's lowest spring total in five years (TYM=119).

LOONS-GREBES

Red-necked and Eared Grebes were not reported this spring. All other members of this group appeared in above average numbers except for the Common Loon, which was well below normal.

Red-throated Loon:- Singletons dressed in the rarely observed alternate plumage were seen from the Green Tower on 13 April (John K. Cassady) and 9 May (Brendan J. Grube).

Double-crested Cormorant:- On 23 May Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns conducted a survey of the large colony on the East Chicago Lakefront. They counted (6500) individuals (excluding chicks) and 3250 nests.

HERONS

It was an outstanding season for waders, as every species, except for the absent: Cattle Egret and Little Blue Heron, was recorded in well above average numbers.

Least Bittern:- It was a record season for this diminutive heron with 6 reported (TYM=1.85). The peak tally was (2) at Grant Street wetland on 31 May (Bob Decker). Matt S. Kalwasinski et al. found and photographed (1) at Cline Avenue Marsh on 5 May, which constitutes the lakefront's second earliest record.

Great Egret:- On 23 May survey Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns conducted a survey of the large nesting colony on the East Chicago Lakefront. They counted (266) adults (excluding chicks) and 133 nests.



Kip Miller, a well known Berrien County, MI naturalist, led a group to Beverly Shores on 27 May. Near the viewing platform they discovered this Least Bittern that was lunching on a tasty frog. Kip, always quick with a quip, referred to the bird in this photo as an “antlered heron.”

Snowy Egret:- One in a barrow-pit at U.S. 20 and Johnson Road, Michigan City on 18 April (Lynea S. Hinchman), provided the lakefront’s third earliest spring record. The individual that has frequented the 129th wetland in Hammond returned on 9 May (Carolyn A. Marsh) and was seen regularly thereafter.

Black-crowned Night-Heron:- A DNR survey of the large colony at the Arcelor Mittal Steel plant in East Chicago, yielded (178) adults and 88 nests (Allisyn-Marie Gillet & Amy Kearns).

DIURNAL RAPTORS

Thanks primarily to Brendan J. Grube’s lakewatches, and 110 hours of effort, we had another fine hawk season with 2160 raptors reported. It is worth noting, however, that 30% of this total consisted of Turkey Vultures, which is the highest percentage ever reported.

Turkey Vulture:- A spectacular count of (160) by Brendan J. Grube at the Green Tower site on 26 March provided the lakefront’s largest count (by

a margin of 85 birds). According to Brendan, “A giant group headed up in the afternoon in between rain clouds and soared off to the east.”

Osprey:- Last year’s nesting birds returned to Gleason Park on 26 April (Rick Welton) and a pair was observed building a new nest at Carlson Oxbow Park on 29 April (Matt S. Kalwasinski).

Bald Eagle:- The Cline Avenue nest in Gary contained (2) nestlings on 22 April (Rick Welton).

SUMMARY 2017 DUNES HAWK-WATCHES 20 February – 15 May 20-year Mean inside “()”

Total	Species	Total	Species
628	Turkey Vulture (151)	3	Rough-legged (7)
28	Osprey (17)	0	Buteo sp. (15)
30	Bald Eagle (12)	2	Golden Eagle (1)
72	N. Harrier (62)	162	Am. Kestrel (58)
361	Sharp-shinned (241)	41	Merlin (24)
60	Cooper’s (50)	17	Peregrine (9)
0	N. Goshawk (0.4)	0	Hawk sp. (2)
76	Red-shouldered (78)	1	Swainson’s (0.7)
185	Broad-winged (71)		
494	Red-tailed (320)	2160	TOTAL (1150)

Contributors to this year’s total included: B.J. Grube, B. Bumgardner, J.K. Cassady, K. Ehn, K. Stratton, J.C. Kendall, J.J. McCoy, R.J. Pals, and KJB.

Broad-winged Hawk:- It was a good spring for this migrant with (206) reported (TYM=88.8). The peak count was (121) that Brendan J. Grube logged at the Green Tower longshore flight watch on 15 May.

Swainson’s Hawk:- A light-morph adult flew past the Dunes S.P. Green Tower on 26 April, it was identified by Brendan J. Grube, Matthew Beatty, Jeffrey J. McCoy, Brad Bumgardner, John C. Kendall, and Lynn H. Vernon. This is the tenth report from this site and the lakefront’s 13th record.

Sandhill Crane:- On 13 May Matt S. Kalwasinski found (2) nests at Cowles Bog, clearly indicating that breeding in the lakefront continues to expand.

SHOREBIRDS

Heavy rains kept McCool Basin brimming, thereby minimizing habitat at this normally productive site. It was another disappointing spring for shorebirds, as 13 of the 24 expected species were reported in below average numbers. Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, White-rumped Sandpiper and Stilt Sandpiper all went entirely unreported.

Black-necked Stilt:- One was at the 129th St. wetland on 18 April. Linda and James Strange reported it early in the day and Matt S. Kalwasinski confirmed the report that evening. The bird did not linger.

American Golden-Plover:- For the first time since 2009 this handsome plover was not reported on the lakefront (TYM=25.5).

Hudsonian Godwit:- The (4) that Rick Welton photographed at the Grant Street wetland on 3 May provided the lakefront's seventh record for the month of May (TYM=0.50).

Sanderling:- On 14 April Michael A. Topp found (2) basic plumed birds at Miller Beach; this is Indiana's second earliest spring record (though a handful of January records also exist).

Least Sandpiper:- Apparently high water levels inundated lakefront habitat as only 11 Least were reported for the season (TYM=124). The latter is the lakefront's lowest spring total since 2006.

Long-billed Dowitcher:- Matthew Beatty found an alternate adult at McCool Basin on 29 April for the season's only report (TYM=2.4).

American Woodcock:- Matt S. Kalwasinski logged (10) at Hoosier Prairie on 1 April. This tally is the lakefront's second largest count behind the dozen that Joy Bower logged at this same site on 11 May 2002.

Wilson's Phalarope:- The (6) that Matthew Beatty found at McCool Basin on 28 April tied the lakefront's fourth largest count. These birds lingered throughout the day, but were not present on the 29th.



This elegant female Wilson's Phalarope, one of six present, brightened McCool Basin on 28 April. The birds were discovered by Matthew Beatty and several additional observers were able to enjoy these single day visitors. Peter B. Grube captured the elegance of this lady on the observation day.

GULLS

It was a miserably poor spring for gulls. Except for the Ring-billed Gull, which benefited from a massive count of nesting birds, no species was reported in above average numbers.

A 23 May DNR survey of the Arcelor Mittal Steel plant on the East Chicago lakefront yielded an estimated (35,000) Ring-billeds and (200) Herring Gulls.

Bonaparte's Gull:- The eleven reported this spring constitutes the lowest spring total in more than a decade (TYM=72.2).

Laughing Gull:- The adult that Brendan J. Grube found at Michigan City Harbor on 30 April constituted the season's only report (TYM=1.3).

TERNs

Among terns only the Caspian was reported in above average numbers.

Caspian Tern:- An estimated (90) adults were surveyed on 23 May at the Arcelor Mittal Steel plant on the East Chicago lakefront where this species breeds (Allisyn-Marie Gillet & Amy Kearns).

Black-billed Cuckoo:- Two were reported for the season: the first at Gibson Woods on 24 May (Loyce Fandrei) and the second in Chesterton on 26 May (M. Penny Starin). The lakefront's TYM for the spring season is 3.25.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo:- It was a good season for this cuckoo with (11) reported (TYM=4.50). M. Penny Starin logged the peak count of (2) near her Chesterton home on 21 May.

Great Horned Owl:- Once again this owl nested in an abandoned heron nest at Cline Avenue Marsh. Matt S. Kalwasinski first observed an adult on the nest on 8 February and young were present on 29 March. Unfortunately, strong early April storms took the nest down (Matt S. Kalwasinski).



A Great Horned Owl nested in a Great Blue Heron nest at the Highland Rookery (also known as the Cline Avenue Marsh). Matt S. Kalwasinski took this photo, which reveals an adult and two downy nestlings, on 30 March. Sadly, a strong storm destroyed the nest and young, as reported by Matt on 9 April.

Long-eared Owl:- One of the wintering Hammond Sanctuary birds lingered until 11 March (Michael A. Topp).

Short-eared Owl:- Michael A. Topp found (1) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 11 March and Brendan J. Grube, Jeffrey J. McCoy, & Kim Ehn flushed (3) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 25 March.

FLYCATCHERS

Spring of 2017 was excellent for flycatchers, as every species except the Least Flycatcher was reported in above average number and the Least was only slightly below normal.

Olive-sided Flycatcher:- The ten tallied this spring is well above the TYM of 6.00. Kim Ehn logged the peak daily count with (2) at West Beach on 23 May.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:- It was a fine season for this handsome empid with a record 39 reported (TYM=17.6). The season's maximum count was the (9) that Aidan Rominger and Don Gorney logged in the n. Lake County traps on 27 May.

Acadian Flycatcher:- A singing bird at Cowles Bog on 4 May tied the lakefront's second earliest record (Annie Aguirre & Tanner Troyer).

Alder Flycatcher:- It was a record spring for this migrant with an all-time high of 38 reported (TYM=14.0). Bob Huguenard tallied the season's maximum count with (8) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 27 May.

Willow Flycatcher:- A record lakefront total of 104 was reported this spring (TYM=49.6). Lynea S. Hinchman and Randy J. Pals logged the season's maximum with (14) at four Dunes area locations on 27 May.

Eastern Kingbird:- The migration peaked on 16 May when Brendan J. Grube tallied (329) during a longshore flight at the Green Tower site. This total is Indiana's fourth largest count.

VIREOS

It was a very good season for vireos, as all species were reported in above normal numbers.

Yellow-throated Vireo:- On 15 April a singing bird in Michigan City provided a new early arrival date for the lakefront by a margin of eight days (Lindsey Grossmann and Carol Goodman).

Blue-headed Vireo:- Highlight of a fine season was the (6) that John K. Cassady & Jeffrey J. McCoy tallied at three Lake Co traps on 9 May.

Fish Crow:- On 25 April Porter became the 19th Indiana county in which this expanding species has been reported. On that day Brendan J. Grube and John K. Cassady saw a calling bird fly past the Dunes S.P. Green Tower.

SWALLOWS

Swallows fared well this spring. All six species were reported in above average numbers.

Cliff Swallow:- The (122) logged during the 9 May longshore flight at the Green Tower (Brendan J. Grube), constitutes the lakefront's third largest count.

WRENS

It was a fine season for wrens, as all five species were tallied in above normal numbers.

Winter Wren:- It was a record spring for this tiny wren with 31 reported (TYM=12.6). The peak daily count was (5) that Brendan J. Grube logged at the Green Tower site on 3 April.

Marsh Wren:- This wren was also logged in record numbers with 182 reported for the season (TYM=52.9). The season's maximum count was (30) that Michael A. Topp recorded at Grant Street wetland on 21 May.

Golden-crowned Kinglet:- One at the Hammond Sanctuary on 27 May (Bob Huguenard, Michael A. Topp, et al.), tied Indiana's fifth latest record.



This tardy Golden-crowned Kinglet frequented the Hammond Sanctuary conifers on 27 May, providing the lakefront's second latest spring record. Photo by Bob Huguenard.

THRUSHES

Spring of 2017 proved to be an excellent season for thrushes. Every species in this group appeared in above average numbers.

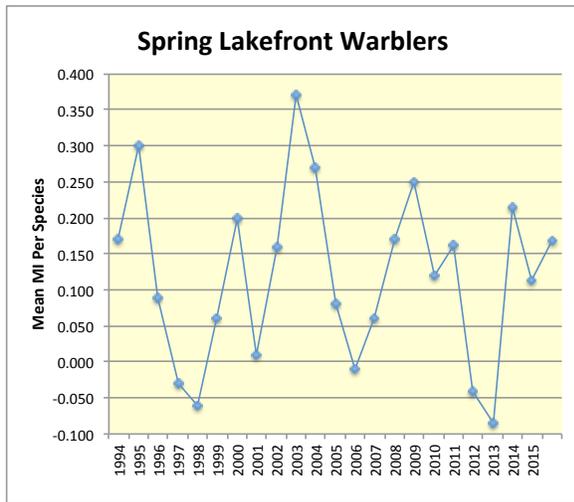
Veery:- The single bird that Carolyn Marsh found at the Hammond Sanctuary on 16 April, constituted the lakefront's second earliest spring record.

Smith's Longspur:- Brendan J. Grube and Jeffrey J. McCoy shattered the early arrival date for the lakefront by flushing (1) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 25 March. The previous earliest date was 12 April of last year. Ironically, a new late date for Indiana was also set 20 May when Michael A. Topp found (3) on the beach at Miller (previous late date was 13 May).

WARBLERS

It was a superior spring for warblers in the Dunes. All 36 of Indiana's regular species were reported and 30 of these appeared in above average numbers. As illustrated in the below graph the season's average Migration Index was +0.171. Among the rank and file the Cape May staged the weakest flight and Worm-eating the strongest.

Record season numbers were tallied for the following warblers: Worm-eating, Orange-crowned, Pine, Blackpoll, and Prothonotary.



Worm-eating Warbler:- The spring’s biggest surprise was the return of apparent territorial birds along Trail 7 in Dunes S.P. The high count was (2) singing birds at that site on 6 May (Annie Aguirre & Tanner Troyer). A total of 6 were reported for the season (TYM=1.65).



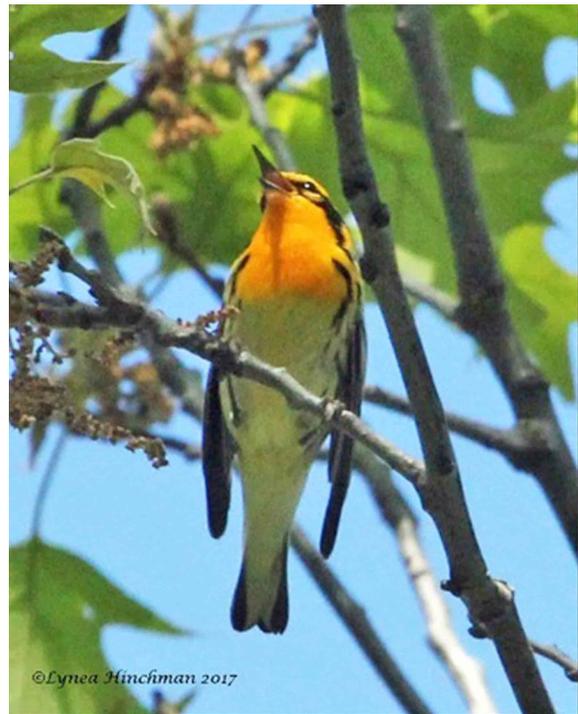
The Worm-eating Warbler is quite rare on the lakefront; consequently, the presence of two in Dunes State Park in early May created considerable excitement. John C. Kendall took this remarkable photo at the site on 5 May.

Prothonotary Warbler:- An all-time spring record of 40 was reported for the season (TYM=14.7). The (6) that Lynea S. Hinchman logged in Dunes

S.P. on 13 May tied the lakefront’s third largest daily count.

Orange-crowned Warbler:- The 50 reported this spring is an all-time high for the lakefront (TYM=20.4). Brendan Grube logged (14) in the Dunes on 2 May, that tally constitutes an Indiana record for the spring season.

Nashville Warbler:- Joseph Drapac identified (1) at Oak Ridge Prairie on 15 April, which provided an all-time early date for the lakefront (by four days).



Birders always delight in seeing the spring’s first Blackburnian Warbler glowing in the morning sun. Lynea S. Hinchman photographed this fine male in Dunes S.P. on 18 May.

Cape May Warbler:- This species staged a feeble flight with only 21 reported (TYM=36.3). This total is the lowest since 18 were logged in the spring of 2010. The one that Matt S. Kalwasinski found in Heritage Park (Munster) on 28 April tied the lakefront’s second earliest record.

Blackpoll Warbler:- A record breaking 166 Blackpolls were reported on the lakefront this spring (TYM=59.5). The season’s peak tally of

(26) was logged on 16 May in the Lake County traps by John K. Cassady, Kim Ehn, Lynea S. Hinchman, and Jeffrey J. McCoy.

Pine Warbler:- It was a record season on the lakefront with 121 birds reported (TYM=39.5). Two exceptional totals occurred during Brendan J. Grube's spring longshore flight watches. The 23 April movement yielded (23) birds, which is Indiana's third largest count. Four days later a state record (47) Pine Warblers were logged.

Yellow-rumped Warbler:- The 19 April longshore flight at the Green Tower site yielded (2213) Yellow-rumped, which is Indiana's all-time third largest count.

"Audubon's" Warbler:- Brendan J. Grube identified (1) at the Green Tower site on 25 April. This is Indiana's fourth report of this western subspecies.

Yellow-throated Warbler:- On 16 April M. Penny Starin logged (6) in the Heron Rookery, which ties the lakefront's largest count.

SPARROWS

The spring sparrow flight went quite well with every species reported in above average numbers except for the rarities: Le Conte's and Harris's, which were not reported.

Vesper Sparrow:- On 16 March Brenda Wineman found (2) singing birds near the Green Tower Site feeders, providing the lakefront's second earliest record.

Henslow's Sparrow:- Seven were reported for the season (TYM=2.25). Two were reported in Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 1 May (Kristin Stratton) and two more were at Mnoke Prairie on 13 May (Randy J. Pals).

Fox Sparrow:- It was the lakefront's second best spring flight with 192 reported (TYM=72.7). On 24 March Michael A. Topp and Carolyn A. Marsh counted (80) in the Hammond Sanctuary. This total constitutes the state's largest daily count (by a margin of 14 birds).

Summer Tanager:- Jeffrey J. McCoy set a new high count for the lakefront on 16 May with (4) at the Green Tower site and (2) in Dunes S.P away

from the tower. This tally exceeded the previous maximum by a single bird.

Bobolink:- A male, photographed at the Grant Street wetland on 25 April (Libby Keyes), provided the lakefront's third earliest record.

Western Meadowlark:- Kristin Stratton found (1) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 19 March. This bird remained until 10 April (John C. Kendall) and was seen by many.



Kristin Stratton found this fine Western Meadowlark at the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 19 March. It lingered and sang in the area until early April when excavation for a pipeline began. KJB took this photo on 1 April.

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- The Grant Street wetland male returned on 22 April and remained through May (Michael A. Topp).

Rusty Blackbird:- Two exceptional counts that Brendan J. Grube logged at the Green Tower site elevated the season total to a record 4967. Brendan's tallies were (1479) on 3 April and (1378) on 9 April.

Baltimore Oriole:- While conducting longshore flight watches at the Dunes S.P. Green Tower, Brendan J. Grube spotted (1) on 10 April. This is

the lakefront's all-time earliest arrival date and, ignoring winter reports, it ties Indiana's sixth earliest spring record.

WINTER FINCHES

Purple Finches were well represented in the spring flight; however, all other winter finches were scarce or entirely absent. Redpolls and crossbills fell into the latter category.

Purple Finch:- The (98) that Brendan J. Grube tallied during a 14 April longshore flight at the

Green Tower site, constitutes the lakefront's fourth largest count. Brendan's count elevated the season's total to 197, which is the highest in eleven years (TYM=83.0).

Pine Siskin:- This normally abundant feeder bird was virtually nonexistent this spring with only two reported (TYM=685). Singletons were logged by Kristin Stratton at Dunes S.P. on 2 April and Brendan J. Grube detected the other at the Green Tower site on 3 May.

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, which compares the current flight with the previous 20 flights. The following relation calculates this parameter: $MI = (Total - TYM) / (Total + TYM)$. 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.