

INDIANA DUNES AREA BIRD REPORT: SPRING 2019
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Unlike last spring the 2019 flight yielded no White-tailed Kite; however, lakefront birders did enjoy a fine migration. Season highlights included: Long-eared Owl, Western Kingbird, Fish Crow, Common Raven, Worm-eating Warbler, Kirtland's Warbler, and Blue Grosbeak, but several of the more common species were observed in astonishing numbers (e.g., 22 Canada Warblers at Cowles Bog during one outing).

The season's weather can be summarized in two words, "cold and wet." Meteorological parameters in the adjacent table are from Chicago, but are similar to the lakefront numbers. Throughout the month of May it seemed to rain every other day. Flooded fields apparently created too much shorebird habitat, as waders were in extremely short supply throughout the lakefront.

| Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal | | |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| | Temp (°F) | Precip (in.) |
| Mar | -3.6 | -0.41 |
| Apr | +0.8 | +2.64 |
| May | -1.1 | +4.57 |

Longshore Flights

| Top Eight Longshore Flights | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Date | Grube Mag. | Highlight |
| 6-May | 86.52 | 184 Palm Warblers |
| 1-May | 67.48 | 43 Martins |
| 5-May | 45.47 | 33 RBWOs |
| 7-Apr | 42.59 | 1239 Flickers |
| 9-May | 39.94 | 202 Spotted Sand. |
| 14-Mar | 39.62 | 75 Long-t. Ducks |
| 2-Apr | 28.82 | Surf Scoter |
| 8-Apr | 21.31 | 2 Long-tail Ducks |

Thanks to Kyle Wiktor's lake watches at the Green Tower site we obtained reams of new data. The season's best movement occurred 6 May and included 184 Palm Warblers, 81 Gnatcatchers, and 31 Red-headed Woodpeckers. It had a Grube Magnitude of 86.52, which is the second largest flight ever recorded. Grube Magnitude provides a measure of flight quality based on the numbers of certain index species: a detailed

description of the calculation is available from the author. The all-time best flight had a Grube Magnitude of 87.34 and was also logged by Kyle last year on 2-May.

Dunes Birding Festival

The numerous field trips conducted by the festival activities elevated the season totals of many species. This year's event occurred in mid-May (16th through 19th) and field-trippers enjoyed excellent numbers of migrants. On 18 May I encountered Wesley T. Homoya's trippers at the Heron Rookery, as they were excited by the simultaneous presence of three Mourning Warblers.

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SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Greater White-fronted Goose:- Kyle Wiktor established a lakefront record of (809) at the Green Tower site on 9 March.

The previous spring maximum was 646, also seen at that site on 10 March 2014.

Cackling Goose:- A lakefront record daily count of (7) was logged at the Green Tower site on 12 March (Kyle Wiktor).

Trumpeter Swan:- This large swan is becoming quite regular on the lakefront, as one to three birds were reported at seven locations this spring.

DUCKS

Puddle ducks fared rather poorly this season with every species except three below the 20-year average. Among these the American Wigeon made the poorest showing. In contrast, all of divers and sea ducks except Ruddy, were well above normal, with Long-tailed Duck and Surf Scoter at the top. Mergansers were reported in near average numbers.

American Wigeon:- This handsome duck was surprisingly scarce with only 23 reported for the season (TYM=38.6). This is the lowest spring total since eleven were reported in 2011.

Surf Scoter:- The season total of 87 constitutes the largest spring tally in eleven years (TYM=18.5).

Long-tailed Duck:- This elegant duck was more prevalent than normal on Lake Michigan with 606 tallied (TYM=150). Excellent numbers were reported off the Green Tower site where the season's peak count of (151) was logged on 6 April (Brad Bumgardner & Matthew Beatty).

Ring-necked Duck:- Primarily due to unprecedented numbers at Grant St. Wetland, it was a record spring with 1618 birds reported (TYM=421). The peak daily count was (400) that Matt Igleski tallied at the latter site on 23 March.

RAILS

It was a fine spring for rails with excellent Virginia Rail and Sora counts.

Yellow Rail:- Kyle Wiktor logged this difficult to find species on 3 May. It was flushed from the Great Marsh just west of the Old Hobart Road in Lake Co (TYM=0.05).

Virginia Rail:- An impressive season total of 96 birds provided the lakefront's best spring total since 107 was logged back in 1997. The season's peak daily count was (6) that Matthew Beatty recorded twice: 6 May at Clark and Pine and again on 11 May in west Beverly Shores.

Sora:- Highlighted by a state record count of (159), which Michael A. Topp logged at Grant St. Wetland on 3 May, lakefront birders enjoyed a record spring for this small rail. According to Michael high water forced the rails into the open where they were much easier to count. For the season some 494 Soras were reported (TYM=93.4).

SHOREBIRDS

The season's heavy rains inundated virtually all habitats away from Lake Michigan's shores. Although 24 shorebird species were reported 13 of these appeared in below average numbers. Indeed, both the Stilt and White-rumped Sandpipers went unreported. Other far below normal species included: Semipalmated and Pectoral Sandpipers plus the Semipalmated Plover.

American Avocet:- Brad Bumgardner observed a flyby flock of (11) at the Green Tower site on 18 April. This report constitutes the lakefront's second earliest record (by one day).

Semipalmated Plover:- A paltry 5 were reported for the season (TYM=36.5). This is the lowest spring total for the lakefront since 2006.

Piping Plover:- Nathan Goldberg found (1) on the Dune Acres beach on 3 May.

American Golden-Plover:- The season's only report consisted of a flyby flock of (40) that Kyle Wiktor observed at the Green Tower site on 22 April.

Upland Sandpiper:- One spent 23 April in the blowout south of the Green Tower (Kyle Wiktor), providing the fourth spring record for this site (TYM=0.03).

Marbled Godwit:- While driving home on I-94 John K. Cassidy saw (2) in the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. area on 16 April. This report constitutes a new early record for the lakefront.

Spotted Sandpiper:- The (202) that Kyle Wiktor logged at the Green Tower site on 9 May provided Indiana's second largest count behind Brendan J. Grube's 314 that were observed at the same site on 15 May 2015.

Wilson's Phalarope:- The season's only report consisted of an alternate male that was found at the C.R. 1275 N pond in Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 29 April (Matthew Beatty).

GULLS

Bonaparte's Gull:- The 212 birds reported this spring provided the best spring total in 14 years (TYM=84.6). The lakefront's peak daily count was (99) that John C. Kendall logged at Reynolds Creek G.H.A., where they joined the Ring-billed Gulls feeding in the fields on 16 April.

Lesser Black-backed Gull:- Matthew Beatty logged (4), three adults and a third-cycle, in the fields at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 12 April, establishing a first record for this site.

Glaucous Gull:- The scarcity of this gull continued this spring with only two birds reported for the season (TYM=12.6). The last was at the Hammond Sanctuary on 20 April where Michael A. Topp identified a second-cycle bird.

TERNs

Overall the tern flight was near average with two species above normal and two below.

Black Tern:- The season's most pleasant surprise was the appearance of 6 Black Terns (TYM=2.05). Lauren Wadas tallied the six in Schererville on 21 May. This is the lakefront's first spring record in three years.

Common Tern:- The eleven reported this spring constitutes the lakefront's lowest count since 2007 (TYM=78.9). The peak daily tally was (3) that Kyle Wiktor logged at the Green Tower site on 8 May.

Common Loon:- For the fifth consecutive spring (since 2013) this large loon was reported in below average numbers. This season a total of 125 was reported (TYM=226).

Sandhill Crane:- The 6895 that Kyle Wiktor logged at the Green Tower site on 23 March constitutes the lakefront's third largest count.

American White Pelican:- It was the best spring ever for the lakefront, with a total of 98 reported (TYM=13.5). The season's peak report was (27) that flew past the Green Tower site on 17 April (Kyle Wiktor).

The latter was also the lakefront's third largest daily count.

HERONS & EGRETS

Numbers for this group were slightly above normal. Only the Cattle Egret, which was missed entirely, was below average.

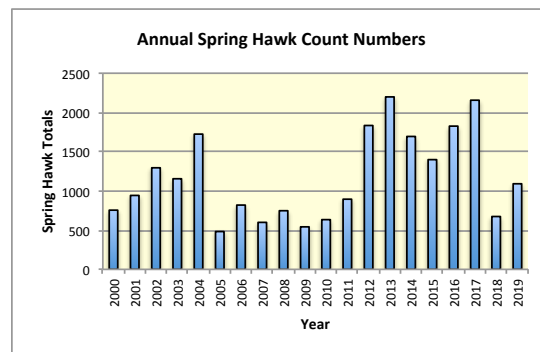
American Bittern:- A spring lakefront record of 19 was logged this year (TYM=4.55). The peak count of three was logged twice: Matt S. Kalwasinski at Grant St. Wetland on 3 May and Lindsay Grossman at DuPont on 16 May.

Owls

Long-eared Owl:- On 3 April Chris Miller found a migrant in the West Beach pinery, providing the first record for this site in seven years.

DIURNAL RAPTORS

Thanks to Kyle Wiktor's watches at the Green Tower, some 1093 diurnal raptors were logged this spring. This is a marked improvement over last year's 657, but remains slightly below the TYM of 1171. Reports for the last 20 years are tabulated below



Merlin:- It was a record season for this small falcon with 58 reported (TYM=21.9). The spring's peak tally was (4) that Kyle Wiktor logged on 17 April at the Green Tower site. Importantly, in late May Kevin B. Ryan reported that the pair that attempted nesting in Chesterton last year had returned.

Northern Flicker:- A record Indiana flight occurred at the Green Tower site on 7 April with (1239) birds counted. The state's

previous maximum was (1127) reported at this same site on 10 April 2011.

FLYCATCHERS

It was a superb spring for flycatchers with every species reported in far above average numbers.

Olive-sided Flycatcher:- The (5) that Jeffrey J. McCoy's group tallied on 25 May tied the lakefront's second highest daily count. The five consisted of a singleton at Forsythe Park and four birds at Beverly Shores: at one point two were simultaneously visible.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:- The season's total was a record 47 birds (TYM=20.9). The 25 May outing by John K. Cassady, Jeffrey J. McCoy, Randy J. Pals, Ryan J. Sanderson, and KJB logged (13) at four sites, which tied the lakefront's third largest daily count.

Alder Flycatcher:- A record (40) birds was reported on the lakefront (TYM=16.3). The vocalizing bird that John C. Kendall found in central Beverly Shores on 11 May, provided the lakefront's third earliest arrival date.

Western Kingbird:- Kyle Wiktor observed a flyby at the Green Tower site on 28 May, providing the fifth record for this site. Interestingly, four of these five reports occurred within the interval 23-28 May.

VIREOS

Members of this group were unusually plentiful, as every species was reported in numbers well above their 20-year means.

Blue-headed Vireo:- It was a record season for this attractive vireo with 60 reported (TYM=21.9). Joseph Drapac logged the largest daily count of (7) at Oak Ridge Prairie on 13 May. The singleton that Matt S. Kalwasinski found in Munster on 17 April established a new early arrival date for the lakefront (by one day).

CORVIDS

Fish Crow:- On 31 May Kyle Wiktor observed a flock of (4) fly past the Green Tower. Kyle noted, "As they passed the

tower, some of them made their nasal Fish Crow vocalizations a few times...they all were the same size."

Common Raven:- Kyle also identified the season's best bird as it flew past the Green Tower on 13 March. Kyle commented, "Flew west. I first noticed it when I heard it croaking a few times. Very large Corvid with signature wedge shaped tail." If accepted by the Indiana Bird Records Committee this will constitute Indiana's first record since 17 October 1953 when one was sighted at Miller Beach.

SWALLOWS

Every species, except the Cliff Swallow, was reported in well above average numbers.

Cliff Swallow:- For the second consecutive spring this swallow appeared in below normal numbers. For the season total was 127 and the TYM=169.

WRENS

Except for the Carolina Wren every member of this group was above average.

Carolina Wren: Surprisingly, especially considering the observer effort, only 9 birds were reported this season (TYM=14.5).

Golden-crowned Kinglet:- A singing late migrant was seen and heard in the Hammond Sanctuary on 17 May (Matt S. Kalwasinski et al.). This date tied the lakefront's fourth latest spring record.

THRUSHES

Superb thrush numbers were reported this spring with all species far, far above their respective TYMs.

Hermit Thrush:- On 23 May John C. Kendall found one at Cowles Bog, which provided the lakefront's second latest record.

WINTER FINCHES

The spring of 2019 was not a winter finch spring. Indeed, the crossbills and Evening Grosbeak were entirely absent and only the local residents (House Finch and Goldfinch) appeared in positive numbers.

Common Redpoll:- The only significant report was a flyby flock of (30) that Kyle Wiktor logged at the Green Tower site on 12 March (TYM=32.2).

LONGSPURS

Smith's Longspur:- Matthew Beatty flushed (1) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 12 April.

SPARROWS

Overall it was a good spring for sparrows, but Fox Sparrow numbers were down slightly. Most impressive was a record number of Henslow's Sparrows.

Henslow's Sparrow:- It was a record season for this sparrow with 23 reported (TYM=3.4). The peak count of 3 was logged twice: on 16 May Stuart Tower at Dunes S.P. Boundary Road and on 19 May when Amy Kearns birded Reynolds Creek G.H.A..

BLACKBIRDS

Western Meadowlark:- Matthew Beatty found the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. bird on 3 April.

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- Two reports, both involving adult males, occurred on the lakefront this spring. The first was photographed at a Hammond feeder on 23 April (unknown observer) and the second briefly appeared at the Grant Street Wetland on 3 May (Michael A. Topp)



This Orchard Oriole, one of three adult males present at the Brock feeders on 2 May, contributed to the lakefront's record spring count. Photo by KJB.

Orchard Oriole:- Spring of 2019 brought a record count of Orchard Orioles with 107 reported (TYM=38.5). Being a Code 5 bird on the lakefront, birders rarely see two males at the

same time. However Randy J. Pals overcame this issue on 2 May when five quarrelsome males simultaneously visited his feeder. According to Randy, "They were even hanging on my patio door screens."

Brewer's Blackbird:- It was the best spring ever for this Icterid on the lakefront with an amazing 193 reported (TYM=11.8). The two flocks found at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 16 April (John K. Cassady, Lynea S. Hinchman, Lynn H. Vernon, & KJB) totaled (43), which is both a Porter County record and the lakefront's second largest count. This record, however, had a brief lifetime, as Brad Bumgardner logged (75) at Reynolds Creek on 18 April.

WARBLERS

All 35 of Indiana's regular warblers (the Chat is no longer considered to be a warbler), plus a Kirtland's, were reported this spring. However, despite heavy birding five species were still logged in below average numbers.



Julie Bonnema found this striking Worm-eating Warbler in Heritage Park (Munster) on 25 April. It lingered long enough for Matt Kalwasinski to arrive and take this photograph. It also provided the lakefront's fourth earliest record.

Worm-eating Warbler:- It was the best spring ever for this warbler with 7 reported (TYM=2.00). One appeared to be on territory in Dunes S.P. and singletons were reported in Munster (Julie Bonnema), the Hammond Sanctuary (Michael A. Topp), the Green Tower (Kyle Wiktor), and at Cowles Bog (John & Karen Lindsey).

Tennessee Warbler:- It was a surprisingly poor spring for this warbler with 109 reported (TYM=156), which is the lowest spring total since 35 were logged back in 2013. The season's peak tally of (15) was logged by Matt Igleski on 18 May at Pinhook Bog.

Kirtland's Warbler:- Lynea S. Hinchman documented a singing male (both heard and seen) in Dunes S.P. on the May Day count (11 May).

Cerulean Warbler:- Following two years of above average spring totals only 31 were reported this season (TYM=39.4).



Photos of female Cerulean Warblers are quite rare. This one was photographed three feet above the ground in Dune State Park on 19 May. Photo by Lynea S. Hinchman

Black-throated Blue Warbler:- Ralph Grundel reported a male in the Dunes on 12 April. This is a record early report for the lakefront (by one day).

Yellow-throated Warbler:- It was a much better than average spring for this warbler with 15 reported (TYM=8.6). Encouragingly all reports were not from the Heron Rookery; indeed birds were also reported at five other sites.



Who needs to visit the Heron Rookery? This handsome Yellow-throated Warbler visited the Pals' deck in Chesterton on several early May occasions. Mary Ann Pals took this superb photo on 8 May.

Canada Warbler:- The 23 birds that John C. Kendall tallied on 23 May at Cowles Bog (22) and Howes Prairie (one) constitute Indiana's fourth largest daily count.

Wilson's Warbler:- The Wilson's that John K. Cassady observed in Forsythe Park on 3 May constituted the lakefront's fifth earliest record.

SUMMER FINCHES

Rose-breasted Grosbeak:- The 311 birds reported this season set a new spring record for the lakefront (TYM=179). Kyle Wiktor logged the maximum daily count of (23) at the Green Tower site on 6 May.

Blue Grosbeak:- An adult male was discovered at the Green Tower feeders on 22 May (Kyle Wiktor); it lingered for three days.

Dickcissel:- This species was slow in arriving and numbers were below levels of the last three years. For the season 28 were reported, but last year's spring total was 96.

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.