

INDIANA DUNES BIRD REPORT: SPRING 2018

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Weather played a major role in the spring 2018 flight, especially for the hawk migration. The unusually cold early months were also dominated by north winds. Apparently, most of the hawks that regularly migrate across the Dunes, avoided these headwinds and circumnavigated the lakefront.

Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal		
	Temp (°F)	Rainfall (in.)
Mar	-1.0	-0.76
Apr	-7.7	-0.66
May	+7.0	+4.53

Highlights

Two spectacular rarities and one amazing occurrence were logged in the Dunes area this season: a Black-throated Gray Warbler in Hobart; a White-tailed Kite at Reynolds Creek G.H.A.; and nesting Merlins in residential Chesterton. Other “good” birds included: Ross’ Goose, Piping Plover, American Avocet, Laughing Gull, Fish Crow, Western Kingbird, and Red Crossbill.



This adult White-tailed Kite was discovered at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. by Mark Welter on 18 May. Scores of Participants in the Birding Festival had an opportunity to view this rarity, which constituted Indiana’s third record. The bird was successful in finding prey and remained in the area until 26 May. The above photo shows that he has a small rodent in his talons and is being pursued by a perturbed Red-winged Blackbird. Michael R. Brown captured this superb shot on 22 May.

Longshore Flights

Kyle Wiktors conducted lakewatches at the Green Tower Site throughout the spring season. North winds in March and April severely limited longshore movements. Despite the unfavorable weather Kyle set a Grube Magnitude longshore flight record on 2 May when he logged 100 species at the Green Tower Site. Kyle’s flight had a Grube Magnitude of 87.34, displacing Brendan Grube’s previous maximum of 81.74. Highlights of then 2-May flight included 334 Pine Siskins, 702 Tree Swallows, 178 Palm Warblers, and 963 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

Dunes Birding Festival

It appears that the Birding Festival was extremely successful. The presence of numerous birding groups generated many of the largest spring woodland bird totals ever recorded (see right column in below table). Accordingly, a plethora of passerines were reported in record numbers; however, it is worthwhile to remember that these marvelous results likely reflect higher birder effort, rather than population increases.

The adjacent table summarizes the 2018 migration by bird groups employing the Migration Index (MI- definition appended). These data suggest that except for herons, non-passerines fared poorly, whereas song 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.

Group	MI/species	Group	MI/species
Ducks	+0.012	Flycatchers	+0.299
Loons/Grebes	-0.181	Vireos	+0.276
Herons	+0.180	Swallows	+0.196
Raptors	-0.043	Wrens	+0.358
Shorebirds	-0.043	Thrushes	+0.432
Gulls	-0.144	Warblers	+0.213
Terns	-0.328	Sparrows	+0.268

Appended to this document is a detailed description of the abbreviations and usages employed in this summary.

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SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Ross' Goose:- M. Penny Starin reported (1) at Cowles Bog on 1 March and Lynea S. Hinchman found another at Hitchcock Road Pond on 20 March (TYM=1.55).

Cackling Goose:- On 21 April John K. Cassady identified a flock of (5) as they flew over

Reynolds Creek G.H.A, thereby establishing a new high count for the lakefront.

Trumpeter Swan:- The lone Trumpeter at Grant Street Wetland was joined by another Trumpeter Swan on 8 May (Rick Welton).



Randy J. Pals discovered a pair of Cackling Geese among the Canada Geese at Hitchcock Road Pond on 18 March. Two days later KJB visited the site and photographed these four.

DUCKS

The overall duck flight was slightly above normal. Dabbling numbers were up for ever species except Mallard and Black Duck. Bay ducks provided a mixed bag, with a majority of the species in negative territory. Except for Long-tailed, sea duck numbers were all above normal. It was a below average spring for mergansers.

Gadwall:- It was a record spring for this duck on the lakefront with 602 reported for the season (TYM=163).

Long-tailed Duck:- Only four were reported this season. The TYM of 119 remains greatly inflated by the 1978 Long-taileds reported during the spring of 2014.

Ruddy Duck:- Matt S. Kalwasinski carefully counted (189) at Grant Street Wetland on 14 April to establish a new high count for the lakefront (previous maximum was 163).

LOONS-GREBES

It was not a good spring for loons, as the numbers of both regular species were down markedly.

Red-throated Loon:- Inexplicably, the season numbers of this loon plunged to only 22, which is the lowest spring total since 2007 (TYM=107.3). Kyle Wiktor reported the season's high count of (3) at the Green Tower Site on two occasions: 18 March and 8 April.

Common Loon:- The season total of 88 is the lowest since 2011 (TYM=277). Fortunately, statewide numbers were well above normal suggesting that the population has not dwindled.

HERONS

This group fared unusually well this spring, as every species except Snowy Egret and Little Blue Heron (not reported) exceeded their Twenty Year Mean.



The American Bittern is exceptionally hard to find on the lakefront. However, Pete Grube not only found this one at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 14 April, but also captured this beautiful flight shot.

American Bittern:- It was a wonderful spring for this species on the lakefront. The season's total was a record 12 birds (TYM=3.70).

Least Bittern:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best numbers in decades with 8 birds reported (TYM=2.3). The peak count was (3) that Libby Keyes logged at the 129th Street wetland on 27 May.

Great Egret:- On 21 May Amy Kearns surveyed the rookery at Arcelor Mittal Steel (East Chicago) and counted 344 egrets along with 172 nests.

Cattle Egret:- This species appeared in the best numbers in nine years, with 8 reported (TYM=2.10). The peak tally was (5) that Kim Ehn logged at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 29 May.

DIURNAL RAPTORS

Due to persistent north winds, especially in March and April, the spring hawk flight was a major dud. Only 657 raptors were logged for the season. This is the lowest season total since 635 were logged in 2010 (TYM=1167).

White-tailed Kite:- Mark Welter found an adult near the big white barn at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 18 May. The bird lingered until 26 May and was seen by more than 150 festival participants, plus many others. This is Indiana's third record and the first for the northern tier of counties.



Michael R. Brown's remarkable shot of the White-tailed Kite's upper parts reveals fresh new primaries growing in on the inner wing. The bird is preoccupied with the interactions with the American Crow. Michael took this photo on 22 May.

Bald Eagle:- Thanks to a tip from Matt S. Kalwasinski on 23 March Matt Beatty found an adult on a nest in East Chicago, which is a new nest-site for the lakefront.

Northern Goshawk:- Kyle Wiktor identified an immature as it flew past the Green Tower site on 24 March.

Red-tailed (Harlan's) Hawk:- On 27 March Lynn H. Vernon and KJB found (1) perched on the ground in a field at Reynolds Creek G.H.A.. Lynn obtained distant photos. This is the lakefront's fourth record of the Harlan's subspecies.

Sandhill Crane:- At least three family groups (all containing colts) were reported regularly in Beverly Shores (M. Penny Starin et al.).



It was another successful breeding season for Sandhill Cranes at Beverly Shores. At least three pairs with young were reported at various locations in the Great Marsh. This striking photo of an adult and colt was taken 26 May by Lynea S. Hinchman.

SHOREBIRDS

Fully half of the 22 expected shorebird species were reported in below average numbers. White-rumped and Stilt sandpipers both went unreported, and Sanderling and Willet were acutely scarce. It was clearly an exceedingly poor spring for shorebirds.

Black-bellied Plover:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best spring flight in 20 years, with 21 birds

reported (TYM=4.25). The season's peak tally was (7) that Amy Kearns *et al.* logged at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 18 May.

Piping Plover:- On 16 April Mary Nell Murphy photographed a "Piper" on the beach at Michigan City Harbor. A banded adult was also seen at this location on 21 May (Ryan Sanderson and Aidan Rominger).

American Golden-Plover:- The flock of 96 that Michael A. Topp reported at Miller Beach on 1 May, constitutes the lakefront's second largest count (TYM=30.3). According to Michael this large flock even landed briefly on the beach, which is a very rare event for the spring flight.

American Avocet:- Zeke Escobedo photographed a flock of 10 in northern Lake Co on 4 May. This is the lakefront's second largest spring count (TYM=0.9).

Sanderling:- The singleton that Matt S. Kalwasinski found at Michigan City Harbor on 10 May, provided the lakefront's lowest spring total since 2012, a year we were skunked (TYM=14.0).

Willet:- The only records were: Michael A. Topp recorded (2) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 11 May and Matt Beatty logged (1) in a Gary puddle on 30 May. These three are far below the TYM of 18.6.

GULLS

The lakefront gull flight was abysmal. Of the eight species reported, the numbers of six were below normal. Among these, the Glaucous and Bonaparte's made the poorest showings.

Bonaparte's Gull:- The season count of 49 is far below the TYM of 77.0. The peak daily count of (8) was logged on three occasions, all at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. (Brad Bumgardner & Kyle Wiktor).

Laughing Gull:- An alternate adult was at Michigan City Harbor on 20 May (Ryan Sanderson, Amy Kearns, et al.). It lingered on the beach through at least 23 May (Edward M. Hopkins).

Glaucous Gull:- On 18 May Matt S. Kalwasinski photographed a tardy first-cycle bird at Miller Beach, providing Indiana's latest spring record.

Apparently this same individual was seen later that day on the Green Tower Site beach (Richard Garrett). On subsequent days it was observed on the outer breakwater at Michigan City Harbor (Sean Verkamp) where it was last reported on 25 May (John K. Cassady et al.).

TERNs

Once again it was a poor spring for terns. Except for the Caspian, which remains to breed, every species was recorded in below average numbers. Indeed, no Black terns were reported.

Black-billed Cuckoo:- It was an excellent spring for this cuckoo with 12 reported (TYM=3.8). The peak daily count of (3), was tallied by Randy J. Pals, John K. Cassady, & Lynn H. Vernon on 22 May.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo:- This was one of those unusual springs in which Black-billed numbers exceeded the Yellow-billeds on the lakefront. Only 7 Yellow-billeds were reported (TYM=4.7).

Great Horned Owl:- Matt S. Kalwasinski observed adults on nests at two locations this spring: Cline Avenue Marsh and DuPont Wetland.



Although the Merlin nest was easily visible from the street, it was almost impossible to determine that it was occupied. However, Brad Bumgardner solved this problem when he digiscoped the bird sitting in the nest on 29 May.

Northern Saw-whet Owl:- Brad Bumgardner banded singletons at Dunes State Park on 4 and 8 March in Dunes State Park.

Short-eared Owl:- Brendan J. Grube logged a lakefront record (18) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 14 April, giving a season total of 27 birds (TYM=4.00).

Merlin:- Chesterton resident Kevin B. Ryan nailed down Indiana's second nesting record. The birds were present for a couple of months and on 23 May Kevin observed copulation. He saw the male feeding the female. The nest is visible in a tall white pine across the street from Kevin's house. The male's favorite perch is atop a somewhat smaller spruce on the front lawn of the house next door to the Ryan residence.

FLYCATCHERS

Spring of 2018 was wonderful for flycatchers. Among the ten species reported only the Eastern Kingbird was reported in below average numbers.

Olive-sided Flycatcher:- A spring record 18 singletons were reported this season (TYM=6.90).

Willow Flycatcher:- A fine count of (37) was logged at three sites (majority at Beverly Shores) on 26 May (John K. Cassady & Lynea S. Hinchman). This tally is Indiana's fourth highest daily count.

Western Kingbird:- For the first time on record three (all singletons) were reported this spring. The first was at Cowles Bog on 18 May (Annie Aguirre & Tanner Troyer *et al.*), the second and third flew past the Green Tower Site on 24 May (Brendan J. Grube) and 27 May (Kyle Wiktor) respectively. The previous spring maximum was two in 2012 (TYM=0.4).

Loggerhead Shrike:- The lakefront's first record since 11 April 2002, was photographed by Michael A. Topp at Miller Beach on 13 April.

Northern Shrike:- On 11 March Jeff Skrentny logged (2) at Wolf Lake near the Illinois state line. This is the lakefront's largest March count in five years. The following day Rick Welton once again located the wintering bird at Chase Street Wetland in Gary. An even later shrike, which Michael A. Topp found at Miller Beach on 13 April, tied two other reports for Indiana's all-time latest spring record.

VIREOS

This group fared quite well with every species well above average.

Blue-headed Vireo:- The 41 reported on the lakefront this season constitutes the largest spring count in many decades (TYM=19.2). Caleb Putnam tallied (5) in Dunes State Park on 15 May for the season's highest count.

Fish Crow:- It was a remarkable spring on the lakefront for this corvid (TYM=0.25). A calling bird flew past the Green Tower Site on 19 March (Kyle Wiktor), providing the lakefront's second record. On 30 April Brad Bumgardner logged another at this same site. Jeffrey J. McCoy had (2) calling birds at the Green Tower Site on 5 May.

SWALLOWS

Both the Purple Martin and Cliff Swallow were reported in below average numbers; the remaining four species were well above normal.

Brown Creeper:- The (37) that Jason Bojczyk counted at Dunes State Park on 13 April constitutes Indiana's fourth largest tally.

WRENS

As occurred with other passerine groups, the wren flight was excellent with every species, except Sedge, well above average.

Winter Wren:- An exceptional 69 birds were tallied on the lakefront this spring (TYM=16.0). The 21 logged by Jason Bojczyk in Dunes State Park on 13 April constitutes Indiana's fourth highest spring count.

Golden-crowned Kinglet:- A couple of fairly late records were recorded on the 12 May Count. In Lake Co Julie Bonnema et al. logged (2) in the Hammond Sanctuary and Bernie Konrady's group found (1) at Inspiration Glen in Hammond. These records tie the lakefront's 8th latest spring date.

THRUSHES

Every species in this group was reported in above normal numbers.

Hermit Thrush:- It was an incredible spring for this catharus thrush. On 13 April Jason Bojczyk

logged an impressive (52) on the trails of Dunes State Park. That total tied the state's 11th highest count. However, on 16 April Brad Bumgardner performed a similar count and tallied an Indiana record (177) Hermit Thrushes.

WARBLERS

Of the 36 warbler species reported this spring only six occurred in below normal numbers: Orange-crowned, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-throated, Cerulean, Hooded, and Black-and-white. Numbers of the last four of these were exceedingly close to normal, in each case the addition on a single bird would have nudged them up to, or above, their TYMs.

Northern Waterthrush:- It was a record spring for this migrant with 273 individuals reported (TYM=100). The season maximum daily tally was (33) reported by Matthew Igleski in Hammond on 4 May. The latter ties Indiana's second largest count.

Prothonotary Warbler:- The nesting pair returned to the Dunes State Park foot bridge and Lynea S. Hinchman counted three pairs on her 12 May traverse of the trails 2 and 10 in the state park.

Orange-crowned Warbler:- Last spring 50 were found on the lakefront, but this year only 17 were reported (TYM=21.0). The 2018 season's largest count was logged on 1 May when Brad Bumgardner tallied (3) at the Green Tower Site.



Although he had heard their song, Professor Steven Bell had never actually seen a Connecticut Warbler. However, a 24 May visit to the Heron Rookery solved that problem in fine style. The hike yielded not one, but three of these furtive warblers. Steve was able to calm himself sufficiently to snap this marvelous photo.

Connecticut Warbler:- The (3) birds that Steve Bell logged in the Heron Rookery on 24 May highlighted a fine season in which 18 birds were reported (TYM=7.60).

Palm Warbler:- The (314) that Brad Bumgardner logged during a 1 May Longshore flight at the Green Tower Site constitutes Indiana's second largest daily count.

Black-throated Blue Warbler:- Surprisingly scarce this spring. The 15 reported is the lowest spring total since 2013 (TYM=17.6).

Black-throated Gray Warbler:- While visiting friends in Hobart on 16 May, Joel Greenberg spotted an adult male as it briefly visited a seed feeder. It flew quickly off and was never relocated. This individual provided Indiana's third record and the second Dunes area record.



On 22 May this pert female Blackburnian Warbler was found feeding in a small leafless shrub at the Hammond Sanctuary. John K. Cassady took full advantage of this opportunity and obtained this fine photograph.

Canada Warbler:- The (24) that John Kaehr, John K. Cassady, Randy J. Pals, et al. logged along the lakefront on 22 May, provided Indiana's third largest single party count.

SPARROWS

Of the 19 species reported this spring only two (White-throated & Henslow's) were tallied in below average numbers. In contrast Grasshopper and Fox sparrow numbers were "off scale."

Vesper Sparrow:- The 44 tallied this spring constitute the lakefront's largest season total since 1957 when 50 were reported (TYM=12.1).

Grasshopper Sparrow:- Thanks to the new habitat provided by Reynolds Creek G.H.A, a lakefront record 24 Grasshopper Sparrows were reported this spring (TYM=3.50). John K. Cassady logged the season's maximum count of (7) on 26 May. The latter total ties the lakefront's second highest count.

Fox Sparrow:- Last year's record count by Michael Topp's was topped by Jason Bojczyk in Dunes State Park on 13 April. Jason carefully counted (154), establishing a new Indiana record daily total. For the season 591 were reported, which is also a record (TYM=101.2).

Blue Grosbeak:- A record 6 Blue Grosbeaks, all singletons, were reported on the lakefront this spring (TYM=1.10). The first, found at the Green Tower Site on 5 May (Brendan J. Grube), tied the lakefront's fourth earliest spring arrival date.

Western Meadowlark:- Brad Bumgardner first noted the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. resident on 20 April.

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- For the first year since 2012, Yellow-headed Blackbirds failed to appear at the Grant Street wetland in Gary.

Rusty Blackbird:- Thanks to Brendan Grube's count of (5064) flying past the Green Tower Site on 13 April, the season total reached a record 6655 (TYM=1294). Brendan's tally is also the highest ever reported in the state (by 64 Rustys).

Baltimore Oriole:- Although there was much discussion about a "flood of orioles" at feeders, the season's numbers were above average, but nowhere near the record high.

WINTER FINCHES

It was a good spring for this group, as every species except White-winged Crossbill (which was unreported) was tallied in above normal numbers.

Red Crossbill:- The season total of 18 was the highest since 37 were reported back in 2013 (TYM=2.95). This spring's peak daily count

consisted of a flock of (10) that Kyle Wiktor observed at the Green Tower Site on 27 May.

Common Redpoll:- The 2018 flight brought the best spring numbers since 2013, with 101 reported (TYM=30.6). Michael A. Topp logged the season's best count (18) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 16 April.

Pine Siskin:- Many lingered well into late May, yielding a season total of 1726 (TYM=769). The peak count was (334) that Kyle Wiktor tallied at the Green Tower Site on 2 May, but Kyle also had two other 300+ counts in that month.

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.