

INDIANA DUNES/LAKEFRONT: SUMMER REPORT 2011

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During the summer of 2011 the state of Indiana was blessed with an unprecedented array of rarities, including two possible first state records: Neotropical Cormorants and Ash-throated Flycatcher. Additionally, the summer list also included a long-staying Western Wood-Pewee (Indiana's second record), a Green Violetear (second state record), and a Curlew Sandpiper (the state's third). This bevy rendered July's stifling heat almost endurable. Unfortunately, for lakefront birders, only the Wood-Pewee was within the prescribed limits of the Dunes area.

June was about 1°F above normal and precipitation was a quarter-inch below average. July sizzled with an oppressive hot spell during the second half of the month. At mid-month a dome of high pressure became fixed over the Midwest and South, forcing the jet stream to remain in Canada. This configuration produced a plethora of record high temperatures across the eastern half of the United States. For the month the Chicago temperature averaged 5.7°F above normal and July was wettest on record.

Summer 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.

Acknowledgement

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Black-bellied Whistling-Duck:- Two were reported in a flooded pool on the Forsythe Park lawn 29 July (Dan Arendas *vide* C.A. Marsh), providing the lakefront's first report of this very distinctively marked species.

American Bittern:- J.C. Kendall and Penny Starin saw (1) at the Chase Street wetland (Gary) on 26 July.

Great Egret:- A fine 9 July count of (104) was recorded at Gary's Chase Street wetland (J.J. McCoy, S.R. Bagby, J.K. Cassady, L.S. Hinchman, & KJB). This was the lakefront's fourth highest summer count.

Snowy Egret:- Ben Hess reported (1) at the Clay Street wetland (Gary) on 1 June. Two were among the 100+ Great Egrets at the Chase Street wetland on 9 July (J.J. McCoy, S.R. Bagby, J.K. Cassady, L.S. Hinchman, & KJB) and were still present 26 Jul (J.C. Kendall & Penny Starin). On the latter date (1) was also seen in the adjacent Grant Street wetland.

Virginia Rail:- Two calling birds ("tic-tic" call) at Grant Street Wetland on 2 July (J.K. Cassady),

providing a first July record for this site.

Common Gallinule (this name should sound familiar to the old-timers):- A fine count of (21) half-grown chicks at the Grant Street wetland on 2 July (S.R. Bagby, J.K. Cassady, R.J. Pals, & KJB) provided Indiana's largest count of young birds since 1985.



Juvenile Bonaparte's Gull in very fresh plumage. This individual was one of three young birds observed at Miller Beach on 31 July. Two of these closely associated with an alternate adult and likely constituted a family group. Photo by KJB.

SHOREBIRDS

Some 18 shorebird species were reported in the lakefront area this summer.

American Avocet:- The season's first Avocets arrived at the Miller Beach USX impoundment on 29 July, with (1) seen by Michael Topp and (2) alternate-plumed birds observed by Penny Starin. J.J. McCoy found a singleton at Miller Beach on 31 July.

Spotted Sandpiper:- A juvenile at Hitchcock Road Pond on 28 June (KJB), provided Indiana's earliest date for this plumage (by one day).

Willet:- See below table.

Summer 2011 Willet Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
6	2-July	Beverly Shores	J.K. Cassady et al.
35	2-July	Mich. City Harbor	R.J. Pals et al.
3	10-Jul	Mich. City Harbor	B.J. Grube
1	24-Jul	Mich. City Harbor	L.S. Hinchman
2	29-Jul	Miller Beach	Michael Topp
10	31-Jul	Miller Beach	J.J. McCoy

Whimbrel:- On 9 July J.J. McCoy saw (2) briefly land on Miller Beach and Michael Topp had a flyby at the same location 29 July.

Marbled Godwit:- Five were among the 35 Willets at Michigan City Harbor on 2 July (S.R. Bagby, J.K. Cassady, R.J. Pals, & KJB). An impressive (12) were at Michigan City Harbor on 10 Jul (B.J. Grube), which ties Indiana's third highest summer count. This is the 21st consecutive summer in which Marbled Godwits have been identified on the lakefront.

Baird's Sandpiper:- An individual in the rarely reported adult plumage landed in the U.S. Steel impoundment on 30 July (J.K. Cassady, Jim & Penny Starin).

Caspian Tern:- On 2 June Amy Kearns & J.S. Castrale counted (20) nests on the East Chicago lakefront. Most contained eggs, but four or five had chicks.

Forster's Tern:- Quite scarce on the lakefront, with only one (an adult) reported (TYM=23.1).



Alternate adult Stilt Sandpiper at McCool Basin on 20 July 2011. Note the droopy bill. The smaller bird is a Semipalmated Sandpiper. This superb flight shot was taken by J.K. Cassady.



Western Wood-Pewee at Hoosier Prairie Nature Preserve in Griffith. Fortunately the bird sang frequently, otherwise it would have been almost impossible to distinguish it from an Eastern Wood-Pewee. This long-staying bird was discovered by Matthew Iliff on 5 July and was still present and singing on 5 August. Photo by J.K. Cassady.

Western Wood-Pewee:- An extraordinary case of birding serendipity occurred 5 July. On that day Marshall Iliff was transiting northwest Indiana when he randomly selected a Highland restaurant to obtain wireless access. Having a bit of spare time Marshall also conducted a web search for nearby birding sites and came up with Hoosier Prairie State Nature Preserve in Griffith. He elected to give the Prairie a first try and upon visiting the site was astonished to hear a singing Western Wood-Pewee. He quickly brought the bird to the attention of Hoosier birders and it was enjoyed by scores of others. The bird displayed territorial behavior and remained, while continuing to sing, until at least 5 Aug (Michael Topp). This is Indiana's second record; the first was in Randolph County on 1 & 2 July 1989.

Alder Flycatcher:- For the seventh consecutive year Dunes area numbers were below average. This summer five were reported on the lakefront (TYM=5.8).

Yellow-throated Vireo:- A singing bird in the Hammond Sanctuary on 4 June (Michael Topp), constituted only the second June record for the traps.

Marsh Wren:- Once again the Grant Street wetland supported a burgeoning summer population. The high count at that site was (46) on 2 July (S.R. Bagby, J.K. Cassady, R.J. Pals, & KJB).

Northern Parula:- A territorial singing male was near the Dunes Creek Bridge from late May through 14 June (Brad Bumgardner & KJB). For the second consecutive July Brad Bumgardner recorded this species in the State Park; this is only the third July record for the lakefront.

Blackburnian Warbler:- S.R. Bagby heard and saw a singing male in Furnessville on 25 June. This is a new summer location for this rare summer resident. Susan's sighting provided Indiana's only summer record for 2011.

Blackpoll Warbler:- A tardy migrant was found in the Hammond Sanctuary on 4 June (Michael Topp). It tied the state's fifth latest spring record.

Black-and-white Warbler:- On 8 June Brad Bumgardner counted (3) singing males in Dunes State Park.



This molting juvenile Yellow Warbler would be perfect for an identification quiz. An attentive mother hovered over this splotchy-yellow youngster in west Beverly Shores on 2 July 2011. Photo by KJB.

Summer Tanager:- For the sixth consecutive summer this tanager was reported in above average numbers in the Dunes area. This year four were reported (TYM=2.5).

Henslow's Sparrow:- One was singing at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore's Chellberg Farm on 5 June (R.J. Pals). Summer birds are quite rare in the Dunes area (TYM=0.9).

Blue Grosbeak:- A male was heard singing at Miller Beach on 19 July (J.K. Cassady) and Michael Topp saw a pair there on 29 July. This marks the eighth consecutive year in which grosbeaks have been recorded at Miller Beach.

Dickcissel:- At least (3) summered adjacent to the Bass Pro Shop near the I-94/S.R. 249 intersection (Brad Bumgardner & Penny Starin). J.K. Cassady observed a calling flyby at the Grant Street wetland (Gary) on 2 July.

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- An adult male briefly landed in the USX impoundment on 23 July (J.K. Cassady, et al.). More importantly, E.M. Hopkins observed a female and three fledglings at Grant Street wetland on 30 July. A territorial male was observed at this site in the spring.

Orchard Oriole:- A territorial pair was observed several times near Derby Ditch in west Beverly Shores. On 2 July the female was seen carrying food (R.J. Pals et al.).