

LAKEFRONT BIRD REPORT: WINTER 2017-2018

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A number of unusually mellow winters have occurred in recent years; however, the winter of 2017-2018 was not one of them. On 26 December the polar vortex once again plowed into Indiana bringing a grinding cold spell that lasted until 8 January. Several subzero days occurred; indeed on the morning of 1 January our Willow Slough CBC team recorded a temperature of -17°F in Newton County. A high ice ridge developed on the shores of Lake Michigan and was especially tall at Michigan City Harbor where it towered above the jetty catwalk. It was also quite snowy: the lakefront experienced multiple consecutive days with flurries during first half of February, including a continuous 36 hours of snowfall on 8 and 9 February. Then, in typical Hoosier fashion, the temperature shot up to 65°F on 20 February.

Departure from Normal: Chicago		
	°F	Precip. Inches
Dec	-0.5	-1.66
Jan	+0.8	-0.19
Feb	+1.1	+2.85

Noteworthy avian aspects of the season included: lingering Black-legged Kittiwakes, exceptional Harlequin Duck numbers, Indiana's fifth Slaty-backed Gull record, a record Snowy Owl invasion, and above average winter finches.



It was a better than average season for Long-tailed Ducks on the lakefront with 55 reported (TYM=14.8). This handsome adult male was photographed at Michigan City Harbor on 19 February. Peter B. Grube photo.

In the following narrative the abbreviation TYM (lakefront twenty-year mean) gives the average number of birds reported over the past 20 years. STYM gives the same value for the entire state.

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GEESE & SWANS

Greater White-fronted Goose:- Two exceptional flocks were reported in late February: a flock of (250) flew over the Beverly Shores lakefront on the 27st (KJB) and on this same day Brad Bumgardner tallied (415) at the Green Tower site. The latter is the lakefront's second largest count.

Tundra Swan:- Matt S. Kalwasinski logged (1) at Seidner Dune and Swale, which provided the season's only record (TYM=32.7).

DUCKS

Dabblers were reported in normal numbers, but bay ducks were mixed, with Canvasbacks down and Ring-neckeds up. It was a marvelous season for sea ducks and mergansers were about average.



The above photos document the marvelous Harlequin Ducks enjoyed during the winter of 2017-18. Adam Wilson took the left shot, showing an immature male and four females, at Whiting Park on 9 December 2017. These five birds tie Indiana's largest daily count. The photo on the right shows a close view of the same male illustrated on the left. It was taken by John K. Cassady at Whiting Park on 23 December, which was also the last day that these five birds were observed.

Canvasback:- Although statewide numbers were above average, this large duck apparently attempted to boycott the lakefront this winter (TYM=57.5). The meager five reported constitute the lakefront's lowest winter total in 27 years.

Ring-necked Duck:- This handsome bay duck was reported in record numbers with 246 logged for the season (TYM=39.5). The peak count consisted of a flock of (150) that KJB found at Striebel Pond on 20 February.

Harlequin Duck:- On 9 December Adam and Sarah Wilson photographed (5- see photo) at Whiting Park. This total ties Indiana's maximum daily count. For the season 23 "Harleys" were reported along the lakefront (TYM=3.85).



This yearling Red-throated Loon was observed by the score of birders that visited Portage Lakefront Park on 27 January. No one could recall previously seeing a beached Red-throated. Many thought it was ill, but John K. Cassady observed it again on 12 February. Photo by KJB.

Black Scoter:- The rarely seen adult male was found at Whiting Refinery Beach on 20 January (Ryan Sanderson et al.) and again on 3 February (Randy J. Pals et al.).

Long-tailed Duck:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best winter numbers in 22 years with 55 reported (TYM=14.8). John K. Cassady and Jeffrey J. McCoy logged the season's high count of (13) at Michigan City Harbor on 16 December.

Eared Grebe:- On 7 December Brendan J. Grube found (1) at the Port of Indiana. This is the lakefront's first winter record in five years.



During an 11 February skiing excursion along Beverly Drive Ralph Grundel encountered some very strange tracks in the snow (left photo). Ralph soon discovered the creature responsible: a Horned Grebe (right photo). Somehow this unlucky bird ended up on the ground rather than in water. Like other members of the loon - grebe clan this bird's legs are so far back that they are virtually unable to walk (hence the scoting trail in the snow). They must run across water to become airborne; consequently, this individual was stranded. Ralph captured the hapless bird and released it in open water.

Wild Turkey:- Kim Ehn logged the winter's largest count with a flock of (37) in a field adjacent to State Road 249 on 5 February.

American Woodcock:- On 25 January Craig Shillinglaw saw (1) near Lake Station, which provided the first January record for Indiana's northern tier of counties.

GULLS

The winter of 2017-18 brought another disappointing gull season (see Winter Gull Totals table). Virtually the only highlight was Chicago birder Carl Giometti's finding of Indiana's fifth Slaty-backed Gull.



This adult Iceland Gull (*L. g. Thayeri*) was photographed in Indiana waters off Calumet Park on 20 January 2018. Note the primary pattern and dark eye. Photo by John K. Cassady.

LAKEFRONT: WINTER GULL TOTALS													
	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
Iceland (thayeri)	13	5	11	16	10	44	8	33	25	23	19	4	5
Iceland (kumlieni)	3	2	3	4	7	16	9	13	6*	10*	4	2	8
L. Black-backed	7	2	5	7	5	16	2	13	7	7	11	11	5
Glaucous	19	12	18	76	35	67	29	79	81	38	22	13	8
G. Black-backed	89	65	93	254	218	194	71	216	490	368	204	178	175
*Corrected to compensate for repeated reports of the Hammond Marina adult.													

Black-legged Kittiwake:- An apparent wintering bird was photographed at Steelworkers Park (Chicago) on 2 December (Don Gorney and Aidan Rominger); the bird was seen in Indiana waters. Subsequently, John C. Kendall observed (2) first-cycle birds flying along the Michigan City Harbor beach on 7 December and Brendan J. Grube had a juvenile fly past the Port of Indiana on 27 December. The winter period TYM=2.2.

Slaty-backed Gull:- On 9-January an adult was seen in Indiana waters off Calumet Park, IL at 2:45 PM. The bird was observed and photographed by Carl Giometti. This is Indiana’s fifth record.

Glaucous Gull:- Astonishingly, the eight birds reported this winter constitute the lowest season total since 1998-99 and is far below the TYM of 40.0. The above Table reveals that numbers have uniformly declined annually over the past four years.

Great Black-backed x Herring (Great Lakes) Gull:- John K. Cassady photographed an adult at the Port of Indiana on 13 January.

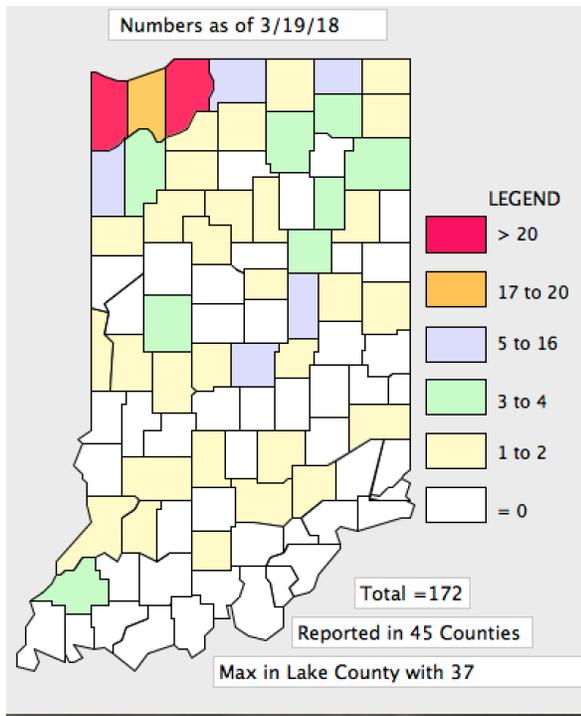


The winter of 2017-18 brought a marvelous Snowy Owl flight, with a record 48 reported on the lakefront. On 21 January 2018 this individual was photographed on one of the Wolf Lake islands by Matt S. Kalwasinski.

Kelp x Herring (Chandeleur) Gull:- The individual that arrived last autumn was last reported at Michigan City Harbor on 16 December (John K. Cassady et al.)

Snowy Owl:- It was a record winter for this owl with 52 reported on the lakefront (TYM=8.7) and an incredible 172 logged across the entire state (STYM=7.1). Indiana’s previous maximum flight occurred during the winter of 2013-14 and consisted of 120 birds; however the latter number includes sixteen owls that were seen in March and April. The 2017-18 total includes 20 owls logged in March. The map on the following page shows the Snowy Owl distribution during the 2017-18 flight.

Long-eared Owl:- Matt Kalwasinski reported (1) at the Hammond Sanctuary on 2 January, which constitutes the season’s only report.



Eastern Phoebe:- Brad Bumgardner established a new early arrival date (and first February record) for the lakefront on the 28th when he identified (1) at the Green Tower site. The next earliest spring record is 8 March.

Northern Shrike:- Interestingly, (1) wintered along the Little Calumet River just west of Chase Street. It was discovered by Rick Welton on 19 December and was last reported 21 January. On the latter date Rick tallied (2) in that same general area: one was the Chase Street bird and the other was 0.7 miles west at Clark Street.

Red-breasted Nuthatch:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best winter numbers in five years with 30 birds reported (TYM=10.4).

Eastern Bluebird:- A lakefront record daily count, for the winter period, was set on 28 February when Brad Bumgardner logged (58) at the Green Tower site during a longshore flight.

Gray Catbird:- Two were reported on the 23 December Indiana Dunes CBC. Randy J. Pals and Patrick Krueger logged one in the Dunes and Alan Anderson found another in east Beverly Shores.

Orange-crowned Warbler:- A late migrant was photographed 12 December at the Humane Indiana Wildlife Center (*vide* Brad Bumgardner). The site is located between the Dunes CBC circle and Valparaiso.

Pine Warbler:- Loyce Fandrei identified (1) at Gibson Woods on 28 February, which provided the lakefront's second earliest spring record.

Yellow-rumped Warbler:- Two records of this winter rarity on the lakefront were logged this season: John C. Kendall reported the first at Ogden Dunes on 19 December and Brendan J. Grube observed the second at the Dunes State Park feeders



It was the best winter for Common Redpolls in five years with many double-digit counts. This dapper male visited the Brock residence feeders on 2 February. Photo by KJB.

on 21 January.

WINTER FINCHES

Except for the complete absence of Purple Finches, the winter finch season was fairly impressive.

Purple Finch:- Although state-wide numbers were near normal, this finch was alarmingly scarce on the lakefront. For the first time since the winter of 2006-07 no Purple Finches were reported on the lakefront (TYM=11.2).

Red Crossbill:- The lakefront's only report consisted of (3) that Frederick Ruckersfeld found at Dunes State Park on 1 December (TYM=0.95).

Common Redpoll:- The lakefront's best winter numbers since 2012-13 were logged this season with 390 reported (TYM=148). The peak daily count was (40) that Matt Beatty found at Cowles Bog on 16 December.

Hoary Redpoll:- One briefly visited the Brock feeders in Chesterton on 22 January (KJB).

Pine Siskin:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best winter numbers since 2010-11 with 152 reported for the season (TYM=113).