

## INDIANA DUNES BIRD REPORT: SPRING 2016

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The spring of 2016 brought another enjoyable migration. Indeed some 400 visitors reveled in the Dunes area avifauna in conjunction with the second annual Indiana Dunes Birding Festival. Season highlights included White-winged Dove, two Kirtland's Warblers, a Smith's Longspur invasion, and a chaseable Harris' Sparrow.

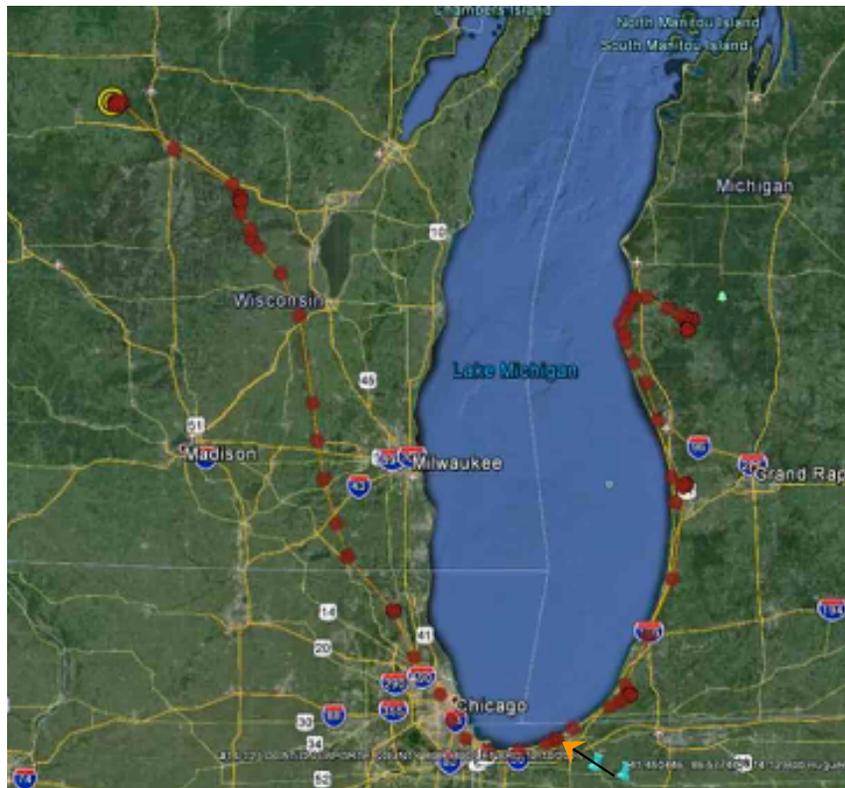
Although March was pleasantly warm, during the first half of April the jet stream contorted into a sine-wave pattern with the trough engulfing the Midwest; this resulted in unusually cold temperatures and local snow. As a result on Saturday 9 April lakefront birders were greeted by an inch of fresh snow with flurries throughout the day; whereas, the following Saturday brought bright sunshine with a high temperature on 82°F.

Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal		
	Temp (°F)	Rainfall (in.)
Mar	+5.4	+0.84
Apr	-1.1	-0.58
May	+0.6	+1.74

### Whooping Serendipity

During the 14 May Big May Count rumors emerged that Beverly Shores residents were reporting two Whooping Cranes in the Great Marsh. However, M. Penny Starin's crack Big May Count team covered the sighting area and saw no Whooping Cranes. Accordingly, I dismissed these accounts assuming that the residents were seeing Great Egrets. But, on 18 May Beverly Shores resident Brian O'Neil sent me a count day photo that Julia Holmaas took a bit east of St. Clair Street; the photo showed one definite Whooper and another white bird that was partially obscured by vegetation. This was perplexing, as Whooping Cranes are exceptionally rare in Indiana during the month of May; indeed only four previous reports exist in the entire state. Were the crane reports valid?

Lee Sterrenburg came to the rescue. He sent the above details to Anne Lacy of the International Crane Foundation, who quickly solved the problem. Anne wrote, "I can answer your question – a picture is worth a thousand words... behold the miracle of remote telemetry. One of the birds reported was 65-15, who wintered in IN, but went straight north to Michigan on migration rather than



Telemetry data showing the course followed by the wandering Whooping Crane 65-15, as delightfully described by Anne Lacy of the International Crane Foundation. The orange arrow at the bottom shows the bird's location on 14 May 2016, which was the May Count day. On that day Julia Holmaas, a Beverly Shores resident, photographed the bird in the Great Marsh south of Beverly Drive and slightly east of St. Claire Street.

taking the NW route back to WI. She wandered for a bit there, and as you can see, kept bumping up against the lake – it did seem as though she knew where she needed to be but couldn’t figure out how to get there... - Until the 11th of May when she started south in earnest. At one point we believe that she joined up with Parent reared (release technique) bird 27-14 – that was likely the second bird reported, and **they were in the IN Dunes area 14-15 May** (my emphasis). She kept going right around the bend and flew right over her release area at Horicon NWR, and is now in Mead state wildlife area. I am glad you asked – it is a neat story. Sorry they didn’t stick around, but it is a great example of migratory instinct.” So quite clearly two Whooping Cranes were in the Great Marsh on 14 May (see telemetry map).

**Oddest Occurrence**

One rarely imagines that the lumbering Red-tailed Hawk could ever be sufficiently nimble to capture a bird; however, Randy J. Pals provided the following fascinating observation.

“On Friday afternoon May 6, I was mowing my (treeless) front yard right underneath a utility pole. I heard a sharp screech from above, and looked up to see a Crow flying past, towards the trees in my backyard, with its legs hanging down. Hmm – a bit strange.

As my gaze came back down to earth, I noted a small clump of black body feathers about 10 feet away. While puzzling over that, I then saw a couple of black flight feathers drifting down from the sky. What the ... ?? The Crow was now perched atop a tree in my back yard, and did not look injured. Then, more feathers from the sky. Finally I looked straight up above my head, and there on the top of the utility pole sat a Red-tailed Hawk eating a Crow! The Crow now in my trees had apparently taken a shot at the hawk, and sure enough, about 15 minutes later he took a couple more shots at it. Meanwhile, I continued to mow the lawn, often very close to the pole, as the hawk stayed very focused on his meal.

Altogether, the hawk was on the pole for about 40 minutes after I first saw it. It looks like he ate the entire Crow, and did not fly away with anything. I noticed his crop was just slightly extended as he flew away. Must have been hungry when he caught it! Evidently, the kill was very fresh when I first saw it – I only wish I would have seen the encounter from the beginning.”

NOTE: In the following discussion the term “DSP Tower” refers the structure that replaced the former Green Tower.

**Longshore Flights**

Once again Brendan J. Grube conducted longshore flight watches from the DSP Tower (former Green Tower site). Some 51 watches were conducted between 6 March and 27 May. Grube Magnitudes for the 2016 season ranged from 0.41 to 78.61 (5<sup>th</sup> all-time highest): the average was 15.61. The peak flight (GM=78.61) occurred 12 May and included 311 Baltimore Orioles (Indiana’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest count), 65 Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (Indiana’s 9<sup>th</sup> largest count), 257 Eastern Kingbirds (Indiana’s 8<sup>th</sup> largest count), 16 Orchard Orioles (lakefront’s 4<sup>th</sup> largest count), 24 Scarlet Tanagers (lakefront’s 2<sup>nd</sup> largest count), plus 44 other countable species. This was also the day that a White-winged Dove flew by (not countable toward the Grube Magnitude). Not a bad day.

**The Spring Flight**

The adjacent table summarizes the 2016 spring flight by bird groups using the Migration Index (MI- definition appended). These data reveal that every passerine group was plentiful and that gulls and the loon/grebe groups were rather scarce. The un-weighted mean of all group’s MI values is +0.073, suggesting that the overall flight was a bit above average. Keep in mind, however, that the multiple longshore flight

Group	MI/species	Group	MI/species
Ducks	-0.041	Flycatchers	+0.193
Loons/Grebes	-0.102	Vireos	+0.183
Hérons	+0.082	Swallows	+0.194
Raptors	+0.047	Wrens	+0.308
Shorebirds	+0.058	Thrushes	+0.108
Gulls	-0.255	Warblers	+0.168
Terns	-0.098	Sparrows	+0.171

watches and contributions by the Festival participants generated atypically high seasonal counts for many species.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to Susan R. Bagby for judiciously proofing an early draft. Thanks also go to Anne Lacy for providing a graphical answer to the Whooping Crane question and to Maricela Aviles, Matt Beatty, and Matt S. Kalwasinski for sharing their fine bird photos.

## SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Greater White-fronted Goose:- On 7 March Brendan J. Grube counted (377) flying past the DSP Tower. This is the lakefront's second largest count. A tardy migrant was still at Lake Palomara, Chesterton, on 7 May (Randy and Sandra Laporte), which is an all-time late date for the lakefront.

Ross' Goose:- For the first spring in six years this small goose was not reported on the lakefront (TYM=1.4).

Cackling Goose:- Indiana's second May record, and the first since 1941, was logged at Wolf Lake on 12 May (Brad Bumgardner, Matt S. Kalwasinski, M. Penny Starin, Kristin Stratton, & Kimberly Ehn).

Trumpeter Swan:- Two briefly visited the Grant Street wetland on 9 April (Randy Pals et al.), one flew past the DSP Tower on 20 April (Brendan J. Grube), and another appeared on Wolf Lake 5 May (Matt S. Kalwasinski et al.).

## DUCKS

Puddle ducks fared reasonably well with only the Black Duck and Mallard reported in below normal numbers. Among the bay ducks Redheads staged an unusually strong flight, but Canvasback numbers were down significantly. Scoters fared well among the sea ducks, but the Harlequin Duck went unreported and Long-tailed Duck numbers crashed. Except for the Hooded, merganser numbers were well below average.

Northern Shoveler:- Unusually prominent throughout the season with a record 1002 reported (TYM=322). The peak count was the (220) birds that Michael A. Topp counted at Wolf Lake on 16 April. The latter tally is a spring record for the lakefront.

Canvasback:- A lingering drake was still in the Chesterton lake behind McDonald's on 11 May (Kimberly Ehn) providing the lakefront's fifth latest record. The season total of five, Canvasbacks constitutes the lakefront's poorest spring in four years.

White-winged Scoter:- It was another fine spring for this sea duck with 478 reported (TYM=148). The season's peak tally was (66) at Michigan City Harbor on 1 March (KJB).

Surf Scoter:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best spring flight since 2008, with 31 reported (TYM=11). The season's peak count was the (7) that Brendan J. Grube logged at the DSP Tower on 26 March.

Long-tailed Duck:- Only two Long-taileds were reported for the season (TYM=119.1). This is the poorest spring flight since 2012.

Wild Turkey:- M. Penny Starin added a new species to the McCool Basin list on 7 April when a female unexpectedly flew in and landed inside the fence immediately in front of her.

## LOONS-GREBES

Only the Pied-billed Grebe count was far above normal, other species were reported in average to low numbers.

Red-throated Loon:- It was a slightly above average spring for this loon with 136 reported (TYM=95.6). The season's peak count was (24) that were observed off the DSP Tower on 9 March (Brendan J. Grube).

Pacific Loon:- On 22 May Brendan J. Grube observed an alternate adult off the DSP Tower, which provided the lakefront's fifth May record.

Common Loon:- Spring of 2016 brought another feeble flight. The lakefront's season total was 202, which is well below the TYM of 318. Brendan J. Grube logged the best daily count of (30) at the DSP Tower on 19 April.

Pied-billed Grebe:- The 180 reported this spring is the second largest season total ever reported (the highest was last year's 189). Matt S. Kalwasinski's (11) birds at the Grant Street Wetland on 26 March, constituted the season best daily count.

American White Pelican:- For the fifth consecutive spring numbers were well above average. This year 23 were reported (TYM=7.6). The peak count was (6) at Wolf Lake on 15 April (Carolyn A. Marsh).

### HERONS

Although the Least Bittern went unreported, it was an above average spring for this group.

Least Bittern:- For the first spring since 2004 this small bittern went unreported (TYM=1.55).

Great Egret:- On 31 May an impressive (270) adults (lakefront's fourth largest count) and 135 nests were tallied at Arcelor Mittal Steel in East Chicago (Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns).

Snowy Egret:- It was a record spring for this small egret with 12 reported (TYM=2.15). Matt S. Kalwasinski found (1) at the 129<sup>th</sup> Street Wetland (south end of Wolf Lake) on 17 April, which provided the lakefront's second earliest spring date. On 28 April Kristin Stratton found (2) in a wetland south of Reynolds Creek GHA. The latter is a record count for Porter Co. Another bird was found at Cowles Bog on 5 May (Brad Bumgardner).

Little Blue Heron:- Only one report: on 31 May Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns found an adult on the breakwall at Arcelor Mittal Steel in East Chicago (TYM=1.95).

Cattle Egret:- Brad Bumgardner found (1) at Cowles Bog on 10 May (TYM=1.95).

Black-crowned Night-Heron:- An impressive 219 were reported this spring (TYM=115). The season's peak count was (128) at the Arcelor Mittal Steel in East Chicago (Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns) on 31 May. They also counted 64 active nests.

### DIURNAL RAPTORS

The spring flight was near average: only the Rough-legged Hawk and Golden Eagle were in short supply. In contrast, the Broad-winged Hawk, Bald Eagle, and Merlin all staged strong flights.

SUMMARY 2016 DUNES HAWK-WATCHES 09 March – 14 May 20-year Mean inside "( )"			
Total	Species	Total	Species
0	Black Vulture (.25)	303	Red-tailed (315)
407	Turkey Vulture (151)	1	Rough-legged (7)
10	Osprey (16)	0	Buteo sp. (15)
34	Bald Eagle (10)	0	Golden Eagle (1)
84	N. Harrier (60)	99	Am. Kestrel (51)
220	Sharp-shinned (233)	28	Merlin (22)
51	Cooper's (48)	5	Peregrine (8)
0	N. Goshawk (0.4)	0	Hawk sp. (2)
56	Red-shouldered (76)	0	Swainson's (0.5)
531	Broad-winged (56)	1829	<b>TOTAL (1099)</b>

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

Osprey:- The breeding pair returned to the Gilson Athletic Field in Gary; they were first seen at the nest site on 19 March (Michael A. Topp).

Bald Eagle:- For the season 60 were counted, which is far above the TYM of 17.5. Matt S. Kalwasinski reported an adult at the Chase Street nest on 14 March and Loyce Fandrei observed (2) young in the nest on 16 April. On 24 May Matt again visited the site and found an adult plus a feathered nestling, but suspected that two were present.

Broad-winged Hawk:- Lakefront birders enjoyed the best spring flight in 24 years with 552 birds counted (TYM=79.1). Brendan J. Grube counted (206) at the DSP Tower on 25 April. This is the lakefront's seventh largest count and the best daily tally since 1992. A late

season flight brought 132 young birds to the DSP Tower (Brendan J. Grube) and 103 at Beverly Shores. The latter flight included a dark morph flying with the migrants (John K. Cassady), which was Indiana's fifth report of this rare morph.

Sandhill Crane:- An unusually large movement occurred 8 March, with 11,585 reported at 13 different lakefront locations. On that day Brendan J. Grube counted a lakefront record (8893) at the DSP Tower. However, as often happens when Brendan is involved this new record was "blown away" on 11 March when he logged (19,712) from the Dunes State Park beach. The latter eclipses the 8 March record by 10,819 cranes. On 24 April Robert T. Zeese found a nest in central Beverly Shores that contained a downy chick and an egg. The following day two chicks were present.

Whooping Crane:- Michael A. Topp noted a migrant at Miller Beach on 11 March and most remarkably (2) were seen by Beverly Shores residents in the Great Marsh on 14 May (confirmed by tracking by the International Crane Foundation).

## SHOREBIRDS

As is always the case habitat availability is a determinant of flight numbers. This year's wet spring, especially in May, inundated habitat at many traditional sites. However, the overall shorebird flight was near average with 23 species reported. Unusually scarce species included, Pectoral Sandpiper and Semipalmated Plover. In contrast the Willet occurred in record numbers.

A season highlight occurred during a birdathon stop at Michigan City Harbor on 12 May. Brad Bumgardner described the event as follows: "... a mini shorebird fall out [occurred] at Michigan City at dawn. A massive storm rode over Lake Michigan pre dawn and we were treated to dozens of spotted sandpipers, Black-bellied Plover, semi-palm plovers, and what looks to be a new spring dunes area high count of 62 Willets! We also had a Hudsonian Godwit hanging out with them."

Black-bellied Plover:- The singleton that Brad Bumgardner, Matt S. Kalwasinski, M. Penny

Starin, Kristin Stratton, and Kimberly Ehn had at Michigan City Harbor on 12 May provided the season's only report (TYM=3.8).

American Golden-Plover:- The flock of (23) that flew over Grant Street wetland on 21 April constituted the lakefront's only report (John K. Cassady & KJB).

Semipalmated Plover:- Only 10 were reported for the season (TYM=42.0). The maximum daily count of (5) was logged by M. Penny Starin at McCool Basin on 9 May.

Killdeer:- A record lakefront daily count was set at the DSP Tower on 7 March when Brendan J. Grube tallied (905). This total is more than double the previous maximum of 388.

American Avocet:- At the DSP Tower Brendan J. Grube saw singletons on 4 and 7 May.

Willet:- The 72 reported this spring constitutes an all-time high (TYM=13.0). Matt S. Kalwasinski discovered (2) basic-plumed birds at the 129th Street wetland (s. end of Wolf Lake) on 26 April, which tied the lakefront's sixth earliest arrival date. A spring record count of (62) was logged at Michigan City Harbor by Brad Bumgardner, Matt S. Kalwasinski, Penny Starin, Kristin Stratton, and Kimberly Ehn during a 12 May birdathon effort.

Hudsonian Godwit:- One, seen among the 62 Willets at Michigan City Harbor on 12 May (Brad Bumgardner, Matt S. Kalwasinski, Penny Starin, Kristin Stratton, and Kimberly Ehn), provided the lakefront's sixth spring record.

Dunlin:- The 26 reported this season is the lowest spring count in 22 years (TYM=105). Strangely, almost 75% of this spring's birds occurred in April, whereas the normal migration peaks in mid-May. Carolyn Marsh logged the peak daily count of (6) at 129 Street on 20 April.

Least Sandpiper:- This year's spring flight was fairly typical. The peak daily count was (58) at McCool Basin on 9 May (Matt Beatty).

White-rumped Sandpiper:- The season's only report consisted of a singleton that M. Penny Starin found at McCool Basin on 9 May (TYM=2.6).



This handsome Stilt Sandpiper, partially molted into alternate plumage, was photographed at McCool Basin on 11 May. Only two Stilt Sandpipers were reported on the lakefront this spring. Photo by Matt Beatty.

Pectoral Sandpiper:- The 55 birds reported this season is the lakefront's lowest total since 14 were logged back in 2007 (TYM=339). The peak daily count was (16) at McCool Basin on 20 April (Matt S. Kalwasinski)

Short-billed Dowitcher:- It was a fine season for this shorebird with 17 reported (TYM=7.65). The peak count was (11) that Brad Bumgardner found at McCool Basin on 10 May.

Long-billed Dowitcher:- The six reported this spring constitutes the lakefront's best season total in three years (TYM=2.35). The peak count was (3) that Jeffrey J. McCoy logged at Reynolds Creek GHA on 21 April.

## GULLS

Spring of 2016 was not a good season for gulls, as every species except Ring-billed and Great Black-backed occurred in below normal numbers. The Arctic nesting species were in extremely short supply.

Bonaparte's Gull:- Once again this dainty gull was scarce on the lakefront with only 30 reported (TYM=113).

Thayer's Gull:- The season's only report consisted of a single first-cycle bird that Michael A. Topp sighted at Miller Beach on 4 March (TYM=4.00).

Iceland Gull:- Brendan J. Grube logged the season's only report, a first-cycle bird, at the DSP Tower on 26 March (TYM=2.7).

Glaucous Gull:- The 4 birds reported this spring constitute the lowest spring total since 1999 (TYM=13.7).

## TERNs

Black Terns fared unusually well this spring and Caspian Tern numbers were near normal, other species were well below normal.

Caspian Tern:- A 31 May survey of the East Chicago colony at Arcelor Steel yielded 309 adults and 69 downy nestlings (Allisyn-Marie Gillet and Amy Kearns).

Black Tern:- On 10 May Wesley T. Homoya counted (7) at Grant Street wetland. This is the lakefront's largest spring count since 1976.

Common Tern:- The 24-bird spring total is the lowest number since a dozen were reported in 2012. The peak daily count occurred 17 May when Jeffrey J. McCoy logged (7) at Wolf Lake.

Forster's Tern:- The subterranean season total of 12 constitutes the lowest spring count in nine years.

White-winged Dove:- One flew by the DSP Tower on 12 May (Brendan J. Grube & Jeffrey J. McCoy). This is the lakefront's eleventh record (nine of which occurred at this location).

Black-billed Cuckoo:- This species was unusually common with 9 reported (TYM=3.2).

Yellow-billed Cuckoo:- It was a bumper spring for this cuckoo with 15 reported (TYM=3.95), which is the largest spring total ever recorded.

Long-eared Owl:- On 6 March Don Gorney found a bird with a broken humerus in the Hammond Sanctuary parking lot. Upon arrival at the rehabber the bird was dead.

Short-eared Owl:- The Reynolds Creek birds lingered into April: the last sighting occurred 18 April when Lynea S. Hinchman saw (2).

Merlin:- As numbers have increased dramatically in recent years, the spring total of

39 was not unexpected (TYM=15.7). The peak daily count of (3) was recorded on three occasions, all by Brendan J. Grube at the DSP Tower.

### FLYCATCHERS

Flycatchers fared well this spring with only two species below average: Yellow-bellied and Acadian.

Olive-sided Flycatcher:- A record 16 of this difficult to find flycatcher was logged this season (TYM=5.5). This spring's high count of (2) was recorded on three occasions: on 20 and 23 May by Brendan J. Grube at the DSP Tower and on 21 May by John Kaehr at Beverly Shores.

Yellow-bellied Flycatcher:- The eleven reported this season constitutes the lakefront's lowest spring total in four years (TYM=16.5).

Acadian Flycatcher:- Seventeen were reported for the season, which in the lakefront's lowest total in eight years (TYM=22.9).

Eastern Phoebe:- M. Penny Starin reported (1) at her home in Chesterton on 9 March, which ties the lakefront's fourth earliest arrival date.

Great Crested Flycatcher:- One at Gibson Woods on 20 April (Joy Bower) provided a new early arrival date for the lakefront, replacing the 22 April 1943 Miller Beach record of D.H. Boyd.

Western Kingbird:- Mary Kaufmann-Kennel photographed (1) at Cowles Bog on 24 May for the season's only record (TYM=0.25).

### VIREOS

It was a marvelous spring for vireos with above average numbers for every species.

Warbling Vireo:- It was a record spring for this vireo with 171 reported (TYM=72.5). Caleb Putnam logged the season's high daily tally when he recorded (6) near Roxana Pond.

### SWALLOWS

All swallows appeared in good number this spring.

Purple Martin:- The singleton that flew past the DSP Tower on 15 March (Brendan J. Grube) provided a new earliest spring date for the lakefront (by 10 days).

### WRENS

A superb wren flight was highlighted by record Sedge and Marsh Wren flights.

Sedge Wren:- Lakefront birders enjoyed a record flight with 28 birds reported (TYM=8.55). The season's peak daily count of 3, was jointly shared by Matt Beatty at Cowles Bog on 24 May and Lynea S. Hinchman at Beverly Shores on 28 May.

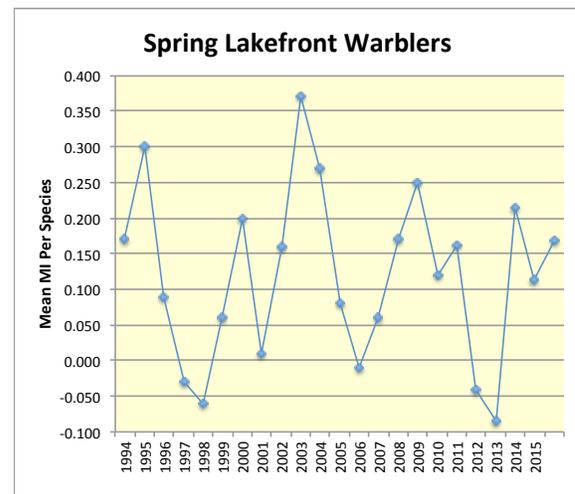
Marsh Wren:- A fine spring flight resulted in the best lakefront total ever with 159 reported (TYM=44.4). The peak daily tally was (22), logged by Matt Beatty at Cowles Bog on 24 May.

### THRUSHES

All species in this group were reported in above average numbers. The mean MI per species was +0.108.

### WARBLERS

Among the 37 species reported only eight were recorded in numbers below normal. The most seriously depressed warbler was the Ovenbird (see text).



Ovenbird:- The season total of 65 is the lowest five years (TYM=92.2) suggesting that this warbler is declining. We should keep an eye on it in the future.



One of the two Worm-eating Warblers that Bob Huguenard photographed at the Hammond Sanctuary on 22 May. It is quite possible that three were present in the sanctuary that day, but two were there for certain.

Worm-eating Warbler:- An unprecedented 4 were reported on the lakefront this season (TYM=1.3). On 10 May M. Penny Starin heard (but was unable to see) a singing bird in deep cover near her Chesterton Home and Michael A. Topp had a singing bird at State Line Woods on 13 May. However, the big excitement occurred 22 May when (2) and possibly (3), were observed at the Hammond Sanctuary (Bob Huguenard, Carolyn A. Marsh et al.).

Golden-winged Warbler:- On 8 May Amy Kearns counted (7) in Dunes State Park, which constitutes the lakefront's second largest count.

Tennessee Warbler:- Lynea S. Hinchman found (1) at Dunes State Park on 19 April providing the lakefront's third earliest spring date.

Kirtland's Warbler:- An astonishing 2 birds were logged on the lakefront this spring (TYM=0.15). Matthew and Madison Beatty, Mari Aviles, and Kristin Stratton observed a male at Cowles Bog on 10 May. This is the lakefront's seventh record and the first since 2003. Incredibly, seven days later John K. Cassady, Jeffrey J. McCoy, Lynn Vernon and KJB located a female at Whiting Park. This lady lingered and was seen by Matt S. Kalwasinski and Michael & Patti Topp later that day, and by John C. Kendall the following morning.



Following a 13 year hiatus, Kirtland's Warbler finally returned to the lakefront. Most remarkably two different birds appeared and both were documented with photographs. This male, found by Matt Beatty at Cowles Bog on 10 May, was photographed by Maricela Aviles.



Incredibly, on 17 May John K. Cassady identified this female at Whiting Park, which happened to be the second record for this site. This accommodating individual lingered for a day and was seen by several other patient birders. Photo by Matt S. Kalwasinski.

"Audubon's" Warbler:- This western counterpart of the "Myrtle" was seen at the D.S.P. Tower on 17 April (Brendan J. Grube). This is the lakefront's second record, as Leland Shaum found the first in Dunes State Park on 28 April 2012.

Blackburnian Warbler:- A handsome male at the Brock residence on 27 April constituted the lakefront's second earliest record (KJB).

Prairie Warbler:- On 16 April Lynea S. Hinchman photographed (1) that appeared to be a first-cycle male. This is the lakefront's second earliest record (by 5 days).

Smith's Longspur:- Reynolds Creek GHA yielded a spectacular season for this lakefront rarity. It was first reported 12 April when Brendan J. Grube found (6); Matt Beatty et al. visited the site later that day and counted (8). Brad Bumgardner tallied (11) there on 13 April and the Saturday Brock group logged (25) on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Then Lynea S. Hinchman emerged from hibernation and walked the entire field on 18 April, counting a phenomenal (120) Smith's Longspurs. Prior to 2016 the maximum lakefront count was only four (TYM=9.05).



Male Smith's at Reynolds Creek GHA on 12 April. This individual was a member of the spring 2016 invasion that gradually increased to a maximum of 120 birds by the 18th, literally rewriting the lakefront record book. Photo by Matt Beatty.

## **SPARROWS**

It was an excellent spring for sparrows with good numbers of virtually every species except the "orange" sparrows.

Henslow's Sparrow:- John K. Cassady found a singing bird at Reynolds Creek GHA on 23 April, providing a first site record.

Harris's Sparrow:- An adult showed up at a residence south of Merrillville on 30 April and was still present on 5 May when Amy Kearns observed the bird. Brad Bumgardner photographed the bird.

Western Tanager:- Amy Kearns reported the brief sighting of a female in Dunes State Park on 7 May, as follows, "Female type seen for 1 second perched near green tower. Flew in, perched on cottonwood, then continued west. Medium-large song bird, two bold solid white wingbars, grey breast, dull yellow head and under tail, horn colored bill, semi-heavy Bill shape similar to scarlet tanager. Overall similar to female SCTA but bold wing bars and grey breast." If accepted by the Indiana Bird Records Committee this observation will constitute the lakefront's fourth record.

Rose-breasted Grosbeak:- A record 306 were logged on the lakefront this spring (TYM=153). An impressive (65) were counted during a longshore flight at the DSP Tower on 12 May (Brendan J. Grube): this tally provided the lakefront's third highest daily count.

Blue Grosbeak:- Brendan J. Grube saw a female during a 25 April longshore flight watch at the DSP Tower, which provided a new earliest record for the lakefront.

Western Meadowlark:- For the first time in decades a territorial bird occurred on the lakefront. On 12 April Brendan J. Grube found (1) in Reynolds Creek GHA; it lingered at the location and was identified by many observers. Last reported on 23 April (John K. Cassady et al.)

Yellow-headed Blackbird:- An adult male returned to Grant Street wetland on 20 April (Matt Beatty). Interestingly, this individual had a penchant for the phragmites along the ditch just outside the containment dike. Most species eschew phragmites.

Brewer's Blackbird:- This blackbird is exceedingly rare in the Dunes area (TYM=0.5); consequently, the pair that Brad Bumgardner found at Reynolds Creek GHA on 13 April was most noteworthy.

Orchard Oriole:- A new spring total of 71 was logged this season (TYM=25.9). The peak daily count was (16) that Brendan J. Grube recorded during a 12 May longshore flight count at the DSP Tower.

Baltimore Oriole:- Thanks to Brendan J. Grube's longshore flight counts a record spring tally of 1757 was attained this year (TYM=547). The season was highlighted by an Indiana record (536) daily count that Brendan logged on 7 May.

#### **WINTER FINCHES**

The absence of crossbills, grosbeaks, and a paltry showing by redpolls, rendered the overall flight well below average. The singular bright aspect was a fine Pine Siskin flight.

Common Redpoll:- A season total of 8 flybys along the lakefront (Brendan J. Grube and Michael A. Topp) comprised the entire season for this species (TYM=25.6).

Pine Siskin:- Following a winter without Siskins, a surprisingly strong spring flight occurred. A majority of the birds included in the 3266 season total were reported during the longshore flights (TYM=683.4). The peak daily tally was (1196) that Brendan J. Grube counted at the DSP Tower on 7 May, which provided Indiana's fourth largest count.

**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.