

INDIANA LAKEFRONT: SUMMER REPORT 2016

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Breeding season highlights included: The first recorded Lake County breeding of Sandhill Cranes, successful nesting by Black-necked Stilts, three state record American Avocet counts, a Hudsonian Godwit, singing Bell's Vireos, July Worm-eating Warblers, one territorial Clay-colored Sparrow, a record summer Dickcissel count, and fledgling Blue Grosbeaks.

Temperature & Precipitation at Chicago: Departure from Normal		
	Temp (°F)	Rainfall (in.)
Jun	+2.7	-0.60
Jul	+1.5	+2.53

As the natural vegetation regenerates in the Reynolds Creek Gamebird Habitat Area, lakefront birders are enjoying a delightful selection of prairie birds that were previously quite rare during the summer period. This season brought record Savannah Sparrow, Dickcissel, and Eastern Meadowlark counts and above average numbers of Grasshopper Sparrows, Henslow's Sparrows and Bobolinks. This site provides a wonderful new habitat for our area.



A highlight of the 13 July shorebird extravaganza was a (temporary) state record count of 65 American Avocets. These birds remained on the Michigan City Harbor outer breakwater for most of the day. In late afternoon the flock took flight and 55 of them are illustrated in Peter B. Grube's superb flight shot. The previous Indiana maximum tally of 35 was recorded at this same location just five days earlier and 95 were recorded here on 24 July.

Canvasback:- An adult male was seen in the Gary sewage lagoon (from I-90) on 18 June (John K. Cassady). Shawn Pfautsch reported this individual at the same location again on 4 July. This is Indiana's fourth June record.

American Bittern:- The season's only report came from Long Lake where Bradley Anderson observed (1) on 20 July.

Least Bittern:- Lakefront numbers were down markedly compared to recent summers. The season's only report consisted of a single bird that Walter J. Marcisz heard on 3 July at the restricted DuPont site in Lake Co (TYM=2.15).

Snowy Egret:- The 129th Street wetland bird that arrived in April was last reported on 24 June (Carolyn A. Marsh).

Osprey:- On 3 July Rick Welton climbed into the grandstand, which allowed him to view (3) chicks in the light-pole nest at Gilroy Field in Gary.

Sandhill Crane:- The lakefront's first breeding record for Lake Co was set 10 June when Matt S. Kalwasinski photographed a pair with one half-grown young near Gleason Park in Gary.

SHOREBIRDS

From the lakefront birder's perspective the late summer appearance of "large-shorebirds" is either feast or famine. There was unanimous birder agreement that large-shorebird "famine" days occurred far too often throughout July.

However, birders did enjoy a mouth watering "feast" on 13 July. At 7:13AM Brad Bumgardner et al. observed 125 Willets and a Marbled Godwit at Michigan City Harbor. At mid-day Brendan J. Grube tallied 164 Willets and four Marbled Godwits on the Michigan City Harbor beach, along with 109 Willets and 65 American Avocets on the outer breakwall. Twenty miles west of the harbor Michael A. Topp visited Miller Beach about 3:15PM and logged 10 Avocets, three Marbled Godwits, and 150 Willets (all flying westward). By 4:00PM at Michigan City Harbor Jeffrey J. McCoy and Peter B. Grube counted 301 Willets (160 on the beach and 141 on the breakwall) and the Avocet flock was still present. It was clearly a sumptuous large shorebird repast.

An even more luxurious banquet occurred 24 July at Michigan City Harbor when Beatty et al. logged an Indiana record 95 Avocets, which were joined by the following singleton large-shorebirds: Willet, Hudsonian Godwit, and Marbled Godwit. Also present were eleven Turnstones and a Short-billed Dowitcher.

Piping Plover:- A banded adult that Matt Beatty photographed at Michigan City Harbor on 8 July, provided the state's second earliest fall record.

Black-necked Stilt:- Two birds returned to the 129th Street wetland (Hammond) on 3 June (Carolyn A. Marsh). On 14 June Carolyn reported a nest and on 1 July she saw both adults and (2) downy chicks. Randy Shonkwiler confirmed the presence of three downy chicks on 2 July. This is the lakefront's first successful breeding; sadly, however, the young birds were not seen after 2 July. The adults were last seen on 5 July (Aerin Tedesco).



Nesting pair of Black-necked Stilts that successfully hatched three young at the 129th St. wetland. On 1 July Carolyn Marsh observed two downy chicks and Randy Shonkwiler counted three the following day. Unfortunately the youngsters were not seen subsequently. The adults were last reported 5 July (Aerin Tedesco). This fine photo was taken by Matt S. Kalwasinski on 3 July.

American Avocet:- It was an astonishing season for this stylish wader, see table (Season total =231; TYM=18.1). The (35) seen in four flocks at Michigan City Harbor on 8 July (John C. Kendall & Brendan J. Grube) constituted the largest number ever recorded in Indiana (by 3 Avocets). This record proved temporary, as Brendan J. Grube and Jeffrey J. McCoy tallied a phenomenal (65) at Michigan City Harbor on 13 July. Then on 24 July even this splendid count was also obliterated when an astronomical (95) Avocets were tallied at Michigan City Harbor (Matt Beatty, Madison Beatty, Maricela Aviles, Ricardo Escobedo, Anthony Escobedo, Jaime Golba, Jeff McCoy, and Ed Hopkins). The latter almost triples the pre-2016 record count.

Summer 2016 American Avocet Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
3	8-Jul	Michigan City Harb.	K. Stratton
2	8-Jul	Dunes S.P. beach	B. Bumgardner
35	8-Jul	Michigan City Harb.	J.C. Kendall
3	8-Jul	Dunes S.P. beach	Jacque Gates
65	13-Jul	Michigan City Harb.	B.J. Grube
10	13-Jul	Miller Beach	M.A. Topp
1	16-Jul	Miller Beach	M.A. Topp
2	18-Jul	Michigan City Harb.	M. Beatty
95	24-Jul	Michigan City Harb.	M. Beatty

Hudsonian Godwit:- On 24 July Matt Beatty photographed a molting adult among the American Avocets on the Michigan City Harbor outer breakwater. This is Indiana's sixth July record and the state's second earliest fall record.

Marbled Godwit:- Two thousand sixteen brought the best summer flight in five years. See table (season total=18; TYM=6.2). The (7) that Brendan J. Grube logged on 30 June constitutes Indiana's largest June count by more than a factor of three.

Summer 2016 Marbled Godwit Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
7	30 Jun	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube
4	13-Jul	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube
3	13-Jul	Miller Beach	M.A. Topp
1	14-Jul	Michigan City Harb	R. Sanderson
1	16-Jul	Michigan City Harb	N. Kiehl
1	24-Jul	Michigan City Harb	M. Beatty
1	25-Jul	Michigan City Harb	R. Sanderson



The stately Marbled Godwits shown in this photo are three of the four that were present in a flock of 164 Willets that occupied the Michigan City Beach on the afternoon of 13 July. Photo by Peter B. Grube.

Willet:- A record summer flight occurred on the lakefront: See table (Season total=506; TYM=99.0). An examination of May and June dates reveals that the longest intermigration hiatus is the 12 days between 23 May and 4 June. Accordingly, Jeff McCoy's 4 June record is most interesting as it represents the all-time earliest fall record. High drama occurred on 14 July when Ryan Sanderson, Don Gorney, and Aidan Rominger observed the local Peregrines capture, kill, and consume one of four Willets present at Michigan City Harbor.

Summer 2016 Willet Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
1	4-Jun	Michigan City Harb	J.J. McCoy
6	29-Jun	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube
13	30-Jun	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube
4	8-Jul	Dunes S.P.	Jacque Gates
2	13-Jul	Bev. Sh. Lakefront	Matt Beatty
164	13-Jul	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube- beach
140	13-Jul	Michigan City Harb	McCoy-breakwall
158	13-Jul	Miller Beach	M.A. Topp
4	14-Jul	Michigan City Harb	R. Sanderson
1	15-Jul	Michigan City Harb	B.J. Grube
1	15-Jul	Miller Beach	M.A. Topp
1	16-Jul	Michigan City Harb	N. Kiehl
2	24-Jul	Michigan City Harb	E. Hopkins
1	25-Jul	Michigan City Harb	R. Sanderson

Whimbrel:- This was the best summer since 2003: See table (season total=11; TYM=7.65).

Summer 2016 Whimbrel Records			
No	Date	Location	Observer
4	14-Jul	Michigan City Harb	R. Sanderson
4	15-Jul	Miller Beach	M.S. Kalwasinski
1	16-Jul	Michigan City Harb	B. Huguenard
2	30-Jul	Michigan City Harb	J.K. Cassady

Sanderling:- Summer numbers rebounded from last year's dismal twenty-count, with 99 reported, but remained well below normal (TYM=164). The season's peak tally consisted of (25) adults that Edward M. Hopkins logged at Michigan City Harbor on 24 July.

Baird's-Sandpiper:- Michael A. Topp observed the rarely seen adult plumage at Miller Beach on 22 July. This sighting also provided the lakefront's third earliest fall record.

Stilt Sandpiper:- Matt S. Kalwasinski found an adult at the 129th Street wetland on 3 July, trimmed one day off Indiana's earliest fall date.

Wilson's Snipe:- On 8 June M. Penny Starin flushed (1) along a Beverly Shores trail. This is only the fifth June record for the lakefront.

Bonaparte's Gull:- An unprecedented summer flight occurred at Michigan City Harbor during the morning of 30 July. In about three hours (133) birds flew past the harbor all heading eastward. All but two first-summer birds were alternate adults (John K. Cassady, Brendan J. Grube et al.). This is an Indiana record high count for the summer season.

Lesser Black-backed Gull:- John K. Cassady, Lynn Vernon, and KJB observed a second-cycle bird resting on the Michigan City Harbor outer breakwater on 7 July.

Common Tern:- A first-summer bird was perched on the Michigan City Harbor outer breakwater on 7 July (John K. Cassady, Lynn Vernon, & KJB). Matt Beatty photographed (2) alternate adults at Michigan City Harbor on 27 July.

Alder Flycatcher:- A singing bird was still present in western Beverly Shores on 18 June (John K. Cassady). Incredibly, (3) were simultaneously heard singing near St. Clair Street in Beverly Shores on 30 July (John K. Cassady, Randy J. Pals, Lynn Vernon, and KJB). This is the lakefront's largest July count in 16 years.

Bell's Vireo:- Walter J. Marcisz heard (2) widely separated singing birds at the restricted DuPont Natural Area (adjacent to the Grand Calumet River) on 3 July. These represent the lakefront's first potentially territorial birds since July 1954.

Philadelphia Vireo:- One seen in the Hammond Sanctuary on 4 June (Richard & Jill Wood) tied Indiana's second latest spring date.

Sedge Wren:- This was the lakefront's best summer for Sedge Wrens in six years, with 7 reported (TYM=8.2). On 4 June Jeffrey J. McCoy found (1) at Reynolds Creek G.H.A., providing the first record for this site.

Marsh Wren:- It was another good summer for this wren with 144 reported (TYM=60.9). Lindsey Grossman logged the peak count of (12) at the Grant Street wetland on 10 June.

Northern Mockingbird:- One was found at the Bass Pro Shop (I-94 & SR 249) on 12 June (Lynea Hinchman), a first for this location. Michael A. Topp observed (3) fledglings at the U.S. Steel plant on 30 June.

WARBLERS

Worm-eating Warbler:- On 28 June Brad Bumgardner found a singing bird on Dunes S.P. Trail #7, east of Mt. Tom. This is the lakefront's

first June record since 1989 (summer TYM=0.15). Brad also photographed another at the Nature Center feeders on 1 July, which constitutes the lakefront's second July record.

Prothonotary Warbler:- It was an unusually successful breeding season in the Dunes. Adults were observed feeding young in Dunes S.P. on 14 June (Keshava Mysore) and a female carrying food was noted at the Trail 2 footbridge on 25 June (Robert D. Hughes and Karen Mansfield). Additionally, singing birds were heard in both east (Lynea Hinchman) and central (Randy J. Pals) Beverly Shores.

Blackburnian Warbler:- On 7 June Rita Jackson photographed a female carrying nesting material in Dunes S.P., providing Indiana's second confirmed nesting record.

Clay-colored Sparrow:- On 4 June a territorial adult was found at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. (Jeffrey J. McCoy et al.). This is a first summer record for the lakefront. The bird was still singing on territory on 15 June (Carol Goodall & Lindsey Grossmann) and was last seen 30 July (Amy Hodson *vide* Brad Bumgardner).



For the first summer on record the Clay-colored Sparrow was reported on the lakefront. On 4 June Jeffrey J. McCoy first discovered this singing bird at the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. It was clearly territorial and was last seen on 9 July; however, nesting evidence was not detected. This photo, which captures the bird on a favorite singing perch, was taken by Matt Beatty on 10 June.

Lark Sparrow:- The two birds reported at West Beach in May were still present on 25 June (Jeffrey J. McCoy).

Grasshopper Sparrow:- A small number summered at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. For the season 21 were reported (TYM=2.1). The peak count was (7), a record high for the lakefront, on 4 June (Jeffrey J. McCoy, Randy J. Pals, & KJB).

Henslow's Sparrow:- Singletons were reported at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 4 June (Randy J. Pals & Jeffrey J. McCoy), 16 July (Lindsay Grossmann), and 31 July (Mark Welter).

Blue Grosbeak:- It was quite a summer for this handsome passerine, as birds were reported at three locations, one of which was new for this species. On 18 June Michael A. Topp discovered (3), two males and a female carrying food, south of Portage Lakefront Park, tying the lakefront's maximum count and establishing a first record for that site. Jeffrey J. McCoy found (2) singing males at West Beach on 25 June (a second record for this location). Most importantly, on 7 July Michael A. Topp observed (2) fledglings at the U.S. Steel plant in Gary providing the first breeding report for the lakefront.



This glowing male Blue Grosbeak is representative of the lakefront's best summer ever for this species. In addition to a record number of grosbeaks the lakefront's first breeding was recorded. This photo was taken on 10 June south of Portage Lakefront Park by Michael A. Topp.

Dickcissel:- This vocal species has become well ensconced at Reynolds Creek G.H.A. As a result, the lakefront's season total was an impressive 185 birds (TYM=19.9). On 18 June John K. Cassady, Randy J. Pals, Lynn Vernon & KJB conducted a survey along the roads at Reynolds Creek and counted (55), which is a record daily count for the lakefront.

Bobolink:- Thanks to the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. it was a decent season for this prairie bird. The summer total was 32 (TYM=21.2). Incongruously, the season's maximum count occurred outside of Reynolds Creek, as Beth Dixon tallied (6) at the County Line Orchard (western Porter Co) on 16 July.



Bobolinks most certainly nested in Reynolds Creek Gamebird Habitat Area this summer, as they were reported regularly throughout the season. This juvenile is in fresh plumage likely fledged locally. John K. Cassady took this photo in the Reynolds Creek G.H.A. on 30 July.

Yellow-headed Blackbird:-The adult male that arrived at the Grant Street wetland on 20 April lingered until 24 June (Matt S. Kalwasinski), but a female was never reported.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: Thanks go to Susan R. Bagby for proofing this document and to Matt Beatty, John K. Cassady, Peter B. Grube, Matt S. Kalwasinski, and Michael A. Topp for sharing their

excellent photographs.

Conventions:- 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. The term "STYM" refers to the twenty-year mean for the entire state. Species marked by "*" were observed outside the lakefront area.