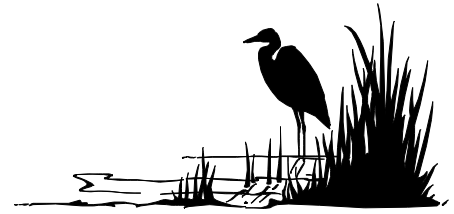


# Stockbridge Audubon



*Representing Northeast Indiana*  
46864

P.O. Box 13131, Fort Wayne, Indiana,

## Get ready for Spring Migration! (Bird of the Month is the Robin, and not a moment too soon)

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### President's Message, by Julie Henricks

It's easy these days to find things to fill one's time, but perhaps harder than ever to discover a pursuit that fills the soul. The association of like-minded, cordial people found in Audubon may be the closest thing to nirvana for someone who seeks intellectual stimulation but appreciates having fun, too. Stockbridge members are especially fortunate to be offered an extensive slate of field trips each spring and fall. Nearly every weekend from late March till late May, and again from early September till early November, birders of all levels of expertise are invited to join the gang and see what Nature has waiting for us. Although the routes may be repeated over the years, no two of these outings ever are the same: there is always a new bird to be seen, or a bird seen a thousand times before but now in a different setting, or behaving in an unusual way. The potential for a once-in-a-lifetime event is intoxicating.

If you've never investigated a Stockbridge field trip, why not "pencil us in" for the spring? There are excursions of varying lengths and distances, and it won't be long till the next batch begins. Check this newsletter for details, and then start your journey -- you won't regret it!

**On the back page: Late-breaking news of a joint meeting with ACRES! Nature Photographer Richard Fields will show slides and give photography tips.  
Saturday March 5 at 7 p.m. at Achatz Hall, U. of St. Francis**



## Bird Notes

By Jim Haw  
October 21-February 1

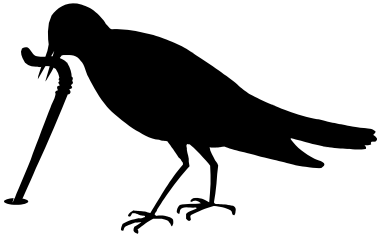
The period produced a few rarities. A Varied Thrush visited Jim Haw's Ft. Wayne yard Nov. 24 and was seen by several. Northeast Indiana's first Snowy Owl since 1996 was found near Markle Dec. 31 (Joyce Gottschalk) and was still present at the end of January to the delight of many. Another Snowy Owl appeared briefly in Allen Co. Jan. 11 (Beverly Richardson). A Laughing Gull at Salamonie Res. Dec. 16 (Haw) was both out of range and out of season. Fox Island's third Common Redpoll was at the feeders there Jan. 14 (Ed & Cynthia Powers).

There were a number of noteworthy birds in late fall. Now annual in northeast Indiana, an Eared Grebe was at Hurshtown Reservoir, Allen Co. Oct. 24 and Nov. 7 (Stockbridge field trips). The latter Hurshtown trip also found 8 Greater White-fronted Geese, 7 Tundra Swans, and a very late Common Tern for this region's first November record. A late Great Egret was at Auburn Nov. 21 (Doug Rood). Recently split from Canada Goose, Cackling Geese were recorded in Steuben Co. Dec. 14 (2; Haw, Sandy Schacht) and in Franke Park, Ft. Wayne Dec. 17-18 (16; Jeff Moore et al). A Black-crowned Night Heron tried to winter on the grounds of the Ft. Wayne zoo and was last seen Jan. 17 (Powers). Two Surf Scoters were on Adams Lake, Lagrange Co. Nov. 11 (Casey Ryan et al). There were more Golden Eagle reports than in any recent season: Allen Co. Nov. 7 (Jim Seely, Galen Yordy), Wabash Co. Nov. 14 (Yordy), and Markle Jan. 1 (Frannie Headings et al).

The Engle Rd. wetland, Ft. Wayne hosted several record late shorebirds: 2 Least Sandpipers Oct. 31 (Haw), 2 Long-billed Dowitchers Oct. 23 and one Oct. 31 (Haw), and a Baird's Sandpiper Nov. 6 (Haw). Also of note was a White-rumped Sandpiper at Fawn River Fish Hatchery, Steuben Co. Oct. 26 (Marisa Windell et al).

A late Marsh Wren was heard in Steuben Co. Oct. 22 (Dave Reichlinger). A Blue-headed Vireo at Salamonie Res. Oct. 21 (Haw, Headings) tied the latest fall date for northeast Indiana, and a Barn Swallow was late there the same day. Also late were a Gray Catbird at Salamonie Nov. 9 (Schacht et al), a Nashville Warbler at Metea Park, Allen Co. Oct. 24 (Rodger Rang), and a Chipping Sparrow at Powers' feeder Nov. 25-28. Orange-crowned Warblers were at Fox Island Oct. 24 (Haw) and Pigeon River Nov. 4 (Headings, Rood).

Notable winter residents included up to ten Short-eared Owls near Roanoke Jan. 8 into Feb. (Joe Steinmetz et al), a Brown Thrasher in Ryan's Allen Co. yard Jan. 14, and Northern Shrikes in Steuben Co. Nov. 23 (Haw, Schacht) and Tri-County FWA Jan. 18 (Haw, Schacht). There were modest numbers of Red-breasted Nuthatches, Purple Finches, and Pine Siskins throughout the period



## **Bird of the Month: the American Robin**

**By Warren Mead**

This month's featured bird is arguably the most anticipated and celebrated springtime migrant in our area, the American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*). The first sighting of Robins each year is heralded by birders and non-birders alike as a sure—and most welcome—sign of spring.

The Robin is a member of the thrush family, which also includes the Bluebirds. Averaging 10 inches in length, the Robin is a good-sized bird that sometimes appears to be “barrel-chested”. Brown above with that well-known orange breast, the Robin also sports a yellow bill, a white throat streaked with black, and white corners on its tail which are conspicuous in flight. The males have a darker head and tail than the females.

Most often seen scurrying across lawns, they will run a distance then stop and cock their head. I remember my Grandmother telling me that Robins listened for worms and that was why they held their head in such a manner. In actuality, Robins are able to see movement in the earth where worms are active just below the surface of the soil. Once spotted, they dive-in with their bill and dig the worm out for a tasty treat.

Insects and worms are the primary food during warm weather months, with fruits and berries becoming the staple food during the cold months. According to an article in *Natural History* magazine, robins actually increase the length of their digestive tracts during the cold months, because dried-up fruits and berries are harder to digest than juicy earthworms.

Cold months, you say? Yes, Robins are becoming more and more common in our area throughout winter. They generally retreat to moist woodlands during this time of the year and that is why they are not commonly seen. If the winter weather proves too harsh however, they will move south and out of our area. Since the first of the year, I've seen a flock of about two dozen Robins around my workplace (SW Ft. Wayne near I-69 and Illinois Rd.) They are feasting on the fruits of the many hawthorn and crabapple trees on the premises.

Robins will begin nesting as early as March in Indiana and the state's latest documented nesting was August 18th. They will usually have two broods with an average of four nestlings each. Their eggs are blue/green—and have even earned notoriety as “Robin's-egg blue” in the world of color descriptions. The female will begin on the second brood while the male cares for the first batch. A Robin's nest is neatly constructed of grasses and mud. The female will contour the nest to her body as the wet mud is put in place. If your bird bath becomes very muddy in the spring, it is most likely a result of Robins dipping bits of dirt in it, to make mud for their nest.

The young hatch after 12-14 days and then leave the nest after another 14-16 days. Robins are extremely defensive of their nests and will “dive-bomb” anyone or anything that gets too close. Young Robins have heavily speckled breasts, which is a common trait among the thrushes.

Perhaps the most sparkling quality of Robins is their song. Commonly described as

“cheerily, cheer-up, cheerily, cheer-up”, this song is heard very early (and I mean *very early*) in the morning and long into dusk, during spring. The “caroling” of Robins is one of the best sounds in nature as far as I’m concerned. They also make a descending “whinny” sound and a “chuk” call.

Although it is late January and ten degrees outside as I write this, the day is quickly approaching when we will be treated to the wonderful song and widespread presence of the most well-known harbinger of spring, the American Robin.



### **Fox Island FeederWatch News** **By Cynthia Powers**

This fall and winter my husband Ed and I have been spending Friday mornings at Fox Island in the Bird Observation Building, counting the birds at the feeders. I’d like to recommend this as an enjoyable and low-stress volunteer “job.”

We record the highest number seen of each species. Since there are several feeders outside the big windows, it’s very helpful to have two people. We’ve counted as many as 28 cardinals and 24 juncos! We also saw a female redpoll which turned out to be the third Fox Island record. Often there are 1 or 2 Carolina Wrens, and possibly a flicker or a hairy woodpecker.

But what’s the most satisfying is when a little “Birding 101” can be taught. One especially delightful visitor was Jacob, about 9, who was a very astute observer. He said “There’s a huge woodpecker!” (it was a flicker) and pointed out that “it has dots underneath, and a white line between its wings.”

Cornell University, which is in charge of Project FeederWatch, has furnished excellent color posters of common feeder birds. We have posted these low enough so that children can see them easily. The birds come right up to the windowsill feeders, so children can easily see the red crown on the male downy, for instance. One little boy, who had come with his class to go skiing, said, “I never saw a cardinal before!”

It’s also been interesting to show people all the kinds of sparrows. American Tree Sparrows are quite numerous, but we’ve had a Fox Sparrow, Song Sparrows, White-throated Sparrows, both color morphs of White-crowned Sparrows, and a winter-plumage Chipping Sparrow which should have gone south!

Working conditions in the Bird Observation Building are good. It's kept warm enough for comfort (we birders know to dress in layers, don't we!) and restrooms are right there. Often a member of the friendly staff stops in to see what rarities may have turned up.

We enter our data on the FeederWatch website. If you're interested in a certain species, say, Chipping Sparrows, you can check out the website to see how many FeederWatch sites have reported them in the winter. This data helps when bird book authors are updating range maps, or when researchers are tracking the effects of West Nile Virus. We also turn in some of our data to Indiana Audubon for their Winter Bird Feeder Count.

If you want to volunteer at the Bird Building, contact Sarah Hendricks, Volunteer Coordinator, at 449-3180.

## **Late News Flash:**

**ACRES** has invited us to have a joint meeting with them **March 5**. It will be Saturday night at 7 p.m. at the auditorium in **Achatz Hall** at U. of St. Francis, and will feature photographer **Richard Fields**. He has taken thousands of photographs for the Indiana DNR, seen in *Outdoor Indiana* magazine and in the book "Indiana from the Air". This will be a one-hour slide show and he will give tips for taking better photographs. **Call ACRES at 260-422-1004 for more information.**