

NORTHWEST INDIANA
SHOREBIRD TOUR
JULY – AUGUST – SEPTEMBER
Weekend Loop – 1 or 2 Days

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Please review ABA's "Principles of Birding Ethics" before starting this Tour. Please do not trespass on private property.

If you are not on In-Bird-L or Bloomington-Birds-L list serves (Indiana's wild bird discussion lists and E-mail alert hotlines), then you may pass along rare bird sightings to me at spancol@aol.com I will post your sightings to In-Bird-L.

Introduction

Shorebird habitat is a rare and delicate commodity. You can find warblers and other passerines just about any where. Not so with shorebirds. The widespread disappearance of wetlands throughout the world has made birding for shorebirds a difficult matter. Over the last 100 years Indiana has seen nearly all of it's vast wetland areas drained and converted to farm land. As a result, shorebirds find few opportunities in Indiana to rest and feed while migrating. Because they are such long distance migrants, it is crucial that these feeding / resting areas exist. I have broken down shorebird habitat in Indiana into 4 basic categories:

1. Lake Michigan – By far the most reliable shorebird habitat in the state. I doubt that Lake Michigan will dry up any time soon and I don't think the beaches will disappear. For this to be a productive site, however, the weather has to be right.

The winds have to be from the north for the lakefront to be a productive site. Beginning birders may find the Lakefront frustrating as most shorebirds seen here are flybys. They are identified in flight. While a few shorebirds may land on the beach, most are flybys at substantial distances. The lakefront is the only place where, given the right weather conditions, there is a reasonable probability of seeing the following species: Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, Marbled Godwit, Red Knot, Willet and Red Phalarope (late migrant). Away from the lakefront these birds are unusual occurrences. When winds are from the south, attention is quickly shifted to habitat away from the lakefront.

2. Wetlands and lakes – Obviously the most abundant shorebird habitat in the state, you will wish for a dry spring if you most frequently visit this type of habitat. Lake and wetland areas are best when shorelines recede, exposing more mud for the shorebirds to work.

3. Sewage Lagoons – Sewage Lagoons are a rare and disappearing commodity. They are being replaced by waste water treatment plants. Many waste water treatment plants do not have suitable habitat for shorebirds.

4. Flooded farm fields / Sod farms – If you rely on flooded farm fields for shorebird habitat, then you will favor a very wet spring. When severe flooding does occur in your region, this may make birding for shorebirds difficult. If flooding is widespread, shorebirds may be widely dispersed and hard to find. Locating shorebirds is much easier when they are concentrated in a few well known birding sites.

Shorebirds often visit sod farms. You most typically see Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Killdeer and an occasional Baird's Sandpiper when visiting this type of habitat. Flooded sod farms will attract other species of shorebirds as well.

1. MICHIGAN CITY HARBOR

Laporte County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 19, A-11

A Lakewatch Site

5:30 A.M. to 6:20 A.M.

Habitat: Deep water lake and beach.

Directions: From the intersection of I – 94 and S.R. 421, continue north on S.R. 421 into Michigan City.

S.R. 421 becomes Franklin Street in Michigan City.

Turn right (east) on 9th Street.

Turn left (north) on Pine Street.

Follow Pine Street past S.R. 12 and veer right (north), following the Beach / Marina sign.

Cross the bridge and turn right (east) on Lakeshore Drive.

Turn left at the first yield sign, which takes you into Washington Park / Michigan City Harbor.

Scan the beach and lake from the parking lot. Then, walk west toward the lighthouse. From the beginning of the catwalk, scan the beach to the southwest (by the power plant-called Nipsco Beach).

Also, scan the outer breakwall to the northwest of the lighthouse.

Walking out to the lighthouse will get you much closer to the outer breakwall. If weather is severe and high waves are evident, do not attempt walking out to the lighthouse.

If winds are from the north, you may want to pull up a lawn chair and conduct a Lakewatch here. Spend an hour or two watching shorebirds fly by.

2. COWLES BOG – Porter County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 19, B / C – 8

6:35 A.M. to 7:15 A.M.

Habitat: large marsh, deciduous woods and shrubs.

Directions: From Michigan City Harbor, go south and leave the harbor going south on Brown Basin Street. Cross the green channel bridge and follow this road around the police station. At the stop light, turn right (west) on S.R. 12.

In Porter County, turn right (north) on Mineral Springs Road (A Dune Acres sign on the right (north) side of the road will signal this road).

After crossing the R.R. tracks, turn left (west) into the gravel parking lot.

At the west end of the parking lot is a gravel truck road.

Walk the gravel truck road west to the brown trail sign.

Follow the arrow on the sign (turn right-north).

Walking north, you will see the marsh to your left (west).

The trail will then veer left (west) and take you out onto the dike. Scan the marsh to the south.

3. MARQUETTE PARK LAKEFRONT SHELTER – Lake County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 18, C-6

A Lakewatch Site

7:30 A.M. – 8:30 A.M.

Habitat: Deep water lake and beach.

Directions: From Cowles Bog, turn right (west) on S.R. 12. Turn right (north) on County Line Road (West Beach and Long Lake exit – flashing red traffic light).

Turn left (west) on Oak Avenue (4-way stop - a brown "Marquette Park" sign is here).

Approaching Marquette Park, turn right (west) on Montgomery Street. Immediately after the right turn will be the Marquette Park Lakefront Shelter on your right (north).

Park here and conduct a Lakewatch from the shelter.

4. MILLER BEACH – Lake County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 18, C-6

A Lakewatch Site

8:35 A.M. to 9:30 A.M.

Habitat: Deep water lake and beach.

Directions: From the Marquette Park Lakefront Shelter, turn right (west) on Montgomery Street.

Go to the 2nd stop light and turn right (west) on Hemlock Avenue.

Turn right (north) on Lake Street (4-way stop).

Follow Lake Street north to the Miller Beach Parking Lot.

Option 1 – Lakewatch: Spend a couple hours watching shorebirds migrate up and down the shoreline.

Option 2 – From Miller Beach, walk west along the beach all the way to the U.S. Steel Breakwall and back, birding the shoreline and lake.

Option 3 – If winds are from the south and no shorebird movement is detected after a reasonable period of time, move away from the lakefront and on to the next location.

5. SCHNEIDER SOD FARMS

Lake County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 24, B-4

10:00 A.M. to 11:00 A.M.

Habitat: Sod Farm

Directions: From Miller Beach, take Lake Street south to S.R. 12.

Turn right (west) on S.R. 12.

Turn left (south) on I – 65.

Turn right (west) on S.R. 2.

Turn left (south) on S.R. 41.

Approaching the town of Schneider, you will see the Huber Sod Farm on the right (west) side of S.R. 41.

Go past the sod farm and turn left (east) on 239th Avenue (If you have past the Marathon station on your right, you have gone too far).

Turn left (north) on Parrish Avenue.

The sod farm begins after you cross the R.R. tracks, on the left (west) side of the road.

Scan the sod farm from Parrish Avenue. When you have reached the northern end of the farm, turn around and head back south on Parrish Avenue.

Turn right (west) on 236th Street (north side of the R.R. tracks).

This gravel road borders the south side of the sod farm.

Continue west on 236th Street, birding the sod farm along the way. **Do not access the private drive of the sod farmer!!!**

6. GRAND KANKAKEE MARSH

Lake County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 19, H-7

11:30 A.M. to 1:30 P.M.

Habitat: Marsh.

Directions: From the Schneider Sod Farms, turn around and take 236th Street back east to Parrish Avenue. Turn right (south) on Parrish Avenue. Turn right (west) on 239th Avenue. Turn right (north) on S.R. 41. Turn right (east) on S.R. 2.

Follow S.R. 2 past I – 65 and turn right (south) on Union Road (you will see a Morrow's Turkey Farm" sign at Union Road).

Follow Union Road south until it dead ends.

Turn left (east) at this T-section.

Follow this road till it dead ends at the marsh.

You will see the dike of the marsh on the left (east) side of the road.

At the "Authorized Vehicles Only" sign, park by the gate and walk down the road and up to the dike.

1:45 P.M. to 2:15 P.M. – Lunch: There is a McDonald's Restaurant in the town of Hebron, which is on the way to the Tom Sporre Wildlife Area.

7. TOM SPORRE WILDLIFE AREA

Lake County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 18, G – 6

2:30 P.M. to 3:30 P.M.

Habitat: A marsh surrounded by a tree line, with grasslands and farm fields beyond that.

Directions: From the Grand Kankakee Marsh, follow Union Road back north to S.R. 2.

Turn right (east) on S.R. 2.

Follow S.R. 2 as it turns left (north) and also becomes S.R. 231.

In Hebron, veer left and stay on S.R. 231 (now going northwest). Follow S.R. 231 until you see the Tom Sporre Wildlife Area on the left side of the road.

Turn left into the Tom Sporre Wildlife Area and follow the dirt / grass road which begins at the southwest corner of the parking lot. If you don't have 4-wheel drive, use your best judgement.

You may want to walk this road instead of driving.

This road will take you around the west side of the marsh.

This road becomes impassable at the southeastern corner of the marsh. The southern end of the marsh is the most productive.

Scan the marsh for shorebirds.

8. JERRY ALLEN MARSH

Porter County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 19, G-8

3:45 P.M. to 5:00 P.M.

Habitat: A dedicated wetland preserve. A deciduous woods borders the southern edge of the marsh with farm land to the north.

Directions: From the Tom Sporre Wildlife Area, turn right (southeast) on S.R. 231.

Take S.R. 231 southeast to Hebron.

In Hebron, turn left (north) on S.R. 2.

Take S.R. 2 north to C.R. 650 S..

Turn right (east) on C.R. 650 S..

Turn left (north) at C.R. 450 W..

You will be at the marsh when C.R. 450 W. elbows right and becomes C.R. 550 S..

At this elbow in the road, turn left (north) onto the grass road, which leads to the marsh parking lot.

Park at the steel gate.

Walk past this gate north to the marsh.

When this road dead ends at the marsh, scan the eastern section of the marsh.

Then, turn left (west) and follow this road to the western section of the marsh.

Scan the west marsh for shorebirds.

9. KINGSBURY STATE FISH AND WILDLIFE AREA – Laporte County

Indiana Delorme Map: Page 20, E-2

5:30 P.M. to 7:00 P.M.

Habitat: A wide variety including an extensive marsh area, dense and open woodlands, large stands of pines, grasslands which are often wet, agricultural fields, and dense roadside shrubs.

Directions: From Jerry Allen Marsh, turn left (east) onto C.R. 450 W.. This road now is C.R. 550 S..

Turn right (south) on C.R. 400 W. (the very next county road).

Turn left (east) on S.R. 8.

Take S.R. 8 east to S.R. 39.

Turn left (north) on S.R. 39 (flashing red traffic light is here).

Take S.R. 39 north to S.R. 6 (4-way stop / flashing red traffic light is here).

Turn right (east) on S.R. 6

Turn left (north) on S.R. 35 (flashing yellow traffic light).

Turn right (east) on C.R. 500 S. (Kingsbury County Market will signal this turn).

At the dead end / T-section, turn right (south) on Hupp Road.

Cross the R.R. tracks and enter Kingsbury State Fish and Wildlife Area.

At the first 4-way stop, turn left (east) and continue on Hupp Road.

Turn right (south) on River Road (this road is lined with a huge stand of pines and telephone poles).

Drive a ½ mile or so and look for the marsh on the left (east) side of the road. Park along side the road and walk up to the dike. Scan the marsh for shorebirds.

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