

Big Walnut Bird Club Newsletter October 2024



Ovenbird- Putnam Co, R. Wilson

In this Newsletter:

- Club News
- Event Schedule
- BWBC Field Trip Report
- Sedge Wrens
- Whooping Cranes
- Pictures from the Local's

Club News

The last few weeks have seen a lot of changes. Crop harvesting, leaves falling, first frost, and monarch and bird migration, etc. Most summer resident birds and pass-through migrants have already disappeared, such as the Flycatchers, Vireos, Swallows, Wood and Swainson's Thrush, Indigo Buntings, Warblers (most) and many others. These are being replaced by incoming winter birds such as Dark-eyed Juncos, Ruby-crowned and Gold-crowned Kinglets, White-throated and White-crowned Sparrows, Brown Creepers, Yellow-rumped Warblers, and Hermit Thrush. Ducks, Geese and Cranes are also starting to trickle in from the far north. Speaking of Cranes, I hope you enjoy the included article on Whooping Cranes that I am finally able to share.

If you've ever wondered which species of birds could be present around you at a particular time of year, there is an online resource for just that; the Ebird barcharts (<https://ebird.org/explore>). These barcharts illustrate past observations by date for the selected "region" and for each species of bird. Enter Putnam County Indiana as the region, then select the "barcharts" tab on the left and you are all set. This Ebird information is populated voluntarily by individuals uploading their personal bird observation checklists. Local birdwatchers such as our own Carl Huffman upload hundreds or thousands of checklists over the years to help make this data accurate and accessible. You can also contribute your observations by just registering with the Ebird website and completing a brief online training tutorial on how to complete checklists.

As always, we invite you to join us on our next outing. And for those who can't make it, you are welcome anytime to send me your birding pictures or stories you'd like to share with the club email group. Thanks to everyone contributing to this issue, hope you enjoy. Happy Birding! Rod

Event Schedule:

November 2- BWBC Field Trip- Lieber State Park and Cataract Lake- 9am

We will meet Saturday 9am at the Lieber State Park beach parking lot inside the park. We'll scope the lake for loons, gulls and waterfowl. And also hike a trail or two, easy to moderate trails less than 2 miles. Please rsvp if able.

December ? (TBD, 14th or 15th maybe?)- BWBC Christmas Bird Count- 8:00am- Noon

Carl will be scheduling this year's CBC soon. The count is sponsored by the American Audubon Society. Every year we bird the same circle, which is 15 miles in diameter and is centered close to Brick Chapel. It includes Greencastle, Bainbridge, Fillmore, Heritage Lake, Glenn Flint Lake and the DePauw Nature Park. This circle is divided into 5 areas, and we need at least one car with at least two people in each of the areas. In addition, we send people out on foot to bird the Nature Park (2 groups because it is so big), People's Pathway and the Putnam Nature Trail. All levels of birders are welcome to participate. We need as many eyes and ears as possible!

Please let me or Carl Huffman know whether you would like to participate and whether you would like to be in a driving group or a walking group. He will send out further information to those participating about their assigned area and other guidelines. We may hold a compilation meeting/lunch afterwards for those interested, to be announced later. More information to follow as we get closer to the date.

BWBC Field Trip Report- Saturday Oct 5, 2024- Portland Mills

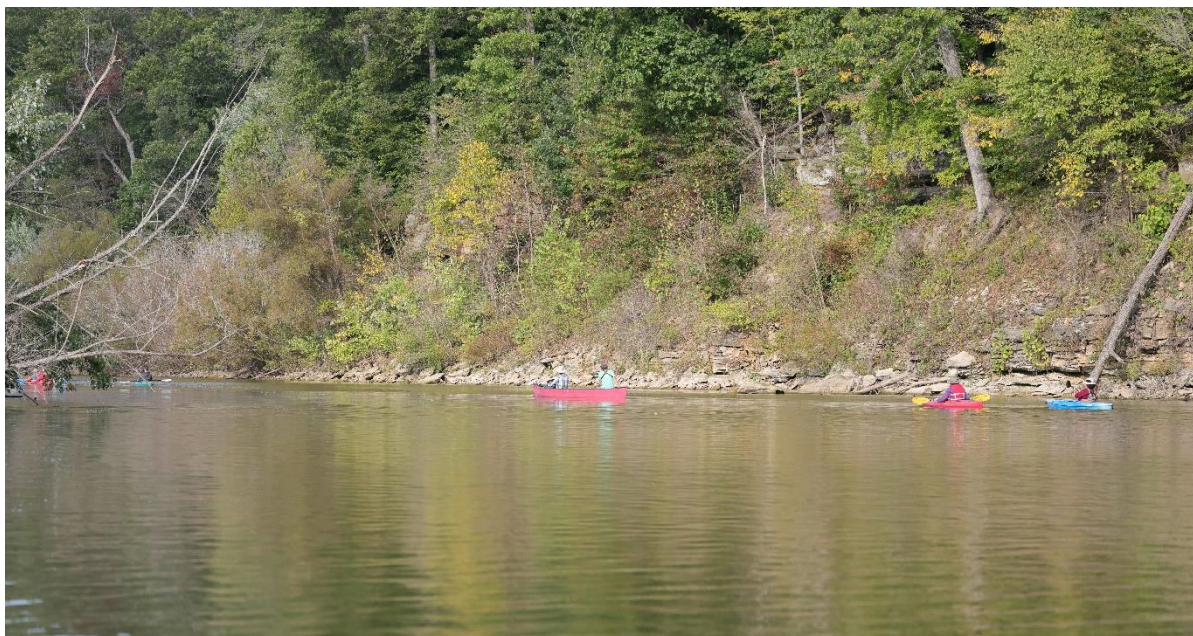
This birding adventure explored the upper reaches of Cecil M Harden Reservoir (Big Raccoon Creek) in Putnam County. We had nine (9) attendees in two canoes and four kayaks. We traveled from the Portland Mills public launch ramp upstream a little over 1.5 miles and back again. It was a beautiful morning and great scenery along the shoreline. The bright white Great Egrets, Eagles, and Belted Kingfishers kept us entertained. Although the number of birds was down compared to just a couple weeks earlier, we still observed at least 19 species. Pics by Jeff Gygi.



Portland Mills area (Putnam Co)

8 Wood Duck
4 Killdeer
1 Spotted Sandpiper
5 Great Egret
3 Great Blue Heron
1 Black Vulture
26 Turkey Vulture
2 Bald Eagle
1 Red-tailed Hawk
2 Belted Kingfisher

1 Pileated Woodpecker
1 Northern Flicker (Yellow-shafted)
2 Eastern Phoebe
20 Blue Jay
2 American Crow
1 Song Sparrow
1 Red-winged Blackbird
1 Northern Waterthrush
1 Northern Cardinal



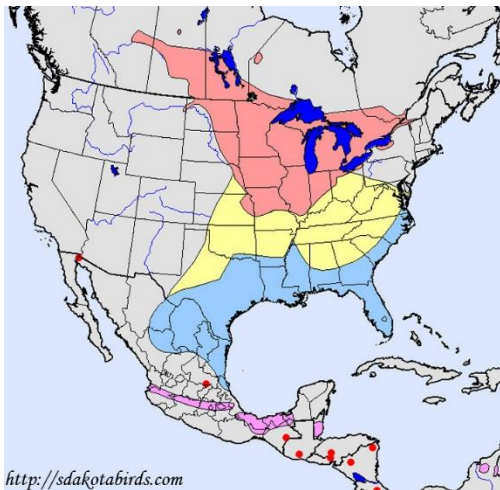
Sedge Wren by Rod Wilson

The **Sedge Wren** (*Cistothorus stellaris*) is a small and secretive [passerine](#) bird in the family [Troglodytidae](#). Its range is confined to the north-central United States and south-central Canada (see range map). The picture to the right taken by Carl Huffman in Big Walnut NP Aug 2023 illustrates a cute characteristic of this wren in a spread leg perch.



Sedge Wren
Cistothorus platensis

Sedge Wren, Putnam Co, Aug 2023, Carl Huffman



Map created by Terry Sohl,
Data from NatureServe

Sedge wrens can be found here in Putnam County if you know where and when to look. I've found them in five locations over the last two years, with four of the five times being in late summer to early fall. This pattern matches up with the "second breeding" season as described below. Data provided in Ebird (which you can access online) includes locations and dates of these previous sightings.

The Sedge Wren is often found in wet grasslands and meadows where it nests in the tall grasses and sedges and feeds on insects. Formerly called the Short-billed Marsh Wren, this species was renamed Sedge Wren to better distinguish it from the closely related [Marsh Wren](#) (*Cistothorus palustris*) by emphasizing habitat differences between the two species. Other wrens found in Indiana include the House Wren, Carolina Wren, and, only in the winter, the Winter Wren.



Sedge Wren, Putnam Co, Aug 2023, R. Wilson

Breeding Season Range- The Sedge Wren appears to be one of the most nomadic terrestrial birds in North America, with breeding concentrated in widely different portions of its range at different times of the breeding season. A first period of nesting is concentrated primarily in the upper-midwestern United States (Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota) and adjacent Canada (Saskatchewan) and occurs during late May and June. A second, more widespread, nesting period occurs later in the summer (July-September), with birds expanding out into southern (for example, Kansas, Missouri, Indiana) and northeastern (for example, Vermont, Massachusetts) portions of the breeding range. Vegetative succession or disturbance caused by grazing, haying, and planting also impart a highly transitory character to Sedge Wren nesting habitats. This habitat instability apparently has led to high mobility and low site tenacity in many areas.

Nesting- The males build multiple nests which serve for nesting, as dormitories, and as decoys for predators. The females will then add a lining of grass, sedge and feathers to the nest she chooses. Nests are round globes of dried grass with a round opening on the side. They are usually built in grasses and sedges about one or two feet above ground or shallow water. The females do most of the parental care and feeding while the males continue to build nests and display for other females. Some early breeding females can also have a second brood later in the season.



*Sedge Wren, Forest Hill Cemetery pollinator plots
Putnam Co, Sept 2024, R. Wilson*

References: Cornell
Ornithology Birds of The
World, and Animalia.bio
websites about sedge wrens



Sedge Wren, Putnam Co, Aug 2023, Carl Huffman

WHOOOPER !

by Rod Wilson



6 juvenile whooping cranes, Nov 29, 2023, Putnam Co IN- Rod Wilson

Did you see these rare visitors in Putnam County this past winter?

These six immature Whooping Cranes made Putnam County Indiana their home last winter, until they returned north in early spring 2024 to Wisconsin to spend the summer. Last winter was likely the first time Whooping Cranes have been seen and recorded in Putnam County since the early 1900's. Since they are an endangered species, their presence last winter was not publicized for their protection.

These six young Cranes were costume-reared at the International Crane Foundation the summer of 2023 and were released at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge in Dodge County Wisconsin during October 2023. Shortly thereafter the six migrated to Putnam County Indiana. All six had leg bands and radio tracking devices to help monitor their activity and locations. One of the cranes died of natural causes last winter, but the other five are currently doing well back at their summer home in Wisconsin and Minnesota. They will once again be migrating south sometime in October or November.

The whooping crane (*Grus americana*) is an endangered crane species, native to North America, named for its "whooping" calls. Along with the sandhill crane (*Antigone canadensis*), it is one of only two crane species native to North America. Standing five feet tall with a wingspan of more than seven feet, the Whooping Crane is North America's tallest bird. It is also the rarest crane in the world. The species was once found across the entire continent, but after being pushed to the brink of extinction due to unregulated hunting and loss of habitat, in the 1940s fewer than 20 individuals survived. Their numbers

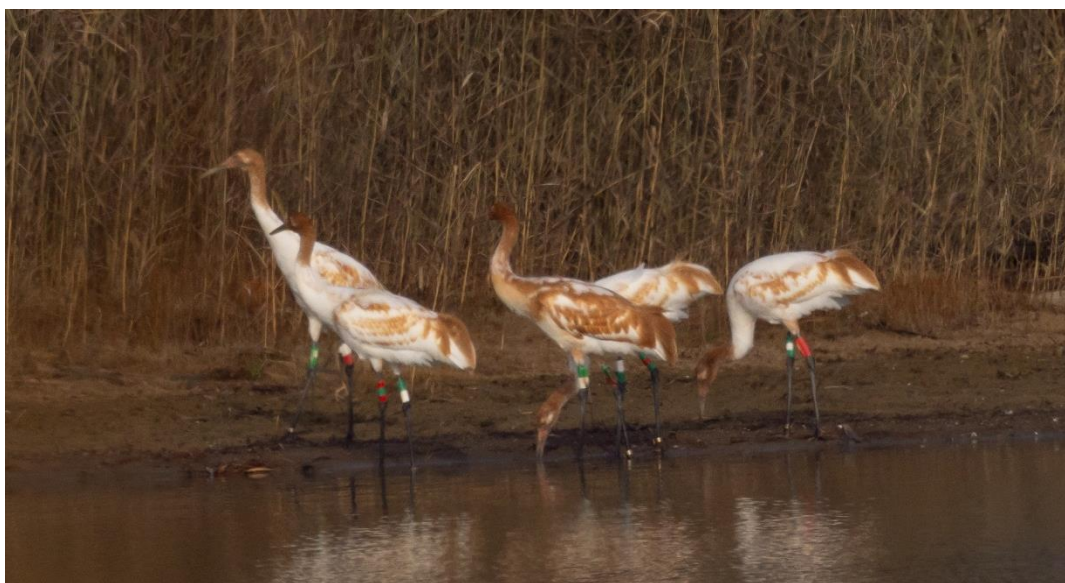
have since rebounded thanks to conservation efforts to rebuild and re-establish populations across North America. Today, the population is slowly climbing and numbers over 800 in the wild and in captivity.

Whooping Cranes occupy four distinct populations, one of which is the “Eastern Migratory Population”. This is the population that stops over in Indiana. The Eastern Migratory Population was first reintroduced to Wisconsin in 2001, and today around 68 Whooping Cranes occupy this eastern migratory flyway between Wisconsin and Florida. Sixteen of these 68 individuals are wild-hatched, and the rest are captive-reared.

In late October and early November, the adult and fledgling Whooping Cranes in Wisconsin will once again begin their migration to their wintering areas, primarily in western Indiana and northern Alabama. Whooping Cranes embark on migration in the fall to move to spaces where they can continue to access food, water and warmer temperatures throughout the winter. In preparation for migration, a Whooping Crane family, typically consisting of no more than four cranes, will join a larger flock of Sandhill Cranes. They will forage and rest in these flocks before departing on an up to the 700-mile flight to their wintering habitat!

Keep your eye out this coming fall and winter, as their southbound migration could bring them back to Putnam County. Since Whooping Cranes are an Endangered Species, the exact location of the birds is usually not publicized for their protection. If you are lucky enough to see one, enjoy the moment and their majestic beauty, but please do not approach or disturb the bird(s), and do not publicize their whereabouts. You can however report sightings of Whooping Cranes to bandedcranes.org. Your sightings help them to understand the migratory routes and stopover habitats Whooping Cranes are using and the risks they face along the way.

During the winter months, *Goose Pond National Wildlife Preserve* near Linton Indiana is the best location for a chance to see a Whooping Crane in the wild in Indiana.



Six juvenile Whooping Cranes- Dec 4, 2023, Putnam Co. IN- R. Wilson



Two juvenile whooping cranes and Canada geese- Dec 14, 2023, Putnam Co, IN- R. Wilson

Additional Whooping Crane Information-

As of September 1, 2024 there were approximately 55 whooping cranes in Wisconsin, one in Minnesota, with locations of the other 12 unconfirmed. The International Crane Foundation, in collaboration with the Fish and Wildlife Service, the Departments of Natural Resources of flyway states, and volunteers, helps keep track of the cranes throughout the year.

An adult whooping crane is white with black wing-tips, a red crown and a long, dark, pointed bill. However, immature whooping cranes (pictured) have mottled white and cinnamon-colored feathers throughout their head, neck and body, and they lack the distinct facial markings of an adult. While in flight, their long necks are kept straight and their long dark legs trail behind. Adult whooping cranes' black wing tips are visible during flight. The whooping crane's lifespan is estimated to be 22-24 years in the wild.

These cranes like wetlands, marshes, mudflats, wet prairies and fields. They nest on the ground, usually in a raised area in a marsh, and lay one or two olive-colored eggs. Whooping cranes are omnivorous and adapt their diet to the seasonal availability of food. During migration, they eat waste grain in agricultural fields. They also eat aquatic invertebrates, small fish, frogs and berries. Unfortunately, whooping cranes face many threats from habitat loss, wetland drainage, development, agriculture and climate change. They are also vulnerable to predation, disease, collisions and illegal hunting. Conservation efforts include captive breeding, reintroduction, habitat protection and public education.

For the fledgling Whooping Cranes that hatched this year, this migration will be their first of many and arguably will be their most dangerous migration. During this time, they will face many new challenges, including exhaustion, inclement weather, predators, unfamiliar habitats, low resource availability and potential collision risks, such as powerlines. To minimize the chances of collisions with powerlines, the International Crane Foundation has partnered with power companies to encourage the use of high-vis reflective flight diverters, which help to make powerlines more visible and minimize collision risk.

You can help Whooping Cranes on their migration by following these crane-safe behaviors:

- Report sightings of Whooping Cranes to bandedcranes.org. Your sightings help us to understand the migratory routes and stopover habitats Whooping Cranes are using and the risks they face along the way.
- Respect private property and only park in designated areas to view Whooping Cranes.
- Report all Whooping Crane harassment, disturbance or poaching to local authorities.

Source of above Information: Publicized literature on the International Crane Foundation website (www.savingcranes.org).

Note: All photos were taken from a public road without approaching the cranes.



Five juvenile whooping cranes- Jan 29, 2024, Putnam Co IN- R. Wilson

A Few Pics from Club Members (taken in Putnam County)

Jeff Gygi- Blue-wing Teal, Song Sparrow, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Meadowlark, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Coopers Hawk, Coyote.







Rod Wilson- Northern Waterthrush, Blue-headed Vireo, Black-billed Cuckoo, Magnolia Warbler, Belted Kingfisher (pooping. Is there more to know about that poop shape? 😊)





