

Birds

Checklist of the of Benton County, Indiana

FNR-165

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Benton County offers birders in Indiana interesting opportunities to see a variety of native birds. The county is located in the portion of the state that was dominated by prairies, and historically supported many grassland birds. The amount of forest in the county has always been small, and was further reduced by the clearing of many woodlots and stream-side vegetation. Thus, few woodland birds are widespread. Because of these land-use practices, the typical birds for Benton County are grassland specialists and open-country birds such as Grasshopper Sparrows and Horned Larks, rather than the familiar woodland birds such as chickadees and woodpeckers.

Much of the former prairie was converted to agriculture long ago, greatly reducing the birding opportunities in the county. Little of this land has been restored to natural habitat. For instance, there has been little county acreage enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program which encourages farmers to restore grass-

land habitat on their land. In the 1990s, however, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources purchased several properties and began restoring wetland and grassland habitats. Today, the Pine Creek Gamebird Habitat Area in southeastern Benton County provides an outstanding birding opportunity for visitors.

Pine Creek Gamebird Habitat Area

In the early 1990s, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources purchased 700 acres to create habitat for pheasants and quail. The land was farmed prior to this purchase. In 1995, Ducks Unlimited and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources collaborated on a wetland restoration project that created 100-150 acres of open wetlands by damming the old drainage ditches on the property in a way that created a series of wetland basins.

The water levels in the wetlands are determined by local rainfall, so the



amount and kind of wetland habitats vary from season to season. A wide variety of wetland birds find the diversity of wetlands attractive, and migratory ducks and shorebirds began using the wetlands almost as soon as they were created. As a

wetland plant community developed, herons, egrets, kingfishers, and many other birds settled into the area. In 1997, the wetland was formally dedicated as the **Robert Feldt Marsh**, honoring a retired DNR wildlife biologist.



Water began accumulating in the restored wetlands in spring 1996. Since that time, 183 bird species have been recorded at Pine Creek, including such Indiana rarities as Hudsonian Godwit, American White Pelican, Bald Eagle, Black-necked Stilt, and American Avocet. The agricultural fields on private lands surrounding the refuge provide habitat for migratory shorebirds such as American Golden-Plovers in the spring, and rare open-country birds, such as Smith's Longspur, in the winter.

The checklist summarizes (page 7) the current status of birds in Benton County, emphasizing the records accumulated during studies at the Pine Creek Gamebird Habitat Area

since the restoration of wetlands began in March 1996. Because Pine Creek does not completely represent all habitats present in the county, data has been supplemented with other records to reflect the status of birds common in towns and woodlands. The *Atlas of Breeding Birds of Indiana*, was consulted, as were the historical records compiled by Dr. Russell Mumford while he wrote *The Birds of Indiana*. Records from local birders and county residents were solicited as well.

Since intensive studies of the county's birds began only in 1996, new information will improve knowledge of local distribution and status of many of the birds found in Benton County. Thus, the checklist should be considered a summary of current knowledge that will be updated as new records accumulate. Birders with additional or new records are urged to contact the authors (address on cover).

Definitions

The seasons are as follows:

Spring = *March—May*

Summer = *June—August*

Fall = *September—November*

Winter = *December—February*

These definitions are somewhat arbitrary and do not accurately reflect seasonal status in all cases. For instance, in February 1998, an early thaw caused many waterfowl to migrate into the Pine Creek area. These waterfowl records are summarized in the winter portion of the checklist because they were recorded

in February, but the birds were really early spring migrants. It is better to use consistent season definitions than to vary the definitions for each taxonomic group. Deviations from these rules occurred when dealing with shorebirds, which migrate through Benton County in April, May, and early June (spring migrants) and again during July—October (fall migrants). Of all the shorebirds reported for the area, only the Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, and American Woodcock are potential breeders in the area and therefore can accurately be called “summering” birds. It would be confusing to report June—August shorebird records as “summer” birds as this might imply they were breeding. Therefore, with the exception of these four species, March—June records of shorebirds are reported as spring migrants, and all July—November records as fall migrants.



Status codes used in the checklist are defined as follows: **Common (C)**: recorded in moderate to large numbers on >50% of the trips in a season; **Uncommon (U)**: recorded in small numbers on 10-49% of the trips in a season; **Rare (R)**: recorded in small numbers on <10% of the trips in a season; **Accidental (A)**: recorded 1-2 times and unlikely to be recorded in most years. A code of **(H)** indicates that historical records of a species exist for the county, but no recent records are known. The status of many species, especially the rare or uncommon migrants, will change as more data are collected.

Species known to breed in the county are indicated with a **(B)** in the breeding column. Species are documented as breeding if a territorial pair was present in suitable habitat for a large portion of the breeding season, or if a nest, eggs, or juveniles were discovered during our studies.



Access

The Pine Creek Gamebird Habitat Area can be reached by driving north from State Highway 18 on County Road 850 East. After 2 miles, turn right (east) on County Road 200 North. This road will take you right through the refuge. Several parking lots are marked along County Road 200 North. Parking Lot #3 (up the hill after the county road crosses the marsh) is a convenient place to start. Most of the wetlands can be scanned with a spotting scope from the bluffs north of County Road 200 North across from Parking Lot #3. Do not park on the county road as it crosses the marsh (you will block passage of local farm equipment).

The entire Pine Creek refuge is open for birding except during the fall hunting seasons. Hunters have priority access during early fall teal season, regular fall waterfowl season, and late fall pheasant season. Dates for these seasons are set annually by the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. The portion of the refuge south of County Road 200 North is closed to all (including hunters) during waterfowl seasons to provide a protected resting area for ducks and geese. During breeding season, walking in mowed pathways will reduce the chances of accidentally stepping on duck, pheasant, or songbird nests concealed in the grass.

During winter and spring, interesting birds can be seen on agricultural fields throughout the county, including migrating shorebirds (peaking in

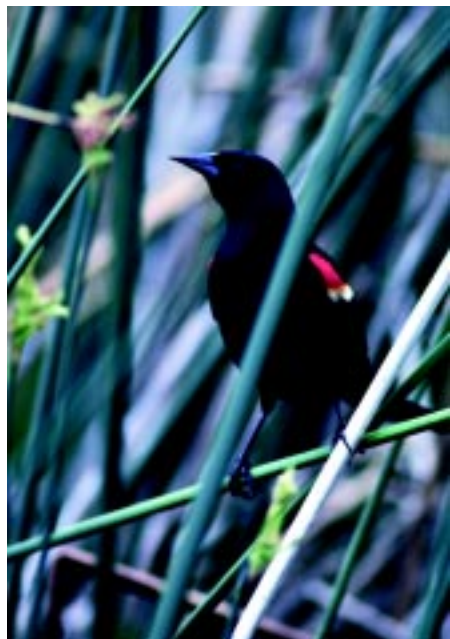
April and early May), and Smith's and Lapland Longspurs, Vesper Sparrows and Horned Larks (December—March). These fields are private property, and birders should not trespass. Many of these birds can be seen or heard by driving slowly along the county roads. A spotting scope is useful.

Acknowledgments

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Photos of American Bittern, Sparrow, Wood Duck, and Hawk by Rick and Nora Bowers.

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SPECIES	BREEDING	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Common Loon		R			R
Pied-billed Grebe	B	C	U	C	
Horned Grebe		U			
Red-necked Grebe		A			
American White Pelican		A			
Double-crested Cormorant		C	C	C	
American Bittern		U	R	R	
Least Bittern			R		
Great Blue Heron	B	C	C	C	U
Great Egret		U	C	C	
Little Blue Heron			R	R	
Cattle Egret			R		
Green Heron	B	U	C	R	
Black-crowned Night-Heron		R	R	R	
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron		R			
Glossy/White-faced Ibis				A	
Tundra Swan				R	R
Greater White-fronted Goose		R			
Snow Goose		R		R	
Canada Goose	B	C	C	C	C
Wood Duck	B	U	C	C	U
Green-winged Teal		U	R	C	
American Black Duck		R		R	U
Mallard	B	C	C	C	C
Northern Pintail		U		U	U
Blue-winged Teal	B	C	C	C	
Northern Shoveler		C		C	R
Gadwall		U		U	U
American Wigeon		U		C	U
Canvasback		R		R	R
Redhead		R		R	U
Ring-necked Duck		U		R	U
Lesser Scaup		C		R	U
Common Goldeneye		R			R
Bufflehead		U		R	U
Hooded Merganser	B	U	R	R	R
Common Merganser		R			
Red-breasted Merganser		R	A		R
Ruddy Duck		U			
Turkey Vulture	B	C	C	C	R
Osprey		R		R	
Bald Eagle		R	R		
Northern Harrier		C	R	C	C
Sharp-shinned Hawk				R	
Cooper's Hawk		U	U	U	
Broad-winged Hawk		R			
Red-tailed Hawk	B	C	C	C	C
Rough-legged Hawk		R		R	U
American Kestrel	B	U	U	U	C
Merlin		R		U	
Peregrine Falcon		R		R	
Ring-necked Pheasant	B	C	C	C	C
Greater Prairie-Chicken	H	H	H	H	H
Wild Turkey		R	R		
Northern Bobwhite	B	U	U	U	U
King Rail		R			
Virginia Rail			U	R	
Sora		R	U	R	
American Coot		C	U	C	U
Sandhill Crane		U		U	U
Black-bellied Plover		R		R	

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SPECIES	BREEDING	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
American Golden-Plover	C		U		
Semipalmated Plover		U		U	
Killdeer	B	C	C	C	U
Black-necked Stilt				A	
American Avocet				A	
Greater Yellowlegs		U		U	
Lesser Yellowlegs		C		C	
Solitary Sandpiper		R		U	
Spotted Sandpiper	B	U	U	R	
Upland Sandpiper	B	R	U		
Hudsonian Godwit				R	
Marbled Godwit		R			
Sanderling				R	
Semipalmated Sandpiper		U		U	
Western Sandpiper		R		R	
Least Sandpiper		C		C	
White-rumped Sandpiper		R		R	
Baird's Sandpiper				R	
Pectoral Sandpiper		C		C	
Dunlin		U		U	
Stilt Sandpiper		R		U	
Buff-breasted Sandpiper				R	
Short-billed Dowitcher		R		R	
Long-billed Dowitcher		R		R	
Common Snipe		C		U	
American Woodcock		R	U	R	
Wilson's Phalarope		R		R	
Red-necked Phalarope				R	
Franklin's Gull				R	
Bonaparte's Gull		R		R	
Ring-billed Gull		U		U	U
Caspian Tern		R	R		
Common Tern			A		
Forster's Tern		U	U	R	
Black Tern		U	R	R	
Rock Dove	B	C	C	C	C
Mourning Dove	B	C	C	C	C
Black-billed Cuckoo	B		R	R	
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	B		U	R	
Barn Owl			H		
Eastern Screech-Owl	B	U	U	U	U
Great Horned Owl	B	U	U	U	U
Snowy Owl					H
Barred Owl	B	U	U	U	U
Long-eared Owl					H
Short-eared Owl				H	H
Common Nighthawk		R	R		
Chimney Swift	B	C	C	U	
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	B	U	C	R	
Belted Kingfisher	B	U	C	C	U
Red-headed Woodpecker	B	C	C	C	U
Red-bellied Woodpecker	B	C	C	C	C
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker		U			
Downy Woodpecker	B	C	C	C	C
Hairy Woodpecker		H	R		C
Northern Flicker	B	C	C	C	U

SPECIES	BREEDING	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Pileated Woodpecker			R		
Eastern Wood-Pewee	B	U	C		
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher		A			
Willow Flycatcher	B	U	C		
Least Flycatcher		R			
Eastern Phoebe	B	U	U		
Great Crested Flycatcher	B		U		
Eastern Kingbird	B	U	C	U	
Horned Lark	B	C	C	C	C
Purple Martin	B	R	R		
Tree Swallow	B	C	C	C	
N. Rough-winged Swallow	B	R	U	R	
Bank Swallow		R	U		
Cliff Swallow		U	U	R	
Barn Swallow	B	U	C	U	
Blue Jay	B	C	C	C	C
American Crow	B	C	C	C	C
Carolina Chickadee		C	C	C	C
Tufted Titmouse		C	C	C	C
Red-breasted Nuthatch					U
White-breasted Nuthatch		C	C	C	C
Brown Creeper		U			
Carolina Wren		U		U	
House Wren	B	C	C	U	
Sedge Wren	B	R	C	R	
Marsh Wren			R		
Golden-crowned Kinglet			U		
Ruby-crowned Kinglet		R		R	
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher		R			
Eastern Bluebird	B	C	C	U	
Veery		R	R		
Gray-cheeked Thrush		U			
Swainson's Thrush		C			
Hermit Thrush				R	
Wood Thrush		R	U		
American Robin	B	C	C	C	H
Gray Catbird	B	U	C	U	
Northern Mockingbird	B	U	U	R	R
Brown Thrasher	B	C	C		
American Pipit				C	R
Cedar Waxwing	B	U	U	U	H
Loggerhead Shrike		H	H		
European Starling	B	C	C	C	C
White-eyed Vireo		R	R		
Bell's Vireo		R	R		
Blue-headed Vireo		R			
Yellow-throated Vireo		R			
Warbling Vireo	B		R	R	
Red-eyed Vireo			R		
Golden-winged Warbler		R			
Tennessee Warbler		R	R	R	
Nashville Warbler		R			
Northern Parula		R			
Yellow Warbler	B	U	C	R	
Chestnut-sided Warbler		R			
Magnolia Warbler		R			
Yellow-rumped Warbler		C		C	

SPECIES	BREEDING	SPRING	SUMMER	FALL	WINTER
Black-throated Green Warbler		R			
Blackburnian Warbler		R			
Yellow-throated Warbler		R			
Palm Warbler		U		U	
Bay-breasted Warbler				H	
Blackpoll Warbler		R			
Black-and-white Warbler		R			
American Redstart		R			
Ovenbird		U		U	
Northern Waterthrush		R			
Kentucky Warbler		R			
Connecticut Warbler				R	
Mourning Warbler		R			
Common Yellowthroat	B	C	C	U	
Wilson's Warbler		R			
Yellow-breasted Chat		R			
Summer Tanager		R	R		
Scarlet Tanager		R			
Northern Cardinal	B	C	C	C	C
Rose-breasted Grosbeak		C	C		
Indigo Bunting	B	U	C	R	
Dickcissel	B	U	C		
Eastern Towhee	B	C	C		
American Tree Sparrow		U		U	C
Chipping Sparrow	B	C	C	R	
Field Sparrow	B	C	C	U	
Vesper Sparrow	B	U	U	U	U
Savannah Sparrow	B	U	U	C	U
Grasshopper Sparrow	B	U	U		
Fox Sparrow		R		U	
Song Sparrow	B	C	C	C	C
Lincoln's Sparrow				U	
Swamp Sparrow		U	R	U	U
White-throated Sparrow		U		U	
White-crowned Sparrow		U		U	U
Dark-eyed Junco		R		U	C
Lapland Longspur					U
Smith's Longspur					R
Bobolink	B	U	U		
Red-winged Blackbird	B	C	C	C	C
Eastern Meadowlark	B	C	C	C	U
Western Meadowlark	B		R		
Rusty Blackbird				U	
Common Grackle	B	C	C	C	C
Brown-headed Cowbird	B	C	C	C	U
Orchard Oriole	B	U	U		
Baltimore Oriole	B	C	C		
Purple Finch				R	R
House Finch	B	C	C	C	C
White-winged Crossbill					A
Common Redpoll					R
Pine Siskin					U
American Goldfinch	B	C	C	C	C
Evening Grosbeak				R	R
House Sparrow	B	C	C	C	C





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