



Indiana
Dunes

Beaches & Beyond

SELF-GUIDED BIRDING





INDIANA DUNES VISITOR CENTER

1215 N. State Road 49

The Indiana Dunes is a birder's paradise. Throughout the year, over 370 species of birds are found in the beaches, wetlands, prairies, and forests making up the Indiana Dunes State Park, Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore, and the Lake Michigan shoreline. The varying species of birds and diverse ecosystems mean the dunes area offers unique birding experiences for visitors to enjoy during every season.

Each May, the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival is held to celebrate the dunes area's array of bird watching opportunities and to create a positive impact on the economic, conservation, and environmental education for visitors to and residents of the Indiana Dunes region. Guided tours fill up quickly during the festival, so the Indiana Audubon Society and Indiana Dunes Tourism wanted to offer something to visitors exploring on their own.

In this self-led tour, we've given you six of the top birding locations in the Indiana Dunes area, as recommended by local birders. Scenic lakeshore drives, stunning sandy hikes, and spectacular birds are waiting for you to discover.

Need a little more guidance? The Backpacks for Birders program allows beginners or experienced birders to travel light by providing all the equipment and information they need to enjoy birding at the Indiana Dunes in a stocked backpack available to borrow at no charge.

Remember to share your experience using our hashtags:

#IndianaDunes #IndianaDunesBirding #BeachesandBeyond





BEVERLY SHORES AND THE GREAT MARSH TRAIL

Beverly Drive, Beverly Shores | Lake Front Drive, Beverly Shores

Beverly Shores is a Dunes community located along Lake Michigan east of the Indiana Dunes State Park. Unparalleled habitat diversity and ease of access make this birding site a “must stop” at the Indiana Dunes.

Beverly Drive runs east to west for about 3.5 miles between Kemil Road and U.S. 12. The best way to sample the plethora of birds here is to drive slowly down Beverly Drive with the car windows down. There are few places to stop along the road, so birding on foot isn’t an option—but you’ll be able to identify many bird calls as you cruise.

Lake Front Drive runs along Lake Michigan on the northern boundary of Beverly Shores. It is one of the prettiest drives along the shoreline, and on the north side of the road, the National Lakeshore’s Lakeview Overlook facility has parking, as well as a platform with a great view of the lake.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: Beverly Drive: Town of Beverly Shores, Indiana; Lake Shore Drive: National Park Service/U.S. Department of Interior.

Hours: None.

Fees: None.

Restrooms: Restrooms are available at the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore Kemil Beach parking lot on Kemil Road.

Special Considerations:

Traffic: Beverly Shores has its own police force that closely patrols the streets. When birding by a car on Beverly Drive, be sure not to stop on the road while traffic is approaching from behind. Cars will pass without much hassle if you drive slowly with your flashers on.

Parking: Pull-offs are limited on both Beverly Drive and Lake Shore Drive. For lakefront parking, National Lakeshore parking lots are located at the Lakeview Overlook facility and the north ends of Kemil Road and Central Avenue. The beach can be accessed on foot after parking in either of these lots.





INDIANA DUNES STATE PARK

1600 N. 25 East

The Indiana Dunes State Park houses a rare collection of habitats for both plants and animals. Beaches, foredunes, dune forests, dune swamps, prairies, and savannas span across the park's 2,182 acres. Its diversity helps support a variety of different bird species and creates a sanctuary for many migrating birds as they funnel along the lakeshore during migration.

The trails below can be accessed from the Wilson Shelter. Each offers a unique experience without having to walk too far:

- **Trail 2**—circles the Great Marsh and traverses it on a mile-long boardwalk, and it's a good spot for nesting woodland birds.
- **Trail 3**—short and unique. It starts at the bird observation area (an old green tower) and passes through the high dunes, savanna, and prairie habitat on the west end of the park.
- **Trails 7 and 8**—crisscross the high dunes and are homes to various bird species throughout each season.
- **Trail 9**—is worth walking to see the blowout features in the high dunes.
- **Trail 10**—follows behind the high dunes and deeper forest habitat. The trail leads back to the beach and passes through Pinery and Paradise Valley on its east end, boasting great birding opportunities.

West of the West Beach parking lot, another great location awaits—the Observation Tower. The tower is an accessible birding platform with a unique vantage point over the dunes. Don't forget about the park's Nature Center. Park information and recent bird sightings can be found there, and the bird feeder area often hosts unusual birds, giving good glimpses of some of the more common species.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks and Reservoirs.

Address: 1600 N 25 E, Chesterton, IN 46304.

Hours: Park is open 7 a.m.–11 p.m. daily.

Fees: Entrance fees are collected daily through November: \$5.00 fee for in-state vehicles, \$10.00 fee for out-of-state vehicles.

Restrooms: Restrooms are located throughout the park.

Special Considerations: During major weekends the park is full of visitors. Seeing migrating birds on the beach during the busy season is unlikely. Try hiking the trails early in the morning to avoid human traffic.





DUNES HERON ROOKERY AND REYNOLD'S CREEK

West Parking lot, 1301 N. 400 East | Reynold's Creek Game Area, 1303 600 E

The Heron Rookery unit and nearby Reynold's Creek Gamebird Habitat Area are two of the National Lakeshore's distinct birding experiences. Though the herons that named Heron Rookery now nest elsewhere, the nearby trail along the Little Calumet River still offers a great variety of birds. Diverse prairies and open meadowlands make up the Reynold's Creek area, just minutes drive from the Heron Rookery east parking lot.

This location is unique in every season, but during Spring, the woodlands along the trail are blanketed with the most extensive display of wildflowers in the National Lakeshore. The closeby prairie and wetland habitats are often great for spotting shorebirds and dabbling ducks.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: Heron Rookery: National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior; Reynold's Creek: Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Fish and Wildlife.

Address: West Parking Lot—1301 N. 450 East, Chesterton, IN 46304.

Reynold's Creek Game Bird Area—1303 600 East, Michigan City, 46360.

Hours: Open dawn to 10 p.m. daily.

Fees: No fees.

Restrooms: No restrooms located on either property.

Special Considerations: During spring floods, the Heron Rookery trail can be very wet. Hunting takes place on Reynold's Creek, but no hunting seasons should be open during the Indiana Dunes Birding Festival, held annually in May.





DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE COWLES BOG

1618 N Mineral Springs Road

Cowles Bog consists of 4.5 miles of interconnected trails. A National Natural Landmark since 1965, Cowles Bog Trail highlights an area of outstanding plant diversity. Hiking trails range from short and moderate to long and challenging through wetlands and forested dunes along the shoreline. This plant-rich treasure is also rich with birding opportunities!

A 2.5-mile loop circles the main wetland, and additional trails traverse across more moderate dune savanna forests, eventually leading out to Lake Michigan. Most birders stick to the main loop for the best view of the wetland species.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior.

Address: 1618 N. Mineral Springs Rd., Porter, IN 46304.

Hours: Open dawn to 10 p.m. daily.

Fees: No fees.

Restrooms: Primitive restrooms located in both the main and south parking lots.

Special Considerations: Cowles Bog can be heavily trafficked during the Birding Festival. Stay on marked trails to preserve this unique habitat located within the Indiana Dunes. The trail surface is mixture of loose sand and packed dirt.





DUNES NATIONAL LAKESHORE MILLER WOODS

100 North Lake Street

Heading north on the Miller Woods Trail offers excellent views of the lake and dunes. The trail winds through several beautiful habitats including wetlands and open dunes, as well as the beach and the globally-rare oak savanna.

This trail is also a Birding Festival program location, as the Paul Douglas Center for Environmental Education is located at the trailhead. Walk from the main parking lot to the overhead pedestrian bridge to access the building and hiking trails. The trails immediately circle two large wetlands that can host a diverse blend of migrating and breeding wetland species, particularly when the weather is cooler.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: National Park Service/U.S. Department of the Interior.

Address: 100 N. Lake Street, Gary, IN 46403.

Hours: Open dawn to 10 p.m. daily.

Fees: No fees.

Restrooms: Restrooms located inside the Paul Douglas Center.

Special Considerations: There is a short paved trail off the back of the Paul Douglas Center that is wheelchair accessible, but otherwise, the trail is a combination of packed and loose sand. The nearby Lake Street Beach (Miller Beach) is globally important for its migratory bird watches, which take place in the fall.

The trail continues through undulating dune woodlands as hikers approach the lake. Birders will want to stay single-file on the narrow trail to stay protected from poison ivy along the trail edges.





MICHIGAN CITY HARBOR

Lakeshore off of Highway 12, Michigan City

This favorite lakefront birding site is located just miles from the Michigan state line in Northwest Indiana. The harbor is an excellent site on the lakefront for viewing Lake Michigan birds thanks to its beaches, piers, and other coastal community landmarks.

Washington Park lies to the east side of Trail Creek and offers a large area with many features for interested birders. Beyond the well-manicured lawns of this urban park, a long stretch of beach serves as a popular resting area for hundreds of easily scannable gulls. To the east of the main parking lot, low dunes offer prime locations to monitor the harbor during times of heavy bird movement along the lake.

Adjacent to Trail Creek and Washington Park lies the yacht basin. This area can be birded from the beachside sidewalk between the parking lot and East Pier, as well as a small pull-off area along the harbor's one-way exit road.

OPERATIONS:

Ownership: Michigan City Harbor: City of Michigan City, Indiana; Michigan City Port Authority

Address: Parking at Washington Park Beach—City Hall & 100 E. Michigan, Michigan City, IN 46360.

Hours: Open dawn to 10 p.m. daily.

Fees: No fees until Memorial Day.

Restrooms: Restrooms located at the beach.

Special Considerations: Access to the Michigan City Harbor jetty and lighthouse is restricted. Pedestrians proceed out to the lighthouse at their own risk. On windy days, the waves can be very unpredictable, washing up and over the concrete jetty with considerable force. In the winter, this can quickly freeze and make navigation on the jetty dangerous. Extreme caution should be employed under all circumstances.

