

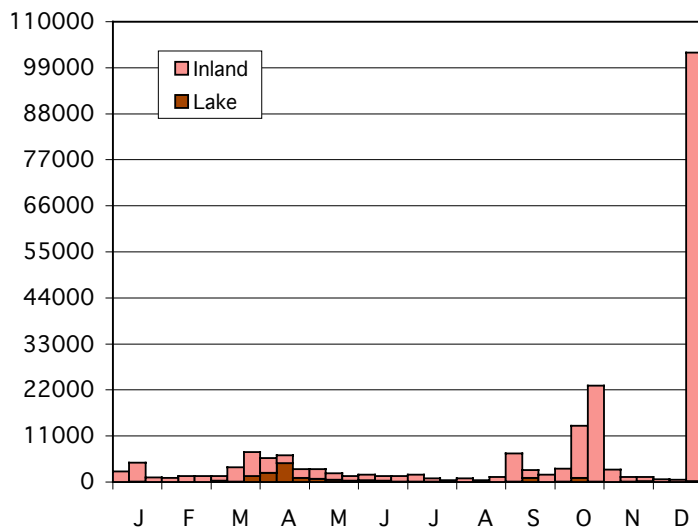
Brown-headed Cowbird

Molothrus ater

Historical Information

First Published Record: A.W. Butler observed this species in Brookville on 28 February 1882 (Butler 1898), which is apparently the earliest published record.

Butler (1898) described the Cowbird as an abundant summer resident that occasionally winters in southern reaches of the state. Keller et al. (1979) considered it an abundant summer resident, common at winter feeders. Mumford and Keller (1984) concurred with the latter assessment.



Current Status

The Brown-headed Cowbird is a Very Common (3) permanent resident.

Occurrence

This widely loathed nest parasite has been recorded in all 92 Indiana counties. It has been reported parasitizing some 49 species of Indiana avifauna (Castrale et al. 1998).

Extreme Records

The 100,000 that Jim and Susan Hengeveld reported at Beehunter Marsh on 21 December 2005 were part of a ribbon of 1.0-1.5 million blackbirds that passed over the marsh in the morning; 10 percent of the flock was estimated to consist of cowbirds (IN-BIRD). A.W. Bruner's enormous Sullivan County report of 20,000 cowbirds (see maximum count table) was accompanied by 20,000 Red-winged Blackbirds and 20,000 Common Grackles (Buskirk 1999).

Breeding

Castrale et al. (1998) reported breeding evidence in 97 percent of Indiana's 647 priority blocks. Mumford and Keller (1984) listed the nest parasitism of 15 warbler species, six sparrow species, and five vireo species in Indiana.

Status

Physical Evidence: At least 25 specimens, plus eggs, are preserved in museums (S.F. Jackson unpublished list and J.B. Dunning unpublished computer list).

STATUS TABLE				
Specimens				
Museum				No.
Carnegie Museum of Natural History				2
Chicago Academy of Sciences				1
Chicago Field Museum				5
National Museum of Natural History				8
Purdue Univ. Wildlife Laboratory				9
Univ. of Michigan Museum				10*
*Includes eggs				
20-Year Abundance Table				
	Win	Spr	Sum	Fall
Northern Tier	4	3	4	3
Central Tier	3	3	4	3
Southern Tier	3	3	3	3
Entire State	3	3	3	3

Brown-headed Cowbird Data

Maximum Single Party Counts				
Spring				
Number	Date	Location	Observer	Ref.
1100*	16-Apr-2004	Dunes St Park	J.J. McCoy	INB
1010	09-Apr-1953	Marion Co	H.C. West	HCW
1000*	11-Apr-2005	Dunes St Park	J.J. McCoy	INB
*Longshore flights				
Fall/Early Winter				
Number	Date	Location	Observer	Ref.
100000	21-Dec-2005	Beehunter Marsh	J. & S. Hengeveld	INB
20000	31-Oct-1998	Sullivan Co	A.W. Bruner	IAQ
5000	12-Oct-1992	Minnehaha FWA	A.W. Bruner	IAQ
Caution is necessary in assessing these counts. In most cases there is no information about how the number was obtained (count, estimate, or guess). Additionally, most blackbird flocks contain a mixture of species, which renders determining the numbers of an individual species problematic.				

Migration Envelopes						
Entire State						
	Earliest	Arrive	Peak	Depart	Latest	Records
Spring	Win. Res.	19-Mar	20-Apr	10-May	Sum. Res.	1894
Fall	Sum. Res.	10-Sep	11-Oct	10-Nov	Win. Res.	394

References Cited

- Buskirk, R.F. (1999) Field Notes Fall 1998 *Indiana Audubon Quarterly*, 77:177-183.
- Butler, A. W. (1898) The Birds of Indiana, Indiana Department of Geology and Natural Resources Annual Report, 22:575-1187.
- Castrale, J.S., E.M. Hopkins, and C.E. Keller (1998) Atlas of breeding Birds of Indiana, Indiana Department of Natural Resources, 388 pp.
- IN-BIRD, a Listserv dealing with Indiana birds developed and maintained by P.W. Kelly. The records are archived at: <http://listserv.indiana.edu/archives/in-bird-1.html>
- Keller, C.E., S.A. Keller, and T.C. Keller (1979) *Indiana Birds and Their Haunts*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 214 pp.
- Mumford, R.E. and C.E. Keller (1984) *The Birds of Indiana*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Ind. 376 pp.

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