

Gerlach Nature Photography

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2026 Indiana Bird Photography Workshops

Columbus, Indiana

with John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone

Only 4 Participants!

All session begin Sunday evening with orientation

Mon. through Thurs. – Intensive morning and afternoon bird photography

Friday is the departure day

Jan. 18 – 23

Feb. 15 – 20

March 15 – 20

April 26 - May 1



Figure 1 The red-bellied woodpecker frequently visits the feeding stations providing plenty of photo opportunities. They particularly enjoy eating the sunflower seed hearts and Peanut Treat suet we provide.

How this Workshop Started

Winters are long, cold, and snowy at our Idaho mountain home. Imagine having snow on the ground to shovel from early November through early May. The heavy snowfall makes living in the Idaho mountains challenging six months of the year. The severe winters drive nearly all wildlife away. Outside of some chickadees and magpies, everything else flies south or to lower elevation offering us few wintering birds to photograph. We had been looking for a second home where some snowy days occur, but not too many. Shoveling the driveway and the roof of the house has lost its appeal to us. The less shoveling, the better!



Figure 2 The Eastern towhee is a permanent resident of our Indiana property. This is one of the "leaf kickers" who prefer to feed on the ground and not fly up to our food sets. By building a dirt mound right in front of the blind putting the birds at eye level, you get terrific photos!

John grew up in Lapeer, Michigan and Dixie grew up in Columbus, IN. Dixie has three sisters in Columbus and wanted to buy a second home near them. Of course, I had never considered Indiana for a second home as my experience driving through northern Indiana is large fields of corn and flat land – not great habitat for wildlife. As it turns out, southern Indiana is nothing like northern Indiana. Southern Indiana is rolling heavily forested hills with many ponds and creeks. I have always wanted to photograph the eastern birds again with the digital cameras we enjoy today. Though I grew up with northern cardinals and blue jays in southern Michigan, I have not lived where they occur since 1986. Reading about the birds of Indiana taught me that southern Indiana is loaded with birds I would love to photograph, plus it is on the migration highways for the millions of migratory warblers, flycatchers, tanagers, orioles, finches, sparrows, and many others that migrate north in the spring and south in autumn. Migrating birds pass right through Indiana as they are attracted to the huge forests that offers plenty of food and cover for them on their journey.



Figure 3 The Carolina wren is adorable and active! During winter, it regularly comes in for bark butter.

Thinking again of blue jays and cardinals, both are wonderful colorful birds and now I have plenty of them to photograph on our own Indiana property. Indeed, the abundant northern cardinals are the state bird of Indiana. Once we erected and stocked the bird feeders, northern cardinals appeared in large numbers. Sometimes we have more than twenty of them at the feeding station simultaneously along with several blue jays.



Figure 4 Northern cardinals are abundant at our photo station. This is the female. We like her variety of colors. Notice how we carefully made the setup to provide a pleasing background. All the birds you photograph will have a non-distracting background like this one.

Our new Indiana home took a while to find. During the spring of 2024 we visited many homes that were for sale around Columbus, IN. While most of them were easy to pass on, a couple were promising. Then we visited one home that was not on the market yet, but we heard the owners were planning to sell it. As it turns out, the next door neighbor is a lady

Dixie grew up with, so they were old friends, and she told us about the home that would be put on the market. The house was about five miles from Interstate 65, several miles south of Columbus, and way back in the hills where it is quiet and heavily forested. When we pulled into the property to meet the owners, I immediately liked the house and especially liked the dozen Eastern bluebirds feeding on insects in the front yard and the red-headed woodpecker flying overhead. Birds were everywhere and the back half of the seven acres is densely wooded with thick brush and enormous trees along with a small weedy field that attracts sparrows, finches, and warblers. All this is super bird habitat. We took possession of the home in August of 2024 and immediately put out bird feeders. In no time at all, flocks of birds were regular visitors. We already know how good the bird photography is on the property. During the winter of 2024-2025, we routinely shot 5000 or more images every morning at our blind that we built next to the forest. At times we have 10 blue jays and 20 cardinals coming into the bird feeders simultaneously, plus another dozen species in various numbers. The photo opportunities are continuous! You do not wait long for a bird to appear. Normally you have ten or more birds in front of you representing several species all the time. It is amazing and so much fun!



Figure 5 The house finch is a common visitor to our backyard feeding station.

We tweak the photo stations each day with new perches or add flowers to the set. Every morning, we try something a little different and the results are remarkable. Sit in a photo blind, the birds continuously come to you, many are within ten feet, and shoot thousands of images. It is super fun! Much thought has gone into photo setups, and we continue to experiment with new perches and other photo tactics.

Morning is the prime time for bird photography at the feeding station, but they are present in the late afternoon too, so we can photograph both early and late in the day. We have more than a dozen different props we use. We discovered this winter that a mixture of suet

and peanut butter (aka bark butter) is a delicious meal for nearly all birds. For example, our local Carolina wrens and Northern mockingbirds do not eat birdseed, but both crave bark butter, and that provides plenty of opportunities to photograph them. And for the majority of birds that like birdseed, we have found nothing better than sunflower hearts.



Figure 6 This American goldfinch is already beginning to get its yellow feathers in late February. They are abundant on our property.

Our First Bird Photo Workshops at our Indiana Home

We already know the bird photography along the edge of our woods in Indiana is absolutely superb. It is pretty easy to shoot 5000 or more images in a single morning. Local and wintering migrant birds you will get plenty of chances to photograph during January, February, and March include:

- Carolina chickadee
- Tufted titmouse
- Downy woodpecker
- Pileated woodpecker
- Hairy woodpecker
- White-breasted nuthatch
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
 - Song Sparrow
 - Northern cardinal
- White-crowned sparrow
 - Fox sparrow
 - Swamp sparrow
- Tree sparrow
- White-throated sparrow
 - Blue jay
- American goldfinch
 - House finch
- Northern mockingbird
- Chipping Sparrow
- Eastern towhee
- Carolina wren
- Dark-eyed junco
- Purple finch
- Mourning dove



Figure 7 During Jan - March, there is a good chance of photographing this purple finch – a nomad from the north.

During April and early May, we photographed all of our local birds and did quite well photographing migrating Baltimore orioles, brown thrashers, and rose-breasted grosbeaks. With only a little luck, we may have nesting eastern bluebirds for you to photograph too.

The main focus of this workshop is bird photography at our feeder stations. Of course, for better bird photos, we disguise the feeders. All birds are using natural perches we provide. No bird feeders or bird seed will appear in your photos. We have a well-built wooden 16-foot long permanent photo hide that is ideal for four photographers at once. It is comfortable to use with a solid wooden floor, sides and waterproof roof. The birds are accustomed to it, so they readily come to the photo stations that are only 8-12 feet away.

Usually, we have 4-5 different photo sets in use simultaneously to provide a variety of images. Your lens must be able to focus as close as eight feet and a zoom lens is the best lens to use by far. For instance, John finds the Canon 100-500mm zoom lens on the Canon R5 Mark II is absolutely ideal for birds from the photo hide. You will easily get full frame images of numerous wild birds. Dixie does splendidly with her Nikon Z9 and the Nikon 100-400mm zoom with a 1.4x teleconverter.

For all the workshops, we plan to add a couple more bird photo opportunities.

The Woodpecker Tree

In our front yard we have a dead tree that is about 25 feet tall. We were going to cut it down, but as it turns out the woodpeckers love it. By providing a special blend of woodpecker suet (called Peanut Treat) in a large metal basket, the woodpeckers are constant

customers. At times we have more than ten woodpeckers at the feeder or in the tree waiting their turn. We drilled a couple small holes in the trunk of the dead tree and fill that with the special suet. When we photograph the woodpeckers, we take the metal feeder down and lay it on the ground. Woodpeckers know where all the spots are that we fill with suet. When the metal feeder is on the ground, they tend to eat the suet hidden in the holes drilled in the tree enabling us to make superb photos of them. During the winter, we often had four species of woodpecker in the tree at once. The species are downy, hairy, red-bellied, and the magnificent huge pileated woodpecker. And in early May, red-headed woodpeckers make it five species. Some red-headed woodpeckers winter in our part of Indiana. We are hoping one or more does remain with us this coming winter now that our local red-headed woodpeckers know we provide Peanut Treat.

Both of the woodpecker shown below love the suet we provide.



Figure 8 Red-bellied woodpecker



Figure 9 Pileated woodpecker

The Reflection Pool

We will have a small reflection pool at the blind along the edge of the forest. Birds like a drink of water from time to time, but they really like the sunflower hearts and suet we hide on the far side of the reflection pool. When they go to this food, they nicely reflect in the water.

Eastern Bluebirds

Eastern bluebirds are a joy to photograph. We have ten bluebird boxes erected at our Indiana home, and we hope to have Eastern bluebirds for our photo workshops guests to

photograph. The bluebirds are relatively approachable, and they are readily attracted to the mealworms we provide. But bluebirds come and go, so we will do our best to draw them in for photos.

This Northern cardinal is drawn to the reflection pool with sunflower hearts hidden in the dark stones.



What You will Learn:

The focus of these photo workshops is small backyard birds.

- How to select the best places for bird photography on your property
 - How to create an appealing background
 - How to create attractive props for birds to perch on
 - How to photograph small birds in flight
- How to better photograph super active birds like the Carolina chickadee and tufted titmouse
 - How to hide bird seed from the camera
- How to use bark butter (peanut butter and suet mixture) to photograph birds that are not attracted to bird seed
- How to determine the exposure easily and quickly using Auto ISO and the highlight alert
 - How to set your autofocus for sharper images
- How to sort through hundreds of similar bird photos to find the best images, delete the rest, and do it fast
 - How to shoot super sharp images
 - How to use and build a wonderful reflection pool
- John will demonstrate how he processes bird images using Canon's DPP4 processing software

- How and why to customize camera buttons and dials
- How to behave inside the photo hide to avoid scaring birds

A Terrific Lens for Backyard Bird Photography

John considers his Canon 100-500mm zoom lens on the Canon R5 Mark II to be perfectly suited for photographing birds from the photo hide. For larger birds like blue jays and mourning doves, he uses the Canon R5 Mark II with the full frame crop and with smaller birds, he switches to the 1.6x crop factor in the camera to give the make the Canon 100-500mm lens have the field of view of a 160 – 800mm lens. This is just an example. Any zoom lens that covers the range of 400mm to 700mm using the crop factor or a 1.4x teleconverter will work super for this workshop. The key is a zoom lens as distance to the subject can vary and the sizes of different birds varies considerably. For instance, a blue jay is much larger than a tiny Carolina chickadee or wren. If you want to capture birds in flight, you will want less focal length than 400mm.

John and Dixie are avid photography instructors who readily share all their knowledge. While we teach the ultimate photo skills you must master to shoot superb bird images, they are not hard, and everyone can learn them. We will advance your photo skills considerably in the intensive bird photography workshop. This goal is easy to achieve because the group size is only four participants allowing unlimited time for one on one instruction and the photo opportunities are considerable.



Figure 10 A bright red northern cardinal is striking anytime, but especially when the snow is falling. Having snow is unpredictable in southern Indiana, but when it is cold enough, we will use a snow machine to give us the wintry feel when we want it.



Figure 11 Northern mockingbirds are abundant and readily come for the bark butter we put out for them. Notice we like natural log perches with character, and we added some red berries for a splash of color.

Daily Schedule

You want to be in the blind shortly after sunrise. The sun actually strikes the bird photo station about 20 minutes after sunrise when it rises above a distant forest, and the blind location is perfect for the light all morning. The hotel you will be staying at is an easy 20 minute drive from our home.

We typically photograph at the blind for the first three hours in the morning. If it is cloudy, then the light is superb for photos all the time. John has already spent at least 130 mornings using the photo blind. While bird activity begins early at first light, he has noticed that the second and third hour after sunrise is the best times for photo opportunities.

While many birds are early risers, not all become active at first light, but an hour after sunrise, the feeders become especially busy as all species are mobbing the feeders then.

In the evening, the blind and photo props are shaded by the dense forest immediately west of the blind, but due to higher ISOs that deliver excellent results, super photos are easy to make in the evening too.

Our bird blind gets a large bird selection because it is on the edge of a thick forest with loads of dense cover near the ground for the birds. The dense cover provides plenty of food and hiding places that birds need to survive.



Figure 12 You will get many chances to photograph Carolina chickadees! They are abundant and frequently appear at the photo props.

Image Review

We review the images you bring from home and the images you shoot during the workshop. We do this during the middle of the day when photo conditions are less desirable or on the last night. Bring up to 30 images from home to share with the group. Please copy images (JPEG only to work with our software) to a jump drive and give them to us. We will download the images and return your drive ASAP.

Instructor Programs to be Presented

Wildlife Photography PowerPoint Program

Macro PowerPoint Program

Landscape PowerPoint Program

Special demonstrations on creating your own bird photography station

While in the bird photography blind, at least one of us will be with you at all times allowing us to answer your questions immediately. Plus, we know all the birds you will see! Since John feeds the birds every morning, many of them are on a first-name basis with him.

Working on your Images

We have a large kitchen table for you to work on after enjoying the lunch Dixie will cook for you at our home. This is a super time to find out how well your photos are coming out and make suggestions for even better results at the next photo session.



Figure 13 The tufted titmouse is another active bird like the chickadee and Carolina wren that you get plenty of chances to photograph.

Meals

Your hotel will serve you breakfast, and Dixie will prepare lunch at our home. Dinner will be on your own when you return to your hotel. Many restaurants are near the hotels. The last night we enjoy a hearty dinner at our home and view the favorite images you made at the workshop.

Camera Gear to Bring

1. Sturdy tripod with a gimbal head. The bird activity is nearly constant. You do not want to be forced to handhold your camera continuously as that gets heavy after a while. The motion of raising the camera also frightens birds.
2. Extra camera batteries and your charger
3. Computer, storage for your images, and cords for everything
4. Especially for the Jan., Feb, and March sessions, bring winter clothes because dawn temperatures can be below freezing. But most days, even during winter in southern Indiana, are quite mild.

Daily Schedule

Breakfast at your hotel

Morning photography in the bird blind

Lunch at our home

Afternoon at our home where we present instruction programs or help you select the best photos you shot that morning.

Bring Your Computer to sort and edit the thousands of images you will shoot

Return to Columbus hotel and have dinner on your own (dinner with us on the last night).

Shoot thousands of Images (John averages 2500 images per hour!)

Small birds are active! Even when perched, they continually change their head and body angles. For example, the Carolina wren is moving most of the time. The best way to capture excellent poses of this adorable but active bird is to follow it as it jumps or scampers along branches while continually shooting photos. Every once in a while, it does hold completely still and then you capture nice poses that are sharp! That means most of your wren images will not be what you want, but a few will be perfect. The wren is so quick that if you wait to see a great pose, and then press the shutter button, nearly always you are too late to capture the pose you saw. Therefore, shoot continuously. John will show you how he reviews six images at once in a couple of seconds, and if no suitable poses are present, he moves on to the next six images. You can cull a lot of photos this way once you know how. John easily sorts through 3000 to 4000 images per hour to reduce them down to less than 3%.



Figure 14 Downy woodpeckers are frequent at the photo stations.

When the Photo Workshop Begins and Ends

Each of the workshops begin on a Sunday and end Thursday night after dinner and the image viewing. If possible, we would like to meet everyone Sunday night before dark at our home to show you around. If you have a late arrival on Sunday, then let us know to work something else out.

The photo part of this workshop begins at sunrise on Monday morning. Driving time from your hotel is about 15-20 minutes as your hotel is 10-12 miles away from our home.

We will have a Thursday night showing of the best photos you shoot during the workshop at our home after enjoying Dixie's dinner on our final night. You will be a changed photographer by the end of this workshop. When you see all the tactics we use to capture pleasing bird poses and shoot so many images, you cannot help but become a much better bird photographer.

Tuition

The fee for this workshop is \$1500. This includes:

- Use of our blinds, feeders, reflection pool, and all the bird food
- All lunches Mon-Thursday at our home and dinner on Thursday night at our home
 - Snacks galore
 - All instruction from us

Full payment (\$1500) is due when you enroll in this workshop. Payment can be by check and made payable to: Gerlach Nature Photography. To use a credit card, call Dixie at (812) 350-0799. We add a 3.5% service charge for using a credit card to cover the banking fees we must pay. Save the credit card fees and mail us a check! That works fine with us.

To save credit card fees. Mail your check to:

Dixie Calderone
9642 S. State RD 58
Columbus, IN 47201



Figure 15 Tree sparrow are winter resident at our home. They breed in the far north but find the mild winter and weedy fields perfect for their needs.

Cancellations

The \$1500 workshop fee is not refundable, and it is required to reserve a spot in this workshop. When you enroll, be sure to book your hotel in Columbus, IN as soon as possible.

Your Accommodations

Hotels

There are several hotels near I-65 that are conveniently located for driving to our home.

We have listed four below. Our home is several miles south and a little west of Columbus. Go to the I-65 and take the ramp south 4.4 miles to exit 64. Turn right on W. County Road 450 (IN-58) and go 2.6 miles. At the stop sign, turn left onto South State Road 58 (IN-58). Go for 1.8 miles and turn right onto our long and narrow blacktop driveway. Our home is on the right side of the driveway as we share it with our neighbor.

Holiday Inn
2485 W. Jonathan Moore Pike
Columbus IN 47201
(812) 417-7200

Days Inn by Wyndham
3445 Jonathon Moore Pike
Columbus IN 47201
(812) 376-9951

Country Inn & Suites
3888 Mimosa Drive
Columbus, IN 47201
(812) 342-8888

Fairfield Inn & Suites
2820 Merchant Mile
Columbus IN 47201
(812) 552-5333

Book your room directly at the hotel of your choice. These hotels are about 7-8 miles from our home. There are other hotels in this area too. Look at hotels close to I-65 and Jonathan Moore Pike.

Airport Options

For those who are flying to Indiana, you have two airport options. You can fly into Indianapolis International Airport (44 miles from our home) or Louisville International Airport (67 miles away).



Figure 16 The song sparrow is the most abundant sparrow on our Indiana property.

Gerlach Nature Photography understands that challenges in life may cause you to cancel your trip with us. Broken bones, illness, severe weather, natural disasters, sick pets, family troubles, and many other reasons may cause you to have to change your plans. No matter the reason for your cancellation, we will follow our cancellation policy exactly as written. When you enroll in our photo workshop, we reserve a spot for you and most often turn others away who would have gladly paid for your spot. Though we often have a waiting list, in most cases people on the waiting list make other plans and are no longer available to replace you. If we can get a replacement for you (no guarantee) or you get a replacement, then we are happy and able to make a generous refund. We hope you understand our position. We wish to continue to offer high-quality photo workshops for small groups at affordable prices. Gerlach Nature Photography encourages everyone to purchase Trip Cancellation Insurance that covers the most likely reasons you would cancel. And to be safe, you can buy 'Cancel for Any

Reason' trip cancellation insurance. Companies that provide trip cancellation insurance are found on the web. Two well-known insurance companies include:

www.allianztravelinsurance.com

www.travelguard.com

Travel and Equipment Information

After making a reservation, we will send pre-departure information describing how to find our home that is several miles south of Columbus, IN, and any other last minute details you might need to know.

What is Not Covered in your tuition:

- Transportation to and from our home is not included. If you wish to carpool, that can be decided the first evening we meet. Lodging is not included. We have listed four of the many hotels you could stay at. Book any room you need directly with the hotel. Except for the four lunches and one dinner you will enjoy at our home, all other meals are not provided in the \$1500 tuition.

We hope you will join us for this incredibly fun and instructional bird photography workshop. We cannot wait to show you what we have created here in Indiana! If you have any questions, contact:

Dixie Calderone at 812-350-0799 or email johngerlachphotography@gmail.com



Figure 17 Song sparrows are permanent residents on our property.



Figure 18 The red-bellied woodpecker is one of the easiest birds to photograph on our Indiana property as they visit the feeding station frequently.



Figure 19 The Eastern towhee is a large member of the sparrow family and a regular visitor at our feeding station.



Figure 20 This is the male pileated woodpecker who frequently comes for the Peanut Treat. Hopefully, you will see him in your viewfinder!



Figure 21 We like to use sticks with character like this one with lichen growing on it. And this blue jay feels right at home on this gnarly stick. Notice the background. In this case, it is the branches of red cedar about 25 yards behind the bird. We trimmed out some vines to get a more distant out of focus background, but it is worth the effort.



Figure 22 A tufted titmouse during a February snowfall.



Figure 23 A female northern cardinal. These birds are super abundant on our property. You will photograph them all you want!



Figure 24 Most folks have never seen this secretive large sparrow. It is the fox sparrow and last year a few of them were regular visitors to the feeding station.



Figure 25 The Eastern bluebird is always possible. It likes the live mealworms we provide.



Figure 26 The American goldfinch in winter plumage. During winter, males look similar to the females.