

Gerlach Nature Photography

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2026 Indiana Bird Photography Workshops

Nashville, Indiana

with John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone

March 22 – 25, 2026

May 3 - 6, 2026

Only 2 participants for this all inclusive workshop. All you have to do is get to our home.

Both Sessions begin Sunday evening with orientation

Mon and Tuesday – Intensive morning and afternoon bird photography and a morning session on Wednesday if your travel permits.



Figure 1 Red-bellied woodpeckers are frequent visitors to the feeding station. You will photo these beautiful birds a lot.

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. Except for chickadees, 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 and wintering birds are abundant. 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 the blind in a low spot of our backyard, you are eye level to the ground when seated in the blind.

John grew up in southern Michigan and Dixie grew up in Columbus, IN. Dixie has three sisters in Columbus and wanted to buy a 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 on flat open land. But southern Indiana is nothing like northern Indiana. Southern Indiana is rolling heavily forested hills with many ponds and creeks. Though I grew up with northern cardinals and blue jays in southern Michigan, I have not lived where they regularly 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, and sparrows that migrate north in the spring and south in autumn. Migrating birds pass right through Indiana as they are attracted to the huge forests (like our 17 acres) that offers plenty of food and cover for them on their journey.



Figure 3 The Carolina wren is adorable and active! 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. Once we erected and stocked the bird feeders, northern cardinals became regular visitors.



Figure 4 This is the female northern cardinal. 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 summer of 2025, we visited many homes that were for sale around Columbus, IN. While most of them were easy to dismiss, a couple were promising, but none were quite what we wanted. Eventually Dixie found a home for sale hidden in the hills and forests of Brown County west of Columbus, IN near Nashville and not far from the popular Brown County State Park. We visited the home and

it was really nice. The forest view out all the windows was just what we wanted and everything about the home was extra nice, plus the house was on 17 acres of forest and most of the land is already in the Forest Reserve program, so taxes are much lower and wildlife more plentiful. We took possession of the home at the end of November in 2025, had three days to move in, and then drove 1700 miles to Grand Teton National Park to lead two consecutive photo workshops. Then we drove back to Indiana and really began putting everything away.

Of course, the first day we took possession of our new home, we put bird feeders out to see what we might have. As expected, birds began showing up right away. In no time at all, flocks of birds were regular visitors. We already know how good the bird photography is on the property. Over the past two months we have lived here, we routinely shot 2000 plus images per hour in the blind we built next to our home. We need light to photograph and there is good light at the house as the rest of the 17 acres is dense forest. Plus, the home is built into a steep hillside and that made it possible to build a blind next to the house where you are photographing at eye level to the ground! Birds are coming and going all the time, as I write this in early February, we have a couple hundred birds at the two feeding stations most of the time and several white-tailed deer do their best to eat out of the feeders too. Currently, we have at least 100 dark-eyed juncos and more American goldfinches, plus many others. And since we live where big trees are everywhere, woodpeckers are always busy at our suet feeders. Right now, we have lots of downy, hairy, red-bellied, and the extra impressive pileated woodpeckers regularly coming to our suet feeders. All of them are easy to photograph. Once pileated woodpeckers discovered how tasty the Peanut Treat suet we put out for them is, they come in all the time. You will get plenty of photos of this normally elusive species. 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 and the birds continually come to you. Birds are six to twelve feet away when you photograph them making it easy to get great closeup images. Even the crow-sized pileated woodpecker comes close as I photograph it at my suet set up for chickadees and that is only six feet away. It is super fun! Much thought has gone into photo setups, and we continue to experiment with new perches and other photo props.

Both morning and afternoon are productive times at the feeding station. We have more than a dozen different props to 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 do not eat birdseed, but 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 which are black-oil sunflower seeds with the inedible black shells removed.



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

Some of the Birds that will be Likely Subjects

We already know the bird photography in Indiana is absolutely superb. It is pretty easy to shoot 5000 or more images in a single morning. With many local and wintering migrant birds you will get plenty of chances to photograph during March and early May include the following, plus two mammals.

- Carolina chickadee
- Tufted titmouse
- Downy woodpecker
- Pileated woodpecker
- Hairy woodpecker
- White-breasted nuthatch
- Red-bellied Woodpecker
- Song Sparrow
- Northern cardinal
- White-crowned sparrow
- White-throated sparrow
- Blue jay
- American goldfinch
- House finch
- Chipping Sparrow
- Eastern towhee
- Carolina wren
- Dark-eyed junco
- Mourning dove
- Brown Thrasher
- Gray catbird
- Baltimore Oriole (May)
- Rose-breasted Grosbeak (May)
- Gray Squirrels
- White-tailed Deer



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

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 the photos. We have a well-built wooden photo hide that is ideal for two 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 6-12 feet away. Usually, we have 3-4 different photo props in use simultaneously to provide a variety of images of birds that eat seeds and/or suet. Your lens must be able to focus as close as six feet and a zoom lens is the best lens to use by far. After all, a Carolina chickadee is a lot smaller than a pileated woodpecker. 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.

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



Figure 8 Red-bellied woodpecker

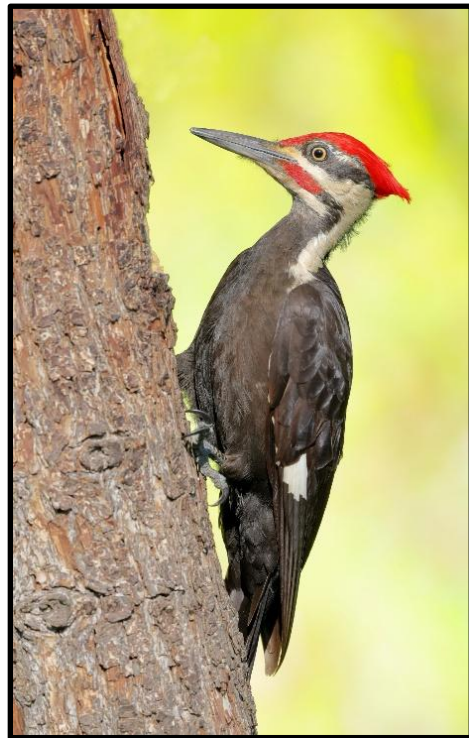


Figure 9 Pileated woodpecker

The Reflection Pool

We will have a small reflection pool at the blind. 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.



Figure 10 By putting sunflower hearts among the black stones at the rear of the pool, this northern cardinal came to eat them while providing a nice reflection in the pool.

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 finds his Canon 100-500mm zoom lens ideal for photographing birds from a photo hide with the Canon R5 Mark II. For larger species, he uses the full-frame; for smaller birds, he applies a 1.6x crop to extend the lens's reach to 160–800mm. Any zoom lens covering 400–700mm, with either crop factor or a 1.4x teleconverter, works well for this workshop. Because bird sizes and distances vary, a zoom lens is essential. Note that less than 400mm focal length is preferable for capturing birds in flight.

John and Dixie, passionate photography instructors, eagerly share their expertise with participants. Our workshop focuses on essential bird photography techniques that anyone can learn to capture stunning images. With an intensive program and a small group of just two people, you will receive plenty of personalized instruction and enjoy abundant photo opportunities—making it easy to significantly improve your skills.



Figure 11 A bright red northern cardinal is striking anytime, but especially when the snow is falling.



Figure 12 Northern mockingbirds 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 about an hour after sunrise. Since we are surrounded by tall oaks and hickory trees, it takes a while for the sun to rise above the trees.

We typically photograph at the blind for three hours in the morning. Cloudy weather produces superb light all day long. We have already spent hundreds of mornings in photo blinds both in Indiana and Idaho. While some bird activity begins early at first light, it is apparent the most productive hours are the second and third hour after sunrise. Some birds sleep in and those that are early risers come in later anyway. That means the feeders become especially busy as all species are mobbing the feeding station during the second and third hours.

We also get wonderful afternoon light at the photo station, and the birds provide even more opportunities. Of course, after the morning session, we will modify the props to get different photos. Often we use flowers to add color to the bird photos.



Figure 13 You will get many chances to photograph Carolina chickadees! They are abundant and frequently appear at the photo props.

Image Review

We review both your personal images and those you capture during the workshop, either midday when lighting is not ideal or in the evening after dinner at our home. Please bring up to 30 photos from home to share with the group and copy the JPEGs onto a jump drive so we can view them with our software. After downloading, we will promptly return your drive.

Instructor Programs to be Presented

Wildlife Photography PowerPoint Program

Backyard Bird Photography Program

Special demonstrations on creating your own bird photography station and reflection pool

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. And all the time you are here we are happy to explain photo techniques and how to use your camera better.



Figure 14 The tufted titmouse is another active bird like the chickadee and Carolina wren that you get plenty of chances to photograph.

Meals

We will eat all meals together at our home. Meals start with dinner on your arrival day and end with breakfast on your departure day. Tuition covers 3 dinners, 2 lunches, and 3 breakfasts.

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. (Note: if you do not have a Wimberley gimbal head, let us know as we have some here that you can use.)
2. Extra camera batteries and charger
3. Computer, storage for your images, and cords for everything
4. Especially for the late March session, bring warm clothes because dawn temperatures can be quite cool. However, most days in March and May are quite mild. For example, 57 degrees is the average high here on March 25 and 35 degrees is the average low.

Daily Schedule

Breakfast with us

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

Afternoon in the bird blind with new props

Dinner with us at our home

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 images per hour to reduce them down to less than 3%.



Figure 15 Downy woodpeckers are frequent at the photo stations.

When the Photo Workshop Begins and Ends

Each of the workshops begin Sunday evening with introductions and dinner at our home and end after breakfast on Wednesday morning.

The photo part of this workshop begins shortly after sunrise on Monday morning.

Tuition

The fee for this workshop is \$1350. This includes:

- Use of our blinds, feeders, reflection pool, and all the bird food
- All meals beginning with dinner on Sunday night and ending with breakfast on Wednesday morning
- All instruction from us
- Three nights lodging at our home. You will have your own room (upper level), but our two participants must share a bathroom. You will love your stay here as this is a really nice place to be!

Full payment (\$1350) 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
3750 S. Whitehorse Rd
Nashville IN 47448



Figure 16 Mourning doves prefer corn, so we always put out some corn for them and the gray squirrels.

Cancellations

The \$1350 workshop fee is not refundable. Please buy trip cancellation insurance to protect your investment.



Figure 17 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 a confirmation letter describing how to find our home that is several miles southwest 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.

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 johnngerlachphotography@gmail.com



Figure 18 Song sparrows are permanent residents on our property.



Figure 19 The red-bellied woodpecker is one of the easiest birds to photograph on our Indiana property as they visit the feeding station frequently.



Figure 20 The Eastern towhee is a large member of the sparrow family and visits our feeding station.



Figure 21 The male pileated woodpecker is a regular in our yard. He can really tear apart wood. Thankfully, our home is made out of stone.



Figure 22 Carolina wrens are both adorable and comical! They love bark butter.



Figure 23 We added these pink flowers to add some color to the blue jay scene.



Figure 24 Notice the low photo angle to this male northern cardinal from the blind you will be using.



Figure 25 Gray squirrels are abundant on our property. You will easily photograph them.