

Gerlach Nature Photography

www.gerlachnaturephoto.com

2025 Indiana Bird Photography Workshop

Columbus, Indiana

with John Gerlach and Dixie Calderone

Only 4 Participants!

Sun. April 27 – Sat. May 3

Sun. May 4 – Sat. May 10



Figure 1 The red-bellied woodpecker is a frequent visitor to our feeding station and will provide you with plenty of photo opportunities. They particularly enjoy eating the sunflower seed hearts and bark butter we provide.

How this Workshop Started

At our mountain home in Idaho, winters are long (Nov. through April). The heavy snowfall makes living in the Idaho mountains challenging six months of the year. Winters are so severe that nearly all birds leave. Outside of some chickadees and magpies, everything else flies south offering us few wintering birds to photograph. We have 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!

As you may know, John grew up in southern 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 and flat land – not great habitat for wildlife. Well, as it turns out, southern Indiana is nothing like northern Indiana. Southern Indiana is rolling heavily forested hills with lots of ponds and creeks. I have always wanted to photograph the eastern birds again with the digital cameras available today. Though I grew up with northern cardinals and blue jays in southern Michigan, I have not lived where they live since 1993. 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 billions of migratory warblers, flycatchers, tanagers, orioles, finches, sparrows, and many others that migrate north in the spring and south in autumn. Millions of 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 2 The Carolina wren is adorable and active!

Thinking again of blue jays and cardinals, both are wonderful colorful birds that would be fun to photograph. Now I have plenty of them to photograph on our own Indiana property.

Indeed, northern cardinals are the state bird of Indiana, and they are abundant. Once we erected and stocked the bird feeders on our Indiana property, northern cardinals appeared in large numbers. Sometimes we have more than two dozen of them at the feeding station simultaneously and blue jays are abundant too.

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 was 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 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 that flew 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 weed field. All this is super bird habitat. We took possession of the home in August, and I immediately put out bird feeders. In no time at all, flocks of birds were regular visitors. As I write this in March, I already know how good the bird photography is on the property. Just the other morning, I set a record for the number of images shot in a single morning – over 11,000. At times I had 10 blue jays and 20 cardinals coming into the bird feeders simultaneously, plus another dozen species. The photo opportunities are continuous! You do not wait long for a bird to appear. Normally you have 10 – 20 in front of you representing several species all the time. It is amazing and so much fun! When in the blind, I shoot about 2,000 – 3,000 images per hour!



Figure 3 The house finch is a common visitor to our backyard feeding station.

We have been developing the photo stations each day. Every morning, we are trying something a little different and the results are remarkable, and the photography is super fun! Much thought has gone into photo setups, and we continue to experiment with new perches and other photo tactics. We know our local birds (all those cardinals and blue jays will be with us this spring) but we also know the huge spring migration passes through southern Indiana primarily from mid-April through mid-May. We have planned these two workshops to run during the peak of the spring songbird migration. That means new bird species could appear each morning at the photo station.

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 several different props we use, plus we have a water feature to draw birds that do not eat bird seed, and our reflection pool gives you the opportunity to photograph birds with a mirror reflection. 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.



Figure 4 This American goldfinch is beginning to get its yellow feathers in late February, and they are abundant on our property. When the workshops are running, the males will be bright yellow with some black markings.

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 birds you will get plenty of chances to photograph include:

Carolina chickadee	Blue jay
Tufted titmouse	American goldfinch
Downy woodpecker	House finch
White-breasted nuthatch	Northern mockingbird
Red-bellied Woodpecker	Chipping Sparrow
Song Sparrow	Eastern towhee
Northern cardinal	Carolina wren

Plus, many species are migratory and while we have not yet photographed on the property between mid-April and mid-May, we know a couple hundred other species pass through the area then. With each spring morning, we get the local birds to photograph plus new migratory species may be available. We have scheduled both workshops to coincide with the peak of the spring migration. On some nights, more than ten million birds are flying at night over our county. Birds that land around us during migration might easily appear at the photo stations in the morning.

The main focus of this workshop is bird photography at out feeder stations. Of course, for better bird photos, we disguise the feeders, so all birds are using natural perches so bird feeders and bird seed will not appear in your photos. We have a well-built 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 used to it, so they readily come to the photo setups that are only 8-12 feet away. That means 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 his 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 well with her Nikon Z9 and the Nikon 100-400mm zoom with a 1.4x teleconverter. We hope to add a couple more bird photo opportunities during our spring workshops if the birds cooperate. Here are two things we hope to make happen for you.

For example, 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.

1. In August we set out hummingbird feeders and immediately attracted ruby-throated hummingbirds. We had quite a few birds. There was enough where hummingbird photography with natural light and multiple flash setups would be productive. We do not know how many hummingbirds are nesting around the property in April and May, but if there are enough, we will do hummingbird photography in the afternoon. Naturally, we will put out several hummingbird feeders around our property in late March and see how many we get. We do know one lady about a mile away from us that gets swarms of hummingbirds at her house during spring, so we are hoping that happens on our property too. If the hummingbirds cooperate, you will get to photograph ruby-throated hummingbirds.
2. Eastern bluebirds have always been the bird we have wanted to photograph and the first bird I saw when we first visited the property. The neighbor has a line of bluebird boxes up already and we have added ten more nest boxes on our seven acre property. Bluebirds are common at our Indiana home, and we hope to have Eastern bluebirds for our photo workshops guests to photograph. The bluebirds are relatively approachable, and we hear they are readily attracted to mealworms that we will provide. Already this winter bluebirds have been perched on our new nest boxes, and we learned they select their home during the winter and begin nesting by early April, so hopefully we will have easy to photograph eastern bluebirds for you to photograph when you arrive in late April or early May.



Figure 5 Eastern bluebirds are common nesting birds in this area.

What You will Learn:

The focus of these photo workshops is small backyard birds.

- How to select the best places for bird photos on your property
- How to create an appealing background
- How to create attractive props for your 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 ones and 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

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 week you spend learning from us. This goal is easy to achieve because the group size is only four participants. This allows us unlimited time for one on one instruction.



Figure 6 Northern mockingbirds are abundant on our property and readily come in to eat 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. Sunrise on May 1 for example is 6:31am. The hotel you will be staying at is an easy 15 minute drive from our home.

You have all morning in the blind. We regularly 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 70 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 visiting 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. Plus, we hope to have a productive eastern bluebird photo station and a ruby-throated hummingbird setup that you can use in the afternoon.

Our bird blind gets a large bird selection because it is on the edge of a thick forest with lots of dense cover near the ground for the birds. The dense cover provides plenty of food and hiding places for all the local birds and also the spring migratory birds. We cannot emphasize enough how interesting it is to photograph during the April and May spring songbird migrations. The numbers and variety of birds vary from morning to morning, so birds that you have never seen before may appear on any morning. We saw many warblers in our woods during the autumn and know more that 30 species of warblers could appear at the bird photo station in the spring, along with another 150 spring migrants including orioles, tanagers, flycatchers, kinglets, thrushes, and more.



Figure 7 You will get many chances to photograph Carolina chickadees at this workshop.

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 Friday 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.

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 lunch at our home. This is a super time to find out how well your photos are coming and make suggestions for even better results at the next session photo.



Figure 8 Tufted titmouse is another active bird like the chickadee and Carolina wren that you will 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 available. Friday night we will have dinner at our home and view your favorite images you made at this workshop.

Camera Gear to Bring

1. Sturdy tripod with a gimbal head (the bird activity is nearly constant, so you do not want to be forced to handhold your camera continuously as that gets heavy after a while)
2. Extra camera batteries and your charger
3. Computer, storage for your images, and cords for everything
4. Bring some warm clothes as some mornings can be quite chilly in late April and early May

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 surely shoot

Late Afternoon to dark – return to the bird blind or hopefully photograph Eastern bluebirds or ruby-throated hummingbirds

Return to Columbus hotel and have dinner on your own (Friday night dinner with us)

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 you will certainly get plenty of chances to photograph 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 looks at six images at once in a couple of seconds, and if there is not a good pose, he moves on to the next six images. You can cull a lot of photos this way once you know how. John can easily sort through 3000 to 4000 images per hour to get them down to less than 3%.



Figure 9 Downy woodpeckers are frequent at the photo station.

When the Photo Workshop Begins and Ends

Each of the two workshops begin on a Sunday and end Friday night after dinner and the image viewing. If possible, we would like to meet everyone Sunday night before dark at our home. 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 7-8 miles away from our home.

We will have a Friday night showing of the best photos you shoot during the workshop at our home after enjoying 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-Friday at our home and dinner on Friday night at our home

- Snacks galore
- All instruction from us
- A \$1000 per-person deposit holds your spot in this workshop

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!

To save credit card fees. Mail your check to:

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



Figure 10 Ruby-throated hummingbirds were abundant on our property in August. We hope there are plenty of them here this spring when we will have males to photograph.

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 from in Columbus, IN as soon as possible.

Your Accommodations

Hotels

There are several hotels near I-65 that are conveniently located for getting to our home. We have listed two of them 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
Front Desk 812-417-7200

La Quinta Inn & Suites

101 Carrie Lane
Columbus IN 47201
812-302-6653

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. You want a hotel close to I-65 and Jonathan Moore Pike.

Airport Options

For those who will be 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 from our home).



Figure 11 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, we can connect interested parties. Lodging is not included. We have listed two of the many hotels (Holiday Inn and La Quinta Inn) you could stay at. Book any room you need directly with the hotel. Except for the five 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 12 The red-bellied woodpecker is one of the easiest birds to photograph on our Indiana property as they visit the feeding station frequently.



Figure 13 The Eastern towhee is a large member of the sparrow family and a regular visitor at our feeding station.



Figure 14 We like to use sticks with character like this one with the 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 had to trim out some vines to get a more distant out of focus background, but it is worth the effort.



Figure 15 A male northern cardinal during an infrequent snowfall in February.



Figure 16 A female northern cardinal. These birds are super abundant on our property. You will photograph them all you want!