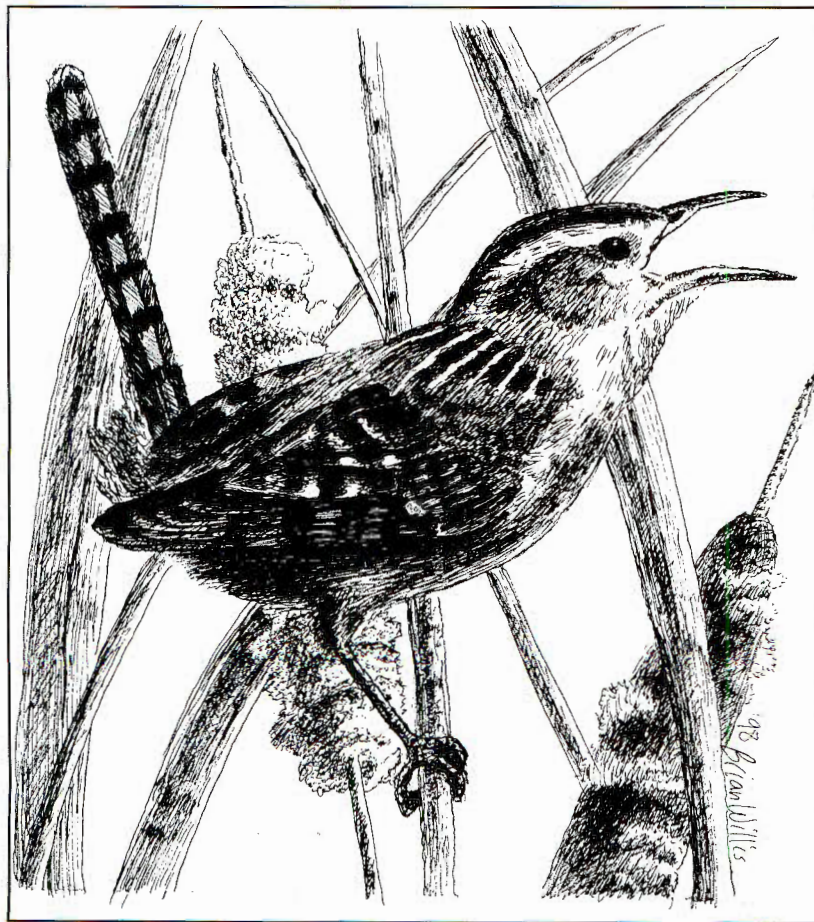


Birds of Prairie Ridge State Natural Area

by Jeffery W. Walk

Introduction

Since January 1994, I have been conducting research on birds at Prairie Ridge State Natural Area (formerly the Prairie-Chicken Sanctuaries), Jasper and Marion Counties. Here I present a summary of these records through 1996. Fields of cool-season and warm-season grasses, as well as four newly created wetlands, are managed to provide habitat for area-sensitive, threatened, and endangered species native to Illinois' prairies and marshes. Several bird species were documented on the natural area for the first time during this study, in addition to species found in previous years.



Marsh Wren drawing by Brian K. Willis.

Methods

Most of the observations of grassland birds were incidental to my 400 m transect counts conducted in May and June 1995 and 1996 during the early morning hours (0530–0900) (Jasper County only). These transects were surveyed to determine the relative abundances of Dickcissels, Eastern Meadowlarks, Grasshopper Sparrows, Field Sparrows, and Henslow's Sparrows in different management units. Areas in Marion County and those not surveyed by transects in Jasper County were walked periodically, but at least once each season to document other species present. Wetlands were surveyed weekly from May through August by walking the perimeter of each and recording species and numbers of individuals of each species present. Wetlands were surveyed once or twice monthly from February to May and September to November.

Results

A total of 222 species was observed on the site over this period, including those observed on Newton Lake, which was surveyed only occasionally and is immediately adjacent to portions of the Jasper County area. Considering only the grassland, wetland, and shrubland habitats (i.e. excluding the few small forested areas adjacent to Newton Lake as well as the lake), 145 species were recorded, including 16 endangered and 5 threatened species (Appendix A). Fifty-