

Benjamin J. O'Neal of the University of Illinois is carrying out the second year of a research program aimed at studying **American Golden-Plovers** (*Pluvialis dominica*), to determine habitat preferences of this species during migration through our state. Illinois supports a substantial portion of the hemispheric population: Tens of thousands of American Golden-Plovers pass through east-central Illinois during their flight from their wintering to breeding grounds.

Volunteer student technicians from the University of Illinois chapter of The Wildlife Society conducted concurrent roadside surveys at the peak of migration during spring 2008, the second year of the planned 3-year study (2007-2009). In addition to abundance estimates, the project documents and analyzes the characteristics of habitat used by plovers (crop type, tillage practice, relative moisture, and landscape position). The findings will support future conservation



Benjamin O'Neal, works with a team of volunteer technicians to study habitat requirements for migratory American Golden-Plovers.

efforts for this species by documenting population numbers and by identifying priority locations that reliably host large numbers of American Golden-Plovers. Identifying habitat associations will yield recommendations applicable to intense row-crop agriculture and

the growing presence of wind farms.

The first year of this project increased knowledge of plover abundance and habitat selection during spring migration. Surveying this mobile and widespread species proved to require intense sampling efforts, both spatially and temporally.

Adam Phillips of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale is studying the impact of **exotic Mute Swans** (*Cygnus olor*) on natural wetlands, focusing on the swans' destructive feeding habits and aggressive behavior. Study areas include Banner Marsh and Spring Lake.

More than 85 percent of historic wetland habitat within Illinois has been lost. Further impacting the remaining habitat available to native waterbird species has been the introduction of exotic species like the Mute Swan, which has been a part of Illinois' avifauna since at least 1971. Past research indicates these swans have the ability (from their feeding habits) to further reduce Illinois wetlands' ability to support native waterbirds. They eat large amounts of submerged aquatic vegetation, which may



Adam Phillips is studying the effects of non-native Mute Swans on Illinois' native water birds.

in turn increase invasion rates of less desirable exotic vegetation species like Eurasian watermilfoil. This very aggressive species may

also exclude native waterbirds from quality foraging and breeding habitats.

The study's goals are to determine the swans' impact on native submerged aquatic vegetation communities and water quality, and to determine whether the presence of swans influences the distribution of both migrating and breeding native waterbirds.