

# Birding the Middlefork River Valley

## Part II: Kennekuk Cove County Park

by Steven D. Bailey

**K**ennekuk Cove County Park is probably the most heavily birded area in Vermilion County, and for good reason. This 2,700-acre park provides great birding opportunities along with a wide variety of recreational facilities without sacrificing its natural character. The park also encompasses virtually every habitat to be found in east-central Illinois, including grassy and old fields as well as an ongoing prairie restoration projects. The forests are equally diverse. Mature, bottomland forests are found along the Middlefork River while mature, wooded ravines are located in the uplands. Successional areas, good for migrants, abound between the fields and woodlands. The park also contains 170-acre Lake Mingo, as well as several small ponds and a fairly large restored marsh complex.

Kennekuk Cove County Park has recently become well known for its breeding birds. Vermilion County birders were lucky to find the entire confines of the park inside one of the atlas blocks of the recently completed Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas Project. We are proud of the fact that this one quadrant had the highest number of confirmed breeding species of any one quadrant in the state with 107, and four others possible. These included many species rare and/or pre-

viously unrecorded as breeding in the county.

Probably my best contribution to the atlas project was also my luckiest. I had come home for the weekend

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**Flocks numbering in the thousands of Lapland Longspurs are not uncommon in early spring and late fall.**

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from southern Illinois where I was spending much of the spring and summer working on a bird research project. I thought I would hike the new marsh complex at the county park one more time that spring hoping to get a late, migrant Least Bittern for my year list. However at the late date, May 30, I didn't really expect to find one. Much to my delight, just after entering the marsh, I flushed my quarry. And much to my surprise, when I waded over to where the bird had flushed, there lay its humble abode, and a first county record.

Birding at Kennekuk Cove County Park begins immediately as you pass through the park gates. During the breeding season, Eastern

Meadowlarks flush from the roadside, and bluebirds, responding nicely to a well-maintained nest box program, are a common sight along park roads. Henslow's Sparrow, formerly one of the main avian attractions of the park, has gradually declined to the point where the species is seldom found. However, it is worth listening for the bird's peculiar insect-like, two-syllable song as you drive along the fields from the entrance to the visitor center.

The successional fields to the south and the shrubby hedgerow immediately to the west of the building are good for Bell's Vireo. Just south of the visitor center, head west a short distance to the first road on your left. As you travel south, watch and listen along the road edges and nearby successional fields for various migrants in spring and fall, especially flycatchers, vireos, and warblers. The large oaks in the yard and woods surrounding the residence house where the road jogs west are good for several breeding species including Eastern Wood-Pewee and Summer Tanager. Continuing west as you make your way to the parking area, the road edges remain good for migrants. The road ends at Lookout Point Picnic area. A trail continues west to Lookout Point through forest and successional habitat good for summer resi-