



*Long-eared Owls can be spotted in pine plantations from late fall through early spring at Horseshoe Pond near Kennekuk Cove County Park in the Middlefork River Valley. Steve Bailey took this photo of a Long-eared Owl at a pine plantation north of Higginsville in May 1986.*

dent species such as Wood Thrush, Carolina Wren, and Scarlet Tanager.

The trail forms the southern boundary of the park, but much of the land to the south is being leased by the conservation district from Illinois Power Co., so feel free to explore the edges of the cultivated fields just south of the trail for nesting Lark Sparrows which have become regular here. Continue to the bluffs overlooking the Middlefork River. At times this area provides a good vantage from which to view migrating hawks, especially in the fall. Also look and listen for Northern Parula, Cerulean, and Yellow-throated Warblers during nesting season down in the treetops along the river.

To see a totally different group of birds, retrace your path back to the T-intersection with the main road west

of the visitor center. Turn left (west) and proceed to the large parking lot near the nature center. Park, then walk north along a gravel road to the north of the parking lot. You may want to bring boots. The marsh complex just east of the road, and farther north, just west of the road, attracts a wide variety of water birds, including Pied-billed Grebe, both bitterns, several herons, Canada Goose (nesting), 18 species of duck, Osprey, Sora and Virginia Rail, Common Moorhen, coot, Sandhill Crane, Willet, Wilson's Phalarope, Black Tern, Willow and Alder Flycatchers, all six swallows, Sedge and Marsh Wrens, American Pipit, and LeConte's Sparrow. A large list can be tallied in this one area of the park on a good day, especially in early spring.

To get to an area with wintering

species, go back to the visitor center and turn left. Watch for the sign for Horseshoe Pond and park. Woodland Prairie Trail starts just north of the parking lot and leads to a small red and white pine plantation. In the pines be alert for Short and, especially, Long-eared Owls which have been almost regular here from late fall through early spring. Accipiters also hunt and roost here, as well as several passerines including both kinglets, juncos, Purple Finch and, once, Red Crossbills.

Lake Mingo is always worth a check, especially before the fishermen cover the lake. There are several sites from which to view the lake. The best are near the dam side where the lake is widest. Bald Eagles and Osprey are not uncommon in migration; the many large dead trees along the lake's edge provide excellent perches. Other likely birds include Common Loon; Pied-billed and Horned Grebes; Double-crested Cormorant; several herons, including Great Egret and Black-crowned Night-Heron; Snow Goose, up to 20 species of duck, coot, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's Gulls, Caspian and Forster's Terns, Belted Kingfisher, and all six swallows. Rarities found there include Eared Grebe, Tundra and Mute Swans, Surf Scoter, and Golden Eagle.

Several good birding spots are outside the park as well. All are on private property. Nevertheless, most can be birded from the road, especially flooded fields in the spring, which are good for shorebirds and longspurs. Twenty-eight species of shorebirds have been found in such fields in the valley, including annual flocks of Lesser Golden Plover that number in the thousands (spring), some of the biggest flocks of this species to be found anywhere. Other interesting shorebirds include American Avocet, Willet, Ruddy Turnstone, White-rumped, Baird's and Buff-breasted Sandpipers, and Wilson's