



and is used when the bird is distressed or disturbed.

Another singer in this grassland opera is the Lark Sparrow. I discovered two nesting pairs during my breeding survey. Their affinity to sandy soils attracts them to the saddles between the knobs. If you visit the grasslands in spring, you may catch some of their courtship behavior such as twig passing and male strutting. In 1990, these same semi-shrub depressions were home to the threatened Loggerhead Shrike and its offspring, but the species has not been detected since.

Be sure to check the former crop fields for Bobolinks and Horned Larks. As these fields are converted to tallgrass prairie, the Horned Larks will move, preferring soy bean fields to prairies.

The western edge of a crop field abuts the eastern edge of Coyote Point, and hidden among the tangles and oaks is a little seep. This small wet area surrounded by good cover attracts Bell's Vireo, Willow Flycatcher, and Yellow-breasted Chat, which have all maintained nesting territories for the last few breeding seasons.

The giant bur oaks here have also attracted two nesting pairs of Orchard Orioles, one a first spring male.

Coyote Point seems to beckon many species to stop and rest, so find a piece of shade, listen, and watch.

Continuing westward from Coyote Point, you will see high tension towers where resident Red-tail Hawks often perch, and a brushy fence line. Go beyond the fence and you will happen upon Wade Creek. If you do a little bush-whacking, you should be able to find a beaver dam. Eastern Bluebirds nest in some of the cavities of old broken willows here. It is nice to see them nesting in a historically correct home.

Since 1990, the state-threatened Veery has sung its woeful aria from the corners of this retreat. We have tried unsuccessfully to confirm its breeding, but remain full of hope for the coming season.

Return by swinging south of the wooded knoll that sits in the middle of the old crop field. This area was seeded in prairie grasses and forbs, and you may flush nesting Vesper Sparrows as you hike. You may even witness their wing-drag distraction display.

Take the high ridge back toward your car. It offers a different vantage point and a chance to view the state-endangered Northern Harrier. No harrier pair was seen during the summer of 1992, only a single female, but

perhaps she will return to nest in 1993.

The best reason to walk this ridge is to see and hear the Northern Mockingbird. He has been known to sing "whip-poor-will" as part of his mimicry.

Another possible loop into the grasslands is from the Stone Barn Road entrance. A small green and yellow Conservancy sign is attached to the fence. Park on the Stone Barn Road and walk the farm road between the two fields. You can wander the knobs or the neighboring savanna. Occasionally, Sedge Wrens have been found in the field south of Doug's Knob. A bit further on you should find the White-eyed Vireo and the Scarlet Tanager using the pools and riffles of Wade Creek.

In the lowland oak savanna, you can often hear the rising "Wheep" of the Great-crested Flycatcher, the "Drink-your-tea" call of a Rufous-sided Towhee, and the "Peter Peter," chant of the Tufted Titmouse.

Stay until dusk and listen to Whip-poor-wills, Great-horned Owls, and coyotes.

If it were not for the neighbors who loved this piece of Illinois and the Nature Conservancy's willingness to buy it, we would have just another housing development on a pretty sand ridge instead of this prime grassland which attracts some rare avian species for us to enjoy. 🐾

Directions: Nachusa Grasslands is in Lee/Ogle counties on Lowden Road, east of the Rock River, between the towns of Oregon and Dixon (See Map 1). Parking is available along the east side of Lowden

Road near the entrance sign. No facilities are available at Nachusa, but you can find some at Franklin Creek State Park, due south on Twist Road.

Other information: Bring water and head covering when visiting Nachusa in summer. Wear long pants and long-sleeved shirts and be prepared for ticks.