

An Important Illinois Bird Area: Pyramid State Recreation Area

by Jeff Walk, Joe Merkelbach and Terry Esker



Figure 1: The tree upon which Bald Eagles attempted to nest was at the rear of a small backyard approximately 30 m from the house and 90 m from a strip mall at the back of the tree in Kane County. Photo taken 17 February 2005 by Karen Lund.

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Literature Cited

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Pyramid State Recreation Area (SRA) in Perry County in southwestern Illinois began in 1965 as a 2,528-acre site. In 2000, a purchase funded by the Open Land Trust Program added more than 16,000 acres, creating the largest state park in Illinois. With these new additions came a lot of wildlife resources, including an abundance of birds and many new outdoor recreation opportunities.

It is no secret that most of Pyramid is atop former surface coal mines, so don't expect to find pristine natural communities. The worst parts of Pyramid are tangled jungles of exotic herbs, vines, shrubs and trees. The best parts of Pyramid, from the perspective of Illinois's birds, are open landscapes of grassland that simply do

not exist on this scale elsewhere in the state. Surveys during the breeding season have estimated populations of about 3,000 pairs of Eastern Meadowlarks, 2,300 Dickcissels, 1,000 Grasshopper Sparrows and 500 Henslow's Sparrows. Christmas Bird Counts in 2004 and 2005 tallied as many as 104 Northern Harriers and 28 Short-eared Owls among the more than 100 species recorded. Recognizing these resources, Pyramid SRA was acknowledged as an Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society in 2005.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources manages Pyramid SRA for multiple uses. Fortunately, 19,000 acres is plenty of space for birders, hunters, anglers, campers, and eques-



Loggerhead Shrike is a state-threatened bird that nests in grasslands at Pyramid State Recreation Area. Photo by Mary Kay Rubey