

# Illinois' Next New Bird

by Eric Walters and Josh Engel

On a crisp, cloudless fall day, we set out to examine the avian life at a forest preserve near our home. The sunny day foreshadowed our great fortune to come that morning. We walked the path through the woods until an open prairie beckoned, welcoming our exploration. A short wooden fencerow separated the path from the prairie.

And there it was! Sitting calmly on the fence as if holding court, awaiting our presence. The stately bird was unlike any that had ever ventured into the boundaries of Illinois. The black cap, gray back, white underparts, and unexpectedly long tail all cinched the identification. We had discovered Illinois' first Fork-tailed Flycatcher (*Tyrannus savana*)!

This fictional story could someday become reality especially if a

panel of Illinois birders is right in naming it one of the next most likely candidates to be added to the Illinois species list. Any birder would love to find a new species, but to increase your chances of being the lucky finder, a birder has to know which species would most likely be expected next, when it would occur, and where in the state to look.

We asked 17 experienced Illinois birders to list the next five most likely species to be added to the state checklist, in order of their probability, and to give reasons for their choices.

The "next new state bird" topic has been broached in print twice before in Illinois, even as far back as 1881 when Robert Ridgway published a list of birds that probably occur in Illinois (Ridgway 1881). His speculation included 38 birds now considered full species. Of those in his list, 23 have been added to the state check-

list in the last 120 years. Red-cockaded Woodpecker, Arctic Tern, Chestnut-collared Longspur, and Scrub Jay are the only four new species added from his list in the last quarter century. In 1975, H. David Bohlen authored an article listing 20 species he expected would occur in Illinois in the near future (Bohlen 1975). Since that article, 12 of them have been added with an additional three more reported. The White-winged Dove was the most recent bird on Bohlen's list to be added to the state checklist.

The authors would like to thank the committee who took the time to share their thoughts and opinions that have formed a solid foundation for this article: Steve Bailey, Laurie Binford, Richard Biss, Frank Bennett, Dave Bohlen, Robert Chapel, Sheryl De Vore, Josh Engel, Robert Hughes,



An unlikely addition to the Illinois state list, the Black Skimmer, was discovered in 1998 by Myrna Deaton at Lake Decatur in Macon County. Dennis Oehmke took this photo 4 September 1998. The bird was a one-day wonder. See *Meadowlark* 8:43-43 for details.



Todd Fink, one of the state's finest birders, now deceased, discovered this Curve-billed Thrasher with Judy DeNeal in December 1993. Todd Fink took this photo 25 December 1993. See *Meadowlark* 2:87-89 for details.



This Broad-billed Hummingbird became the state's first record when it was discovered in fall 1996 at a feeder in Peoria County and identified by Dave Bohlen, Myrna Deaton, Vernon Kleen, and Dan Kassebaum. Dennis Oehmke took the photo of this bird 14 November 1996. See *Meadowlark* 6:42-44 for details.