



The Red-headed Woodpecker's numbers are declining throughout its range.

Illinois IBAs that support breeding Red-headed Woodpeckers include Lost Mound Unit, Savanna District of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge and the Iroquois County State Conservation Area.

These photos, above, a juvenile Red-headed Woodpecker still in its nest, and below, an adult Red-headed Woodpecker were taken by Mary Kay Rubey on 31 July 2005 along the road to Lock and Dam No. 13 along the Mississippi River in Whiteside County.



Illinois' Important Bird Areas: a primer

by Robert Fisher

On a recent warm, sunny, Saturday morning in late September, about 50 people gathered to celebrate the designation of Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve and Pate Phillip State Park as an Illinois Important Bird Area (IBA).

Pratt's Wayne is a 3400-acre assemblage of marshes, wetlands, woods, grasslands and shrublands where extensive restoration has taken place since the DuPage County Forest Preserve District acquired the property a number of years ago. Separated only by a secondary road that runs along the north boundary of Pratt's Wayne, the two units form a more or less continuous complex of habitats. Like Pratt's Wayne, the 500-acre Pate Phillip State Park has also been subject to extensive restoration; it has been managed and staffed by the DuPage County Forest Preserve District under an agreement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Both the park and the preserve were mostly farmland when they were acquired by their respective agencies. The extensive restoration work has led to a partial return to their pre-farming, more natural state, especially in the wetlands. One result: The birds have returned, including the state-endangered Yellow-headed Blackbird and the state-threatened Sandhill Crane. It was for these two species that the combined 4000-acre site complex received its IBA designation.

Among the crowd on that Saturday were a number of non-birders, including a couple of elected officials from the Forest Preserve District. At the conclusion of the dedication, some of those folks questioned the organizers on what

the IBA designation means and why they should care whether a natural area like Pratt's Wayne receives that designation.

As birders and bird conservationists, the answers to those questions seem obvious. But to the general public, even to those with a love of the outdoors, perhaps they are not so obvious. That dichotomy perhaps best defines why the IBA program in Illinois needs our active support. As Frank Gill, former Director of Science for National Audubon, said, "IBAs have a unique power to unite people, communities and organizations in proactive bird conservation, one place at a time."

How did IBAs start?

The Important Bird Area concept and program began in Europe during the 1980s. The concept and practice originated with BirdLife International, a global coalition of more than 100 individual country-based bird conservation groups. Thousands of sites throughout Europe have received IBA designation, covering more than 7% of the European land mass. The program spread throughout the world. Now 167 countries have IBAs, and the number grows daily. In many cases, this designation is the first line of defense in protecting areas identified as most critical in maintaining habitat for bird populations. Land managers, public and private, are keyed in to exactly why their site is critical, whether it be for a breeding population of a threatened or endangered species, a crucial wintering area, or a migratory bird stopover that provides food and shelter for often exhausted birds on their way north or south.