



Yellow-headed Blackbird is a state-endangered species which breeds in several of Illinois' Important Bird Areas.

Travis Mahan took a photo of this juvenile on 19 July 2005 at the Paul Douglas Forest Preserve in Cook County.

major corridor/stopover for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds.

Northeastern Illinois has eight IBAs, ranging from the often abused and neglected (but very critical for many species) Lake Calumet area, to the northern Kane County – southern McHenry County patchwork of fields and treelines, which support a very small breeding population of Swainson's Hawks. This IBA is critical to the conservation of this state-endangered bird. Suburban sprawl and unplanned, unchecked development threaten to rob these birds of the necessary habitat and prey base (the state endangered Franklin's Ground Squirrel may be an important prey item for the hawk) for their continued viability as a nesting species in Illinois, the only breeding Swainson's anywhere east of the Mississippi.

The rest of the sites are scattered throughout the state, and are quite diverse in terms of the habitat they provide and the birds they support. Six form an irregular chain along the Mississippi, from Lost Mound near the northwestern corner of the state south to the Calhoun Division of the Two Rivers National Fish and Wildlife Refuge, just north of St. Louis. The two units of Prairie Ridge State Natural Area, our state's prairie-chicken refuge, which also provides critical habitat for a wide range of other species throughout

the year, are viewed as one IBA even though they are not physically connected. Midewin and Goose Lake Prairie State Park offer large blocks of grassland and shrubland habitat for those two suites of species, both of which have experienced large declines in Illinois during the recent past.

One hundred miles or more southwest of Midewin, the Double T State Fish and Wildlife Area in Fulton County provides another critical grassland habitat island used by Upland Sandpipers. Pyramid State Park in Perry County is a large and diverse complex of habitats, which again features grassland and shrubland species along with waterfowl. On the state's eastern border, the Iroquois County State Conservation Area received IBA designation because of its importance to Red-headed Woodpeckers, a species which is declining across its range. The Castle Rock State Park/Lowden Miller State Forest complex provide habitat for breeding Cerulean Warbler with the Kaskaskia River Corridor almost 200 miles farther south.

Finally, Trelease Woods is important to note because it is the only IBA in Illinois that received the designation because of its importance as a research site, with its



Blue-winged Teal is a migratory and breeding species of Illinois. Many of Illinois' IBAs provide important habitat for migratory waterfowl.

This photo of a Blue-winged Teal was taken 14 May 2005 at Ethel's Woods, Lake County, by Eric Walters.

long, unbroken bird monitoring history and database.

**Where do we go
from here?**

And what we can do.

48 IBAs seems like a lot, but it's not. Here's what you can do to help.

Nominate a site

Figure 1 locates all 48 IBA sites on a map of Illinois. It's easy to see how large areas of the state are devoid of IBAs. As birders, we know locations within those blank areas where birds breed and congregate during migration or winter, locations where threatened species are hanging on. Even in the regions where the map is dotted with IBAs, other sites deserving designation are 'not on the map' yet. One of the first things that can be done: Identify, gather the data and nominate a site. Table 2 contains both a list of sites currently under review (2A) for designation and a list of sites the Technical Committee is convinced will qualify for IBA status (2B); they are ready to review the 2B candidates, once they have the completed application in hand. But even if your site is not on their wish list, nominate it anyway. New site nominations are especially sought in northwestern, central and southern Illinois, as these areas are clearly under-surveyed for potential new IBAs.

Site nominations can also be aimed at under-reported or poorly understood species. Perhaps you know of a major Chimney Swift roost, or nightjar nesting area. Either or both would likely be eligible for IBA status. Although a category exists in the nomination form, our state Technical Committee continues to seek quantitative data for Important (Migratory) Bird Sites so they can be brought in under the IBA umbrella. It's fairly easy for waterfowl, and to a lesser extent shorebirds, but warblers and other passerines rarely mass at one location for any length of time and can certainly be hard to count even when they appear at a site in large numbers.