



Least Bittern, a state-threatened species, nests at Pyramid State Recreation Area. Photo by Mary Kay Rubey.

trians to find room for their avocations. Mostly what you find at Pyramid is solitude. Because most of the site recently came into public ownership, many roads, parking areas, hiking trails, restrooms, picnic areas and other infrastructure are under development. Some of the areas are still being reclaimed following mining operations, so the habitat itself is also changing. We recommend a stop at the site office when visiting Pyramid to get a map of the expansive area and to check with site staff on areas where construction might be on-going, or that have recently opened.

Most of Pyramid remains more-or-less unexplored by birders, especially during spring and fall migration, but we have cobbled together a site list of at least 200 species. Among the noteworthy birds found at Pyramid SRA are grassland birds including Henslow's Sparrows, Upland Sandpipers and Loggerhead Shrikes, shrub specialists like Bell's Vireos and Yellow-breasted Chats, wetland birds including Common Moorhens, American and Least Bitterns, concentrations of waterfowl, and a plethora of raptors. A few rarities have been found here as well, including a

Cinnamon Teal, Great-tailed Grackle, and a Burrowing Owl that remained on the site throughout the fall and winter of 2005 and into March 2006.

The "Original Pyramid"

This 2,500-acre part of the park is typical of "pre-law" strip mine lands (those reclaimed prior to the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977): An almost dune-like topography of short steep hills, covered with dense forest regrowth, and numerous lakes and ponds. On the southeast side of the entire complex, the site headquarters is in this part of the park, just off of the Pyatt-Cutler Road. Though this is the oldest part of the park, most recent birding activity has focused on the vast new additions to the west and north. A morning of birding in this part of Pyramid SRA, particularly during spring and fall migration, would undoubtedly yield a good diversity of woodland birds. Residents include Red-shouldered Hawks, Wild Turkeys and Pileated Woodpeckers. Campers in the park are serenaded by Barred Owls and sometimes Whip-poor-wills.

The Captain Unit

Geologists and miners have an old saying, "if it can't be grown, it must be mined." We live in an energy-hungry society. Coal is one of those sources of



A Burrowing Owl was discovered at Pyramid State Recreation Area on the Denmark Unit in November 2005 and remained there until at least March 2006. This photo was taken at Pyramid SRA 11 November 2005 by Randy Smith.



More than 2,000 pairs of Dickcissels have nested at Pyramid State Recreation Area in one season. Photo by Eric Walters.

energy. Coal is found underground, and to get it, we dig. That reality sets in at the 6,100-acre Captain Unit of Pyramid SRA, where most of what you see, from horizon to horizon, was recently turned upside down. The height of every hill, the slope of every wetland, the course of every stream was created by diesel-powered machines operated by people. To our collective credit, much of this reclaimed land appears plausibly natural and can provide very good wildlife habitat.

While some mining infrastructure is still being removed, Captain is delightfully open. On the broad slopes, hundreds of Henslow's Sparrows hiccup their buzzy songs all summer. Keep an eye open while driving the interior loop road, as Common Nighthawks nest on the gravel roads and other barren areas where grasses are still being established. A stop near any clump of shrubs (including plantings of sawtooth oak and encroachment of autumn olive) is likely to yield a handful of birds including Bell's Vireo, Willow Flycatcher, Brown Thrasher, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Yellow Warbler. In winter, the sky can be filled with raptors: harriers, Short-

Meadowlark