



Dickcissels nest in Boone County grasslands. Mary Kay Rubey took this photo of a Dickcissel at another place where they nest in Illinois, Nachusa Grasslands.

Resources, have received grants to purchase land from willing sellers to create a new wetland conservation area.

To get to Garden Prairie Slough, take US 20 west from Marengo to Garden Prairie Road, just west of the McHenry/Boone County line. (If coming from the west, take US 20 east from Belvidere to Garden Prairie Road). Turn south on Garden Prairie Road and proceed about 1.5 miles to the bridge over Coon Creek. Be sure to check the grain elevator about one-half mile down the road for Eurasian Collared-Doves. Immediately after crossing the bridge over Coon Creek, a cattail marsh will appear on your right (west), with some areas of open water. Yellow-headed Blackbirds have nested here, but have been absent for the past four to five years, presumably as the result of lower water levels during dry years.

Check both sides of the road and, when you get to Slough Road, about one-half mile south of the bridge, turn left and check for flooded fields and birds along the north side of the road after you go east of the hunt club barn.

The best time to visit is March and April, when the flooded fields are attractive to migrating water-

fowl. Sometimes the water covers hundreds of acres. At this time, look for Tundra and Trumpeter Swans, 5 species of geese, puddle ducks, and a few species of diving ducks. The divers, which prefer deeper water, normally aren't found here. In May, listen around the cattail marsh for American and Least Bitterns, Sora, and Virginia, and, occasionally, King Rails. If the surrounding plowed fields are still holding shallow water, this can be a particularly good place for shorebirds. The 2004 IOS annual meeting in Rockford had a field trip to the slough which produced a wide variety of late-migrating shorebirds, including White-rumped Sandpipers and a variety of other peeps. Hudsonian Godwits put in an appearance in 2007, and Black-necked Stilts have been recorded there twice. Keep an eye out for unusual waders. Osprey and Peregrine Falcons have been seen here quite often in migration.

The farm fields at the southern end of the marsh are often good places to find shorebirds. Recent planting and management changes in the property no longer result in seasonal plowing, so the former mud flats are not as extensive as they once were, resulting in reduced visibility for shorebird watching. Still, Wilson's Snipe are plentiful in March and April. This is also the area where a Garganey was found in a large flock of Blue-winged Teal in May 1999. Sandhill Cranes nest here.

In winter, the area should be checked for Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, and Northern Shrike.

Several local hunting clubs now own extensive tracts of the floodplain and their property is private. No entry by birders is permitted, so

birding must be done from the road right-of-way. Don't be surprised to see Ring-necked Pheasants wandering along the roadsides, but they are probably releases from the hunt clubs.

Distillery and LIB Conservation Areas

Distillery and LIB Conservation areas straddle the Kishwaukee River west of the city of Belvidere. Each must be accessed separately. To reach the parking lot at Distillery, take US 20 west from Belvidere about 2.5 miles to Distillery Road. Turn left on Distillery and go 1.5 miles to the end and parking lot. To reach LIB, go west from Belvidere about 2.5 miles on Newburg Road to the well-marked entrance on the north side of the road. The parking lot is immediately adjacent to the road. Trail maps are at the parking lot display boards, or can be obtained from the Boone County Conservation District headquarters.

Distillery is primarily a large area of open grassland abutting riparian woods along the river, with several tracts of upland hardwood on the ridges and higher areas. Boone County Conservation District has undertaken a project to plant extensive native prairie plants. From the parking lot, at the eastern end of the trail loop, there is a low ridge of hardwood trees. Running parallel to the ridge on the west is an area of cool season grasses. This area held Henslow's Sparrows for several years, although they move elsewhere after the area is burned. The new grasslands are attracting Bobolinks and Dickcissels, as well as Sedge Wrens, Field and Savannah Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Eastern Towhees (in the shrubby areas), and occasionally Northern Shrike in winter. Infrequently, Northern Mockingbirds occur. Look for Osprey over the river in migration, and Bald Eagles in winter and early spring. The grassland trail is a good place to look for a variety of migrant and wintering sparrow species.