

# Birding Rockford in early June: a primer for the IOS annual meeting

by Daniel T. Williams

**Editor's Note:** *The annual IOS meeting for 2005 will take place in Rockford, Illinois June 3-5, the perfect time to bird Boone, Winnebago and Ogle Counties, all of which have preserved many fine parcels of high-quality habitat containing many uncommon Illinois bird species. Field trip leaders will visit some of the best spots in these counties during the meeting. Here's a primer on birding this terrific northern Illinois hotspot. To register for the meeting, visit our Web site at [www.illinoisbirds.org](http://www.illinoisbirds.org), look for a future mailing or email [Rmontey@aol.com](mailto:Rmontey@aol.com).*

Winnebago County, of which Rockford is the county seat, is dominated by its four rivers. The four feature different habitats, and, therefore, a nice variety of breeding birds. (See Figure 1)

The Rock River, largest of the four, has its headwaters at Horicon Marsh in Wisconsin and empties into the Mississippi River at the Quad Cities. It passes through Winnebago County, beginning at South Beloit, Wisconsin, and serves as the conduit into which the other three rivers drain.

The Sugar River begins in southwestern Wisconsin, entering Winnebago County in the northwest, and joins with the Pecatonica River (which also comes from southwest Wisconsin, but enters the county more directly from the west at the town of Pecatonica) at the town of Shirland. From there, the Pecatonica flows east-northeast, joining the Rock River at the town of Rockton. The junction of these two rivers contains some recently preserved properties that become more excellent for birding each year.

The Kishwaukee enters from the northeast, passing through the city of Belvidere and then southeastern Winnebago County, before joining the Rock River just south of the city of Rockford.

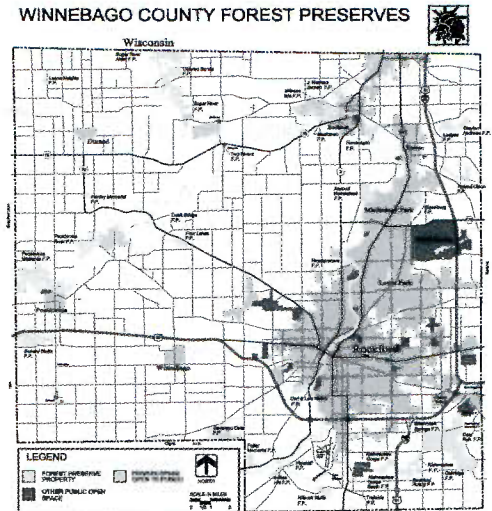
## Winnebago County

Rock Cut State Park, with its expansive 3,100 acres, contains two

man-made lakes, lots of upland hardwood forest, and many grassland and shrub areas. Target birds at this Illinois Department of Natural Resources property include breeding Henslow's Sparrows, which nest in the cool season grasses (that formerly were cut for hay), Sedge Wrens (in the same fields), Wood Thrush, Veery, both cuckoos, Dickcissel, Orchard Oriole, and Blue-winged, Cerulean, Kentucky, Hooded (rare) and Chestnut-sided Warblers. Also breeding here are Yellow-breasted Chat, Bell's Vireo (difficult to find some years), and Willow, Least (occasional), and Acadian Fly-catchers. Broad-winged and Cooper's Hawks nest in the park, and occasionally, Black-throated Green Warblers are singing in June. A Black-and-white Warbler was here on a recent July 1st, but no nest was found. For more information, call (815)885-3311 or visit [www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R1/ROCKCUT.HTM](http://www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/Landmgt/PARKS/R1/ROCKCUT.HTM).

Just north of Rock Cut is the Kieselburg Forest Preserve, part of the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District, which now has more than 12,000 acres in its ownership and continues to pursue a plan of acquiring all of the high-quality habitat along these river corridors, as well as preserving wetland and other diminishing habitats in the county. Call (815)877-6100 for more

## WINNEBAGO COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES



information or visit [www.wcfpd.org/index.htm](http://www.wcfpd.org/index.htm)

Kieselburg holds one of the few sedge fens in the state. Sedge Wrens and Orchard Orioles nest here, and Bell's Vireos and Yellow-breasted Chats are frequently seen and heard in summer.

The Natural Land Institute, a private not-for-profit agency created by George Fell, one of the founders of The Nature Conservancy, has recently acquired over 700 acres of river bottom and wetland at the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers, near Rockton, and is restoring the grassland and wetland habitat, including re-routing Raccoon Creek to its original course based on aerial photographs that predated its straightening. This area, the Carl and Myrna Nygren Wetland Preserve, provides habitat for many species of birds, including Sandhill Crane, Dickcissel, and Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows.

The Sugar River Valley is biologically interesting, and the preserves along the upper section of this river are extensive. The Winne-