

mon Loon (rare), Pied-billed Grebe, Great Blue and Green-backed Herons, Great Egret (rare), Canada Goose, Wood Duck, Mallard (as well as a small array of other puddle and diving ducks), Red-tailed Hawk, Sora, coot, Belted Kingfisher, all the swallows, Cedar Waxwing (common) and if you're lucky, a Bald Eagle or Osprey.

## Middlefork State Fish and Wildlife Area

To get away from the crowds and see more birds, head north to the Middlefork State Fish and Wildlife Area. Retrace your way back west out of Kickapoo State Park. At the intersection of 850E and 1870N, turn north along 850E. This becomes 900E as you continue 4 miles to the first entrance of the Middlefork State Fish and Wildlife Area. When you get to the small brown sign on the west side of the road identifying the site, turn east on 2250N.

The Middlefork State Fish and Wildlife Area is known for hawks and owls, breeding warblers, and sparrows. On the first annual Middlefork River Valley Christmas Bird Count, 15 species of raptors were tallied, including an incredible five Northern Goshawks, Peregrine Falcon, Long and Short-eared Owls, and a Northern Saw-whet Owl. The many scattered pine plantations and cedars are good places to find the owls, as well as the many grassy fields at dusk and dawn, especially during the winter.

The relative solitude, especially on a cold winter morning, makes this a special place to bird. The 2,700-acre area contains several fine natural sections, as well as brush fields interspersed with a regular ro-

tation of corn and sunflower planted for wildlife. You will find 35 miles of trails for hiking and horseback riding, a non-electric campground, and two canoe access sites on the Middlefork River. An enjoyable way to bird the area would be to take a two-day canoe trip down the Middlefork River from the Higginsville Bridge access site to the Kickapoo State Park access site. Canoes can be rented and

these nocturnal birds is to sit and imitate their calls. Many of my more memorable encounters have been with Barred Owls. They will come as close as it takes to satisfy their curiosity. While sitting behind a large oak tree on the edge of a tall bluff above the Middlefork River one afternoon, I began the, "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?" Barred Owl call. The owl responded by coming to just 5 feet from the ground and 10 to 15 feet from me. This was not my closest encounter with a Barred Owl, however.

One morning before dawn, while on a spring bird count, I stood in the middle of a gravel road at Kinney's Ford near the Middlefork River. I began giving Barred Owl calls while alternately turning from one side of the road to the other. When I turned in another direction, I found a pair of Barred Owl's talons no more than 2 feet from my face. I immediately fell to the ground, causing the owl to veer off at the last second.

Where 2250N makes a 90-degree turn north (at 1.6 miles) there is an oak-hickory woods, good for breeding Wood Thrush, Kentucky Warbler, and Summer Tanager. At 1.8 miles you will see the equestrian campground to the west. There, you can park near the brown pavilion and walk back to the intersection where you will see two large boulders blocking car access to an old road. You can walk this road for a few miles along the Middlefork River. Northern Parula, Yellow-throated, and Cerulean Warblers can be found along the river as well as several species of sparrows in the nearby fields. This is also a good area to observe hawks migrating along the river or hunting the fields in other seasons. Back at the intersection,



*Barred Owl drawing by Brian Willis.*

shuttled to the access sites from the Kickapoo State Park.

The area behind the cemetery, .1 mile east on 2250N, is usually a dependable place to spot a Northern Mockingbird or Eastern Bluebird. Continuing east, you will come to parking area No. 1 (open 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.; closing is 6 p.m. Nov. 15 to May 15). Beginning in late April, you can hear Whip-poor-wills as well as three breeding owls, especially Barred. A Chuck-will's-widow was once heard for several days near the parking entrance gate.

One of the best ways to see