

Bird Finding Guide

Nelson Lake Marsh:

Birds, turtles, frogs, and butterflies
abound at this 200-acre wetland

by Roger Reason and Nancy Bent

One July, we were watching a snapping turtle with a baseball-sized head when out of one of the wet areas at Nelson Lake Marsh walked two Sandhill Cranes. Then, behind them, followed one fuzzy 1-foot-tall chick. They fed as they walked toward the peat ponds and then slipped out of sight. This could be the second confirmed nesting of Sandhill Cranes, a state-endangered species, at Nelson Lake Marsh, a 200-acre wetland located in east central Kane County near the town of Batavia.

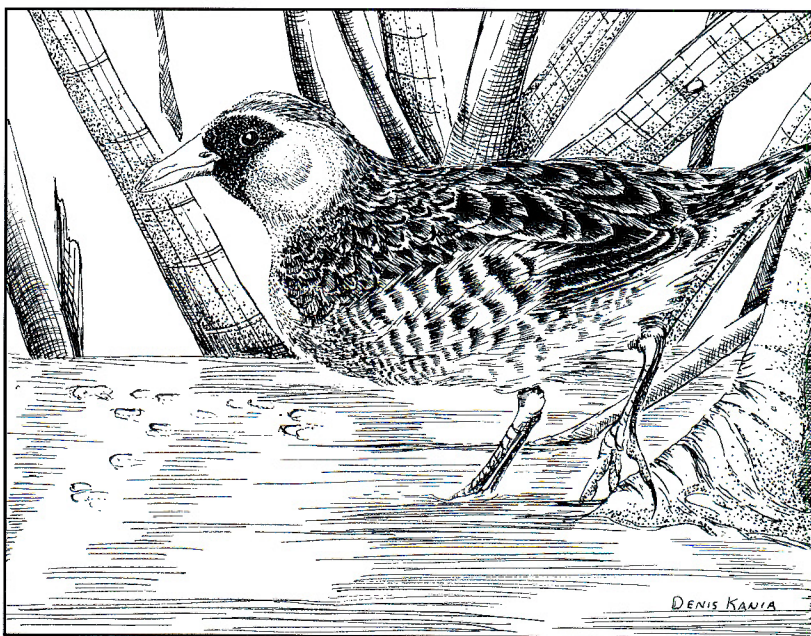
This site is part of the Kane County Forest Preserve system and was designated as an Illinois State Nature Preserve in 1981. Natural areas include marshes, fens, and open water communities, with woodland and savanna bordering the wetlands on the west. Nelson Lake is a 40-acre glacial remnant. The preserve's north end also contains numerous ponds, the result of peat mining operations in the early 1900s.

Because of its habitat diversity, Nelson Lake Marsh is an excellent all-around birding spot, and a walk along its trails can yield a varied list ranging from the common to the unexpected. We have observed 120 avian species from March through September, including 11 that are state-endangered or state-threatened.

The Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas lists an additional 16 species for this site. Among these are King and Virginia Rails, the state-threatened Common Moorhen, and the state-endangered Yellow-headed Blackbird and Black Tern. The Directory of Illinois Nature Preserves also lists the American Bittern and Wilson's Phalarope, both endangered in Illinois as being present at Nelson Lake Marsh. The 17 state-threatened or

state-endangered species visiting Nelson Lake represent 40 percent of those listed for Illinois.

Some birds are widespread throughout the site. Common Yellowthroats, Yellow Warblers, and Swamp Sparrows can easily be seen and heard anywhere in the wetland areas during spring and summer. Likewise, raptors, while not common, are a possibility anywhere. Such species as Ospreys (state-en-



Nelson Lake Marsh: Sora drawing by Denis Kania.