

eared Owls, kestrels and Red-tailed and Rough-legged hawks.

“Super Lake,” a waterfowl refuge area, is the biggest birding draw on Captain. Aerial surveys in winter often show upwards of 20,000 waterfowl, with 24 species of swans, geese, dabbling ducks and diving ducks recorded. As Snow Geese begin their northward migration in late winter, concentrations of over 50,000 birds are typical, if short-lived. Overlooks and access points for Super Lake can be found both along Panda Bear Road on the east, and the interior gravel road to the north of the lake. Osprey are seen fishing over Super Lake each spring and fall. Trico Road on the west, and leading to the village of Cutler, is likely to produce a loggerhead shrike on the fences enclosing pastures.

### The Denmark Unit

Located just south of the Captain Unit, this 4,400-acre area is named for an old village, only marked now by a church along the Pyatt-Cutler

Road. Like Captain, Denmark sports large chunks of grasslands, teeming with Henslow’s Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks and Dickcissels. Upland Sandpipers, though scarce, are regularly found here in the summer. Look for areas where cattle have grazed the grass to boot height, no shorter and not much taller. Double check your site map and posted signs before wandering off-road, as some private land in-holdings are embedded within the park. Shallow wetlands scattered throughout the area (some visible from the road), are always worth a scan for waterfowl and shorebirds. A Burrowing Owl was discovered by students from Southern Illinois University in the fall of 2005 in a grazing allotment on the Denmark Unit. Though word spread slowly, the bird remained in the area at least into March 2006.

At the far southern tip of the Denmark Unit is a good entry for Illinois’ “largest phragmites marsh.” This is a good place to hear Least Bitterns and Common Moorhens,

though spotting them in the minimal amount of open water or through the wall of vegetation is difficult. Access is easiest from a county road on the Perry-Jackson county line, off of Illinois Highway 4, south of Willisville. If a birder were to paddle the borders of the many lakes throughout Pyramid, most ringed by cattails and phragmites, in a kayak, canoe or small boat, the effort would likely yield close-up encounters with Marsh Wrens, Least Bitterns, and perhaps a Common Moorhen or an American Bittern. Areas infested with autumn olive are more extensive on Denmark than Captain, but they do hold Blue Grosbeaks, Eastern Towhees, Orchard Orioles, and many other birds. Cruising the interior gravel road, along the west boundary of the Denmark, check utility lines and the tops of scrawny trees for Northern Mockingbirds and Loggerhead Shrikes. If you’re visiting in the late fall, pick a stand of restored prairie—most any will do—and walk to start kicking up grassland sparrows. Getting your binoculars on flying targets is great quick-draw practice for identifying sparrows: Song, Swamp, LeConte’s, Savannah, Field, White-crowned, and more.

### Galum Unit

Pronounced locally as “g-LUM” or simply Glum, this is another 2,900 acres of grassland, lakes and wetlands. Northern Harriers have nested in the grasslands here (alongside even more Henslow’s Sparrows and other grassland songbirds). Pied-billed Grebes, Blue-winged Teal and Mallards nest in and near the shallow water wetlands surrounded by grassland. Bald Eagles regularly nest in the forested strip along Galum Creek, as well.

East Conant Unit. Extending north and east of the original park, the 2,800 acres of the East Conant Unit includes most of the land at Pyramid that was not mined. In these areas, many small fields remain, with grassy borders, shrubby fencelines and small woodlots. The Northern Bobwhite, an abundant bird throughout the park, is well-suited to this type of habitat. In addition to the original portion of



*Upland Sandpiper, a state-endangered species has also been found at Pyramid State Recreation Area. Photo by Mary Kay Rubey*