



Rare Summer Birds of the Lowden-Miller State Forest: Is this really Illinois?

by Scott K. Robinson, Ph.D

When I agreed to undertake a breeding bird census the summer of 1994 at the Lowden-Miller State Forest near Oregon, Ogle County, Illinois, I was mainly interested in its relatively large (2,225-acre) size. Because most smaller tracts in northern Illinois had low nesting success, I reasoned that Lowden-Miller had the best potential of any site in the region for escaping the devastating

effects of habitat fragmentation. About a half hour into my first census, however, I realized that it is the composition of this bird community that sets it apart, not just its potential for managing forest interior birds. In my first four point counts (each count lasts 6 minutes at points spaced 150 meters apart), I recorded a bizarre mix of northern (Chestnut-sided, Mourning, and Canada Warblers) and southern (Summer Tanager, Yellow-throated Warblers, and Kentucky Warblers) species, none of which I had expected.

The reasons for this odd mix of species quickly became apparent. Before it was sold to the state, the site was the Sinnissippi tree farm, in which extensive white and red pine plantations were interspersed with clearcuts, selectively logged oak/hickory ridges, and young floodplain forest along the Rock River. Some areas even contained Norway spruce plantations and shrubby fens. This mostly unnatural diversity of habitats has created what I consider to be Illinois' most unusual and surprising breeding bird community.

*Above:
Black-throated Green Warbler
drawing by David Athans.*