

## Area 4

The northwest corner of the preserve can be loosely described as savanna. This area can be reached by following the trail from Area 3 straight up into the woods until it branches and taking the north (right) branch. The trail circles around and eventually joins itself again near the starting point. Magnificent bur oak trees tower above undergrowth characteristic of old pastureland. Their field forms indicate that the uplands were probably true savanna in pre-settlement times. This area is the best place to see Indigo Buntings and House Wrens. Ring-necked Pheasants are often heard crowing here, and can sometimes be seen in the open grassy areas. There is also a bluebird trail running parallel to the fence line at the western edge of the preserve and extending from this area into Area 5. Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows have been seen inspecting them.

## Area 5

Taking the south (left) branch at the previously mentioned junction leads through a strip of woodland bordering the marsh. This area also has huge old bur oak trees, with a thick invading understory of mostly black cherry trees. The area is undergoing restoration work by The Nature Conservancy volunteers and the Kane County Forest Preserve District, and most of the undergrowth is being removed. Brush clearing has revealed a number of young bur oaks, the next generation of these savanna specialists. Early spring migrants using the woods include White-throated and Fox Sparrows, Golden- and Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Brown Creepers (state-threatened), Veerys (state-threatened), and Swainson's, Gray-checked, and Hermit Thrushes. East-

ern Phoebes and Great-crested Flycatchers frequent the area in the summer, and Cooper's Hawks (state-endangered) and Great Horned Owls are occasionally observed. On a good day during fall migration large numbers of warblers can be seen, particularly in the brushy growth along the fence line bordering the adjacent cornfields. American Redstarts, Canada, Magnolia, Black-and-White, and Wilson's Warblers have been spotted working the fence line and adjacent trees for those last few calories before moving farther south.

As the trail heads south it reaches a point where it keeps going straight or angles left through the woods. Going straight leads to a dead end, but taking the left branch leads to an overlook offering a sweeping view of the marsh and of Nelson Lake. The vista has few signs of human habitation and gives an idea of what this part of the state must have looked like before the settlers arrived. This spot can provide some interesting birding, but a spotting scope is recommended.

Waterfowl, including Snow Geese, Common and Red-breasted Mergansers, Green-winged and Blue-winged Teals, Northern Pintails, Wood Ducks, Shovelers, Gadwalls, Lesser Scaups, Ruddy Ducks, and Ring-necked Ducks use the lake during spring migration, along with occasional Pied-billed Grebes (state-endangered), Forster's Terns (state-endangered), Double-crested Cormorants (state-threatened), American Coots, and Bonaparte's Gulls. In the summer of 1991 a Ruddy Shelduck spent some time on the lake (probably the same bird that was seen later that year at Baker's Lake near Barrington about 30 miles away).

From May through July Sandhill Cranes are often heard calling and sometimes observed flying just above the marsh vegetation before dropping back down out of sight. You can also hear Marsh Wrens from the

area in front of the overlook, but seeing them is more difficult.

In the fall, migrating Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feed on the jewelweeds immediately below the overlook, and hundreds of Purple Martins hawk insects over the lake. One year we observed an albino Purple Martin feeding with a flock of its normally colored cohorts.

After leaving the overlook, the trail heads north (right) along the east edge of the woods, affording further views of the marsh. In the spring this part of the path is bordered by wonderful blooms of wildflowers, the display changing as the season progresses. This trail leads back to the starting point, and turning east (right) there takes the intrepid birder through Area 3 again and back to the parking lot.

Nelson Lake is also known for its wealth of lepidopteran species. Almost any visit during the main flight season (May - August) will yield monarchs, viceroys, alfalfas, pearl crescents, and least skipperlings, along with the occasional comma, question mark, and tiger and black swallowtail. Accidental and habitat-restricted species we have recorded include giant swallowtails and meadow fritillaries in Area 1, and Baltimores, banded hairstreaks, eyed browns and black dash, fiery, Dion, and broad-winged skippers in Area 3. Bring along a butterfly field guide and your enjoyment of this natural area will be doubled.

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