

Rend Lake *Shorebirds, Southern Style*

by Todd Fink and Judy De Neal

"I have a good feeling today," I announce to Judy De Neal as we drive down Interstate Highway 57 at 10 a.m. on a steamy, sunny, windless September day. We're going to the best place to find shorebirds in southern Illinois - Rend Lake.

"Is it a Curlew Sandpiper kind of a feeling or is it just a Willet kind of a day?" asks Judy, teasing, knowing the Curlew Sandpiper has been seen only once at Rend Lake.

I concede that maybe it will be a Piping Plover kind of a day. Whatever kind of shorebirding day it will be, I can't forget that I've seen 25 species of shorebirds on one day alone in late summer at Rend Lake. So the fact that we have to walk through itchy, prickly agricultural fields and wade across ankle-deep, slippery mud as we sweat from the scorching sun doesn't deter us.

We know the possibilities that exist beyond those obstacles.

Thirty-five species of shorebirds including Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Hudsonian Godwit, American Avocet, and Red-necked Phalarope have been sighted at Rend Lake, located off Interstate 57 south of Mt.

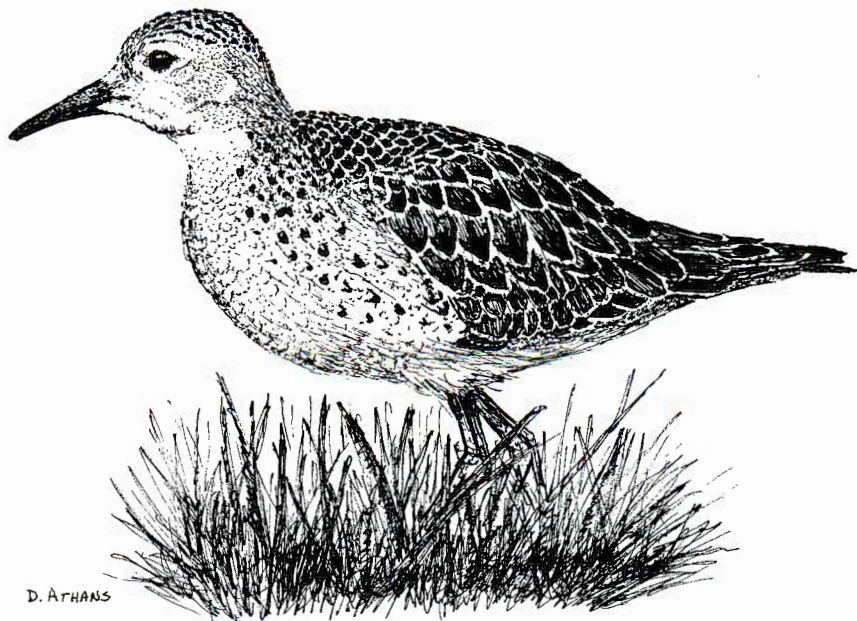
Vernon in Jefferson and Franklin counties. The only Illinois recorded shorebirds that haven't been seen at Rend Lake are Snowy and Wilson's Plovers, Black-necked Stilt, Eskimo and Long-billed Curlew, Sharp-tailed and Purple Sandpipers, and Ruff.

Needless to say, the area encompassing two counties provides birders a good chance to improve their shorebird identification skills. And you don't

have to get up at the break of dawn to see them. When the shorebirds are there, they're there all day.

What makes Rend Lake a mecca for shorebirds? Sheer size, for one thing. The 18,900-acre lake has 162 miles of shoreline and is surrounded by 21,000 acres of public land.

In addition, Rend Lake, created in 1965 by the damming of the Big Muddy River, is on some of the flattest land in



Buff-breasted Sandpipers are regular visitors to Rend Lake. Drawing by David Athans.