

trail. What attracted this species back to the county after an 80-year absence? It's an interesting question to ponder, along with, will it appear again in 2004?

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Editor's Note: A pair of Clay-colored Sparrows also nested in DuPage County the summer of 2003, and were discovered by Joe Suchecki.

Yellow-headed Blackbird breeds at Hennepin and Hopper Lakes

by John D. McKee

In the spring of 2001, The Wetlands Initiative, an Illinois not-for-profit organization, turned off the pump that drained a 2,600-acre plot of leveed agricultural fields along the Illinois River in Putnam County, and an amazing wetland was reborn. By the summer of 2002, birds had swarmed to the site, called Hennepin and Hopper Lakes, and breeding activities were confirmed for numerous species including Pied-billed Grebe, American Coot, Ruddy Duck, Blue-winged Teal, and Northern Pintail.

On 26 April 2003, during a TWI membership meeting at the lakes, Doug Stotz, biologist with The Field Museum, was presenting a program when a male Yellow-headed Blackbird (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*) landed in a nearby tree and began calling. Doug lost his audience, but was placated by the fact that he could add a new species to the site list. For the rest of the spring, several calling males and occasional females were observed in a large stand of cattails about

Vic Berardi took this photo of a Yellow-headed Blackbird in north eastern Illinois within the past several years.



one-fourth mile north of the lake's observation tower and 100 yards off the eastern shore.

As volunteer monitors of the wetland, Cindy McKee and I conducted a bird census there on 12 July 2003. While working the shoreline of the small savannah in the center of the site, we observed a female Yellow-headed Blackbird fly into a shrub in an extensive stand of smartweed. On close inspection, we found the shrub contained five young Yellow-heads. While they were able to fly, they were still grouped together and begging for food indicating they were recently

fledged and confirming breeding at Hennepin and Hopper Lakes.

This spectacular wetland/prairie restoration and its surrounding woodlands have, in just 2 years, produced a site list of more than 200 species with more than 70 of them considered likely to breed or already confirmed as doing so. As this wetlands complex continues to develop, increasing varieties of uncommon Illinois nesters are sure to find a home there. For further information on The Wetlands Initiative and its activities you may visit its website at www.wetlands-initiative.org.

The Yellow-headed Blackbird is endangered as a breeder in the state and confined mostly to northeastern Illinois. The species breeds in high-quality marshes and has enjoyed a high rate of reproductive success in Illinois. Still its population is declining in the state and scientists are conducting studies to find out why (Ward 1998).

Literature Cited

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