

Illinois Ornithological Society



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Letter from the editor

The July morning began with a brilliant sunrise over the fields owned by the Northbrook Gun Club off Campbell Airport Road in Round Lake. Ralph Herbst and I were walking a fallow field across from the club house searching for nesting species for the Illinois Breeding Bird Atlas. We spotted a fledgling Common Yellowthroat just as the wind began to blow strongly and a herd of thunderheads rapidly approached. As I ran through six-inch tall grasses toward the van a quarter mile away, a sparrow-sized bird suddenly flew from underneath my feet. I stopped, bent down and instinctively pulled back a tuft of last year's grass. There nestled in a tightly woven cup of dried vegetation was a single, soft blue Dickcissel egg.

The experience demonstrates an important characteristic of grassland species; their ability to go undetected just inches in

front of you. It makes searching for grassland species challenging and searching for proof of their nesting success even more challenging.

Grassland species are rapidly vanishing in our prairie state. In this issue, James Herkert of the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board explores the history of grassland birds in Illinois offering insights into how and why the populations are changing. Also, Ann Haverstock explains how to find nesting grassland species such as the endangered Upland Sandpiper at the Nachusa Grasslands, an area managed and protected by the Nature Conservancy of Illinois.

I hope these articles inspire you to visit Nachusa this summer and also to get involved in conservation projects that will help protect the habitat these species need to survive.

Sheryl DeVore

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