

the day, came true. It was there just as it had been last year.

Next, we headed to Lyons Woods, a former conifer nursery owned by the forest preserve. White firs, spruces and pines, 15 to 20 feet tall, attract some rare birds here including nesting Golden-crowned Kinglet and Red-breasted Nuthatch. Probably our only chance for getting these species in late May in Lake County is at Lyons Woods. When we arrived, we witnessed an amazing sight. Warblers, loads of them—bay-breasted, Nashvilles, redstarts, magnolias—many species fed on the ground beneath the conifers. We could almost kick them out of our way as we walked off the path, urged on by this magical forest. It was difficult to break away—but on a Big Day, you don't relish the moments, you chalk up the birds, and get on with it. Besides, Dave reminded me we could get warblers anywhere during migration—we were there to find the kinglet and nuthatch. OK. OK. So Renee and I found him the kinglet. We heard the sibilant "see, see, see, see" sound and followed it to the male declaring its territory just as Dave was coming around the other side. No nuthatch, though.

On to Illinois Beach State Park—where we were nearly arrested. I will say no more about that because Dave and Renee won't let me. But suffice it to say, that sweet-talking Renee saved the day.

Here was the most grueling part of our adventure. We were there for Western Meadowlark, Upland Sandpiper, and Brewer's Blackbird, possibly Grasshopper Sparrow. We had those species there last year, and this is the most reliable spot in Lake County to get them this time of year. We hiked thigh-high in marshy, wet sedges, and cattails to get to where the blackbirds were.

I don't need to tell you that had we not seen that gorgeous blackbird

with a yellow eye (and had I been forced to fork over \$75 to the guy who almost arrested us), I would have been utterly miserable in my wet clothes the rest of the day.

But finally after hundreds of insect larvae swished in our boots (maybe even a couple of crayfish), we saw the blackbird and its mate. Then we dashed, well, swished, back to the car to get a clothes change and more Gatorade. We just kept drinking that Gatorade Dave brought. Renee insisted that's what kept our energy levels high. I think the birds had something to do with it, too.

### Swallowing pride

Each of us had to swallow pride at least once that day. It's a requirement for a Big Day. For instance, Dave and I were reminded of a lesson birders sometimes forget. Don't assume anything. We walked by what Dave and I tossed off as just another Song Sparrow, but Renee insisted we check it out, and it turned out to be a Lincoln's, the only one we had that day.

I shouted Common Loon at a bird that turned out to be a cormorant and Dave saw some rare duck that turned out to be some other rare duck. Not to mention the Willet he insisted was a Whimbrel (Actually, I made many more mistakes than he did, but who's writing this article anyway?)

Next it was on to the Des Plaines River Wetlands Project on Wadsworth Road and Route 41 to get our Yellow-headed Blackbird and Pied-billed Grebe. We didn't get the Common Moorhen, though. And we should have.

Renee next led the way to Red-wing Slough and Deer Lake, where she and Joel Greenberg do the Spring Bird Count. Here we had Forster's Terns, Black Terns, and an American Bittern responding to our tape right where Renee said it would be. Even

a Green-winged Teal.

Off to Chain O' Lakes State Park. Renee and I had staked the park out the previous day and had an Acadian Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, and Cerulean Warbler. Today, we heard none of them, but I suggested we play the warbler tape and by golly, the little guy, sang right back at us. We also enjoyed a Hairy Woodpecker feeding young.

### Shorebird and woodpecker trek

Then it was that time of the day—my mid-afternoon slump and the Dave Johnson Shorebird Trek. Renee got behind the wheel while Dave shouted out directions, where to go, where to stop, what we would find where.

We drove. We saw. We counted.

Hudsonian Godwit in this little spot. White-rumped Sandpiper over there. Semipalmated Plovers and Semipalmated Sandpipers in that little spit. Greater Yellowlegs over there.

Didn't you see it, Sheryl?

No.

Sheryl, look in that scope again.

Oh, yeah. Now I see it. Phew.

Hey, we've got to get to Ryerson Woods by 6 (the plan was 5:30—but since it was already 5:30, we obviously weren't going to make it.) The Pileated Woodpecker will be there. It has been hanging around the preserve entrance in the flatwoods drumming on an oak about 5 or 6 p.m.—and I had just seen it a week earlier for the Spring Bird Count at Half Day preserve.

Now all you central and southern Illinois birders, please don't snicker. Pileated Woodpecker is a very rare bird to see in Lake County. Getting it on a big day is not an easy feat. And, we got it! Pulled right into the entrance and got it drumming.