

Changes in 2009 to the list of threatened and endangered birds of Illinois

by Jeffery Walk

The most recent changes to the list of threatened or endangered birds in Illinois generated far more response from the ornithological community than any previous list change. The level of interest in these changes is encouraging for conservation, and is also an opportunity to clarify how changes to the list are proposed, discussed, and decided upon. When considering the consequences of these changes, there are two important facts to remember. First, species that recover and are removed from the Illinois list of threatened and endangered species are still protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and killing them or intentionally destroying their nests is a violation of state and federal law. Second, the protections afforded to threatened species under the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Act are identical to the protections for endangered species.

The Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board is required by law to review and revise the state list at least once every five years. In reviewing the list, the Board relies on six Endangered Species Technical Advisory Committees (ESTACs) — one each for plants, birds, mammals, fish, reptiles, and amphibians and invertebrates. These committees review data and make recommendations for potential list changes. Each ESTAC is comprised of experts statewide, who serve voluntarily and are not compensated for their time or expenses

ESTAC's review information for each species including its range in the state (including changes in its occupied range), abundance in Illinois (total numbers), number of known populations or locations where the species occurs, number of these locations known to be protected, popula-



Immature Peregrine Falcon photo taken by Frank Holmes on 27 July 2009 at Horseshoe Lake, Madison County.

tion trends (changes in total numbers or numbers of populations over time), and threats to the species and/or its habitat. Recommendations to list or delist a species take into account the individual requirements of each species. In some circumstances, species which are low in number, but have always been rare or uncommon in the state, are not considered endangered or threatened if their numbers are stable or they are under no specific threat.

The Bird ESTAC considers data from a variety of sources for making any recommended changes to the list of threatened or endangered species. As a legal protection tool, the most important data are from the Illinois

Natural Heritage Database. This database includes records of endangered and threatened species (including data from the Northeastern Illinois Wetland Bird Survey) and is housed at and maintained by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Whenever the Illinois Department of Natural Resources is consulted for a project that may affect a threatened or endangered species — such as a road construction project or a wind energy development — this is the database used to judge if an endangered or threatened species is in a particular area.

Information gleaned from the North American Breeding Bird Survey (accessible online at www.mbr-pwrc.usgs.gov/bbs/), the Bird Conservation Network (accessible online at www.bcnbirds.org/), Breeding Season Records published in *Meadowlark: A Journal of Illinois Birds*, the Spring Bird Count (published in the *Audubon Bulletin* and *Meadowlark*), and the research and field notes of scientists and conservationists are all considered as well. Recovery plans have been completed for some species, and the Bird ESTAC is striving to complete “recovery outlines” for all listed birds. These documents provide quantitative metrics of distribution, abundance and survival or recruitment to help inform our decision-making process on whether a particular species should be added to the list, removed from the list, or have its status changed on the list.

In addition to recommending any changes to the list of threatened and endangered species, the ESTACs identify information gaps so that the Illinois Endangered Species Protection Board can solicit surveys to determine a species' status or research into the causes of a popula-