

savanna to forest. Along the edge of the river are impressive dunes higher than the rest of the terrace to the east. This dune system is about 5 miles long and held in place by black oaks, some of which are at least 250 years old. A second, smaller series of dunes occurs about 1 mile to the east and parallel to the river edge dunes. Another mile brings one to the base of the bluffs. Water seeping from the bluffs presumably supported a narrow band of more mesic sand prairie but these areas have long since been under the plow. The bottomlands contain backwater sloughs, wetlands and floodplain forests with low tree diversity typical of the Upper Mississippi. The lock and dam system keeps the water artificially high for barge traffic and only a few trees species can survive the high water table. Small pockets of more diverse forest stands are usually found only in areas at least 10 feet higher than the rest of the floodplain.

### Birds of Lost Mound

Decades of cattle grazing and fire suppression by the U.S. Army shaped the upland bird communities at Lost Mound. The abundance of Grasshopper Sparrow and Western Meadowlark is due largely to the abundance of little bluestem and the short sparse structure of sand prairie vegetation. The fourth most abundant species, Field Sparrow, gives you a hint of the amount of woody encroachment. Lark and Vesper Sparrows frequent areas with open sand. Killdeer, Horned Lark, and Common Nighthawk nest in gravel roadsides and other sparsely vegetated areas. The nighthawk population here is easily one of, if not, the largest breeding population in natural or man-made habitats in the state. Other common grassland species include Eastern Meadowlark, Dickcissel, and Bobolink. Henslow's Sparrow and Upland Sandpiper are uncommon; Northern Harrier occurs year-round but nesting on-site has not been confirmed. Red-winged Blackbird does occur but is not the most common species by far as it is at most grassland sites in northern Illinois. Ring-necked Pheasant does not occur at Lost Mound but is found at sites nearby.

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Species common in grasslands but nesting in shrubs, trees or cavities include Eastern Bluebird, Tree Swallow, Orchard Oriole, Log-ger-head Shrike, Eastern Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, American Goldfinch, and Mourning Dove (which sometimes also nests on the ground). Blue Grosbeak occurs mainly on the east side along the main railroad line. Yellow-breasted Chat has been found in some denser patches of shrubs in the past three years and Bell's Vireo occurs some years but not others. The Loggerhead Shrike population on site very likely consists of the largest number of breeding pairs in all of northwestern



*Long-eared Owls roost in dense groves of cedar each winter. Up to 40 birds have been seen in one roost. Photo by Stan Boussan.*

Illinois, likely all of northern Illinois outside of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie. The Loggerheads are usually replaced in winter by one or more Northern Shrikes. Rarities include Scissor-tailed Flycatcher and Western Kingbird.

In the savannas and woodlands common species include Baltimore Oriole, Eastern Towhee, Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, Cedar Waxwing, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Great Crested Flycatcher, Yellow-throated Vireo, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher and Red-headed Woodpecker. Wild Turkey is abundant but Northern Bobwhite is uncommon (this species is common in parts of the refuge south of Thomson). In addition to Scarlet Tanager, Summer Tanager has appeared the past two years apparent-



*Bald Eagles can be seen year-round at Lost Mound. Eight pairs nested in 2004 and hundreds pass through in late winter and early spring on their way north to breed in the upper Great Lakes region.*

ly expanding its range from the south. The woods at the north end are enlivened by Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Kentucky Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, and Red-eyed Vireo. During the breeding season Lost Mound features both cuckoos, seven species of woodpeckers, and six diurnal raptors (possibly eight). Although the nearby Hanover Bluff and Mississippi Palisades offer better-quality forests during spring migration, we have found 32 species of warblers, all five spotted thrushes, Yellow-bellied and Acadian Flycatchers and many other migrants at Lost Mound.

The bottomlands have not been thoroughly explored because the only easy access is by boat. Bald Eagles have increased from three nests in 1998 to eight in 2004. In winter, eagles congregate around open areas in the otherwise ice-covered river and backwaters. Hundreds pass through during their northward movement in late winter. Typically 500-600 eagles can be seen in late February. One or two Golden Eagles are seen each year as well. A Great Blue Heron rookery