



This photo taken October 22, 1935 by an unknown author shows scrubby sand prairie looking southwest toward the Douglas Austrian pine plantation just south of the Dead River; roughly 50 to 65 years after the trees were planted.

Photo courtesy of the Illinois Natural History Survey archives.

In 1873, the Douglas family bought more than 600 acres (of what is now part of the south end of Illinois Beach State Park) and planted more than 200,000 trees in the next 15 years or so. Many spruce, fir, and pine trees as well as a variety of deciduous trees were planted with the surplus of each year's nursery supply. "The result today...are two long tracts of sturdy Scotch pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), with an occasional European larch (*Larix decidua*), or white pine (*Pinus strobus*)," wrote Ferry (1907). Although a few Scotch pines are still present today, the pines that attract many of the more interesting and rare bird species like Red-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta canadensis*), both crossbills, and a variety of pine-loving vagrants (see list at right), are the large Austrian pine (*Pinus nigra*) trees (also planted by the Douglas family) that are found growing atop the sand ridges south of the Dead River. These were the trees often utilized by Illinois' first recorded Red-cockaded Woodpecker (*Picoides borealis*) seen between August and December 2000, (Sweet 2001) and Brown-headed Nuthatch (*Sitta pusilla*) seen in July 2001 and was documented on the 2001 Christmas Bird Count (Semel 2001). The Austrian pine cones have also been fed upon by many Red Crossbills (*Loxia curvirostra*) and also the vagrant Clark's Nutcracker (*Nucifraga columbiana*), seen in November 2007 (pers. ob.), Illinois' second accepted record (Stotz 2008).

### Early collections, sightings including winter finches

Some of the other more interesting bird species that were found (and often



collected) by Ferry, Sanborn, and others in this area included Evening Grosbeak (*Coccothraustes vespertinus*) and Pine Grosbeak (*Pinicola enucleator*), both Red (*Loxia curvirostra*) and White-winged Crossbills (*Loxia leucoptera*), Common Redpoll (*Carduelis flammea*), Snow Bunting (*Plectrophenax nivalis*), Northern Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*), Bohemian Waxwing (*Bombycilla garrulous*), and even Boreal Chickadee (*Poecile hudsonica*). Three Boreal Chickadees were collected by two different individuals on different dates in November 1906 (Ferry 1907) as well.

Ferry (1907) gives many interesting anecdotes about the diverse variety of rare finches which visited the Beach area. He mentions a pair of Pine Grosbeaks (one collected) encountered in the Beach pines, and of the White-winged Crossbills that arrived, "being fond of juniper berries" and of Robert Douglas seeing them feeding on wild, sunflower seeds, presumably in the dunes prairies at Beach. So many White-winged Crossbills later descended on the Douglas Nursery seedling conifers the

This photo taken by Sheryl DeVore in February 2009 shows how immense the Austrian pines have grown since they were planted roughly 135 years ago.

following spring, "in such numbers that they were systematically shot." All of the above species were noted just during the fall and early winter of 1906, mainly among the dense pines at Beach. (Although much of Ferry's article concerns the area in and around Beach in northeastern Lake County, his article also involves birds noted as far south as Jackson Park in Chicago, Cook County.)

A Black-backed Woodpecker (*Picoides arcticus*) was collected at Beach on 7 October 1920 (Sanborn 1922a), and another 15 individuals of this species were noted by a number of observers in the Chicago area that fall and winter (Eifrig 1921, Bohlen 1989). One interesting observation, apparently at Beach, involved a half-eaten White-winged Crossbill found impaled on a dead pine branch, apparently by a Northern Shrike (Ferry 1907).