

Texas – with too few people to survey and record their movements,” DeCapita said.

General information about the Piping Plover critical habitat pro-

gram and a copy of the Federal Register filing are available on the USFWS web site at <http://midwest.fws.gov/endangered/piping-plover>.

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*Editor's Note:* In this article, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife representative states that there is no sure fire way to attract breeding pairs of Piping Plovers to a given area. However, unpublished data show that the Forster's Tern, a rare breeding species in Illinois, can be enticed to nest by playing conspecific attraction calls. An article on this “new” technique will be forthcoming in Meadowlark. This technique has also been shown to attract passerines in Illinois and elsewhere including the federally endangered Black-capped Vireo in Texas (in press Ward and Schlossberg). Piping Plovers would be a good candidate for this type of attraction.

Guest  
Essay

## Lake Chautauqua and Counting Shorebirds

by Steven D. Bailey

With the advent of Illinois' Important Bird Areas program (nominations are due at the end of September), this would be a good time to recognize the fact that the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network has designated Lake Chautauqua as a regionally significant site that provides critical habitat for shorebird species of international concern. Within the last few years, management of the lower pool of Lake Chautauqua has put more emphasis on maintaining habitat for shorebird than it has historically (pers. comm. Ross Adams). Unfortunately, problems with high Illinois River levels causing repeated breaching of levees, as well as outbreaks of avian botulism, have made it difficult to manage the south pool for optimum shorebird usage. Another problem this situation has created is that much surface area in the pool has now become inundated with five-to-ten-year-old willow growth. This situation has made it difficult for the few systematic censuses that are done by such folks as Sigurd and Richard Bjorklund to accurately estimate the true numbers of birds present, due to reduced visibility.

Notwithstanding all of these things, the Lake Chautauqua region continues to host anywhere from 100,000 to 250,000 shorebirds each fall. It is not uncommon to have greater than 10,000 shorebirds present on a given day, between mid-July and late September. Problems involved with estimating or otherwise properly counting these birds include the shorebirds being extremely far away from viewing access points as well as wetland vegetation obscuring large numbers of birds, which often only become apparent with the passage of raptors such as Northern Harriers, Bald Eagles and Peregrine Falcons.

Then, too, birders are looking for rarities here, and often forget to count the common species for which

Lake Chautauqua may become even more important as a stopover site. The commonest species that use the area include both yellowlegs, Pectoral and Least Sandpipers, and to a lesser extent, Semipalmated Sandpiper, dowitchers, and Solitary Sandpiper – species that may greatly rely on the Lake Chautauqua region as an important stopover area during migration (see the first article in this issue on shorebird estimates). Most of these species are often ignored by birders reporting totals for publication in Meadowlark and North American Birds, and so the true importance of this refuge has not yet been revealed. Those who most frequently bird the Lake Chautauqua region have generally agreed that there are peak days during shorebird migration there, where more than 100,000 birds or more may be present on a single day. Greater than 90 percent of these are often Pectoral Sandpipers and Lesser Yellowlegs, and to a lesser extent, Least Sandpipers.

Often, shorebirds on a national scale are only thought of as coastal organisms; however, refuges like Cheyenne Bottoms and Quivera in the Great Plains are well-known for attracting huge numbers of shorebirds. Lake Chautauqua easily has the potential, with proper management and interest, to attain the high status of the other Midwestern shorebird stopover sites.

Although everyone enjoys the rarities to be found in such crowds of shorebirds, it is more important to provide habitat for the species whose populations in Illinois are most critical during their migration to and from their breeding grounds.

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