



*Hooded Merganser drawing by Brian K. Willis.*

## POPLAR CREEK FOREST PRESERVE

by Judy Mellin

During the past seven years, 169 species of birds have visited the Poplar Creek Forest Preserve in Hoffman Estates, Cook County during migration and the nesting season. Of that, 84 are confirmed breeders, and 6 more are probable breeders. Much of this success is due to restoration of some of the 4,200 acres of land leased out for farming beginning in 1960 by the Cook County Forest Preserve. In 1989, the Forest Preserve entered into a joint arrangement with The Nature Conservancy to return the preserve to its original state. The Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards, a group of active volunteers, have been working to restore the land, concentrating efforts on 600 acres framed on the north by Shoe Factory Road, on the east by Rt. 59, on the south by Golf Rd. (Rt. 58) and on the west by the EJ&E railroad tracks. This area also includes the Shoe Factory Road Prairie, a 9-acre site set aside as a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve.

Our mission was not to restore a garden but to try to recreate an ecosystem. As part of our work, we began listing the creatures who use the land with hopes of managing for their long-term protection. Duane Heaton from Prairie Woods Audubon Society had been monitoring the area

as part of the statewide Breeding Bird Atlas project since 1986, so it was a logical leap to continue his work.

The area features three distinct habitats: woodlands including a 40-acre oak savanna, wet areas, and grasslands. Elliott Bennett has surveyed and produced a nesting map the past few years for the site.

### WOODLANDS:

Fragmented woodlands can be found in the preserve, but the main restoration work was done on the oak savanna. We cleared brush, burned, and seeded the area which was extremely overgrown with brushy, non-native species. The savanna has provided nesting sites for Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Wood Pee-wee, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Indigo Bunting. In 1993, we confirmed breeding of a Scarlet Tanager that raised three young with no cowbird parasitism. An article in the *Meadowlark* led us to apply to the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology's Project Tanager study. We participated in this study in 1994 and 1995. Tanagers have been spotted in two of the seven study sites but no young have been seen.

We are hoping to attract a bluebird population back into the savanna

as it becomes more open but so far have not confirmed breeding. Adults were observed there in 1993 and five immature were seen in August, 1994.

A Yellow-billed Cuckoo was seen feeding young on the western-most edge of the savanna in 1993. In 1995, a singing male Chestnut-sided Warbler was present here until June 17, but we could not confirm breeding.

Five species of woodpeckers that nest in Illinois have been seen in the savanna and all but the Red-headed have been confirmed as nesting. House Wrens and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks sing all summer long; grosbeaks have been confirmed nesters the past six years. A resident Great Horned Owl has nested in the savanna four of the last six years, and in 1995 moved just across the horse trail (see map). Every January, we begin our hunt and every May we see the young birds but we have never yet seen them on the nest. That quest drives us out every winter.

The Poplar Creek site has been chosen as one of two in Cook County large enough to support Wild Turkeys; a plan has been devised to introduce them here in the future. Low numbers in the last two winters in the areas from which they would be relocated have put the plan on hold for now.

The rest of the wooded areas are difficult to survey because the brush is so dense. We may have more