

The call of the Acadian Flycatcher is one of the most familiar sounds at Fox Ridge State Park during breeding season in central Illinois. After crossing the corn and soybean desert that is most of central Illinois, suddenly finding oneself in the midst of steep wooded ravines creates a pleasant sense of displacement. But this park, six miles south of Charleston along Illinois 130, also contains grasslands, old fields, and various stages of second growth woods in the hunting areas. This diverse habitat makes for a diverse population of landbirds. Waterbirds are in short supply, as the only lake in the park, Ridge Lake, is too small to support them.

The main part of the park does not open for automobile traffic until 7:30 a.m., so any early morning birding will have to be done in the hunting areas, by entering off of either County Roads 300N or 400N, or by parking in the campgrounds and entering the ravine trail system on the south side of the park. I would suggest beginning very early in the morning in the ravine trail system. Get a map at the entrance to the park, and either park in the campground parking lots for camp visitors, or, if preferred, you may wish to camp overnight.

The trailheads begin on the west end of the campgrounds and immediately lead into the ravine system (1). Follow the trail along the base of the main ravine. This ravine is over 100 feet deep by the time you reach the 147 steps to the "Eagle's Roost" (2). Along the way you will find numerous Acadian Flycatchers, perhaps the most common bird along the ravine trail systems. But listen and look for Yellow-throated Vireos, Red-eyed Vireos, Warbling Vireos, Kentucky Warblers, Northern Parulas, Louisiana Waterthrushes, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, Scarlet Tan-

agers, and Wood Thrushes. Barred Owls are also common here. At the "Eagle's Roost and the nearby Shady Ridge Picnic Shelter (3), look for Cerulean Warblers. Along side ravines (4), listen and look for the occasional Worm-eating Warbler. Past the Eagle's Roost, the No-name and Riverview trails run along the Embarras River. Here you will find Yellow-throated Warblers and an occasional Prothonotary Warblers. In the more open areas at the base of the park road, you may find American Redstarts.

Once the park road opens, you can access the picnic and recreation areas of the park. Here is the best opportunity for finding Summer Tanager. Both orioles will be found here also. The southern fork (5) leads to Shady Rest where, if you have waited until later to go to the ravine system, is a good place to begin hiking. I have found Kentucky Warblers, Summer and Scarlet Tanagers, and both orioles, as well as Cerulean Warblers here. The north fork of the road system leads to the Hunting Area. Stop at Ridge Lake, where Belted Kingfishers and phoebes can be found. Proceed to the hunting area (6) where White-eyed Vireos, Yellow-breasted Chats, and Dickcissels are common. The woods to the east of the road can be entered at several areas, although the only marked trail system is the Horse Trail (7), an area I have only briefly explored, entering from the outside, in 1999.

In the wooded areas, such species as Kentucky Warbler, Northern Parula, and Acadian Flycatcher can be found, although they are not as common here as in the ravine system. Cerulean Warblers have also been found here, especially on the east side of the hunting area (8), but not consistently. However, these woods (9)

are the only area where I have been able to find Ovenbirds. Edge species, such as Eastern Towhees, White-eyed Vireos, and chats are also found in these woods, which are somewhat fragmented compared with the ravines. This area does not have clearly marked hiking trails and I have found my way around either by hiking on old abandoned lanes, or stream beds. You may want to bring a compass.

Local birders may wish to elaborate on this description of Fox Ridge State Park, particularly with regard to wintering or migrating birds, or to give a more complete site guide to this beautiful State Park that holds so much birding promise. In addition, comments or site guides to nearby areas would be useful. For instance, Lake Charleston, just five miles north of the Park is an excellent area to see migratory waterfowl. And Lincoln Log Cabin State Historical Site, while not a "natural area" does provide excellent habitat for a variety of birds such as Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Summer Tanagers, and Orchard Orioles. Bewick's Wren, which is on the Fox Ridge check list (not reliable - it has Northern Shrike, but not Red-eyed Vireo), may be extirpated from the park, but was present in a farmyard 4 miles south of the park in 1999 and it may be worthwhile checking the surrounding countryside for them.

II. LINCOLN TRAIL STATE PARK AND MILL CREEK COUNTY PARK.

Lincoln Trail State Park is about four miles south of Marshall, Clark County, just east of Illinois 1. In some ways it is similar to Fox Ridge State Park, with several ravine systems. However the ravines are not as deep and there are no trails through the woods. Also, the lake (1) here is much larger than at Fox Ridge.