

*Saving the Greater Prairie-Chicken*

This issue presents a lead article by Jeff Walk and photographs by Mary Kay Rubey on one of the rarest birds in Illinois – the Greater Prairie-Chicken, one which I might add was once so common in the state that it was found from the far reaches of northern Illinois in my home town of Mundelein to the rich prairies in southeastern Illinois made famous by Robert Ridgway.

Today, as pointed out in Walk's article, the prairie-chicken lives in only a few select locations in Jasper and Marion counties. If not for the dedicated research of people like Walk, Scott Simpson and Terry Esker as well as the Illinois Audubon Society's dedication to purchasing good habitat, this bird could have been extirpated from Illinois. IOS's role in educating others about rare birds as well as publishing articles about them can also be of great help.

If we don't do something now, the Greater Prairie-Chicken could become our generation's version of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, another species that disappears because of rampant destruction of habitat. Indeed, likely the only thing that will save the prairie-chicken in Illinois is preserving more habitat and letting state officials know how important it is to establish more breeding territory for these birds. One prime example is Pyramid State Park, where there are already good numbers of rare breeding grassland birds. In southeastern Illinois, prairie-chickens have recently re-established themselves at former agricultural lands, which have been managed for prairie-chickens by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Illinois Audubon Society played an important role in this venture.

To learn about this species, how difficult it is to save a bird with a small gene pool and how its population can be stabilized in Illinois, read Walk's and Simpson's article on the Illinois prairie-chicken recovery plan beginning on page 82.

*Sheryl DeVore*

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### About Our Cover:

Michael Retter drew this issue's cover art of a Lark Bunting. He is a central Illinois native who works as a tour leader for Tropical Birding, leading tours in Mexico, the US, and (soon) Madagascar. He has worked the last five summers for Rocky Mountain Bird Observatory on its Black Hills monitoring project. Among all the hustle and bustle, Michael also manages to run GBNA, the continent's email listserv for GLBT birders. He accepts commissioned artwork and tours. You may visit his website at <http://retter.xenospiza.com/>.

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