



conservation over the past 50 years by the forest preserve districts, state and federal agencies, and private organizations?

Since translocations of prairie-chickens ended in 1998, Prairie Ridge has expanded by 1,280 acres, 600 of those acres being secured by the Illinois Audubon Society. Many of the new areas are still being established into grassland habitat, so habitat conditions favor gains for these birds in the short-term. And the birds do respond to new habitat: the number of prairie-chickens on booming grounds in 2005 was 56% higher than the year before. Nonetheless, this is a small, vulnerable population. Full recovery is dependent upon creation of thou-

Department of Natural Resources recently added about 16,000 acres of reclaimed strip mine grasslands to the park, which is home to several hundred Henslow's sparrows, dozens of Loggerhead Shrikes, and lots of Northern Harriers and Short-eared Owls in winter (Walk 2001, Hoover 2003). Besides the huge amount of available grassland habitat on state property and the surrounding landscape, the area is beyond the range of Ring-necked Pheasants, avoiding that complicating factor. The Pyramid area could be connected to the Marion County population, about 60 miles away, with relatively few satellite sites.

Other areas evaluated for prairie-chickens were the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie – Goose Lake Prairie area, Lost Mound National Wildlife Refuge (formerly the Savanna Army Depot), Nachusa Grasslands, Green River State Fish & Wildlife Area, and Iroquois County State Fish & Wildlife Area (the last two purchased as prairie-chicken refuges in the 1940s). For a variety of reasons, including small size, the certainty of conflicts with pheasants, degraded habitat conditions, too much woodland or urban land use, and isolation from other potential reintroduction areas, these areas have low potential for sustaining robust prairie-chicken populations at this time.

Grassland restoration and management throughout Illinois are important for Upland Sandpipers, Grasshopper Sparrows, Northern Harriers and other grassland birds that are rare and have declined significantly in recent decades. Some species, like Bobolinks and Savannah Sparrows, are naturally limited to the northern two-thirds of the state, where prairie-chickens can't survive now...but may someday, if grasses become important biofuel crops or the birds adapt to new conditions. Fifty years ago, few people would have predicted the recovery of sandhill cranes in northeastern Illinois that we're witnessing today. But would that recovery have been possible without wetland



*Photos: Top left to bottom right (on page 84); Male Greater Prairie-Chicken with long head feathers raised; Greater Prairie-Chicken male in full territorial defense posture; Two male Greater Prairie-Chickens face off; (on page 85) Left, Greater Prairie-Chicken males begin territorial dispute; Right, two male Greater Prairie-Chickens in full territorial dispute.*