

tion, however, on the need to protect the Illinois-endangered breeding Common Terns, which use a sandbar in the harbor of the Naval Base. The site is the only last nesting spot left for this species in Illinois. The summer of 2001, some 20 pairs of Common Terns nested at Great Lakes, but not one fledgling survived due to predation. An electric fence and other measures added by the Navy and approved by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources were not enough to deter marauding rodents, fox, and raccoons.

In 2002, Dann worked closely with the Navy and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources to better protect the nesting terns and to remove invasive non-native species from their nesting area. The Navy is extremely eager to protect these birds and to improve the habitat. They want to be able to share the data and show off their good stewardship, Dann said. He has received special permission to conduct his shorebird survey for Manomet at Great Lakes, despite extremely limited public access to the base because of security concerns. "I love doing this. It's really fun and I get to further conservation at the same time. What could be better?" he said.

One thing, perhaps. Dann's conservation mantra is to raise public consciousness, over and over and over again. "People don't care about wildlife, about conservation. We need to make them care, to understand the consequences of their actions," he said.

Dann's recommendation for a birding volunteer who wants to make the most use of their conservation time bank is direct activism. Get involved with the politicians who control so much of what impacts the environment, impact their votes and elect responsible candidates, he said. See a future issue of *Meadowlark* for an article by Donald Dann and Brad Semel on the progress of the Common Terns at Great Lakes Naval Base.

### **Land Becomes a Mission: Isolation in the Center of Naperville**

Illinois Ornithological Society Board member Joe Suचेcki was just a birder when he got the first call from a local activist about a local grassland in Naperville that was slated to become a lake. One of the last high-quality streams in DuPage County was to be dammed to create a boater's paradise.

"Vicki Shinn told me about all the great birds at this site — Short-eared Owls and Northern Harriers — which I didn't even know were present at what is now Springbrook Prairie," said Suचेcki. "I went to visit the place and it was amazing! I got curious about the site and started to get interested in its preservation as a grassland. It becomes a mission for you to do something about a site, to make sure it's protected and that the habitat is appropriate for birds," he said.

Suचेcki started to conduct breeding bird surveys and found good numbers of Bobolinks, rare nesters in Illinois, and fair numbers of other grassland birds. His survey data was used to help convince the DuPage County Board to change its mind about creating Dragon Lake and instead, develop a management plan for an 1,800-acre grassland known today as Springbrook Prairie.

"Though most of the fields had been farmed, as you moved through them, you saw different birds and habitat variance. Your interest in the site is also helped along when you find really rare birds — Cinnamon Teal, Lark Sparrow, Peregrine Falcons, and most recently, Black Rail," said Suचेcki.

Once he witnessed the grassland bird activity at Springbrook Prairie, it became obvious to Suचेcki that restoration work and habitat management were really necessary to remove invasive species and to plant native species. Results were swift: Brush clearing on a few hundred acres brought back grassland birds such as Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrow and Bobolinks the very next year.

"It's very gratifying to see that what you're doing is really working. Land — it just becomes a passion. You want to be out there all the time and just want to do more and more," Suचेcki said. Living five minutes away makes breeding bird censuses very easy for Suचेcki. It ties him even more closely to this parcel and has made him an advocate for what was once a very little-used forest preserve. Back in 1993 and 1994 when Suचेcki first visited Springbrook, he hardly saw anyone else. Northern Harriers still nested there in 1996, but have not been present during the breeding season since then due to increased recreational use.

"You can destroy a site by loving it too much," Suचेcki said. "My goal is to maintain Springbrook as great habitat for birds. But it's extremely vulnerable. Demand for recreation space in a place like Naperville is very high. We did a great job getting the master plan for the site changed, but all it takes is a majority vote of

the Forest Preserve District Board to change that," Suचेcki said.

Springbrook Prairie has natural rolling hills with a stream flowing through it. "When you are down in the stream valley, you cannot see any human interference," he said. "You can imagine what the prairie really looked like.



*Among his many volunteer activities to help birds, Joe Suचेcki has served on the Illinois Ornithological Society Board and has chaired the Board's Annual Meeting Committee.*