

THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER



SUMMER, 1989

What to look for: Two rare bird species and a marsh

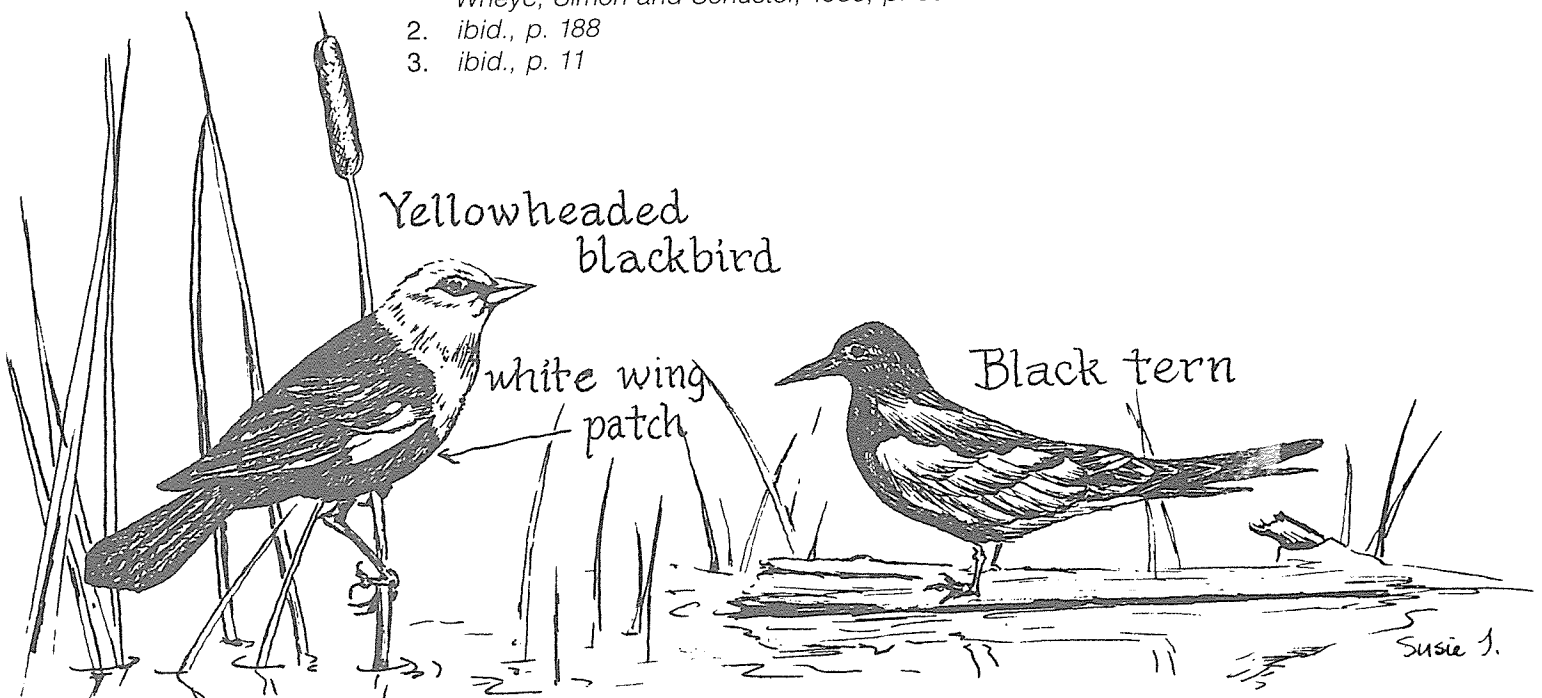
The large marshy lake adjoining the Illinois Prairie Path in Pratt's Wayne Woods Forest Preserve is a peaceful haven for birdwatchers. It was formed about ten years ago when an industrious crew of beavers dammed a small stream that flows under the Path and thereby flooded a low-lying area northeast of the trail. When the beavers abandoned the dam a couple of years ago, DuPage County Forest Preserve District personnel recognized the value of this watery ecosystem as wildlife habitat and took over the beavers' job of maintaining the lake. A weir in the culvert under the Path one-half mile southeast of Dunham Road now controls the water level.

Many species of water birds nest in the marsh, including the Yellow-headed Blackbird and the Black Tern, both rare in DuPage County. The spectacular Yellowheads are larger than Red-winged Blackbirds and tend to "take over the best territories (areas of cattails and other plants in deep water that harbor the richest insect life) and force the Redwings into the shallower, drier, more marginal habitats."¹ Yellowheads are rare in DuPage only because they are a western bird and our area is at the extreme eastern edge of their range. The normal water depth in this marsh is perfect for them.

The Black Tern, on the other hand, is rare here and is "declining in many areas due largely to loss of wetland habitat. Greatly reduced hatching success in the upper midwest may be due to agricultural chemicals."² From 1978 to 1986 this species was on the National Audubon Society's Blue List, which "provides early warning of those North American species undergoing population or range reductions."³

To help save the Black Tern and continue attracting the Yellow-headed Blackbird we should all support the DuPage County Forest Preserve District and its strong program of wetland preservation.

1. **The Birder's Handbook, A Field Guide to the Natural History of North American Birds**, Ehrlich, Dobkin and Wheye, Simon and Schuster, 1988, p. 607.
2. *ibid.*, p. 188
3. *ibid.*, p. 11



“...Neither Snow Nor Rain...”

Heroes they were, every one: the stalwart participants in the May 6 Illinois Prairie Path History Treasure Hunt, who pedaled their bikes through miles of snow showers blown by icy winds, and the equally sturdy Prairie Path volunteers, who gamely stayed at their chilly checkpoints through the longest, coldest day in May that anyone could remember.

The winners were not hard to identify. The valiant volunteers were all winners, of course, for sheer stick-to-itiveness. They outnumbered the contestants more than two to one. Of the approximately twenty entrants in the Treasure Hunt six were adjudged winners and received Illinois Prairie Path T-shirts at a small awards ceremony at Volunteer Park, Wheaton, on Sunday, May 21. Three participants who managed to visit all fifteen historic sites between the hours of 9:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. on that one day, riding their bikes (or sometimes walking) the entire distance, also received an Illinois Prairie Path patch in recognition of their outstanding effort. They are: Jim Rice of Wheaton, and the “Team Extreme”, Tad Dinsmore and Chris Koller, Elmhurst. The other prize-winners were interested less in competition and more in a leisurely viewing of the DuPage County historical sites. In the fourteen-years-and-under class were Nada Wigand, 10, of Westmont and Duane Anderson, 12, Wheaton. Each of these two young people visited almost half of the sites, Nada accompanied by her parents John and Lala, and Duane by his mother, Darlene — good sports all. Female winner in the fifteen-to-thirty-nine class was Suzanne Fountas, who traveled the longest distance, all the way from Bolingbrook, to participate. There were no winners in the over-forty class because there were no entrants, undoubtedly on account of the inclement weather.

The three champions provided some memorable moments for the volunteers. For example, the lonely checkers eating a cold picnic lunch in a snowstorm at their remote outpost in the middle of the Winfield Mounds Forest Preserve, will never forget their first glimpse of Jim Rice, the Red Knight, emerging from a cloud of swirling snowflakes on a fiery red Nishiki International with a huge frost-covered wraparound windshield, a do-or-die look on his face. “Somebody found us!” shouted the frozen trio joyfully as Jim rode up. “Are you really here for the Treasure Hunt?”, gasped one in disbelief. “Why else would I be riding my bike through the woods on a day like this?” replied Sir Jim, patiently pausing to accept their congratulations before speeding off on his solitary quest. The same checkers, packing up to leave at the end of the day, will also remember the Team Extreme flying along Geneva Road, waving and smiling as they pedaled furiously back to Volunteer Park from their last checkpoint at the West Chicago Prairie to beat the 5:00 p.m. deadline. The boys made it and noted that their odometer registered sixty miles for the Treasure Hunt, to which they had to add another ten miles before they reached home in Elmhurst. This was even more remarkable because they had had a flat tire near the County Courthouse early in the morning! When asked what motivated them to finish the grueling course in such miserable weather, Jim, Tad and Chris agreed that it was the newspaper stories they had read. Reporters for the Chicago Tribune and the Daily Journal had quoted both Jean and Paul Mooring as saying they believed such a feat was impossible. “Well, they proved us wrong,” laughed Jean later. “These three wild and crazy guys made everyone’s day!”

Many members and friends of The Illinois Prairie Path who were unable to participate in the Treasure Hunt have asked us for copies of the worksheet to guide them in their trail explorations in the future. Accordingly, the worksheets will be available at the IPP office in Wheaton and at the Villa Park Historical Museum/IPP Visitor Center, open weekdays, 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays and Sundays, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., May through October. One is also included with this *Newsletter*. To complete the historical record, several copies have been mailed to the DuPage County Sesquicentennial Steering Committee.



Treasure Hunt organizers Jean Mooring (left) and Esther Cryderman (right), flank five winners, Chris Koller, Jim Rice, Suzanne Fountas, Tad Dinsmore and Duane Anderson. Nada Wigand could not be present for awards ceremony.



Tad Dinsmore, half of the Team Extreme, points with pride to his new IPP T-shirt and patch. In background are Lyn Cryderman and Bob and Bonnie Hargis.



Jim Rice signs in at Checkpoint #5. Margaret Mooring, Madison, Wisconsin, welcomes him.

Photo by Jean Mooring

Honor Roll of History Treasure Hunt Volunteers

Defying the weather, forty-eight friends of the Prairie Path cheerfully manned the fifteen Treasure Hunt checkpoints and initialled the participants' worksheets during all or part of the day. They also circulated questionnaires on behalf of the Illinois Rails-to-trails Conservancy, which is conducting a survey of trail usage on all Illinois trails during and after Trail Appreciation Month. We thank these generous people for a job well done:

- Checkpoint #1, Valparaiso Moraine, Glen Ellyn. Hope Marsh, Ed Marsh, Susan Terwedow.
- Checkpoint #2, Perry Mastodon, Wheaton. Esther Cryderman, Lyn Cryderman.
- Checkpoint #3, West Chicago Prairie. Mel Hoff, Scott Hensey, Renee Robbins, Paul L. Johnson, Joyce Siebens.
- Checkpoint #4, Buffalo Herd, Fermilab. Don Pellico, Bill Booth, Jean Booth, Doug Van Tol, Bob Rawls.
- Checkpoint #5, Indian Village and Mounds, Winfield. Jean Mooring, Margaret Mooring, Roberto Aldana.

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Long Distance Biker Visits Illinois Prairie Path

This story appeared last winter in *The Whistlestop*, the newsletter of the Villa Park Historical Society.

"On October 19, 1988, a cyclist stopped at the Museum. He was sun-tanned and had three bags of gear strapped to his bike. He was riding across the United States. That morning he had ridden in from St. Charles via the Prairie Path. From his home in Austin, Texas, CHARLES FREEMAN traveled on his bicycle to California and then north across the Plains. He crossed the Mississippi River in Minnesota, then came down to Illinois. From our museum he was bound for 'Michigan Street' (Michigan Avenue and the Lakefront). After visiting with a friend in Chicago, he was heading for Georgia, then home to Texas. He thought the Prairie Path was wonderful, a pleasant route on his long journey. Charles signed our Guest Register, took along trail maps and a Villa Park Historical Society folder as a souvenir of his stop in Villa Park."

Editor's Note: The Washington-based Rails-to-Trails Conservancy is working to establish a network of trails, "Greenways," like the Illinois Prairie Path across the country so that more and more adventurous Americans can enjoy the pleasures of bicycling, local and long distance.

Berkeley Beautifies Trail

For the past several years the Village of Berkeley and the Berkeley Park District have been developing an attractive multiple-use park and recreation area on the Illinois Prairie Path right-of-way and the adjacent Great Western right-of-way. The most recent improvement was initiated a year ago by three good friends of the Prairie Path: John Rizzo, Berkeley village trustee, John Kacich, IPP board member, and Laddie Dvorak, a member of the Berkeley ZBA who rides his bike on the Path almost every day. The group met with the Berkeley Park Board at the invitation of President Ken Schill, to present their plan for improved lighting of the area and beautification and resurfacing of the trail. The project was soon approved and the work was completed last fall. The park district spent a total of \$4,000 for a variety of trees planted in the combined park area, including fifteen along the trail, primarily honey locusts. The park district also spent \$3,000 to resurface 1500 feet of trail with limestone screenings and to install two benches beside the Path. Commonwealth Edison cooperated by erecting seven tall pole lights around the playgrounds.

This park has become a tremendous recreational asset for the people of Berkeley; and The Illinois Prairie Path board of directors congratulates everyone who has helped build it.



Ready to leaf out, newly-planted honey locust stands beside resurfaced Prairie Path in Berkeley. Park district shelter house and tot lot in background.

SUMMER ACTIVITIES, Rain or Shine

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| Saturday, June 3 | Trail Appreciation Bike Ride , 40-mile loop trip on Illinois Prairie Path/Fox River Trail. Meet at 9:00 a.m., Rte. 59 and IPP (Oak Meadows). Leader: Nancy Hesler, 293-1062. |
| Saturdays, June 17 July 15 August 19 | Work Days . Volunteer Prairie, IPP at Liberty Street and Carlton, Wheaton. Leader: Larry Sheaffer, 790-0313. Other work projects. Leaders: Bob Hargis, 668-7377; Paul Mooring, 469-4289. |
| Saturdays, June 24 | Bird Walk in West Chicago Prairie, 6:00 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. |
| June 24 July 22 August 26 | General Field Trips in West Chicago Prairie, 9:00 a.m. to noon. |
| July 15 | Prairie Seed Collection , 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. For all events meet at northeast corner of Electronic Support Systems parking lot on east side of Industrial Drive ½ mile south of Hawthorne and just north of Western. Information: Mel Hoff, 393-4715; Mollie Millen, 232-4394. |
| Saturday, August 26 | Illinois Prairie Path/Lincoln Marsh Tour of savanna, wetlands and prairie, 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Meet at IPP Volunteer Park, Liberty and Carlton. Bring cameras and binoculars for this popular 3-mile trek. Co-sponsored by the Wheaton Park District and The Illinois Prairie Path not-for-profit corporation. Ages 8 and over; limit 25. \$2, residents; \$3, non-residents. Information and reservations: 665-4710. |