

A Nature Field Guide
to the
ILLINOIS RIVER VALLEY

at
*Chautauqua & Emiquon
National Wildlife Refuges*

Prepared by the
Emiquon Audubon Society
Chapter of the
Illinois Audubon Society



Brochure artwork by: Robert Waldmire

◆ **Using a Compass and binoculars**

A compass will be useful in locating landmarks mentioned in the following text. Binoculars are a must for picking out important landmarks and observing wildlife from a distance.

◆ **Access to Nature Preserves:**

In a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve, everything is protected by law. Groups of 25 and over require a special visitation permit from the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

◆ **Estimated length (time) of tour:**

With an early start and without spending too much time in any one particular location, it should be possible to cover this entire tour in one day. A more leisurely pace, however, is suggested, spreading this tour over two days.

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Additional information available from:

Emiquon Audubon Society

220 W. Main Street
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-2749
(re: general questions, birding)

Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

17500 E. CR 1950N, P.O. Box 590
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-2744
(re: Illinois Nature Preserve System)

Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges HQ

19031 E. CR 2105N
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-535-2290
(re: National Wildlife Refuge System management, Illinois River, general questions)

Illinois Natural History Survey

Forbes Biological Station
17500 E. CR 1950N, P.O. Box 590
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-3950
(re: Illinois River research, wetlands and waterfowl)

Illinois Natural History Survey

LTRM Field Station
704 N. Schrader
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-6000
(re: Illinois River research, aquatic)

The Nature Conservancy

Great Rivers Area Field Office
220 West Main Street
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-6502
(re: The Emiquon Project, Illinois River restoration)

Havana Area Chamber of Commerce

227 West Main Street
Havana, Illinois 62644
309-543-3528
(re: restaurants, overnight accommodations)

Dickson Mounds Museum

10956 North Dickson Mounds Road
Lewistown, Illinois 61542-9733
309-547-3721
(Hours: daily 8:30 am to 5:00 pm)

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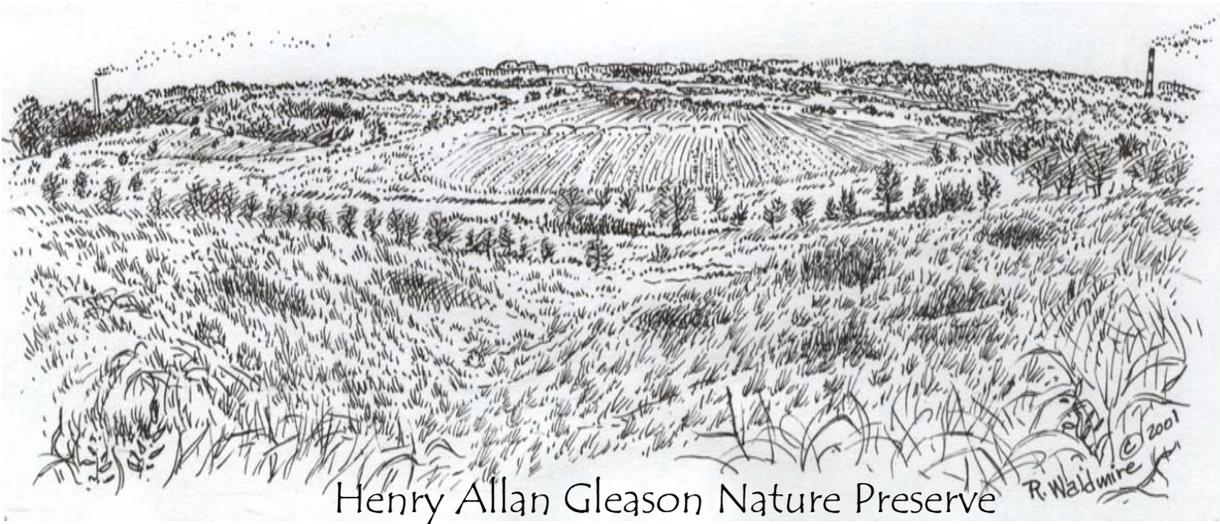
at
*Chautauqua & Emiquon
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Chautauqua and Emiquon National Wildlife Refuges (NWR) together function as an ecological centerpiece of the Illinois River Valley.

In addition to their wildlife values, the refuges provide prime wildlife viewing and recreational areas for the public.

This brochure was designed to help foster appreciation for the wildlife refuges and the river valley by guiding visitors to a variety of key stops selected to provide a sample of the many wildlife habitat types found in this part of the river valley and adjacent areas.



Henry Allan Gleason Nature Preserve



Henry Allan Gleason Nature Preserve

Directions: In Havana, locate the intersection of Promenade Street and U.S. Route 136 (Laurel Ave.). Then proceed east on U.S. Route 136 for 5.4 miles to County Road (CR) 2130E. Turn left (north) on CR 2130E. Continue north on this road 3.5 miles to the T-intersection at the Manito Road (CR 2000N). Turn right (east) on the Manito Road. Continue east for 1.7 miles to CR 2300E. Turn left (north) on CR 2300E. Continue on this road for 2.0 miles. The parking area for Henry Allan Gleason Nature Preserve is on the left. Follow the footpath directly west to the preserve. Continue up the path to the top of the first rise, then turn north to the top of the larger hill known as Devil's Tower.

From the top of this large hill (actually a stabilized sand dune), several important landmarks are visible: the smokestack from Havana's power plant at 230° (11.2 miles distant), the red-and-white-striped smokestack from the Duck Creek power plant at 335° (6.7 miles distant), and the light brown modernistic buildings of Dickson Mounds Museum along the Illinois River Valley bluffs at 260° (11 miles distant)--the final destination of this tour. Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, on the bottomlands of the Illinois River, lies between 250° and 320°.

The state of Illinois is organized into 14 areas called natural divisions. These divisions are defined not by political boundaries but by factors such as geological history, bedrock, topography, flora, fauna, and soil type. You are standing within the Illinois River and Mississippi River Sand Areas Natural Division. The distant wooded bluffs and beyond are part of the Western Forest-Prairie Natural Division. Between these two natural divisions is the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands Natural Division. (For more information on the natural divisions of Illinois see the winter 1997 issue of **The Illinois Steward** magazine, the winter 1999-2000 issue of **Illinois Audubon** magazine, or contact the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.)

Prior to settlement of Illinois by Americans of European descent (i.e., for all practical purposes, before the 1800s), about two thirds of the state consisted of various types of prairie (mainly a mixture of grasses and wildflowers). Today less than 100th of one percent of the original prairies remain in many small, scattered patches. The 110-acre Henry Allan Gleason Nature Preserve contains native sand prairie and savanna remnants. Plants adapted to dry and nutrient-poor conditions survive very well at this preserve. Fire-tolerant blackjack and black oaks (with hybrids) are the dominant trees. And prickly pear cactus and little bluestem grass are common across the prairie, giving this preserve a certain "western" feel.

Before leaving this site, be sure to scan the sky for soaring raptors. During the warmer months you may see lark sparrows, a variety of other grassland birds, ornate box turtle, six-lined racerunner, and bull snake. Also, note the small mounds of bare sand throughout the prairie; these were excavated by plains pocket gophers.



Eagle Bluff Public Access

Directions: From H. A. Gleason Nature Preserve continue north on CR 2300E for 1.0 mile to CR 2300N. Turn left (west) on CR 2300N. Continue on this road past Goofy Ridge and along the river valley bluff (Buzzville Road) 3.4 miles to the refuge public access area. The upper parking area has a restroom, viewing platform, and display boards. Then follow the gravel road on the right to the refuge levee access and boat ramp.

The 4,488-acre Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge is managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for biodiversity with wildlife as the number one priority. Consequently, certain areas of the refuge may be closed to the public at certain times of the year for bird migration. Signs are normally posted to indicate closed areas. When the main levee is open to the public, you are free to walk at will beyond the gate. Occasionally, the main refuge levee--which leads from the cross levee parking area around the south pool to the refuge headquarters--is open to private vehicles. On these special days, usually during National

Wildlife Refuge Week in

October and International Migratory Bird Day in May, the public is

invited to "Ride the Refuge" (a special interpretive "Ride the Refuge" brochure is available from refuge staff or through the Emiquon Audubon Society).

Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge illustrates the ecological concept that species diversity is directly related to habitat diversity. Spend some time here paying careful attention to the different bird species attracted to the exposed mud flats, shallow-water wetlands, deep open water in the north pool, willow thickets, bluff woodlands, floodplain forests, and other wildlife habitats. For the last several years (as of 2002), an active bald eagle nest has been visible at the "snag forest" (a large area of standing dead timber) just to the right of the cross levee in the north pool. The resident eagles are usually perching near their nest or foraging over the water for fish. Be sure to read the refuge display boards at the upper parking area before departing for the next stop on this tour.

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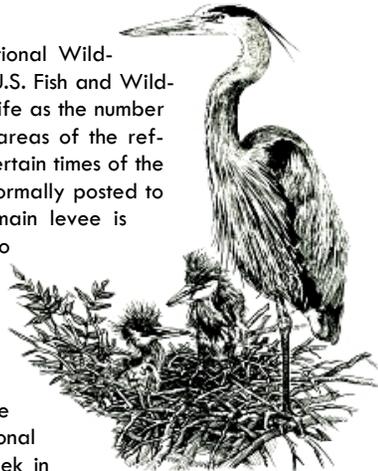
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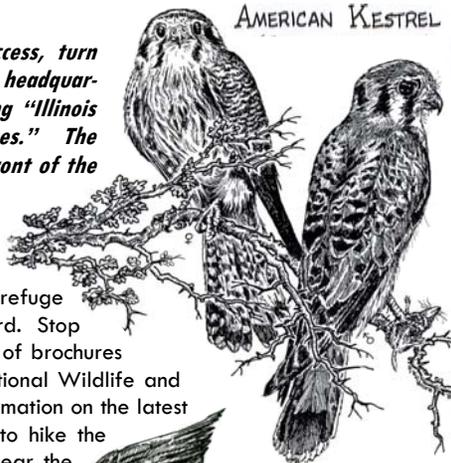
Chautauqua NWR Headquarters

Directions: From Eagle Bluff Public Access, turn right and proceed 1.0 mile to the refuge headquarters road with the large sign proclaiming "Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges." The gravel road leads to a parking area in front of the refuge office, where the trail begins.

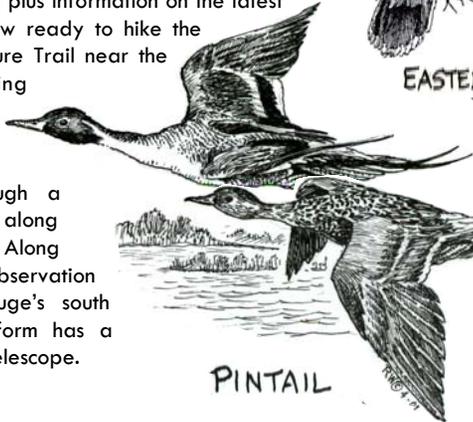
Please note the prairie plants on both sides of the steps leading to the headquarters building. These plants were obtained and planted by volunteers from the Emiquon Audubon Society and refuge staff. An interpretive prairie brochure is available at the display board. Stop at the refuge headquarters and visit with the refuge staff. A variety of brochures are available in addition to a bird check list for the Illinois River National Wildlife and Fish Refuges (Chautauqua, Emiquon, and Meredosia Refuges) plus information on the latest wildlife sightings. Armed with this information, you are now ready to hike the short and easy Chautauqua Nature Trail near the headquarters parking area. At the head of the trail, pick up an interpretive brochure.



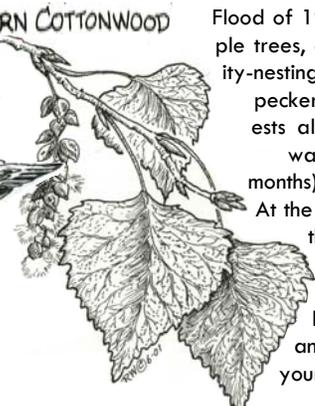
The trail leads through a black oak sand forest along the river valley bluffs. Along the trail there are three observation platforms overlooking the refuge's south pool. The middle platform has a mounted spotting telescope.



AMERICAN KESTREL



PINTAIL



EASTERN COTTONWOOD

5

Frank C. Bellrose Nature Trail

Directions: From the Bellrose Island parking area, turn right (south) on Schrader. Continue south to Dearborn Street (U.S. Route 136/State Route 78/State Route 97). Turn right (west) and follow State Route 78/97 over the Illinois River bridge to Fulton County (note, while crossing the river, the Havana power plant, originally located from atop H.A. Gleason Nature Preserve, on your left). Before long you will turn right (north) to continue on State Route 78/97. Six tenths of a mile after turning north on State Route 78/97, just before the Spoon River bridge, turn right into the Spoon River Public Access Area at Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge.

The Frank C. Bellrose Nature Trail begins at the yellow gate and follows along the Spoon River, eventually looping back to the starting point. For a more challenging hike without trails, follow the north bank of the Spoon River to its confluence with the Illinois River, just across the river from Bellrose Island. In this area you will pass near Horseshoe Slough, formerly a part of the tortuously meandering Spoon River.

In direct contrast to H.A. Gleason Nature Preserve, plants of this bottomland forest are highly adapted to periodic flooding from the Illinois River. Soils, deposited by past flood waters, are silty and dark with a high water-holding capacity. Not surprisingly, blackjack and black oaks are entirely absent, replaced by a flood-tolerant, silver maple-dominated forest.

Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge currently encompasses 3,400 acres. The refuge, when complete, will total 11,122 acres. As you travel to Dickson Mounds Museum, all of the bottomlands you will be passing through on both sides of the road are within the proposed refuge acquisition boundary. These areas, currently in agricultural production (as of 2002), were once among the most biologically diverse bottomlands along the entire river valley (for more information, see the book *Waterfowl of Illinois*, by Steve Havera, published by the Illinois Natural History Survey in 1999). The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is continuing to pursue the completion of Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge, which has broad public support.

4

Bellrose Island Nature Trail

Directions: From the entrance road to the refuge headquarters, turn right (south). Continue south to the T-intersection at the Manito Road. Turn right (west) and follow this road 6 miles to Havana. Just after the coal docks bridge, which passes across several railroad tracks, turn right (west) on Mound Ave. Continue on this street to the fourth stop sign at Schrader Ave. Turn left on Schrader. Almost immediately, just past the brown house on the right and before the privately owned Tall Timbers Campground entrance, turn right and bear to the right, directly down a steep, sandy slope to the Havana Park District parking area and entrance to Bellrose Island.

Although once an island, today Bellrose Island is actually a peninsula. Follow the trail from the parking area through the mature bottomland forest directly to the Illinois River. In some areas, you may notice an unusually large number of standing dead trees. Many of these resulted from the Great Flood of 1993. The large cottonwood and silver maple trees, alive and dead, attract a variety of cavity-nesting birds. Look especially for pileated woodpeckers, common in the mature bottomland forests along the Illinois River, and prothonotary warblers (present only during the warmer months), a specialty along river bottomlands.

At the river bank, you are directly opposite the mouth of the Spoon River and Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge. Before returning to your vehicle, sit against a log and spend a few minutes simply watching and listening to the active river life around you, both river traffic and wildlife. Then remember to recall these moments during your final stop on this tour at Dickson Mounds Museum.



Brown Creeper

6

Dickson Mounds Museum

Directions: Turn right (north) from the parking area at Emiquon NWR and follow the signs 4.0 miles to the final stop on this tour, Dickson Mounds Museum.

Just after turning onto the museum entrance road you will have passed from the Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands Natural Division to the Western Forest-Prairie Natural Division. Before observing exhibits, museum staff will direct you to the third floor to watch a short video describing the Illinois River Valley and its importance to past and present cultures. Following the video, you will be directed to the museum's observation deck (bring your compass, binoculars, and spotting scope).

As you are looking out onto the broad floodplain of the Illinois River Valley, try to find the sand prairie at Henry Allan Gleason Nature Preserve at 80° (11 miles distant) and the smokestack at Havana's power plant. Think back on the video you just saw, past cultures inhabiting this area long ago, and the time you spent listening and observing on the banks of the Illinois River at Bellrose Island. And please consider that we are only the latest in a long line of many destined to eventually pass this area and its abundant natural resources on to future generations. Have we made improvements during our tenure? Or will future generations have less? It is our opinion that Chautauqua and Emiquon National Wildlife Refuges allow plenty of room for optimism.

