

17

C755

7:D519

1982

SEP 1 1982

DEWEY'S PASTURE Wildlife Management Complex



Ruthven Wildlife Unit
RR #1
Ruthven, Iowa 51358

STATE LIBRARY OF IOWA

Hist
DES MO

17 C755 7:D519
/Dewey's Pasture Wildlife Management Com



3 1723 00025 3294

What's black with a yellow head, lives in a marsh and says "Poppcock!"? It's the yellow-headed blackbird, just one of the interesting residents of the Dewey's Pasture Complex of marshes and lakes located in Clay, and Palo Alto Counties in northwestern Iowa. A jet black body and bright yellow head makes the yellow-headed our most appropriately named blackbird. It's song has been described as a raucous "Poppcock!".

The yellow-headed blackbird is typical of many marsh dwelling creatures. It has very specific habitat needs (there must always be water under its nest, for example). When these needs are met, this and other marsh residents will be present in huge numbers, even though they are seldom seen in other parts of the state.

The Dewey's Pasture Complex consists of 2,200 acres of marsh, 2,300 acres of lakes and 800 acres of grass, cropland and woods all within a fairly small area north of the town of Ruthven, in Clay and Palo Alto Counties. This imperfectly drained area is probably typical of the sight that met early settlers in most of northwestern Iowa; water, water everywhere. In some areas, as much as one half of the land was covered with marshes and lakes. Ninety-eight percent of these natural wetlands have been drained since Iowa was settled. Dewey's Pasture preserves a bit of our natural heritage, a tract of land the way it looked over 100 years ago.

Marshes in this area range from tiny "potholes", no bigger than a living room to Barringer Slough, which covers nearly 800 acres. Lakes are usually only slightly deeper than marshes (Trumbull Lake is only about three feet deep), but the extra water depth keeps cattails



and rushes from growing. Water areas which are too deep for emergent plants to grow are defined as lakes.

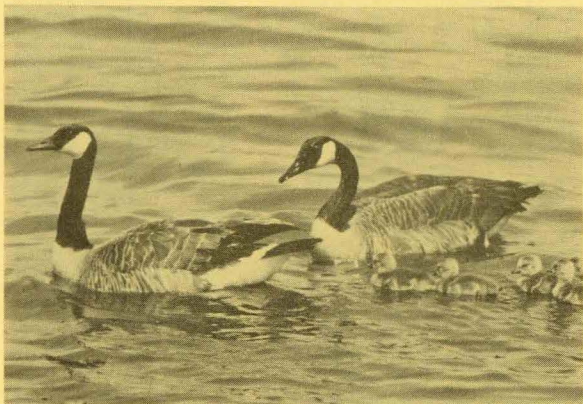
Thanks to natural runoff and farm fertilizers, marshes are one of the most productive places on earth. Muskrats may reach densities of 25 per acre and yellow-

headed blackbirds 10 per acre over large areas of marsh.

Some other common denizens of the marsh are the pied-billed grebe, which build a strange floating nest, and may not fly on their puny wings for months at a time. In fact they are sometimes "grounded" by drying pools which don't give them enough "runway" to get airborne.

The "thunder-pumper" or American bittern has perhaps the strangest song in the bird world. Usually heard at night, and carrying for as much as a mile, this song resembles the noise made by an old hand water pump.

You may also see the tiny marsh wren, which builds dozens of nests before it settles down to nest in one. Waterfowl are much in evidence, with the most common being the tiny blue-winged teal. Although it actually nests in grassy uplands, the blue-wing raises its young in the marsh. The stately Canada goose also



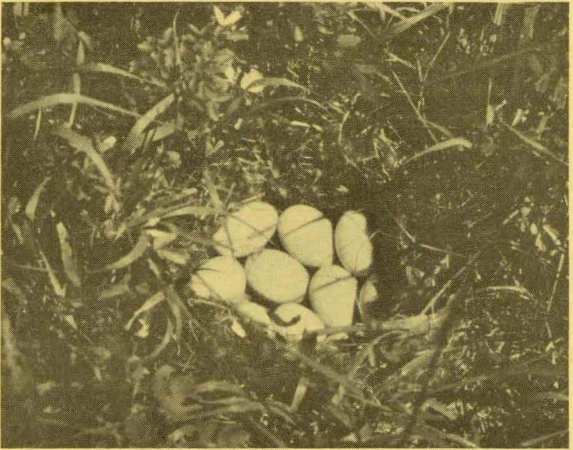
nests in the area, as do mallards, redheads and a few other kinds of ducks. Perhaps the strangest duck in the area is the little ruddy. This small duck lays eggs almost twice as large as hen's eggs, frequently in other birds' nests. When the eggs hatch the young ruddies are readily accepted by their foster parents. The male ruddy in breeding season is unforgettable. He swims low in the water, tail pointing straight up and has the most incredibly bright blue bill.

Management

Public lands in the Dewey's Pasture Complex were purchased over the last 40 years with money from hunting and fishing license sales and taxes on guns and ammunition. Production of waterfowl is one important goal. Water levels in marshes are regulated as much as possible to benefit wildlife.

Prairie areas which were neglected for years gradually grew up to bluegrass, almost worthless for nesting birds. By the careful use of spring burning, these areas are gradually changing back to tall grass prairie. Some prairie plants which hadn't been seen in twenty years came back after two years of burning. Spring fires were apparently one of the reasons Iowa was once covered with prairie instead of brush or trees.

Although production of wildlife is an important goal, an effort is made to avoid artificial management for one or two species. The ultimate goal is protection and perpetuation of the whole marsh-grassland ecosystem and the wildlife that is found there.



Small tracts of level land in the complex are farmed, with a portion of the crop left for wildlife. Where this is impossible, food plots of corn or sorghum are planted for wildlife. Tree and shrub plantings are made at strategic spots to provide winter cover for songbirds, pheasants, deer and other wildlife.

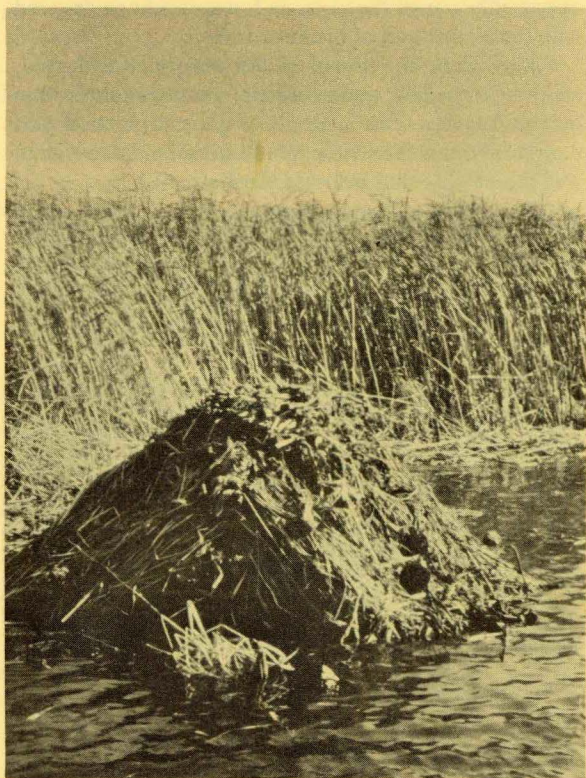
Public Use

All the areas in this complex are public hunting areas except Round Lake, which is closed to hunting during the waterfowl season, and Lost Island Lake which is an "open water" refuge (no hunting except from shore).

Prior to 1900, the area was home to the giant Canada goose. They were wiped out by over-hunting and habitat destruction, and were unknown as nesting birds in the area for about 70 years. Then in 1971 they were re-introduced and given protection. Within ten years the project was a resounding success, with nesting Canada geese scattered over the whole area. The entire complex is closed to Canada goose hunting to protect this resident flock.

Excellent hunting is available for other kinds of waterfowl, as well as pheasants and deer. A few spots provide hunting for rabbits and squirrels, and trapping is usually good for aquatic furbearers.

As you may have already gathered, this is an excellent area for watching birds. One birder spotted 102

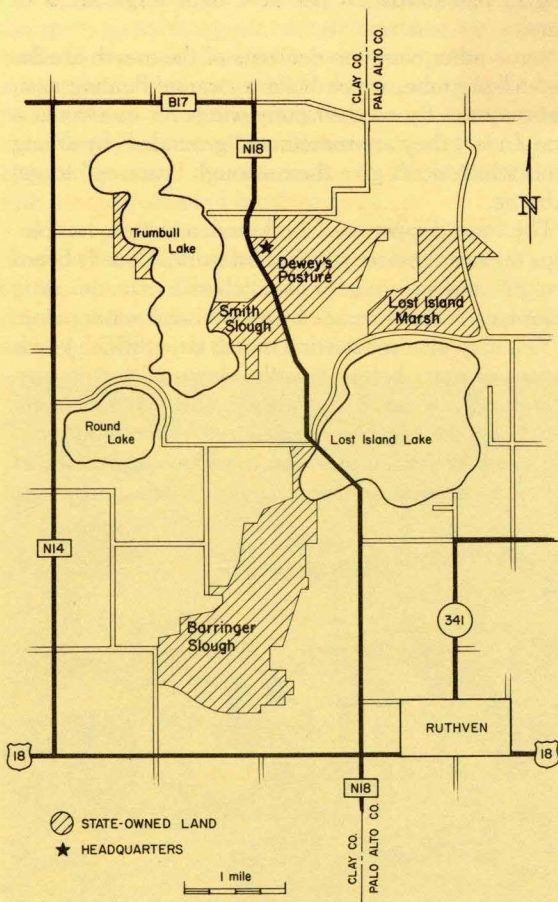


different kinds on a weekend visit to the area.

Lost Island Lake often provides good fishing for bullheads and walleyes. Trumbull Lake sometimes has excellent fishing for perch, northern pike or bullheads.

Picnicking, camping and swimming are available at the Palo Alto County Conservation Board park adjacent to Lost Island Lake. There are plenty of opportunities for informal nature study, hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing or just "getting away from it all". If you need further information or wish to arrange a tour, stop at the Ruthven Wildlife Unit headquarters 4 miles north of Ruthven, or phone 712-837-4850.

This complex is managed as a "mini wilderness". Vehicles are prohibited on most of the area, and you won't find sidewalks or manicured lawns. But if you want to see nature as it really is, visit the Dewey's Pasture Complex.



IOWA CONSERVATION COMMISSION
 WALLACE STATE OFFICE BLDG.
 DES MOINES, IOWA 50319