

City preserve is top oasis for birds

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Recently much has been written about the potential effects of tropical deforestation on populations of North American migrant songbirds which winter in the tropics (neotropical migrants). We must be concerned also about the impact of habitat loss along migration routes between the wintering and the breeding grounds.

As we continue to fragment our forests, destroy wetlands, eliminate hedge rows, spread chemicals on our agricultural lands and expand our cities, there is less habitat available for the millions of birds which annually migrate to and from Central and South America. These birds travel thousands of miles over landscapes with which they are totally unfamiliar. There are no signs advertising the nearest restaurants, motels, and rest areas; and yet every few hundred miles they must stop to rest and refuel.

One of the best examples in the Midwest of the importance of preserving natural areas in the suburban environment is right in the City of Kalamazoo. The approximately 50-acre Kleinstuck Preserve, under the stewardship of Western Michigan University, provides food, water and cover for thousands of migrant songbirds each year.

Kleinstuck is a unique site for migrant birds because of the combination of its location, the pond, and the diversity of food and cover which it provides. The preserve is somewhat comparable to an oasis — in this instance a verdant island in the midst of suburbia. The many wildlife plantings over the years enhance the habitat to provide food for birds the year around. The many conifers and dense shrubs which were added provided plentiful and safe roosting sites for resident birds and migrants alike.

The numerous species of trees and shrubs include species which leaf early (wild black cherry and honeysuckle) and late (the oaks) providing a continuous source of food and insects (food for birds). The pond acts to buffer the effects of periods of colder temperature as insects are available more readily around the pond edges.

Kleinstuck consistently has attracted more migrants than other sites three or four times its size. Every warbler which regularly occurs in Michigan, except the Kirtland's warbler, has found its way to the preserve in the past 18 years. For some species (worm-eating and Kentucky warblers), there are more records for Kleinstuck than the rest of Kalamazoo County combined. Locally, the rare summer tanager, yellow-throated warbler, Bell's and white-eyed vireos have also been seen there. Even a boreal chickadee showed up once to watch the many birders who had gathered to watch the warblers.

Spring is the time to visit Kleinstuck. During the first week of May the trees become alive with birds as many of our common summer residents return and the waves of warblers begin. Residents such as the gorgeous scarlet tanager, northern oriole, rose-breasted grosbeak, and indigo bunting can be found in good numbers. Several warblers fit through the trees, including blue-winged, golden-winged, Nashville, black-throated green, and black-and-white warblers, while ovenbirds pursue food in the undergrowth.

Along with these come the solitary vireo and least flycatchers. By the second week of May it is common to see 100 or more individual warblers of 10-15 species in a morning including Tennessee, chestnut-sided, magnolia, and Blackburnian warblers and the American redstart. Red-eyes and Philadelphia vireos are regular. Now the number of species often exceeds 70 in a morning and can be 85 or more.

Kleinstuck Preserve also attracts the many look-alike thrushes. In early May the resident wood thrush and veery and migrant gray-cheeked, Swainson's, plus late lingering hermit thrushes can be seen side-by-side for easy comparison.

During middle to late May many flycatchers pass through including the yellow-bellied, Acadian, alder, and willow along with the uncommon olive-sided flycatcher an extra bonus. The warbler wave continues with many of the species mentioned earlier plus the Canada, Wilson's, mourning and Connecticut. The Connecticut warbler is especially difficult to find in Michigan, but at Kleinstuck the species occurs every year during the period 15-25 May.

Kleinstuck is outstanding as an outdoor laboratory. Over the years hundreds of birders have visited the preserve from the surrounding areas and even other states and countries. Scores of students have learned to tell a downy from a hairy woodpecker, a warbler from

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NATURE'S WAY

a vireo. In addition, Kleinstuck supports a diversity of plants and insects along with numerous reptiles, amphibians, and mammals, which can be viewed close up.

When one considers the quality of life in Kalamazoo, Kleinstuck Preserve is one of its jewels.

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