

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Wildlife Highlights

October, November, and December 2019

Prepared by Patrick McCrea



As fall transitions into winter wildlife in Dekalb county begins to prepare. This beautiful chorus frog was spotted while we were collecting remnant prairie seed along the Great Western trail. The small ephemeral wetlands along the trail offer these frogs a great place to breed in the spring and a possible place to hibernate in the fall. This year the invasive phragmites grass was treated along the trail to help improve these wetlands.

In October we discovered one of our mulch piles at Afton Forest Preserve had created ideal conditions for amphibians to hibernate in. In this photo is an American toad, gray tree and 2 out of focus chorus frogs. On a warm day we surveyed 15 cubic feet of mulch to better understand what was using the pile. We found 53 Chorus frogs, 3 American toads, and one tree frog. We returned the animals to the pile and we were impressed at how many amphibians were in just 15 cubic feet.



Amphibians and reptiles in Dekalb County have to hibernate to survive the winter. They often hibernate in abandoned burrows, beneath logs or rocks, underground or in the mud at the bottom of a pond or stream. Mulch, leaf, and habitat piles can also offer wildlife a refuge for winter.

This common Garter snake at South Branch Prairie is seeking temporary shelter in a flooded crayfish burrow. Some snakes will hibernate in crayfish burrows. The burrows offer stable temperatures and conditions for a snake to survive the cold.



While the amphibians and reptiles are getting ready to hibernate some adult butterflies are getting ready to migrate. Butterflies have different strategies to survive while some migrate others overwinter as pupas, some as caterpillars and even some as adult butterflies. As we were working on replacing windows at Chief Shabbona Forest preserve this Question Mark butterfly took a break to enjoy the sun on the steps of one of the shelters. The Question Mark is one of the butterflies that uses a couple strategies to survive winter. Some of the adults hibernate seeking shelter in hollow trees and any crack or crevice they can fit in while others migrate south.



This fall we were able to capture an American Badger on a camera trap in Russel Woods. When badgers are not raising young, they like to move around. They may move to a different burrow every night. This badger showed up on our camera every 10 to 12 days. They feed primarily on burrowing rodents so by leaving burrows open for a few days prey sometimes takes up residence only later to become a meal when the badger revisits the burrow. Badgers don't fully hibernate but they do reduce the amount of time they are active in winter.



As some birds leave for the winter others take up residence. At Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh Dark Eyed Juncos can be seen daily. As we worked to remove invasive brush along the trail these birds flickered about. In the summer Dark Eyed Juncos breed in Canada and Alaska. When the seasons begin to change these birds migrate down to the United States and Mexico for the winter. Photo by Tom Robbins



Every year volunteers participate in the Christmas Bird Count. This is a citizen science program set up through the National Audubon Society to help understand and record bird populations. DeKalb County Forest Preserve District welcomes this survey to take place within the preserves. This year volunteers discovered a Saw Whet Owl at one of the Preserves. These are small owls only about the size of an American Robin. DeKalb County is in their non breeding range but Saw Whet Owls are a rare and exciting sight for the preserves. Photo by Karen Lund