

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District Wildlife Highlights

April, May, and June 2020
Prepared by Patrick McCrea



The spring in DeKalb County Forest Preserves are full of color! Warblers use many of our Forest Preserves as stop overs on their migration north. The Canada Warbler winters in South America and nests in Canada. It prefers wet woods and can be spotted along stream corridors. Photo by Ken Reinert

DeKalb County Forest Preserves provide beneficial habitat for these spring and fall visitors. Warblers typically forage on insects and this American Redstart does so by dropping its wings and fanning out its tail. The flash of orange startles insects allowing the Redstart to capture even well camouflaged insects as they try to get away. American Redstarts can be found along wooded stream corridors in the spring and fall. If you're looking for Warblers in early spring P.A. Nehring, Prarie Oaks, Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh, Sannauck, Russel Woods, and Knute Olson Jr. are all great preserves to see these migrants.

If you're looking to provide habitat for warblers at your own house planting native trees and shrubs can help. Native trees and shrubs provide a place for insects to feed, grow, and reproduce. Warblers feed on all kinds of insects and Kinglets even feed on insect eggs. Providing native trees, shrubs, and plants can help promote native insect populations and help feed these birds as they migrate north. Photo by Ken Reinert





Photo by Ken Reinert

Warblers have amazing patterns and vibrant colors in the spring as they migrate through but in the fall as they head back south they are a little more drab. This is because in the spring males are in full breeding plumage as they make their way up to summer breeding grounds. This spring we spotted a Magnolia Warbler flickering around an ephemeral wetland at P.A Nehring. With these species and others in mind we are treating invasive plants and working to maintain and increase overall diversity in all of the preserves.

Warblers are not the only ones to brighten up the woodlands. This male scarlet tanager is bound to catch your eye. Scarlet Tanager's migrate across the Gulf of Mexico from their wintering grounds in South America to the North Eastern United States where they breed. These birds will breed and nest in Dekalb county. They prefer woodlands and typically nest in mature deciduous trees. The DCFPD continues its efforts to remove invasive shrubs like honeysuckle and buckthorn this effort will help promote native tree and shrub regeneration. We also plant native trees and shrubs so these long-distance travelers will continue to have a place to forage, breed, and nest. Photo by Ken Reinert





In the Forest Preserve Districts efforts to better understand our preserves, staff participated in the Spring Bird Count this year. The spring bird count is unique to Illinois organized by the Illinois Audubon Society. This count has taken place since 1972 and has continued every year since with the help of volunteers. This year Karen Lund was our county compiler. She helped organize volunteers and the data that volunteers collected. With a bunch of bird loving volunteers, the total count for species this year was 126. The data collected on this day can be compared to past years to better understand bird trends. The DCFPD is performing several bird surveys throughout the year to better understand individual preserves. On one of these surveys our staff was lucky enough to spot

an indigo bunting along The Great Western Trail. Photo by Ken Reinert

As birds are flickering around the woodland's snakes are slithering through the prairies. At South Branch Prairie, Forest Preserve staff found this beautiful snake while surveying the snake boards we have at this preserve. The typical observations are common garters, plains garters, and Dekay's brown snakes. This happened to be a melanistic common garter snake. Melanism is an increase in the dark pigment melanin. Photo by Damon Lubkeman





While we were working to maintain diversity in the Afton wetlands, we came across this painted turtle crossing the trail. You may see turtles out for a couple of reasons. In early spring male painted turtles may move from different aquatic habitats in search of a mate. In May and June, you may see female turtles looking for a nesting site. In any case let them go about their business most the time they know what they are doing. If you have to move a turtle off the road try to put it in the direction it is traveling. Painted turtles can usually be spotted at Afton and Knute Olson Jr. Forest Preserves.

This turtle is new to our recent survey records. This is a Northern Map turtle that was spotted at Knute Olson Jr. Forest Preserve. These turtles prefer backwaters of large rivers and large lakes. After the flooding this spring we suspect it moved into the small pond and will eventually move back to the river. Both the Northern Map turtle and painted turtle lay 2 to 3 clutches of eggs a year. This may help prevent all their offspring from being destroyed if a predator finds a nest. Photo by Damon Lubkeman





In the month of June little Killdeer chicks are out exploring with their mothers. DeKalb County FPD is actively involved in creating and maintain wetland habitats that are so important to these birds and all kinds of wildlife. Killdeer are a common sight

along roadways because they prefer to lay their eggs in scrapes they make on bare ground. Often, they find the gravel shoulder to be appealing. Nesting in gravel seems uncomfortable but chicks hatch fully feathered and leave the nest as soon as their feathers dry. Photo by Ken Reinert

Our Chief Shabbona Preserve Manager captured a photo of this fawn while he was working on the trails. The majority of whitetail fawns are born in May and June in Illinois. With their little legs they can't keep up with their mom so the doe will leave her young to forage and come back around dawn or dusk to feed her fawn. Best thing to do if you stumble across a fawn is to leave it alone. If this fawn makes it to adulthood it can look forward to a max speed of 30mph and have an average lifespan of about 4.5 years. Photo by Angus Clucas

