

# Forestry is for the Birds!

What makes a forest good for bird habitat? Is it simply the trees, or is there more to it than that? It should come as no surprise that the answer is as complex and varied as the birds that enjoy the woods. Many species of birds require a particular parts of the woods to be just right to make their homes. A large portion of those traits come from the structure of the forest. By structure, we mean the age of the trees in the forest, the species present, how much dead wood is there, and the most dominant trees in the canopy. Every part of the forest is important for birds, as each can provide the necessities for their survival. Michigan's forests are bountiful in this regard, and can provide a great amount of insight on what our local woods can provide to our feathered friends.

The structure of the forest in Southwest Michigan can often be placed into three distinct categories. The first is the "Unmanaged" woods, which are often left alone by their owners purposefully or unknowingly, and leads to a woodland with older trees and an abundance of shade and little regrowth on the forest floor. There are also the "Actively Managed" woods, in which the owners have either done some logging or are purposefully pursuing a goal with their woodlot. The third is kind of an oddball, and it is the leftover plantations from the Civilian Conservation Corps. Both the first and third categories end up having fewer species of trees, and generally have very few if any trees and shrubs growing underneath the most dominant species. In actively managed woodland, there are more opportunities for new trees to grow, and landowners can purposefully manage a forest to have trees ranging in age from very young, to mature, to dead on the ground. This makes them the ideal type of forest for attracting birds of all kinds.

The species of the trees in your woods can also determine what birds will end up living there. Many birds are picky eaters, and have adapted to feed on very specific foods that these trees provide.

For example, wild turkeys will seek out oaks and hickories for their acorns and hickory nuts, a valuable source of protein and fat. Cedar Waxwings are another year-round inhabitant of our woods, and they survive entirely on soft fruits and berries like from dogwoods or elderberry. There are also endangered species that require unique living arrangements, such as the Kirtland's Warbler which makes it's nest under young Jack Pines. Different arrangements of tree species, woodland structure, and the surrounding environment make it so that each forest is a little different, and can show off the great biodiversity this state has on the land.

For the many game hunters and folks who live near both water and woods, waterfowl are often a welcome sight in the woods. Forests, wetland, and open water are often close neighbors in Michigan and interact with each other to provide the habitat necessary for a complex ecosystem. Wood Ducks, Mergansers and other game species rely on cavities in dead trees near open water to make their nests. Likewise, woodcocks and other wetland species depend on both living and down trees for food and mating rituals.

The management of the woods is important, not only for birds, but also for the many other people, plants, and woodland critters that depend on them. Having old growth woods that have been untouched for decades or hundreds of years is critical, but is often not something the average landowner has access to do. Actively managing our woods to help improve biodiversity and structure is a great option for landowners who want to do something more with their land. Working with your woods will help employ it's strengths, so that you get the most value from your property, and it becomes a more sustainable resource for years to come. If you are unsure on what you can do with your woods, contact your local district forester for a free on-site assessment. District Forester Ben Savoie provides professional guidance for all landowners in Barry, Allegan, and Ottawa counties. Call Ben at 269-908-4134 to schedule your visit!



## This month by the numbers:

Site Visits - 12  
Site Visit Acreage - 128  
Private Sector Referrals - 10  
Public Sector Referrals - 8  
Media Occurrences - 3

## Outreach Activities:

Oak wilt treatment guidance with the residents of the Oak Grove neighborhood in Grand Haven.

## Open Referrals:

None available at this time, keep watch for new requests at the Barry CD website or stay tuned for more requests via email.

As always, thank you for all the work you do!

