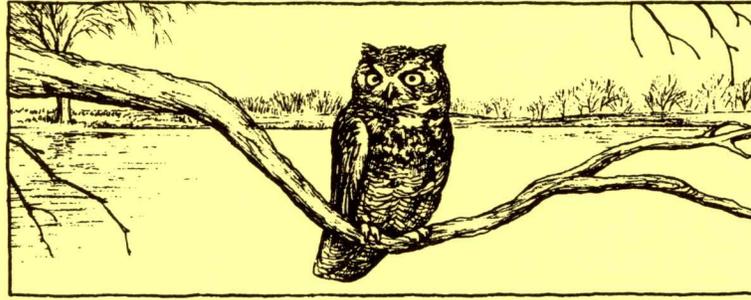


STILLMAN NEWSLETTER



©SUMMER 2002

SPRING WARBLERS: Niches in Time & Place

-- Mark Spreyer

To the uninitiated, sorting through the 54 species of warblers can be a bit challenging. The names alone can drive you nuts.

For example, there is a yellow warbler, a yellow-rumped warbler, a yellow-throated warbler, and a common yellowthroat... which is a warbler. And whatever you do, don't confuse the black-throated green warbler with the black-throated blue or the black-throated gray warbler.

Be that as it may, they are some of the most striking birds you'll ever see. As a licensed bird bander, there is nothing more exciting than banding a colorful spring warbler. Since many spend winters south and summers north of us, most of these avian jewels can only be seen in spring and fall.

In May, I had the opportunity to both see and handle a variety of warblers which gave me reason to speculate on the term *niche*.

You see the warblers belong to the second biggest family of North American songbirds, exceeded only by the finches. At first glance, these similarly-sized insect-eaters would seem to be competing for the same natural resources.

Before continuing, let's define a couple of terms. *Habitat* is the local environment occupied by an organism. The lake a fish occupies would be its habitat.

Niche is often described as the "role" of a species in its habitat. That is to say, what a critter eats, what it is

eaten by, where it lives and so on. A bottom-feeding catfish, for example, plays a different role in the lake than does a predatory bass.

Many of the warblers passing through Stillman are heading for a northern forest to breed. Where are the niches for all these warblers? How do they avoid direct competition?

As the illustration shows, one way is to feed at different locations within the tree. This brings me back to a couple of the warblers that were encountered at Stillman in May.

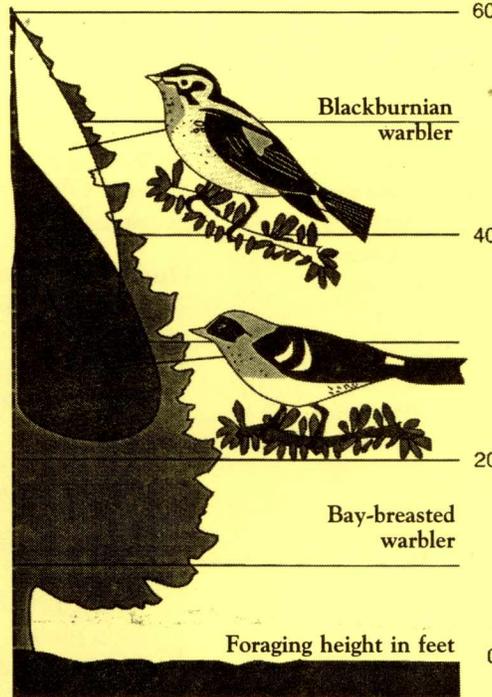
One of the first warblers to be seen heading north is the palm warbler, named after the tropical trees. This, unfortunately, is a poor name for the species. When on its wintering grounds, it is rarely seen in palms, preferring the low-growing saw palmetto.

This preference for feeding low is true during migration as well. It can often be seen feeding on the ground, in shrubs, and along fences. This habit makes it relatively easy for me to catch and band (see **Programs** for more about banding). Its diet includes ants, aphids, mosquitoes, flies,

grasshoppers, gnats, plus small green caterpillars.

Like other palm warblers, the one I banded this spring was brown above, yellowish below and wearing a sporty chestnut cap. It weighed 10 grams, roughly a third of an ounce. It always impresses me that such tiny birds cross the country twice a year.

Some palm warblers might stay to breed in the



Adapted from W.P. Cunningham and B.W. Saigo, *Environmental Science: A Global Concern*, 5th ed. © 1999

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northern regions of Wisconsin, Minnesota or Michigan but most are headed for Canadian bogs. There, they'll build a nest at the base of a small birch, fir, or spruce. In order to add the palm warbler to the illustration on this page, we would have to shade the area beneath the bay-breasted.

We would need a different figure to show where the black-and-white warbler fits in. This is another early migrant that we got a good look at during our spring bird walks at Stillman.

Unlike the palm warbler, this species lives up to its name. It is, indeed, black and white. It has a striped crown with stripes running lengthwise down its back and sides.

The black-and-white winters from the Gulf Coast to northern South America. Compared to the palm, the black-and-white warbler is less choosy about the forests it nests in. It can be found in a variety of broadleaf and mixed forest habitats. Given these eclectic tastes, it nests across much of southern Canada and the eastern United States. Unfortunately, nests in Illinois are few and far between.

So why would we need a different illustration to show the black-and-white's niche? It specializes in feeding along the larger limbs and trunks of trees which are barely visible in the picture. Unlike other warblers, its bill is slightly curved which facilitates poking through nooks and crannies in search of spiders, leaf beetles, wood borers, bugs, moths, and weevils.

Luckily for us, a few warblers stick around to nest. In particular, we often hear the common yellowthroat and the yellow warbler all summer long. So come join us for a walk and try your hand at spotting these butterflies of the bird world.

PROGRAMS

Program Basics: PLEASE CALL OR FAX US AT 428-OWLS(6957), OR EMAIL STILLMAN AT stillnc@flash.net TO MAKE RESERVATIONS for programs (except for bird banding open houses). Remember to include your name, phone number, and the number of people that will be attending.

If less than 5 - 10 people (varying with the activity) have called two days prior to a program, the program could well be cancelled. So, don't forget to call the nature center in advance. If you discover that you are unable to attend, please call to cancel your reservations. This courtesy will be greatly appreciated.

BIRD BANDING OPEN HOUSES

Watch Mark Spreyer (a licensed bird bander) measure, weigh and record data about our resident and migratory birds. Catching birds is not always predictable, so come prepared to hike the trails. If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.



Date: Sundays, June 2, July 7 & Aug. 4
Time: 9:00AM to Noon
Fee: None

YOGA IN NATURE WORKSHOPS

Join us for a unique twist on enjoying nature's summer ambience, while helping to relax, stretch, and tone at the same time. With the sounds of birds as the accompanying "music," instructor Evamarie Pilipuf will lead you through an outdoor yoga routine, including basic breathing techniques, carefully selected postures, and yoga's most valuable element: mindfulness. No prior yoga experience needed. Please bring an exercise mat or large towel, dress in weather-appropriate, comfortable clothing, and bring a bottle of water. *Advance registration required; please call 847-428-OWLS to register.* If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Dates: Friday, June 21 Tuesday, July 16
Times: 9:00 - 10:00AM 7:00 - 8:00PM
Member's Fee: \$7.00 per session
Non-member's Fee: \$10.00 per session
Age: 18 years and up

SPECIAL VOLUNTEERS AND MEMBERS EVENT

We are hosting our fifth annual outdoor meeting. We'll provide the main course and beverages. We'd like you to bring along a side dish. ALL of Stillman's members, volunteers and their families are invited. Feel free to come any time between 4:00 and 7:00PM.

If it's raining, we'll reschedule this picnic to an autumn date. *Please call 428-OWLS to let us know if you plan to attend and what kind of dish you'll be bringing.*

Date: Sunday, June 23
Time: 4:00 - 7:00PM

SUNDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Mark Spreyer will lead a morning bird walk. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. If it's raining, the activity will be cancelled.

Date: Sundays: June 30, July 21 & Aug. 18
 Time: 8:00AM
 Fee: None
 Age: 10 years and up

FRIDAY MORNING BIRD WALKS

Just like above but on a weekday. Mark Spreyer, former Director of Chicago's peregrine falcon release project, will lead the walks. Binoculars and field guides are a must. If you don't have any, don't worry, Stillman does. Please call 428-OWLS to make reservations.

Date: Fridays: July 19 & August 16
 Time: 8:00AM
 Fee: None
 Age: 10 years and up

POND LIFE: From the Bottom Up

This afternoon, with the help of long-handled dip nets, visitors will scoop into our pond in hopes of catching crayfish, dragonfly larvae, tadpoles and other rarely seen pond inhabitants. Dress in clothes and shoes you don't mind getting muddy.

Date: Sunday, August 11
 Time: 2:00PM
 Fee: None

PRAIRIE RAMBLE

Our volunteers, under the leadership of Daria Sapp, have been working hard to get prairie plants growing in Stillman's "south forty." They've been quite successful and this is your chance to join Daria on a tour of this colorful site.

Date: Sunday, Aug. 25
 Time: 2:00PM
 Fee: None

THE TRIBUTE TREES

At the suggestion of one of our Board of Directors, Stillman is establishing a grove of tribute trees. These trees will be planted to honor or celebrate persons or events that have touched our lives. The list of tribute trees currently available and the price (which includes purchase, delivery, and planting) are listed below. The selection and price list will change with availability of trees.

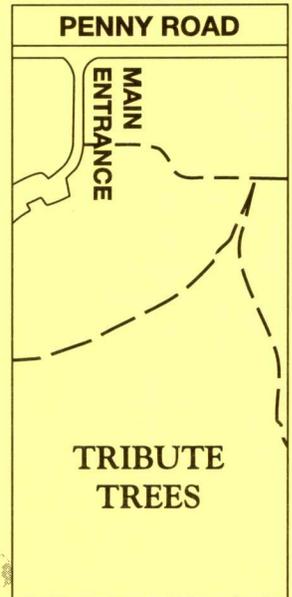
In addition to the tree, most of which will be 2" in diameter at breast height, the honoree's name will appear on a small plaque which will be located on the white brick wall that parallels the entrance drive.

Please keep in mind that this will not be a formal grove. We are hoping that in a few years time, these trees will look like they've been here for decades. Also, since many of the trees must be dug from the nursery in spring, there may be a delay between your contribution and the time the tree will be planted.

We hope you are as excited about the idea as we are. In fact, two of our Board of Directors have already purchased trees. The dedication for these trees appears below.

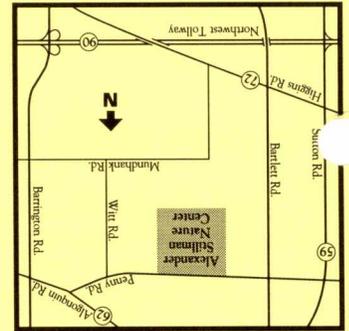
• A swamp white oak has been planted in memory of: Barbara E. Provan, David G. Provan, and Ragner Nelson.

• A bald cypress will be planted in memory of Be Nemeth from John and (Mary) Lou Albanese.



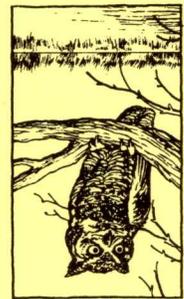
Tree Contribution List

<u>Variety</u>	<u>Contribution</u>
paperbark maple	\$700.00
black maple	500.00
common alder	600.00
white alder	500.00
river birch	650.00
green ash	600.00
Kentucky coffeetree	650.00
swamp white oak	600.00
bald cypress	700.00
lacebark elm	600.00
black gum	600.00



Email: stillinc@flash.net
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STILLMAN
 nature center



Open Sundays 9-4

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If you aren't already a member, please consider joining us.

- Yes, I'd like to become a member of the Stillman Nature Center. I enclose my tax deductible contribution of \$_____.
- I'd like to help as a volunteer with programs or land management at the Stillman Nature Center, please call me.
- Please send a gift membership from _____ to the name and address listed below.

Name _____
 Address _____

 Telephone _____

Student	\$10.00
Member	25.00
Supporting Member	50.00
Contributing Member	100.00
Sustaining Member	500.00
Partner	1000.00

Please mail with your check to:

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