

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 12, Number 3

Autumn 2007

Park Focus: The Onder Property

by Billy Kirst

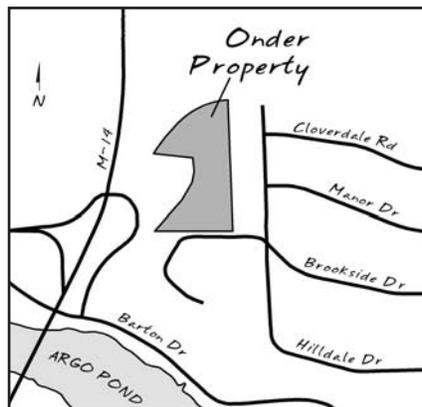
Break out your hand saws and safety glasses – we're about to have another big restoration party! Recently, the city purchased "the Onder property," a 4.2-acre parcel of land. (This nature area hasn't yet been officially named, so for now we'll just call it "Onder.") Though currently overwhelmed by buckthorn and honeysuckle, Onder shows clear signs of natural riches waiting to flourish. The parcel consists of mesic forest, formerly dominated by ash. A few large oak trees, and many black cherry and box elder fill in the overstory. There are two small streams and many pockets of wooded wetlands. The stream at the north end has a nice diversity of mesic and wet mesic woodland wildflowers including trillium, early meadow-rue, and marsh marigolds, woven together by a ground cover of Virginia creeper.

One of Onder's most important ecological features is its location. Positioned between the upland forests of Leslie Park and Black Pond Woods and the riparian complex of Argo, Bandemer, Barton, Bird Hills, and Kuebler Langford, Onder – with adjacent non-developed properties – serves as a "green corridor," providing important habitat connectivity.

Green corridors act in much the same way as those in buildings. Connecting spaces together as a cohesive unit, indoor corridors allow people to comfortably move from room to room without stepping out into the cold or rain. As a green corridor, Onder is a place where birds, mammals, reptiles, insects, and seeds can move through the urban landscape without facing assault from *the lawn*. Despite deceptive luscious greenery, most lawns lack the shade, water, and other habitat qualities needed by wildlife. Lawns can be places where native plants and animals encounter such perils as mowers, kitty cats,

and herbicides. Connections like Onder offer welcome relief.

Landscape corridors are becoming an increasingly important component of natural areas planning and management. To see for yourself, grab your "Parks Map and Recreation Facility Listing," (free if you contact us or come to a workday!), and let's check out the city from a turkey vulture's eye view. Over 25 natural areas, parks, and green spaces line most of the Huron River as it winds through the city. This corridor provides contiguous habitat and resources for plants and animals. Rivers make especially great corridors since their connectivity not only supports species on land, but provides greater continuity of habitat for amphibians and aquatic wildlife.



Fragmentation of the natural landscape by roads, buildings, parking lots, and agriculture strains the ability of the remaining natural areas to support an ecologically diverse and functional assemblage of plant and animal species. When a natural area is completely surrounded by development, wildlife become isolated from potential mates, and diversity and survival rates suffer. This is particularly true for species with highly specific habitat requirements and limited dispersal abilities. It is also essential in regions where fire is an important historic and current feature of the landscape. Many fire-sensitive species take refuge from fires in nearby ecosystems, only to repopulate into the burned location. Habitat connectivity, therefore, can be a lifeline for many species.

Habitats in large, continuous tracts also buffer the effects of landscape change. Say, for example, that a population of Joe-pye-weed was wiped out by a marauding army of glossy buckthorn. Then some NAPpers came along

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Coordinator's Corner

Getting Rid of "Stuff"

This summer I cleaned my office. For those of you who have ever visited my office, you'll appreciate the significance of this. I am not, by nature, a tidy person. I tend to set things down in a convenient spot, and then never touch them again. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that my office is rather small with most of the perimeter occupied by windows or doors. So the pattern over the 12 years that I've occupied this space is that it slowly fills up with "stuff" until it eventually reaches the point where *even I* can't stand it anymore. Then I box up everything and remove it to another part of the building or, I'm ashamed to admit, ask another staffer to sort through and file it for me. And then I have a clean office again... at least for awhile.

That's where I am in the cycle again now; my office is clean. But something is different this time. In addition to cleaning it, we (my staff actually gets the credit for this) also re-designed it. We thought about my individual organizational quirks (for example, I'm a *piler* and not a *filer*) and tried to design an office with those tendencies in mind. Now, I have places designed to hold piles of papers, rather than files, so when I walk into my office, I can set things down without immediately creating a mess. Instead of pretending that I could change my tendencies, we've found a way to work with them.

This is not, of course, an original notion about office design. But here's the tie-in to NAP that occurred to me in the middle of this whole process: this is no different than what happens in our natural areas. Over the millennia, many of our native ecosystems (here and throughout much of the U.S.) have tended to burn frequently. That regular process was one of the main forces that maintained their open structure and let in enough sunlight to support a rich ground-cover of grasses and wildflowers. Since European settlement, however, we've changed historic land-use patterns and removed fire from the landscape. The result is that, over time, these prairies, savannas, and oak woodlands slowly start to fill in with "stuff," mostly shrubs that never would have tolerated the historic fires. We can go into these areas and "clean" them out every so often but, like my office, the "stuff" tends to come back. The seedbank is now loaded with seeds from exotic shrubs, so there's more competitive pressure than ever before from these invasives.

We found this out the hard way at Furstenberg years ago. It was one of the first parks in which NAP did significant shrub-cutting, back in 1994 when we were getting started. We cleared out the shrubs, patted ourselves on the backs, and moved on to our next conquest. But alas, in 2 or 3 years, the shrubs were back at Furstenberg, thicker than ever. So we had to "clean" them out again. But this time we added an additional management tool – regular prescribed fire. That proved to be what was needed to keep the shrubs out and the site from filling in with unwanted "stuff" too quickly.

So I know this concept works in nature. I just hope the new "management plan" for my office is as effective at keeping the unwanted "stuff" from creeping back into that space. Or maybe, I should consider employing some prescribed fire on my piles of papers there!

-Dave Borneman, Natural Area Preservation Manager

Editor's note: For a list of opportunities to help clear some "stuff" out of our natural areas, see the NAP Volunteer Stewardship Calendar on page 4 of this newsletter!



City of Ann Arbor
**Natural Area
Preservation**

A unit of the City of Ann Arbor
Public Services Area

The mission of Natural Area Preservation is to protect and restore Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster an environmental ethic among its citizens.

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If you would prefer to receive your next newsletter via e-mail, please call NAP

Annual Photo Contest

by Dana Wright

Since Natural Area Preservation's inception in 1993, staff and volunteers have taken thousands of photos of Ann Arbor's 150 natural areas. Many memorable photos show the sometimes slow, but steady, changes that we have facilitated in our parks. A series of photos which come to mind shows the hairpin turn of the now closed road that winds its way down through the slopes of Cedar Bend Nature Area. By comparing a current picture to a historic photo from the early 1900s, we see an area that has bounced back from logging, erosion, and exotic shrub invasions to become a restored woodland with a tall over-story of oaks and hickory and a healthy smattering of spring native wildflowers. Another one of my favorites shows one of NAP's first workdays. Grinning with restoration enthusiasm and sporting loppers, staff and volunteers crowd around a NAP work truck that looks like it might be a demolition derby winner.

To help us continue our tradition of excellent photography and to keep up with our varying needs for photos, please join our photo collection by entering NAP's second annual photo contest. We need beautiful pictures of our changing landscapes and all the people who make the important work we do possible. Winning pictures from this year's contest will have the distinction of being included in our *first ever* NAP calendar, which will be available just in time for the New Year! There will also be a few tantalizing prizes and perks for winning photographers.

See our website for details about how, where, and when to enter...www.a2gov.org/nap. It's just another way to

THE NAP PUZZLER!

1. Fill in the blanks below by finding the missing information in the articles of this newsletter.

- * Landscape _ _ _ _ _ _ , which connect one or more natural areas, are serving an increasingly important role in natural areas management.
- * Regular _ _ _ _ _ _ fire helps keep invasive plants (or, um...Dave's piles) in check.
- * NAP's Assistant Ornithologist made acquaintance with a _ _ _ _ _ _ Rail after playing its call on a tape recorder.

2. Now, unscramble the circled letters above to reveal which one of Ann Arbor's oldest parks, obtained by the City in 1905, contains a trail designed by landscape architect O.C. Simonds and shelters the state-threatened plant, upland boneset.

get out into nature and enjoy the gifts we have! We look forward to seeing you out there collecting images!

Furstenberg Native Plant Garden Expansion

by Aunita Erskine, Park Steward



When I turned fifty this year, my lawn-loving husband finally relented and let me dig up the rest of my front yard for a new garden. Amazingly, I had so much energy left I decided it was time to expand the Furstenberg garden as well! One of the goals of this sunny native plant garden is to help visitors identify plants in the rest of the park. The expansion right next to the current garden will provide

some shade so we can plant oak savanna species or more shade-tolerant plants. The new planting will include: northern bedstraw, white snakeroot, blue-stemmed goldenrod, Canada anemone, and Pennsylvania sedge among many others. The expansion will also include species like wild columbine and butterfly milkweed which were crowded out of the existing garden.

NAP was busy herbiciding the new area this past summer. Two workdays will be used to install the planting: on September 23rd from 1:00 to 4:00 pm, we will be spreading a load of wood chips on the area. On October 7th from 1:00 to 4:00 pm, we will be doing the actual planting. Please consider volunteering on one or both of these workdays, and tell all your friends! We'll have a grand time getting to know Furstenberg all over again and starting up a new worthwhile project.

Autumn 2007 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

NAP is located at the Leslie Science & Nature Center (1831 Traver Road, Ann Arbor, 48105), 734.996.3266. Workday orientations start promptly at listed times. Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes. Minors must either be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Contact NAP if a group you are involved with is interested in planning a volunteer stewardship event. Our website is www.a2gov.org/nap

September

September 8, Saturday
Foxfire West Nature Area
10:00am to 1:00pm

In the fall we collect seeds from native plants to spread to other sites. This is a fun, less strenuous activity suitable for children and adults. Learn about native plants in their important seed-producing stage. Meet at the park entrance on Birchwood Dr.



September 9, Sunday
Hansen Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00pm

Trail maintenance is needed in this park! Help us put in cut logs over wet spots. We will also be cutting some woody invasives. Tools provided. Meet us in the Grace Bible Church parking lot (1300 South Maple Road), 1/3 mile south of West Liberty.



September 16, Sunday
Scarlett Mitchell Woods
1:00 to 4:00pm

Come out and help in the ongoing eradication of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle. Great exercise, and you can really see the difference at the end of the afternoon. Tools and gloves provided (or bring your own favorites). Meet in the Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine. Free snacks!



September 23, Sunday
Furstenberg Native Plant Garden
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Join Park Steward and Master Gardener, Aunita Erskine, as she expands the native plant garden. If there's time we'll take a botanical walk through Furstenberg Nature Area! Meet in the Furstenberg parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School. Workday orientation starts promptly at 1:00 pm.



September 29, Saturday
Dicken Woods
9:00am to 12:00pm

Join the Dicken Woods Neighborhood Association in the annual cutting of woody invasive shrubs! Buckthorn and Honeysuckle crowd out many of our native plants. By removing them, plant diversity is maintained. Tools and snacks provided. Meet at the park entrance at the end of Dicken Dr.



September 29, Saturday
Redbud Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00pm

Join fellow nature enthusiasts in a fall planting! We will be setting out plugs of native plants and spreading some seed. We will provide tools, gloves, and snacks. Meet at the park entrance at the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.



October

October 6, Saturday
Greenview Nature Area
9:00am to 12:00pm

Invasive shrubs out-compete native spring and summer wildflowers by shading them out. We need many hands to help us get rid of these shrubs in the woodland. Meet at the Greenview Park sign, on Greenview Road, across from Barnard Road. We will provide tools, snacks, and water.



October 7, Sunday
Furstenberg Native Plant Garden
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Join Park Steward and Master Gardener, Aunita Erskine, to plant fun flowers in the native plant garden. If there's time we'll take a botanical walk through Furstenberg Nature Area! Meet in the Furstenberg parking lot



off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School. Workday orientation starts promptly at 1:00 pm.

October 20, Saturday
Bluffs Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00pm

Fall is for seed collection! Help us gather various grass and flower seeds for dispersal in other locations. This park has fun hills and trails through lovely woods. We'll meet you in front of the park steward's house at 236 Sunset. We provide snacks and botanical information.



October 20, Saturday
Swift Run Marsh
1:00 to 4:00pm

Have your choice of collecting native plant seeds for dispersal in other parks, or cutting invasive woody plants. Buckthorn and Honeysuckle are shading out many of our native wildflowers. When they are cut out, the native plants come back! We'll meet you on Eddy Street, off of Verle Avenue. Gloves, tools, and snacks provided.



October 28, Sunday
Barton Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00pm

Join us to learn to identify the seeds of certain native plants as we collect them for planting in other locations. This fun activity is suitable for the whole family. Snacks provided! Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot on Huron River Drive.



October 30, Tuesday
Volunteer Appreciation Potluck
6:30pm

See announcement on next page for our annual Volunteer Appreciation Potluck! This year, wear a costume and stay to dance!



November

November 3, Saturday
Redbud Nature Area
1:00pm to 4:00pm



Come out and help us collect native plant seeds and then plant them in other areas of this park. Join us for fun, snacks, and to learn about the native plants of this park. Meet at the park entrance at the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.

November 4, Sunday
Huron Parkway Nature Area
1:00 to 4:00pm



We always love help with cutting out woody invasive plants! Bring your friends, get outside, get exercise, and help maintain this natural area. We'll meet at the Park Steward's house at 3470 Woodland Road, off East Huron River Drive.



Stewards' Circles

Join informal, monthly discussions with volunteer and professional stewards and others interested in nature. Hosted by the Stewardship Network.

2nd Tuesday of the month,
7:30 to 8:30 am
Bruegger's Bagels,
N University, Ann Arbor

3rd Thursday of the month,
12:00 noon to 1:00 pm
NEW Center, 1100 N Main, Ann Arbor,
upstairs in the north conference room

September 11 & 20: Land Protection
Greenbelt initiatives, land trusts, conservation easements, land use planning and ordinances. Pros and cons?

October 9 & 18: Herbicide
When should we use it and when should we use other IPM strategies?

November 13 & 25: Winter Restoration
What is most appropriate for this time of year?

Volunteer Appreciation Potluck & Costume-Dance Party!

Tuesday, October 30th
Cobblestone Farm - 2781 Packard Road
Potluck & Award Presentation 6:30 to 9:00pm
Harvest Costume/Dance Party 9:00 to Midnight

Everyone is invited! Please bring a dish to pass, anyone you would like, and your own place setting. Awards will be presented for NAP's Volunteer of the Year and Photo Contest Winners!

Join us afterwards for a costume dance party to celebrate this year's harvest *and* win a prize for Best Costume!

Please call NAP to RSVP - 734-996-3266



Stewardship Network Conference 2008



The Science, Practice & Art of Restoring Native Ecosystems

Friday & Saturday, January 25 & 26, 2008
Kellogg Center, East Lansing, MI

Join us for this information-packed, fun two-day conference linking wildlife enthusiasts, nature lovers, land managers, and researchers from throughout Michigan to improve the science, practice, and art of caring for natural lands and waters.

Stewardship Network member registration: \$60/day - \$100 both days

Non-member registration: \$75/day - \$125 both days



The Stewardship Network

Pulling together for nature

Visit our website at www.stewardshipnetwork.org
or call 734/996-3190 for more info.

Park Focus: The Onder Property *Continued from page 1*

and showed the buckthorn the door with the help of a brush-blade. Eventually, Joe-pye-weed could return to the site, even if there were no plants or seeds left in Bandemer. Because of the corridor of connected natural areas along the river, a few fluffy seeds from the Barton sedge meadow could just hop a flight on the wind or travel down the river to the recently-cleared Bandemer meadow. After a short while, a new population of Joe-pye-weed could become established. One population moving in to take another's place is called "recruitment." This recruitment, made possible by connectivity between natural areas, would be much less likely were Barton a big water park, racetrack, or otherwise without its native sedge meadow.

This brings me back to Onder and our future restoration party. With a little loving care Onder can support and benefit from the "flow" of forest and savanna species

between adjacent natural areas. Birds, mammals, and herps will continue to seek shelter, move under the cover of nature, and enjoy the streams that babble through. But there is work we can do to enhance the ecological effectiveness of Onder. As we expand the ecologically intact area by removing invasive plants and opening up habitat for natives, we will help Onder maximize its potential as a "green corridor."

Editor's note: Your property, regardless of size, can act as a green corridor as well. All you have to do is plant or set aside a natural garden, making sure to use non-invasive plants. NAP has a set of brochures on native plants, and Sara Stein's Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Your Own Back Yard is an excellent resource. Once you've restored your yard, you can invite your neighbors to do the same!

Staff Updates

hello...



Jacob Job

As NAP's Assistant Ornithologist, I'm getting to participate in one of my greatest joys – birding. My love for all things avian began while studying biology as an undergrad at East Tennessee State. Right now, I'm in the midst of studying in the Ecology and Organismal Biology graduate program at Eastern Michigan

University. After completing this masters, I hope to travel to Montana to pursue another one in Natural History and Filmmaking. Maybe one day, everyone will be watching my documentaries about birds of the world! At the very least, I look forward to sharing my love of birding with the NAP crew and volunteers.

Sean Zera

As NAP's Assistant Herpetologist, I'm helping to survey for reptiles and amphibians at the new Skyline High School. I volunteered during the initial animal rescue there and am glad to continue to see how well these species cope with the changes to their habitat. I have a B.S. in biology from the University of Michigan. My interests include wildlife photography, collecting animal skulls, and growing unusual plants.



changes...

Sheara Cohen

After time off working on my masters thesis (it's almost done!), I'm back, and filling in for Michelle as an Outreach Assistant, putting together *this very* newsletter. With just a couple months left to go before heading off to Boston to finish my landscape architecture degree, I'm glad to spend the time with NAP volunteers and staff.



NAP Alumna News

Fred Kraus

Dr. Fred Kraus, NAP's 1st Herpetologist (from 1995-96), has been a Research Zoologist for the Bishop Museum in Honolulu, Hawaii for the past six years. Most of his field time has been spent in Papua/New Guinea where he has discovered about ninety new species of frogs, lizards, and snakes! He's also putting together a database of alien "herps" from around the world, and hopes to have a new book out on that topic next year.

Michelle Michney

Michelle, NAP Conservation Worker from 1999 to 2001, just got married to John Progar. The newlyweds will be living in Kettle Falls, Washington, where they will start their second year climbing around on ladders at Cliffside Orchard, an organic orchard growing apricots, peaches, apples, and pears.

NAPpennings

Thank you...

- ♥ John Heider, Park Steward, for the beautiful framed photograph of Hansen Nature Area. *To all: stop by our office to check it out!*
- ♥ Cheryl French and Jiffy Co. for donating a giant sack of gloves for our volunteers
- ♥ Stephanie Feldstein for donating 300 yummy Clif bars

The warm winter and spring we had was very productive for local herpetofauna. One of the major highlights this year was the discovery of a female **Blanding's Turtle** (a species of Special Concern in Michigan) in one of our parks. Blanding's Turtles are becoming increasingly rare in Michigan due to habitat loss, road related mortality, and heavy illegal collection for the pet trade. This rare find exemplifies the importance of preservation and connectivity of our natural areas!

On the avian front, more than 100 (!) **Cliff Swallow** nests were built by these hard working (but uncommon) birds on the east side of the bridge at Gallup that takes Huron Parkway over the river and the park.

Also, **kudos** to the Ann Arbor Airport and Wheeler Service Center staffs! Thanks to their willingness to delay mowing grasses (in sites that wouldn't compromise safe operations), several rare birds were given a chance to nest and reproduce undisturbed. **Henslow's Sparrows** (a Michigan threatened species) and **Upland Sandpipers** were found at the airport this breeding season, while **Grasshopper Sparrows** (a Michigan species of special concern) and **Bobolinks** were at both the airport and Wheeler Service Center.

In early 2007, NAP was appointed to the City's **Huron River and Impoundment Management Plan (HRIMP)** Committee to address the stewardship of the river. The HRIMP Committee will formulate a comprehensive management plan for the 10-mile stretch of river that passes through Ann Arbor. They will also make recommendations for upstream and downstream management and consider issues such as drinking water, storm water management, dam removal, and aquatic management. Over the next 12 to 18 months, the committee will be seeking both expert and public input. NAP has been involved with Huron River management issues for many years and is excited to contribute to this valuable process.

And Events Galore!

National Public Lands Day is the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance the public lands American's enjoy. Last year nearly 100,000 volunteers built trails and bridges, planted trees and plants, and removed trash and invasive plants. Join us for our workdays in Dicken Woods and Redbud on Saturday, September 29 to celebrate the 14th annual National Public Lands Day.

The **34th Annual Natural Areas Conference** will be held in Cleveland on October 9-12. The theme of the conference is *Some Assembly Required: Preserving Nature in a Fragmented Landscape*. Symposia, oral and poster presentations, and field trips will explore this and other ecosystem conservation topics, ranging from invasive species to fire ecology and global climate change. For more information or to register, go to www.naturalarea.org/07conference.

The **Midwest Invasive Plant Network Annual Meeting** will be held in conjunction with the Natural Areas Conference. For more information, go to www.mipn.org.

The **Annual Convention of the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council and Michigan Association of Conservation Districts** will be at Shanty Creek Resort on December 3-5. The prescribed fire management workshop will take place on either the 4th or 5th. Other sessions will cover conservation education, private lands conservation, and water quality. Registration and further information are available at www.macd.org.

On Saturday, December 1 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm, the **Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor cluster** will be holding its **year end celebration** at Matthaei Botanical Gardens. Bring a dish to share and join the celebration, reflecting on goals for the year to come! To RSVP, call 734.996.3190.

The **Stewardship Network's Annual Conference** will be held on January 25 & 26 in East Lansing, MI. *The Science, Practice & Art of Restoring Native Ecosystems* will be a fun and information-filled couple of days linking wildlife enthusiasts, nature lovers, land managers, and researchers from throughout Michigan. See announcement on page 5. For more information and to register, visit www.stewardshipnetwork.org.



*A Nesting Cliff Swallow
in Gallup Park
Photo by Rich Miller*

Owls and Woodcock and Rails – Oh My!

by Jacob Job

As NAP's new Assistant Ornithologist I have to laugh and think, "How am I getting paid to do something I love so much?" With Dea Armstrong, City Ornithologist, deeply involved with the Michigan Breeding Bird Atlas right now, I was given the opportunity to survey for breeding owls, woodcock, and rails in Ann Arbor's natural areas this spring and summer. Our findings are important factors in informing park management decisions.

My birding with NAP began in April, surveying for three owl species and American Woodcock. On my first visit to Barton Nature Area, a well known site for woodcock, I was not surprised to find two male American Woodcock in the large open meadow near the center of the park. I also turned up a slew of Eastern Screech Owls in Black Pond Woods, Eberwhite Woods, and Dolph Nature Area. Leslie Science and Nature Center staff reported, and I verified, a family of Eastern Screech owls – a juvenile with parents – which confirms their breeding status in Black Pond Woods.



A baby Eastern Screech Owl
Photo by Jason Tallant

Next on my list was to look for rails. These secretive marsh birds are more active at night and easily hidden by the marsh vegetation. Because of this, bird surveyors judiciously use "playbacks" of their calls on a cassette player to see if the rails will respond. I quickly discovered that Dolph was the center of all the action. On my first visit to Dolph, I heard three Sora Rails calling from the cattails at First Sister Lake and, a few weeks later, I heard both Sora and Virginia Rail in the same area. On one occasion, a Virginia Rail approached me and my cassette player, walking to within three feet of where I was standing!

Clearly, we have great bird habitat, even in the middle of city! The presence of these birds illustrates how important natural areas are, not only for our enjoyment, but for the continued preservation of avian biodiversity.

Editor's note: Thanks to all NAP volunteers who helped survey our parks for breeding birds! If you'd like to come out next spring to help, please get in touch.

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