



BRANCHING OUT

Spring 2015

Habitat Stewardship promotes conservation and renaturalization of native, biodiverse habitat to support a wide variety of native species of wildlife. This year's theme is **BIRDS**, masters of adaptation. Over 300 species of songbirds, waterfowl, raptors and avian scavengers have been recorded in Huron Woods and surrounding areas. Benefits of birds are: insect control, seed distribution and the joy of birdsong.

BIRD SONG What are those melodies all about?

- Most birdsong emanates from males but, in some species, the females sing e.g. Orioles.
- Bird calls are innate and are understood across species e.g. Alarm calls to warn of danger.
- Bird song, however, is melodious, learned behaviour and species specific, serving to define territory and attract mates: the longer the male can sing, the stronger and therefore more attractive he is as a mate, and the better the territory he controls.
- Better territory offers more food, better nesting materials and protection from predators.
- Bird repertoires can contain 3-3000 songs, the more mature males mastering more songs, and more complex songs, thus making them more attractive as mates.
- While melodious to human ears, the purpose of birdsong is to define territory amongst rival males competing aggressively for food, nest sites and mates.
- Humans can sing only one note at a time, but bird anatomy allows for several tones to be sung at once, each song unique to each species.

NON VOCAL SOUNDS

- Bull clattering, drumming on hollow branches, gutters and trash cans, attracts mates and declares territorial boundaries.

COLOURATION

- Females, not males, are in charge of mate selection, so strong colours show strength and good health, critical to species survival, and are important attributes for males acquire.
- Bright, rich colours attract females, allow members of the same species to see each other at a distance and allow males to distract predators away from nest sites that are under attack.
- Cryptic colouration of females provides camouflage from predators and, since females choose their mates, there is no need for them to have colourful plumage.
- Countershading, darker colours on the upper body and lighter colours below, are adaptations which make birds in flight more difficult to see against a sunlit sky and harder to see on the ground when observed by predators from above.
- Bright colours on the inside of chicks' mouths stimulate parental feeding.



Female Rose Breasted Grosbeak



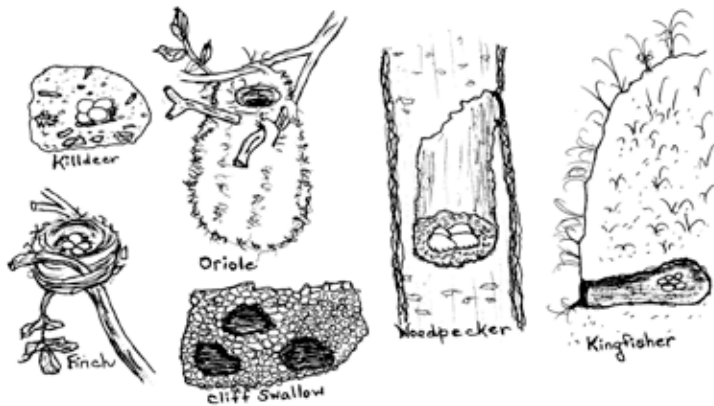
Male Rose Breasted Grosbeak

Cryptic colouration: females are camouflaged for safety while male's distinct colourations attract mates, distract predators, and signal other males of territorial domination.

WHAT BIRDS SEE

- Birds see more colours than we do, are able to detect ultra-violet light; some, like pigeons, see polarized light and birds, generally, have longer focal lengths in their eyes, allowing them more acute vision and much better distance vision.
- To birds, we appear to be moving in slow motion, enabling flocks to quickly avoid collisions with cars or other birds when flying in tight formation.
- Certain birds prefer some colours over others e.g. hummingbirds prefer red flowers because their nectar content is high.
- Daytime (diurnal) species have more cones in their retinas to detect colour while nocturnal birds, like owls have a predominance of rods for excellent night vision.

NEST STRUCTURES - adaptation at work



Nest structures, each unique to the species, can be on the ground, in cavities, on rock cliffs, suspended pouches, inside tree trunks or the familiar open cups. In each case, parents use available materials to create nests that foil predators yet maintain accessibility for incubation and feeding.

Causes of Decline of the Songbirds

- forest destruction and fragmentation
- parasites like cowbirds usurping nests
- predation by raccoons, blue jays, cats, rats, crows, grackles
- global warming which disrupts food supply and timing of migrations
- chemical sprays to control insect invasions of crops

How We Can Help

- keep biodiversity of native plants
- refrain from using sprays
- install bird houses and feeders
- discourage predators

Please join us for the following SPECIAL EVENTS

May 2 - Group Trip to St Williams Nursery & Ecology Centre- 7:30 a.m. Carpooling from 9939 Old River Road
e-mail sharpal@hay.net to register

May 24 - Brian Lasenby presents " Bird Adaptation" - 1:30 at HWCA Clubhouse

June 21- Maris Apse presents "Attracting Birds to Your Woodland" - 1:30 at HWCA Clubhouse

July 31 - Brian Salt of Salthaven Rescue Centre- "Saving Our Wildlife" - 7 p.m. at HWCA Clubhouse - please bring Canadian Tire money or unwanted gift cards as donations