



Letter from the Editor

Tell us your favorite or most special Illinois birding spot: Here's mine

Sitting here looking out my window at the snow watching the common winter birds such as American Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos, I began to think about my favorite birding spot in Illinois. Of course, I've been to lots of places in Illinois and birding spots in southern Illinois surely have to be at the top of my list.

But it all comes down to the first time I heard a Blue-winged Warbler sing at least 30, if not longer, years ago. I had taken a birdwatching class through the College of Lake County and we met at Ryerson Woods in Lake County. When I heard that unique, "Bee bzzz" sound as if it were in a fourth dimension, a whole new world opened to me. Someone knew that a Blue-winged Warbler was singing, and I couldn't see it, but I heard it. I felt like Alice in Wonderland.

Being a beginning birder, I didn't quite realize all the wonderful places to bird in the state, so I made most of my early forays to Ryerson Woods, truly a magical place for migration. As a flutist and pianist, I immersed myself in the songs and calls, listening to tapes over and over trying to memorize the various utterances of the warblers.

One day I was listening to the Hooded Warbler song in the car as I pulled into the lot at Ryerson Woods. I turned off the tape, got out of car and heard – a Hooded Warbler. "That's a Hooded Warbler!" I said to no one there. Indeed it was, and I had discovered the gem by song first, then admired the gorgeous yellow and black colors of this bird, which is fairly rare at Ryerson.

It happened that way over and over at Ryerson Woods. For some reason, I was entranced by the "I am so lazeeee" song of the Black-throated Blue Warbler. While hiking Ryerson Woods down a trail toward the farm, I heard it – a Black-throated Blue Warbler singing, and I found it, and it was the most beautiful bird I had seen. Yes, I know. Blackburnian Warblers are far much prettier, but this was a bird I had again found with a song and I was there alone with the bird. As many of you may know, Black-throated Blue Warbler is one of my favorite birds of all time. Indeed, I went to their breeding grounds in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, and heard them singing on a hot, bug-infested July day. On another autumn day while hiking one of the longer trails at Ryerson Woods, I spotted a beautiful male Black-throated Blue Warbler. So entranced was I watching the bird with binoculars that I didn't realize that five white-tailed deer had gathered around me in a circle. I was startled when I lowered my binoculars and saw them. Were they watching the bird? Well, of course not. But it was one of those rare times when I felt completely and utterly part of the fourth dimension of the natural world.

I found several more of my firsts – to add to my life list – at Ryerson – by hearing the song first. I had longed to hear a Connecticut Warbler and one day on the short trail behind the program cabins, I heard it – that loud, vociferous, unmistakable sound that I had listened to over and over on my tape. To see the bird, I had to slosh in some mud, then lean far back against a tree, strain my neck, search through the leaves and finally, glimpse the elusive creature.

I will never forget where I saw my first Black-throated Blue and Connecticut Warblers. It's never the same, is it, the next time you see the birds you covet as lifers. But it was so much more enhanced for me because I had learned the songs before I went looking for them.

I'd love to hear tales of your favorite birding places in Illinois, or perhaps, the one that's most special to you – and why. Please email me at Sheryl.devore@comcast.net with your stories. I'll be gathering them and hope to get them into a future issue of Meadowlark.

Sheryl DeVore

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