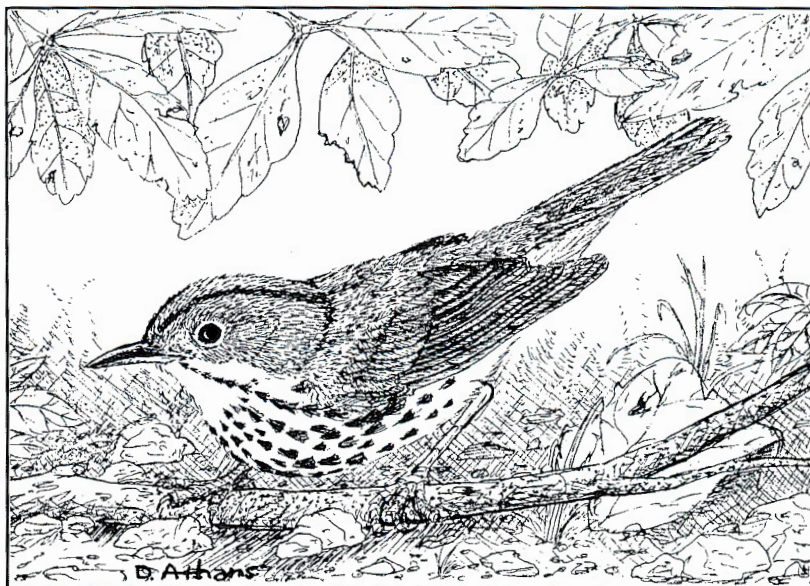


Breeding Birds of the Ryerson Conservation Area, Lake County

1 June 1995 - 12 July 1995

by Sheryl De Vore



Ovenbird drawing by David Athans.

Woodland songbird numbers, specifically neotropical migrants, are declining due to forest fragmentation on their breeding grounds in Illinois and the Midwest as well as habitat destruction of the species' wintering grounds in the tropical rainforests (Askins et al. 1990). Ryerson Conservation Area (Ryerson Woods) in Lake County, Illinois, with its roughly 400 acres of contiguous woods is one of the few remaining areas in the northern two-thirds of the state that provide woodland habitat for nesting neotropical forest interior songbirds. In this paper, I report the results of a breeding bird census conducted at Ryerson Woods the summer of 1995 for the Lake County Forest Preserve District.

Methods

To estimate the number of possible breeding pairs of each species at Ryerson Woods, I visited a series of points spread throughout the area (see map). Each point stop was approximately 100 m apart. Birds observed or heard singing at each stop during a six-minute visit were recorded. Birds observed or heard singing at the same spot at least twice and at least 10 days apart were considered possible breeders. Each survey began at approximately 5 a.m. and lasted until approximately 9 a.m.

Point Count Survey A, with a total of 28 stops, followed a course through upland and riverine forests on the eastern portion of the preserve (see map) and was surveyed on 1, 9, and 17 June 1995. Point Count Survey B, with a total of 18 stops, followed a course through river backwater areas and former farm field which has recently been planted with prairie grasses, and was surveyed on: 4, 10, 14, and 21 June. In addition, spot checks through certain areas were made on 21 June, 23 June, and 12 July 1995.

Results

The state-threatened Veery and rapidly declining Ovenbird were found in only one area of Ryerson Woods. Veeries were only heard or seen in the upland forests near areas

A6, A7, and A8. Ovenbirds were found through areas A5 to A14. Both these species are ground nesters and require layered forests in which to nest. Approximately 10 years ago, Veeries, Ovenbirds, and Wood Thrushes were considered to be among the most common breeding species at Ryerson (Hickman 1993). Only two pairs of Veeries, five pairs of Ovenbirds, and six pairs of Wood Thrushes were the most that probably nested at Ryerson Woods in 1995. (Table 1). Upland forests adjacent to riverine habitats also attracted three or four pairs of Yellow-throated Vireos, another rare and declining songbird.

Many of the forest species that attempt to nest at Ryerson are in serious trouble in Illinois. Between 1966 and 1991, Ovenbird populations declined by 70.7 percent; Acadian