

April 2, 2021

Dear Dr. Kendeigh:

I read with pleasure your report from 1942 related to the breeding bird communities at the Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve. Although our paths never crossed, as I was only 2-years-old when you passed away in 1986, our shared passion for birds is our connection. Like you, I am a college professor involved with bird studies at the Huyck.

Early in your report, you mention abundant mosquitos during the summer of 1942. Much to the discomfort of current researchers and students collecting data, mosquitos remain abundant at the site. During summer 2018, I recall accompanying undergraduates in the field to conduct songbird point counts at the Preserve. The persistent hum of mosquitos around our ears was nearly enough to mask the trill of Cedar Waxwings overhead. I suspect you experienced similar occurrences in the forests and wetlands on the property.

Since 1942, many of the ephemeral plant communities you studied have grown into closed canopy forests. While small, scattered pockets of the grassy fields, briars, and mixed shrubs that you described can still be found today, forest cover types are undoubtedly more prevalent. The grassy fields are still poor in birds, but in recent decades there has been a growing conservation concern for grassland and other early successional species. Late in your career, the predominant conservation movement across much of the Northeast likely involved limiting timber harvest and promoting reforestation to improve conditions for species breeding in mature forest. However, in recent decades, New York State's Young Forest Initiative and similar programs seek to promote more active forest management, often using clearcutting to conserve some of the species breeding in young forest that you wrote about. (I suspect that clearcutting was taboo during much of your time.)

I am particularly struck by your synthesis of bird communities on pp. 2-4. In comparing birds found in an 8-acre young forest stand, a 21-acre hemlock-beech stand, and a 62-acre beech-maple-hemlock stand, you noted many more pairs in the young forest stand (about 264 pairs per 100 acres) compared to either of the older forest stands (about 147-191 pairs per 100 acres). It is also worth noting that you documented more species in the young forest stand compared to grassy fields and older forests.

These observations highlight the importance of young forest in the Northeast. Since your time, many peer-reviewed articles have been published that support the same general patterns you observed back then. In particular, the presence of some young forest on our northeastern landscapes works to maximize bird diversity. You also noted that some species found in the young forest you studied were only there for feeding opportunities. Similarly, more modern studies using bird banding and tracking via radiotelemetry have found the species breeding in mature forests that you observed at the Huyck, like Ovenbird for example, using young forest during the post-fledging period.

You'll be pleased to know that the hemlocks at the Huyck Preserve still stand tall. And near the tops of them, Blackburnian Warblers still sing. You are right that the Blackburnians, Black-

throated Blues and Greens, Magnolias, and Canadas will likely disappear one day following the loss of these stately hemlocks. Unfortunately, the spread of hemlock wooly adelgid to these forests may work to speed up this process. For now, visitors to the Huyck Preserve can still experience these warblers and all their colorful glory during the month of June, just as you did in 1942.

Sincerely,

Roger J. Masse
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