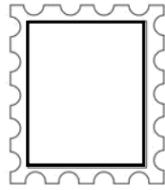




Tropical Wings, Inc.  
2107 Chestnut Drive  
Hudson, Wisconsin, 54016



# Tropical Wings Newsletter

Volume 9 · 2026

*"There can be no purpose more inspiring than to begin the age of restoration, reweaving the wondrous diversity of life that still surrounds us."*  
—E. O. WILSON



## Birding Journal

By Tropical Wings President, Patty Mueller

It can be overwhelming at times to consider all that could be done to help our birds, especially those that migrate between countries and continents. There are so many places that need to be protected or restored to ensure each individual bird has the food and shelter it needs to travel from its winter home to its breeding ground. Doug Tallamy, entomologist, and author of "Nature's Best Hope" encourages us to not be discouraged, but instead to "focus on the piece of the earth you can influence".

What can you do? Plant native trees, shrubs and flowers. Even a container garden with natives can make a small but important difference. Convert even a fraction of your lawn to native plants, creating an important habitat for the native insects that then feed our native birds.

Each year Tropical Wings awards Habitat Grants for larger scale habitat conservation projects in the St. Croix Watershed. One of our ten grant recipients in 2025 was Marine Village School. The grant funds are supporting student-led restoration projects on their 1.5 acre school forest located along the St. Croix Scenic Riverway, an important migratory corridor and breeding grounds for our neotropical birds. Thank-you students of Marine Village School, your efforts are "reweaving" essential habitat for our birds!



Marine Village School provides a learning environment that blends engaging classroom instruction with enriching outdoor experiences in their MN DNR School Forest.



## Upcoming Events



For more info and to register for programming, scan the QR code or visit [tropicalwings.org](http://tropicalwings.org)

### Earth Day Poetry Reading

April 22 | 6:30—8:30pm  
Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

### Wings of Spring Festival

May 9th | 6:00am—Noon  
Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

### Immersive Rainforest Exhibit Reception

May 15th | 6:00—8:00pm  
Phipps Center for the Arts Atrium

### Golden-winged Warblers on the Breeding Grounds

June 6th | 5:30am  
Meet at Saint Croix Falls  
Severson Memorial Park

### Nature Sketchbook & Journaling Retreat

August date TBD  
Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

### Fall Migration Celebration

September 12th | 7:30am—Noon  
Carpenter Nature Center WI Campus

### Costa Rica Bird-a-thon

February—March 2027 dates TBD  
Contact TW Secretary Nina Koch  
[gakoch@gmail.com](mailto:gakoch@gmail.com)

## DONATE

Become a *Friend of Tropical Wings*

### Hummingbird

\$15 (Students & Seniors)

### Warbler

\$35 (Individuals)

### Osprey

\$50 (Households)

### Falcon

Donations > \$50

For more info and to donate scan the QR code or visit [tropicalwings.org](http://tropicalwings.org)



## Partner Profile

By Lana Sjoberg

### Immersive Rainforest Exhibit | The Phipps Welcomes Willow River Elementary Migration for Fifth Year

The fourth grade students at Willow River, as part of their curriculum, study the neo-tropical migratory birds that winter in Costa Rica and migrate to the midwest in May for the summer months. The students study their own bird's nesting and feeding habits. They learn about the environment needed to support these birds here during the mating season. The fourth graders write about their bird and create a 3D bird out of layers of cardboard. The students migrate (walk) their birds from Willow River Elementary through the neighborhoods marked with the countries the birds would actually fly over to arrive at The Phipps. Here they hang or place their bird in the Rainforest habitat most suited for their bird.

The entire school is involved in the creation of the rainforest, K - 5, by creating other parts of the rainforest, such as bugs, plants, frogs, vines, lizards and the canopy. Even the families, including parents and grandparents, create tropical flowers at the Family Fine Arts Night in April.

Join us for the Immersive Rainforest Exhibit Reception at The Phipps Center for the Arts on May 15th from 6:00—8:00pm . The rainforest will be on display in the Atrium from May 15—July 12.



Top: Large, artificial foliage sets the stage for many species of crafted creatures. Bottom left: Cardboard rendering of a Dickcissel. Bottom right: An insect made with chenille stems and a milkweed seed pod.



## Bird Biographies

By TW Board Member, Brian Collins

### A Beak Full of Insects | Ecological Interdependence Among Birds and Bugs

On a May morning along the Saint Croix River valley, an early golden sun pushed through the trees and illuminated morning fog amid an echoing chorus of Neotropical birds. Delicate necklaces of dew sparkled among a gallery of spider webs at the forest's edge. Perfection. Dozens of migrating warblers, brilliant in color, moved in waves through young aspen at the forest's edge, some up high, others down low, all of them searching for insect prey. American Redstarts chased winged insects flushed from the leaves. Blue-winged and Golden-winged Warblers worked through the aspen, cutting open rolled leaves and extracting caterpillars. A Black-and-white Warbler probed small insects from the bark. In the nearby oaks, as if a tiny fire in the trees, a Blackburnian Warbler probed deep into a flourette of baby oak leaves for tiny aphids.



About half of the bird species around the Great Lakes are Neotropical migrants. Each year, warblers, tanagers, hummingbirds, vireos, buntings, grosbeaks, thrushes and so many more make a complete migration from their northern latitude breeding grounds to their overwintering grounds in the tropics of MesoAmerica and back again. Neotropical birds rely heavily on insect prey, often timing their migrations to the emergence of springtime hatches and timing their nesting to the emergence of summer caterpillars. Insect prey provides nearly all of the fat-building fuel for Neotropical migrants to cross the Gulf, to scatter across the landscape in pursuit of the best nesting habitats, and to return to the tropics in the fall, pushing 400 miles or more in a single night flight. As Neotropical migrant birds time their breeding seasons with peak insect emergence, stuffing their nestlings with beakfuls of mayflies, stoneflies, and caterpillars, vast quantities of insect biomass build the bodies of baby birds.



Insect-eating birds are necessarily entwined with the lives of insects. In their symbiotic dances, birds enforce ecological controls on insect populations, maintaining plant health in many ecosystems by the removal of defoliating caterpillars, parasitic insects and wood boring grubs. Many boreal forest warblers, Neotropical migrants that nest in the upper Great Lakes and mid-Atlantic regions into Canada, rely heavily on spruce budworm caterpillars. The caterpillars are there because of the dense conifer forests. The birds are there, nesting among the balsam fir, because of the caterpillars. During infestation years, spruce budworms can prove to be destructive to balsam fir trees, imparting significant changes to tree health and overall ecosystem structure, even compounding the risk of forest fire. In those same cycles, many species of warblers show a direct population response, with some studies

Top: Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*) with Chalk-fronted Corporal Dragonfly (*Ladona julia*). Middle: Blackburnian Warbler (*Setophaga fusca*) with caterpillars. Bottom: Prothonotary Warbler (*Protonotaria citrea*)  
Photo Credit: Brian Collins

showing as much as a four or five-fold increase in warbler populations in response to budworm outbreaks. In this response, warblers become important biological controls. They demonstrate their interdependent links and reliance upon insect populations. Indeed, some studies now strongly suggest that declines in insect-eating bird populations are directly related to long-term declines in insect populations.

There is a delicate nuance from species to species, relationship to relationship among birds and insects. Many of these relationships have yet to be discovered and described to science. In 1990, I observed a tropical endemic bird, a Puerto Rican Vireo, as it built a nest within a shrubby dry forest in southwest Puerto Rico. The vireo held a live caterpillar crosswise in its beak, and, pressing gently, it began expressing silk from the caterpillar. As if painting the silk onto the nest, the vireo delicately passed the caterpillar up and down along the hanging cup of fibers. Black-throated Green Warblers, Blue-gray Gnatcatchers, and Ruby-throated Hummingbirds rely on insect and spider silks in the construction of their nests, and, for certain, the list goes on.

Whether pollinators or prey, healthy, robust, and diverse communities of insects belong in all ecosystems. Biotic communities are most resilient and most stable when species diversity is high, community interdependence is intact and natural landscape area is large. These ecosystems are robust enough to allow populations to healthily ebb and flow with the generations, maintaining that classic and teetering balance of nature. When we try to rid our world of insects, we also extinguish the lives of our birds. Birds remind us through their beauty and song that we must seek a deeper ecological knowledge, that what we do to any one species we also do to the whole web. As people who love birds and the worlds they connect, we have a responsibility to share our love of insects and the habitats that support them through sound environmental education.

## Habitat Heroes

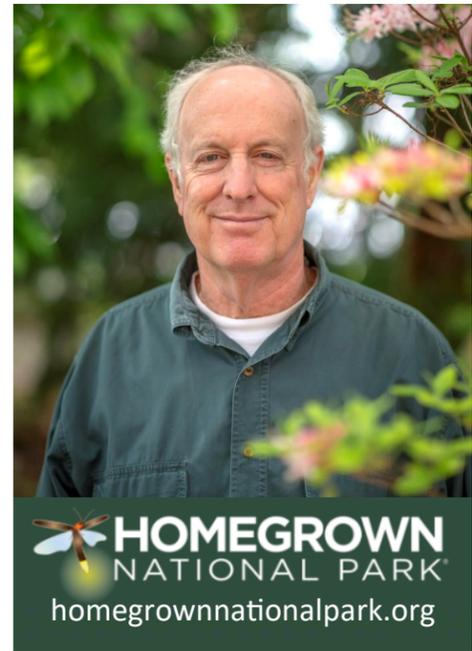
By TW Board Member, Lynette Anderson

### Homegrown National Park

Doug Tallamy, an entomologist and ecologist at the University of Delaware, has raised an alarm that we are losing some of our most important characters in nature, the insects. Caterpillars in particular are affected by the loss of native habitats that support them. Many of our insects, especially caterpillars, have specific relationships with plants. By replacing native species with non-native species, we have inadvertently added to the decline of insects. Seeing this decline and understanding its implications has brought Professor Tallamy and others to address this important issue by creating the non-profit, Homegrown National Park. This is a grass roots effort to raise awareness and urgently inspire everyone to address the biodiversity crisis through different choices in our personal landscaping.

How do we help? The call to action is simple. Choose native plants. Remove the invasives. Be willing to change the paradigm of what a lawn should look like. It could be one aster or a small clump of bergamot or a whole yard of native shrubs and flowers. The end result will be more food for more insects, and more of our beloved nature in our yards. As Doug Tallamy says: "There are millions of us out there and if we each realize that we all have a role in conservation and a responsibility to be good stewards of the land that we love, we can collectively make a difference..." Let's all join this necessary revolution, be a part of the change and make a difference!!

**A peek into a chickadees' world |** *The waning of winter has begun. If you step outside you are likely to hear "Feebee, FEEbee, Feebee" the welcome spring call of the Black-capped chickadee. They will soon begin the task of making a nest in a small tree cavity, laying their eggs and then beginning the arduous task of raising an average clutch of 6-8 hatchlings. The nestlings will need a high protein diet. A typical meal might consist of spiders and bugs but most important are the soft, easy to digest caterpillars. The parents will spend every waking hour gleaning this critical nutrition from the leaves and branches of native trees and shrubs. An average chickadee clutch will consume between 6000-9000 caterpillars over their 16-18 day nestling phase. This comes out to roughly 350-570 caterpillars per day! Even more are required during their fledgling phase. The importance of caterpillars cannot be overstated!*



## Osa Partner Updates

By TW Secretary, Nina Koch

### Vivero Quira Native Plant Nursery

In 2018 Osa Birds established the creation of a native plants nursery in Costa Rica. Osa Birds, a partner of Tropical Wings, is a United States 501(c)(3) charitable non-profit corporation dedicated to conserving birds and their habitats on the Osa Peninsula. Because reforesting degraded lands and providing bird friendly contiguous landscapes is such a significant part of Osa Birds mission, they embarked on a journey with the Biological Monitoring Group made up of people who have been part of our biological monitoring initiative since 2015, and the community of Rancho Quemado to establish the creation of a native plants nursery – the Quira Nursery (Vivero Quira).

The nursery was built with initial funding that Osa Birds received from the Primer Canje de Deuda por Naturaleza (Debt for Nature Swap), Tropical Wings and private donations. Here you will find native plants for birds and insects as well as endangered hardwood trees such as Caoba (mahogany), Cedro (cedar), sandalo, manú negro, Ajo, Ceiba (Kapok tree), purple heart amongst many others. The Quira Nursery has grown over the years, more than doubling in size in terms of physical structures, plant inventory and workers dedicating full time paid hours to the nursery. As of July 2023, there are 5 full time workers and over 30 community members who have contributed to the nursery in various ways from construction to maintenance.

The Quira Nursery is arguably the most sought-after nursery for native plants and trees, having received over 200 customers from all over the peninsula and beyond! Osa Birds is now one of their customers! They are purchasing thousands of seeds and plants for our reforestation network that aims to reforest and restore degraded lands, birdscape for bird friendly gardens and beautify the local communities that we work in. Osa Birds will continue to work with the Quira Nursery on future land restoration projects. Success for the community of Rancho Quemado, Osa Birds, the birds, insects and all pollinators!

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