

# Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 16, Number 2

Summer 2011

## Wurster Park: A Taste of Nature in the Old West Side

by Erin Dreps

Wurster Park occupies more than five-and-a-half acres in Ann Arbor's old west side, with entrances off of Madison St., Third St., and the Edgewood Place cul-de-sac. Its proximity to downtown and its many attractions make it a mixed-use park, highly valued by neighborhood residents and visitors from all parts of Ann Arbor.

When I arrived at Wurster via the Edgewood Place entrance, I was treated immediately to sweeping views of the city skyline and the open expanse of the park laid out before me. The view of downtown was particularly spectacular since it was early spring and the leaves had yet to fill in. As I strolled the asphalt paths that meander through the park on that overcast April morning, the neighborhood's casual affinity for the park was on display: residents trickled through continuously, walking dogs or jogging. It was easy to imagine that on a sunnier and warmer day, the playground equipment, picnic area, horseshoe pit and volleyball court would be put to full use, and people would be playing pickup games of soccer, football or Frisbee in the open, grassy spaces.



*The edible plant garden at Wurster Park was installed in 2008 and will soon be ripe with blackberries, pears and other fruit.*

*Photo by Erin Dreps*

Park stewards Deb VandenBroek and Rita Mitchell have more than just a casual affinity for the park, though. Several years ago they noticed that while the equipment and fields were well maintained, the park's natural components could use some help. They now volunteer many hours each year planning and

organizing events to improve Wurster's natural areas, by controlling invasive plants and planting beneficial and attractive native species that add interest to the park. They were both on hand that morning during a volunteer event and were kind enough to point out the many details and improvements that might escape the notice of most visitors, including the delightful wild strawberry plants lining the edge of the playground.

One of the highlights, and one of the focuses of the volunteer event that day, was the edible garden; a relatively recent and unique addition to the park that was installed in 2008 near the Third St. entrance. Arborists and experts in the Slow Food movement were helping at the event by providing pruning expertise. Soon it will be ripe with native blackberries, pears, and other fruits. It's worth a visit to Wurster to appreciate this demonstration garden.

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# Coordinator's Corner

## The Future of Stewardship

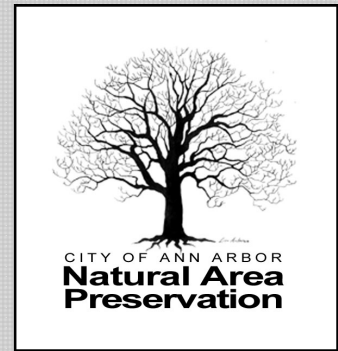
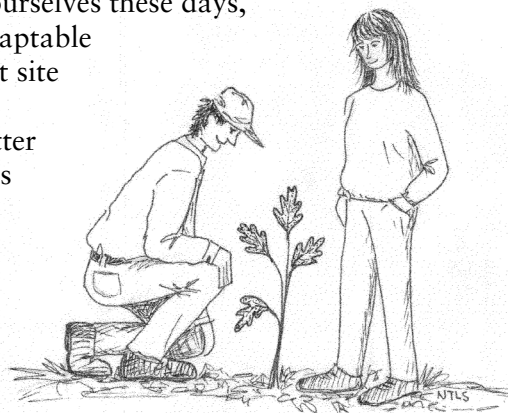
Interesting how change always brings new opportunities. An old tree crashes down in the forest, ripping a gash in the canopy as it topples. A disaster? Not for the young saplings that have been waiting years for just this opportunity to stretch their own branches toward the sunlight. The forest will continue, slightly different than it had been, but more in sync with the current conditions onsite. The old tree may have started hundreds of years ago when site conditions allowed it to be the most competitive, the best fit for the site. Today's conditions may favor a different species, or a different ecosystem altogether.

Nature does this sort of re-sorting and re-prioritizing continually, and quite effortlessly - survival of the fittest. We humans tend to have more trouble with it, tending instead to cling to the existing way of doing things. It gives us a sense of security, stability, and control. But it can also keep us from adapting to better match the current conditions.

With this in mind - as we stand here blinking in the bright sunlight after Jason Frenzel's recent departure has let some additional sunlight down to the forest floor - NAP is participating with others to consider the future of stewardship, the future of volunteerism, within the City. NAP is certainly the established leader when it comes to working with volunteers in the City. That's why the Mayor asked us to create the Adopt-A-Park program a few years ago. And the success of AAP has led to a new Adopt-A-Median program starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, also being launched under the NAP umbrella (but with separate funding). There's talk of other "Adopt-A-..." programs in the future as well. Meanwhile, the Park and Recreation facilities have their own budding "Give 365" volunteer program, and there are other volunteers scattered across the City, from Solid Waste to Forestry to the Police Department.

How do these various volunteer programs work together? Where is there overlap? How can we coordinate better? Would a unified program better serve our volunteers and the public in general? And, specifically, what is NAP's role in this bigger picture? And where do we best fit within the broader City organization to fill that role?

These are questions we're asking ourselves these days, trying to make sure that we are adaptable enough - *fit* enough for the current site conditions - to survive and thrive into the future. Watch this newsletter and NAP's other outreach channels to stay abreast of these exciting developments!



A unit of the City of Ann Arbor  
Public Services, Field Operations

*The mission of Natural Area  
Preservation is to protect and restore  
Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster  
an environmental ethic among its citizens.*

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# Wurster Park: A Taste of Nature in the Old West Side

*Continued from page 1*

Deb and Rita also proudly introduced me to the park's real treasure: a former national champion chinkapin oak tree (*Quercus muehlenbergii*). At seven feet in diameter at its base, and with a girth of nearly 18 feet, Deb and Rita describe it as Wurster's centerpiece – and rightfully so!

Unfortunately, the special oak tree wasn't offered much attention for many years. Invasive plants such as garlic mustard began surrounding the base of the tree. The choking effect of these plants and the abuse its roots suffered from mowing threatened the tree's health. On the day of our visit, however, not a single garlic mustard plant was surrounding the tree. Thanks to Deb and Rita, woodchips now carpet the base of the tree and the perimeter is outlined with signs declaring it a "No Mow Zone".

The success in protecting this prized oak doesn't mean that the work is done, however. After a long winter, the signs will need replacing, and wet conditions in a clearing behind the tree prompt Deb and Rita to contemplate establishing another no mow zone so that tires will not tear up the fragile ground.

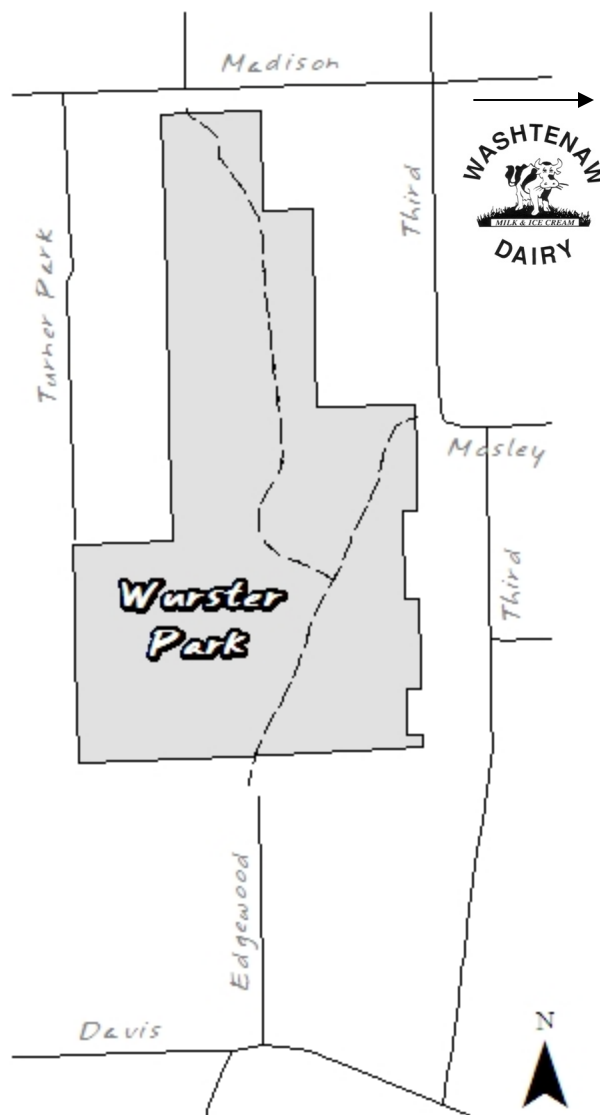
Other areas of the park, too, will continue to improve with attention. While we spoke, volunteers at the NAP workday were busily pulling garlic mustard, motherwort, and other invasive species in a wide swath alongside the edible garden. During the course of the workday we progressed around the perimeter of the park finding invasives all along the

way. Thorough as our efforts were, they will need to be repeated annually to ensure success, persistence being the key to controlling invasive plants. Future plans include removing invasive shrubs and continuing to foster a more vibrant native plant population.

Deb and Rita's dedication to the park is certainly appreciated by both NAP and residents alike. During the course of our conversation, many residents passed through, noticed the work being done, and expressed their enthusiastic appreciation. The stewards pointed out after the event that most of the volunteers helping that day were not actually neighborhood residents, but rather folks who were part of a group from the University of Michigan. Though NAP's workdays and all volunteers they attract are invaluable to the park's care, Deb and Rita hope that more nearby residents who regularly visit the park will show a greater interest in improving their neighborhood resource.

Enjoyment of Wurster Park, of course, is by no means limited to its neighbors. The next time you grab an ice cream at Washtenaw Dairy, take a stroll on over to Wurster while you're enjoying your treat. In three quick blocks you'll be in the perfect spot to both appreciate some nature and relax in the summer weather.

Be sure to check out the edible garden and the champion chinkapin oak tree, and feel free to grab a bench and simply enjoy the views.



*Wurster Park is just three blocks from Washtenaw Dairy, making it a great place to stroll to while enjoying an ice cream cone!*

# Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

## June

### June 4th, Saturday Bird Walk Wheeler Service Center 7:30 am to 9:30 am

Free and fun for all ages. Join city ornithologist Dea Armstrong at one of the best bird watching sites in A2. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet in the small parking lot on the right off the main entrance to the Material Recovery Facility off of Platt Rd. just south of Ellsworth.

### June 4, Saturday National Trails Day Events

For National Trails Day, we will be trimming back the overgrowth and spreading woodchips to help keep the trails accessible. Bring your own plastic sleds to help with the hauling. Pick one of the three events below.

#### Fuller Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Meet us in the Fuller parking lot off of Fuller Rd.

#### Onder Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Meet at the intersection of Hilldale Dr. and Brookside Dr.

#### Barton Nature Area 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot at the corner of Huron River Dr. and Bird Rd.

### June 10, Friday Mayor's Green Fair Main Street, Downtown Ann Arbor 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Visit NAP's table at the annual Mayor's Green Fair on Main St. For more information, visit [www.a2gov.org/green](http://www.a2gov.org/green) or call 734-794-6161.

### June 11, Saturday Bird Walk Gallup Park

7:30 am to 9:30 am

Free for all ages and family-friendly! Join city ornithologist Dea Armstrong at one of the best bird watching sites in A2. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at the paddleboat dock in Gallup at the canoe livery near the Fuller Rd. entrance.

### June 11, Saturday Evergreen Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help with the effort to clear this natural area of invasive plant species that hinder the growth of beautiful native plants. Meet at the park entrance on Valley Dr. between Pinewood and Barber off of Dexter Rd.

*Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.*

### June 14, Tuesday Stewards' Circle Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave 7:30 am to 8:30 am

Join the Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor Cluster for an informal discussion on a monthly topic with volunteer and professional land stewards, plus others interested in nature. This month's topic - Intro to Restoration: Local restoration efforts, considerations and resources.

### June 16, Thursday AADL Series: Nature Walk Black Pond Woods Nature Area 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

*This is part of a series of talks, walks and workdays in partnership with Ann Arbor District Library to give participants a more in-depth understanding of the natural areas and restoration work in the city.*

Please join NAP for a walk through Black Pond Woods Nature Area. We will observe and discuss restoration efforts that have occurred over the past few years at this site, plus learn about native plant species. Meet in the Leslie Science and Nature Center parking lot, 1831 Traver Rd.

### June 18, Saturday Black Pond Woods Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

You took the nature hike on Thursday evening- now take action! Help pull narrowleaf bittercress and other invasive plant species. Meet in the Leslie Science and Nature Center parking lot, 1831 Traver Rd.

### June 19, Sunday West Park Grand Reopening 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Celebrate the reopening of West Park. Dedications and entertaining events all afternoon. Stop by NAP's table and say hello!

### June 21, Tuesday Stewardship Network's Solstice Potluck! Argo Nature Area

5:00 pm until we're ready to go home! Celebrate the summer solstice and our work in the local natural areas. Bring a dish to pass, place settings, family, and any outdoor equipment. No registration required. FREE!

## July

### July 9, Saturday Molin Nature Area 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Last year, volunteers were able to slow the effects of stormwater on Molin Nature Area by planting water-loving plants along the main trail. This year, come out and help remove invasive plants in this area to keep it in tip-top shape! This is an opportunity to learn about rain gardens and see the positive impact they have on the environment. Meet at the end of Powell Ave. on Columbia Ave.

# Summer 2011

## July 9, Saturday Furstenberg Native Garden 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help us weed and preserve the native garden at Furstenberg Nature Area, featuring some of the most diverse flora anywhere in Ann Arbor. Plus, you're certain to learn a lot about native plants from Park Steward and Master Gardener Aunita Erskine. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Rd, across from Huron High School.

## July 12, Tuesday Stewards' Circle Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave 7:30 am to 8:30 am

See June 14. This month's topic - Non-traditional Work Forces: Why people volunteer and ways to meet their expectations.

## July 16, Saturday Redbud Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help pull invasive plants, such as Canada thistle, from the area to maintain this floodplain forest. Meet at the park entrance at the intersection of Parkwood Ave. and Jeanne St.

*Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.*

## July 17, Sunday Huron River Day Gallup Park 8:30 am to 4:00 pm

Enjoy the beautiful Huron River and participate in FREE family activities, as well as discounted boat rentals. For more information, visit [www.a2gov.org/hrd](http://www.a2gov.org/hrd) or call 734-662-9319.

## July 21, Thursday AADL Series: Invasive Plant Walk Traverwood Branch - A2Library 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

See June 16. Please join NAP for a talk about different techniques used to remove and manage invasive species in Ann Arbor's natural areas. We will then walk down the block to Stapp Nature Area to learn more about the techniques employed. Meet at the Traverwood Branch of the Ann Arbor Library.

## August

### August 6, Saturday Barton Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help with our efforts to control spotted knapweed, a troublesome invasive plant, in the old field prairie area of this beautiful 83.6 acre nature area. Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot at the corner of Huron River Dr. and Bird Rd.

### August 9, Tuesday Stewards' Circle Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave 7:30 am to 8:30 am

See June 14. This month's discussion - Waterway Restoration: Considerations for promoting resilient and ecologically vibrant water corridors.

### August 18, Thursday AADL Series: Nature Walk Furstenberg Nature Area 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

See June 16. Please join NAP for a nature walk through Furstenberg. On this walk we will observe and discuss the flourishing native plant garden and also learn about the extensive restoration efforts which have occurred over the past few years at this site. Meet by the restrooms in the Furstenberg Nature Area parking lot off of Fuller Rd across from Huron High School.

## August 20, Saturday Furstenberg Nature Area 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

You took the nature walk on Thursday evening- now take action! Help us remove invasive plants from the nature area to help the native ecosystem thrive. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Rd, across from Huron High School.

### Stewardship Network's Native Gardening Workshop Series Leslie Science and Nature Center 1831 Traver Rd 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm

Utilizing native plants in your yard can add a great deal of beauty as well as help the environment. During this five-part series, learn about the benefits of native plants and how to plan for the easiest installation; about all the wonderful choices you have with native plants; how rainwater gardening can be beautiful, ecological, and economical; and what maintenance you will need to plan for and how to keep your new garden beautiful! Join five local experts for one or all five parts in this series on native gardening.

Register in advance on their website:  
[www.stewardshipnetwork.org](http://www.stewardshipnetwork.org)  
Cost: \$10 Stewardship Network members / \$15 non-members for individual workshop, \$40 Stewardship Network members / \$60 non-members for the whole series

### August 3, Wednesday Benefits of Native Plants

### August 10, Wednesday Planning a Native Garden

### August 17, Wednesday Plant Selection

### August 24, Wednesday Rain Gardens

### August 31, Wednesday Native Garden Maintenance

# Staff Updates

hello...



## Renée Hytinen

In April I started as the new Adopt-A-Park Coordinator in the Outreach office. I've been friends with several NAPpers over the years and I am so excited to finally be in with the 'IN' crowd. My path toward NAP has wound through various fields of work, so I'm hoping to use my diverse experiences to serve the public, parks and natural areas.



## Rob Schubert

Having been conferred upon by the regents of the University of Michigan, I have returned to NAP. No longer an intern, I have ascended to the prestigious position of city employee. And though the rain may often fall cold upon my head, birds do also sing me songs, flowers greet me in a myriad of hues, and, on occasion, I've the warmth of a good fire upon my face. Cheers to the good people of Ann Arbor for having the wisdom to recognize a need for preservation.



## Jeremy Sobczak

As a graduate of U of M's Program in the Environment, I am especially interested in ecosystems, food systems and health. After spending a year as Growing Hope's Volunteer Coordinator, helping to promote healthy food access in Ypsilanti, I'm excited to be back in Ann Arbor, look forward to spending time with NAP's wonderful volunteers and furthering my knowledge and understanding of our native ecosystems as a new NAP Outreach Assistant.



## Jill Sweetman

After interning with NAP last fall, I am happy to now be a part-time member of the field crew. The rest of my days are spent starting Green Things Farm just north of town with my fiancé, Nate. I am excited to be a part of improving both Ann Arbor's natural and food systems.



## Xiangwan Ma and Ning Wu

We are masters students at the University of Michigan, and we are both from China. As interns at NAP, we are working on recruiting international students and residents to increase the diversity of NAP's volunteers. We are excited to be the bridge connecting different cultures, and to help more people enjoy, learn about, and help the nature in this area.



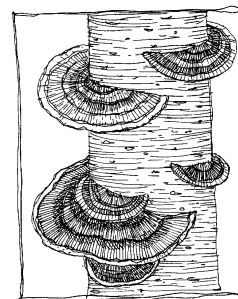
## Toyoko Kamada

I have been in Ann Arbor since April 2009 because of my husband's work at the University of Michigan as a PhD. I enjoy the beautiful nature here and I wondered who took care of it all. I was excited to learn about NAP from my friend, Naoko, who also volunteers at NAP. Many Japanese in Ann Arbor still don't know much about NAP, but I am looking forward to helping connect the Japanese community to volunteer opportunities with NAP.



## Erin Dreps

With a bachelor's in economics and Spanish from Kalamazoo College, I'm making a bit of a change and pursuing my master's at the University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources and Environment. With NAP, I will primarily be leading volunteer workdays, with a little newsletter writing and photo monitoring thrown in. I'm particularly interested in environmental education and outreach, so I'm excited for this opportunity to work with community volunteers.





farewell . . .



### Jason Frenzel

After nearly ten years at NAP I've decided to shove off. It's been a superb time – having joined the NAP team after two years of volunteering on the burn crew, I figured I'd be at NAP for a couple-three-years. Dave always gave me lots of

room to find new challenges and meaningful projects, for myself and NAP, which was a big reason why I stayed around. Of course the most meaningful thing has been all of the amazing people I've met and gotten to know. The staff at NAP have always been fun and I've happily called them family; and the Science Center my home. All of my adult mentors I've gotten to know in my time at NAP: Dave Borneman, Lisa Brush, and Jeannine Palms. And then there are the hundreds of people who work in so many ways to support the environment, the city, and our community. I wish I had time to thank each of you. But I imagine you know who you are and that I owe you a debt of gratitude. We probably spent a Saturday morning together, went for a walk in the woods, or sat over a beverage chatting about the ways of the world. At NAP we call these folks Advanced Volunteer, Park Steward, Park Adopter, Volunteer of the Year, and the like. I call you friend and thank you for your positive influence on my career and my life. I

am deeply grateful for the professional development, emotional tools, and personal growth you have offered to me. I promise to repay these gifts to our community and the environment. And of course, please drop me a line or stop by my new office at the Huron River Watershed Council.

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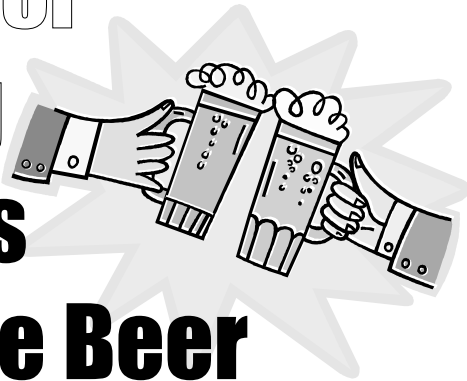
## NAPpennings

thank you...

Many thanks to the following groups who volunteered with NAP in January, February and March. We could not make such a difference without you!

- EMU Game On Volunteers/VISION program
- UM Alpha Phi Omega
- UM American Association of Pharmaceutical Sciences
- UM Economics 108 Class
- UM Engineering Council
- UM Hunger, Housing and Nature Committee of Circle K
- UM Rackham Graduate School students
- UM Sigma Phi
- Huron High School Crew Team
- Temple Beth Emeth Hebrew & Religious School

Thanks for  
drinking  
**165 Pints**  
**of Spruce Beer**  
for **Adopt-A-Park!**



For the third year in a row, Arbor Brewing Company has hosted a special fundraiser for Adopt-A-Park. A special batch of "Old Tjikko Spruce Ale" is brewed just for the Arbor Day event, and \$1 from each pint sold is donated to the Adopt-A-Park program. The Spruce Ale dollars go toward planting trees in parks around the city. This year several Park Adopters, NAP volunteers, NAP staff, family and friends gathered to celebrate the annual event and raise a glass to improving city parks.

Thanks for doing your part!



A special thanks to Arbor Brewing Company for the effort involved in hosting a fundraiser, and for the generous donation toward keeping the "Arbor in Ann!"



# Kirtland's Warbler Visits Dolph Nature Area

by Dea Armstrong

## Exciting News!

Dolph Nature Area is well known by birders as a premier warbler hot spot in the spring. Apparently the birds know it, too! The May 10<sup>th</sup> visit of a male Kirtland's Warbler was a first for the site. With fewer than 1800 pairs of birds, the Kirtland's Warbler is one of the rarest warblers in the world. The species is listed as endangered in both Michigan and the U.S. Kirtland's Warblers winter in the Bahamas and breed mostly in areas of the Upper Peninsula and the northern end of the lower peninsula of Michigan where there are Jack Pines. They are rarely seen on migration in Michigan, and there are only 12 records for this bird being seen in Ann Arbor since 1875, so the many birders who came to Dolph on May 10<sup>th</sup> to see this bird consider themselves quite fortunate! What a good reminder of the high importance our natural areas serve to wildlife, including some globally rare species!



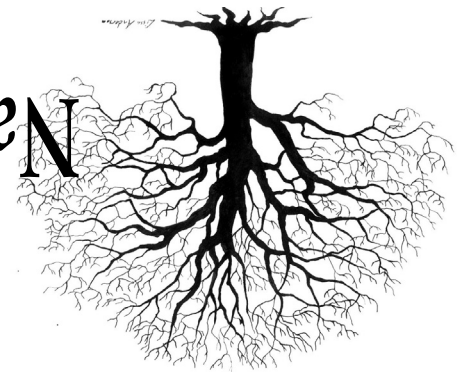
John Lowry (2011), kingbird.org

*The endangered Kirtland's Warbler has only been sited in Ann Arbor 12 previous times since 1875, which makes this little fellow a very special guest!*

*photo by John Lowry,  
taken at Dolph Nature Area*

Summer 2011

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