



DAVID DISENER PHOTO

Red-Winged Blackbirds are at Civitan Park, along with Belted Kingfishers.

## REVIVED: *Wetland* *benefits people, wildlife*

**W**hen I tell people I was birding at Civitan Park, they usually respond, "Where's that?" Unless you bike or jog along the Salem Creek Greenway, you probably don't know about this



Bird's-Eye  
VIEW

wetland and natural area. It sits along the greenway behind Winston-Salem State University's Anderson Center. The small park demonstrates how a natural area can benefit both people and wildlife.

Ten years ago, this area of Salem Creek was not very attractive and in trouble. Erosion of the stream's banks threatened the university's parking lot and made a pedestrian bridge between the lot and the greenway unsafe. Water quality and downstream flooding also had become serious problems, as storm water, silt and debris rushed along each time it rained.

Through a cooperative effort by several parties, including the



JOURNAL MAP BY NICHOLAS REAR

city and the school, a stream-restoration project was designed to improve water quality and control. The project was underwritten in large part by the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

To control erosion, the banks were lowered, the creek was given a meandering path, and a streamside meadow of grasses

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• **On the Web:** To hear the song of the Red-Winged Blackbird, visit [www.journalnow.com](http://www.journalnow.com).

# BIRDS

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and wildflowers was planted. The bridge was replaced. Across the greenway, a 5.2-acre wetland was created. After it rains, the wetland serves to settle silt and filter pollutants from the runoff before it reaches the creek.

With spring rains easing the drought at least temporarily, the park has been a center of bird-nesting activity.

As I cross the foot bridge, I am greeted by male Red-Winged Blackbirds sitting on nearby wildflowers or willow shrubs, flashing their red and yellow epaulets, and calling "congar-ee." Nearby, the brown-streaked females and young blackbirds fly about the reeds, often joined by insect-hunting swallows.

A family of Belted Kingfishers frequently rattles as they race up and down the stream. Yellow Warblers and Indigo Buntings sing their "sweet-sweet" tunes from trees along the greenway, while I look for a Green Heron in the wetland ponds and the Orchard Orioles in the nearby trees. Eastern Kingbirds and Blue Grosbeaks often perch on the wetland willows. Killdeers nest close by in the fields.

I enjoy seeing each of these

colorful species. However, my target birds lately have been two nondescript brown birds that are far less common to Forsyth County. The Willow Flycatcher looks similar to the more common Eastern Phoebe that is also present. It is a member of the Empidonax flycatcher group, which are almost impossible to tell apart except by call. Soon I hear the telltale "titz-bew" from a nearby telephone wire. The other species is the Warbling Vireo. This "little brown bird" has a warbling song not unlike that of the neighboring orioles. Two vireo nests at the park are the first documented in the county in recent years.

Civitan Park is a good nesting habitat for these and other birds, because it has the food and water they need. At this time of year, wildflowers such as butterfly weed, coreopsis, coneflower, daisy and Queen Anne's lace attract butterflies, caterpillars and other insects that birds eat. Soon, Goldfinches and other birds will pick out the seeds. In addition, the water is home for other insect life, as well as small fish, snails and amphibians that herons find tasty.

The moist habitat also provides food and shelter for cool-weather species. Song Sparrows are year-round residents, but in

winter and early spring they are joined by White-throated and Swamp Sparrows. A sharp eye may spot a sandpiper-type bird called a Wilson's Snipe. Great Blue Herons, Mallards, Cedar Waxwings and several species of hawk can also be seen in both winter and summer.

Civitan Park's natural area covers less than 25 acres. Nevertheless, the birding is so good that the park is included with Salem Lake and the connecting stretch of greenway as a stop on the N.C. Birding Trail. From Business 40, take Martin Luther King Jr. Drive south to Reynolds Park Road and turn right into the parking lot. Or save gas and ride your bike along the greenway.

On Saturday, the monthly Audubon bird walk will explore similar habitat — the wetland at Historic Bethabara. Participants will meet at 8 a.m. in the day-care center parking lot at Reynolds Road and Bethabara Park Boulevard.

**A reader asks:** What should I do about bees that come to the bird bath and seem to keep away the birds?

In hot, dry weather, the bees need water just like the birds. Try providing the bees with an alternative source. Place a shallow tray or saucer of gravel or small stones in the shade and

add some water. Keep the water fresh so you don't breed mosquitoes.

■ *Bird's-Eye View* is joint column by Ron Morris and Phil Dickinson. Today's column was written by Dickinson. Dickinson is a legal writer. He has been an active birder for 15 years, and is currently the president of the Audubon Society of Forsyth

County. Morris retired after 24 years as curator at the N.C. Zoo. He has studied birds on four continents, 22 countries and many islands. If you have a birding question or story idea, write to Bird's-Eye View in care of Features, Winston-Salem Journal, P.O. Box 3159, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27101-3159, or send an e-mail to [birding@wsjournal.com](mailto:birding@wsjournal.com). Please type "birds" in the subject line.