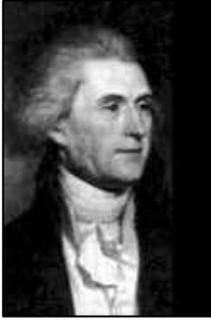
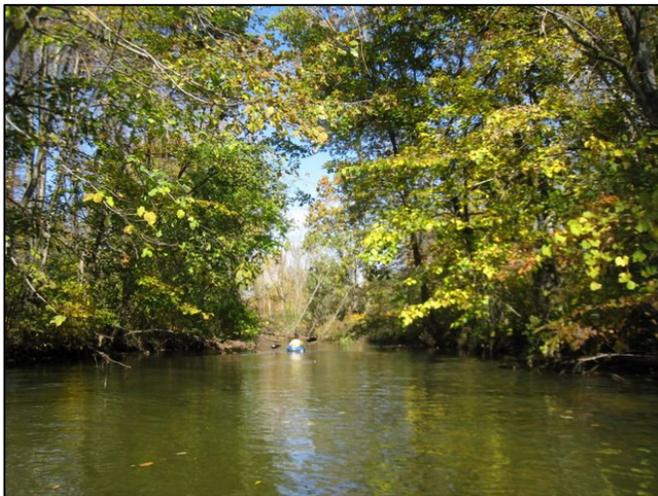


Rivers of Birds: Riparian Habitat



Imagine you have entered a time machine and have gone back to the past. It is early May, 208 years ago. The 1700s are about to end and the 1800s are about to begin. Thomas Jefferson will be elected President of the United States in less than three years. There are no trains, no cars, no aircraft; not even anything that uses electricity to work. California is not part of the United States. It belongs to the country of Spain. You have been asked to explore the rivers and streams that are now part of the State of Michigan. You are to investigate the birds that are found using the forests that grow alongside the rivers and streams. You find yourself on the Paw Paw River. The plants that grow along these rivers and streams are called riparian habitat by scientists. You are to report your findings to the people of today.



What do you find?

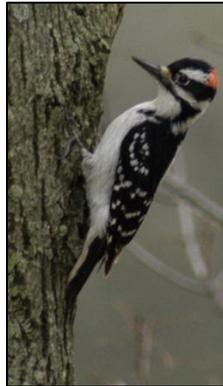
Paw Paw's rivers and streams are bordered by magnificent forests of trees. Some of the trees you see are cottonwoods, willows, and oaks. On many rivers you find great tangles of wild grapes and blackberries. Often times you find the best way to explore is to use the waterways like a car would use a highway; only you use a canoe.

One thing you notice is that there are birds everywhere. They seem to be drawn like a powerful magnet to the trees and smaller plants along the rivers and streams. It seems as if the riparian habitat has turned into rivers of birds. The colors of the birds match all of those found in the brightest rainbow, and more. There are birds that live in the river forests year round. Many others have just arrived on their own flights from the states of western Mexico and beyond. But, no matter where they came from they seem to want to be here.

Why Are They Here?



You find that it is because the riparian forests produce millions upon millions upon millions of insects that birds love to eat and feed to their young to help them grow into birds that can fly on their own. Because of the water, because of the lush riparian forests, because of the seemingly endless food supply, you discover that more birds depend on riparian habitat for some part of their lifetime than any other habitat in all of Michigan. .



Some come to hunt fish.

Some for the insects.

Some for the fruit.



You notice that over 135 species of birds depend on riparian habitat.



Can you name all the birds on these pages?

You now re-enter your time-machine and return to the end of the year 2008.