

By Stephanie Young

Do birds prefer native understory vegetation, or just large trees, or both? Birds are known to live in a variety of ecosystems, it can be easy to assume they prefer mature trees. This science project's goal is to study the impact of native underbrush on bird population.

According to the University of Florida, a healthy native Florida yard supports woodpeckers, cranes, and more. Cultivating plants like Beauty Berry, Wild Coffee, and Sabal Palm provide shelter and food for birds. Birds such as warblers and flycatchers are included in expected migrants. With this gathered data, a hypothesis was formed. If a neighborhood has both large trees and native understory plants, then it will have more birds and a greater variety of bird species. The Cornell Lab predicted the expected peak migration would be mid October.

The research starts with peak migration in mid October. Birds were observed and documented with their quantity and species. This was repeated three times a day from 8:00 A.M. to 9:30 A.M. on October 13, October 17, and October 20. This was done in the neighborhoods of Cathy Lane, Longbrooke Way, and Lichen lane. The neighborhoods were next to each other and ecosystem was the same.

Each neighborhood would have data collected on each of the windows of time 8:00 to 8:30 am, 8:30 to 9:00 am, and 9:00 to 9:30am.

On October 13 in Longbrooke Way, 75 Oak trees, 40 Pine trees, 22 Cuban palm trees, 18 Cabbage palm trees, and 66 native shrubs of 5 various types were cataloged. In Lichen Lane on October 13, 53 Oak trees, 17 Cabbage palm trees, 20 pine trees, 2 Cuban palm trees, and 0 bushes were observed. In Cathy Lane on October 13, 28 Oak trees, 10 Cabbage palm trees, 3 Pine trees, 2 Cabbage palm trees, and no bushes or shrubs were surveyed.

On the day with the highest bird count and bird diversity for Longbrooke Way, 140 birds were observed and 26 species were observed. On the day with the highest bird overall bird population and bird variety in Lichen Lane, 85 individual birds were observed and 15 species were observed. In Cathy Lane, 60 birds were observed with 9 total species on the day of greatest bird population and diversity. There were some uncontrolled variables that impacted the bird counts, like the presence of hawks or excessive landscaping noise.

Overall, Neighborhoods with both large trees and native understory vegetation had the highest bird and species counts. This supports the hypothesis and research findings. In the future, I would conduct bird walks in more neighborhoods during several seasons of the year when doing this project.

References;

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