



## Birds in My Woods

As a woodland owner you have a unique opportunity to become acquainted with the diverse community of birds living in your woods—and also to encourage that community to grow through your stewardship of the land. Once you get to know the types of birds that can live in your region, and what they need to thrive, you can plan the care of your woods with birds in mind. If your woods provide what a given bird needs, chances are it will come.

### Attracting birds with healthy habitat

The health of any bird community depends on the availability of quality, safe habitat they need to nest, forage and breed. In-tact forests are one of the most important assets for birds and many bird populations are struggling due to the fragmentation and degradation of America's forests.

As a woodland owner you have the ability to give these beautiful and lively creatures what they most need--a healthy place to live and breed. This section will show you how to protect and care for your woods to support bird populations.

### Checklist: Creating Healthy Bird Habitat In My Woods

Working toward a healthy, bird-friendly forest means supporting all levels of woodland growth—herbaceous, shrub, sub-canopy and canopy. Birds rely on every part of the forest for important resources. And because different birds rely on different parts of the woods, ensuring the health of all layers of the forest will help draw a diverse community of birds.

- ✓ **Maintain a consistent, unbroken, multi-story habitat** that birds can rely on. When cutting trees, practice single-tree removal or limit sections of tree removal to 1.25 acres at most. Retaining clusters of over-story trees will help provide continuous habitat for birds. Increase the area of unbroken forest in your woods by eliminating unused roads and other openings that break up the canopy and diminish habitat value for forest-dwelling birds. Also plant groundcover, bushes and under-story trees to birds that frequent the lower forest will have plenty of cover.
- ✓ **Plan management activities by season.** Forest management activities will impact birds, but you can minimize that impact by trimming and cutting trees outside of the breeding season, which typically runs from early spring to late summer. By giving

- breeding birds a chance to hatch, rear and fledge their young, you will give them a better chance for breeding success and encourage them to consider your woods a safe place to live.
- ✓ **Leave deadwood and brush piles.** In a natural forest, nobody is out clearing the old trees and shrubs. Because of this, many birds have grown to rely on deadwood. An average of 40 species in a given forest use dead trees and logs for perches and cover, as well as an important source of bugs and other critters that birds like to eat. So if you can, let it lie. Note: If you are concerned about the safety of leaving snags on your land, consult a forester about the best way to retain deadwood.
  - ✓ **Plant food trees.** Berry, seed and nut trees are very important for birds. Native plant species like serviceberry, black cherry, beech and oak are particularly bird-friendly because they provide fruit and seeds, support bug, spider and insect communities, and create safe spaces for birds to hide from predators. Fruit and nut trees will thrive with some care, and the healthier they are, the more resources they provide for wildlife.
  - ✓ **Minimize the negative impacts of edge habitat and accentuate the positive.** Edge habitat is where a forest transitions into a field and it can be a very productive area with many diverse species of birds. But it can be dangerous for some birds, particularly if the change is abrupt. Predators like domesticated cats, non-native birds and raccoons have an advantage when the forest opens abruptly. You can minimize negative impacts of abrupt edge habitat by maintaining a circular or square-shaped forest. Where edges exist, make a transition zone by planting trees sparsely on the forest edge and encouraging the growth of thickets of fruit-bearing native shrubs. You can also cut trees selectively to soften the edge and encourage the growth of thickets. Consider adding nest boxes at your softened forest edge to encourage birds like bluebirds and screech owls to inhabit the enhanced edge.
  - ✓ **Promote the health of waterways and wetlands.** Water is essential for all birds, for bathing, drinking and foraging. Having healthy water sources will help you attract all types of birds.
  - ✓ **Conserve and restore forests along streams and ravines.** Woodlands along streams are important for migratory birds, as well as those that forage and nest exclusively in the forest cover along streams. Try to maintain a forest buffer of 200-300 feet around streams. In addition to supporting birds, the buffer zone will help maintain the health of the stream by preventing stream bank erosion.
  - ✓ **Reduce non-native, invasive plant species like kudzu, English ivy, and privet.** These invasive plants often out-compete or kill native plant species that provide important resources for native birds. Keeping them in check is an important element of maintaining a healthy forest.

- ✓ **Avoid the use of pesticides and herbicides.** Chemical weed and insect controls can poison waterways and food sources for birds, as well as posing hazards to people and pets. An estimated 7 million birds die annually due to the use of pesticides on lawns.
- ✓ **Keep cats indoors.** Domesticated cats kill hundreds of millions of birds in the U.S. annually. One important way to ensure birds can live safely in your woods is to keep cats inside. If you know there are feral cats in your woods, you can help protect birds by planting plenty of good ground cover and providing brush piles for birds to hide in.
- ✓ **Help birds see windows.** If you have glass surfaces on your land, help birds avoid collisions by installing screens, closing curtains when you are not home (especially if they are light colored), and using other methods that help birds identify glass surfaces. It is estimated that 1 billion birds die annually in the United States alone from running into windows.
- ✓ **Support celestial navigation.** Many migrating birds use the stars as waypoints. But when there are distracting electronic sources of light, birds can be thrown dangerously off course. You can aid bird travelers by turning off interior and exterior lights when they are not in use.

## Learn More

- Native Vegetation Management for Wildlife:  
[http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2\\_002336.pdf](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/nrcs144p2_002336.pdf)
- Common Backyard Birds of Alabama:  
[http://www.alabamawildlife.org/uploadedFiles/File/Backyard\\_Birds\\_in\\_Alabama\\_PPT\\_as\\_a\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.alabamawildlife.org/uploadedFiles/File/Backyard_Birds_in_Alabama_PPT_as_a_PDF.pdf)
- Common Birds of Prey in Alabama: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1386/ANR-1386.pdf>
- Eastern Bluebirds: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0687/ANR-0687.pdf>
- Red-cockaded Woodpecker:  
[http://www.forestry.state.al.us/PDFs/ResourceSheets/Birds/Red-cockaded\\_Woodpecker.pdf](http://www.forestry.state.al.us/PDFs/ResourceSheets/Birds/Red-cockaded_Woodpecker.pdf)
- The Pileated Woodpecker: Life History and Management:  
[http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Publications/TREASURED\\_Forest\\_Magazine/2006%20Summer/The%20Pileated%20Woodpecker%20-%20Life%20History%20and%20Management.pdf](http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Publications/TREASURED_Forest_Magazine/2006%20Summer/The%20Pileated%20Woodpecker%20-%20Life%20History%20and%20Management.pdf)
- Bird Houses for Songbirds: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0550/ANR-0550.pdf>
- Feeding Birds: <http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-0554/ANR-0554.pdf>
- Field Borders: Giving Bobwhites the Edge:  
[http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Publications/TREASURED\\_Forest\\_Magazine/2005%20Summer/Field%20Borders%20-%20Giving%20Bobwhites%20the%20Edge.pdf](http://www.forestry.alabama.gov/Publications/TREASURED_Forest_Magazine/2005%20Summer/Field%20Borders%20-%20Giving%20Bobwhites%20the%20Edge.pdf)