

Get More Animals to Call Your Woodland Home

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Woodlands may already be home to birds, bats, snakes, salamanders, turkeys, white-tailed deer, and many other types of wildlife. But how can woodlands be improved



Copperheads eat a wide variety of animals including mice, birds, small reptiles and amphibians.

to make them more attractive to wildlife? Like most things in life, a plan is paramount. Do woodland owners want to attract more game species such as deer and turkey or more songbirds for bird watching? Narrowing down objectives can help determine the management activities that need to be implemented to meet goals.

In general, all wildlife need three basic things: food, cover, and water. It's just that each species needs different types of food, cover, and water. That's where contacting a natural resources professional such as a Private Lands Biologist with the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources or a Service Forester with the Kentucky Division of Forestry can help. These individuals can provide guidance on how to attract the kinds of wildlife desired in a woodland.

Food

Woodlands provide various types of food for animals. Berries and fruits (referred to as 'soft' mast) and nuts and acorns ('hard' mast) are produced by numerous shrub and tree species. Thus, having a wide variety of these food producing plants in the canopy and understory of woodlands can attract a wide range of wildlife. Proper timber management and wildlife management usually go hand in hand. Consider thinning young stands with an emphasis on enhancing the dominance of a variety

of mast-producing species in the main canopy. Thinning also opens the canopy allowing light to reach the forest floor. This light will allow for the development of more abundant cover and food in the understory.

Although larger trees typically produce more mast than smaller ones, size alone is not a good indicator of acorn or nut production. Individual trees success at producing large mast crops for several years is the best indicator of future success. Reduce competition around the crowns of these high mast-producing trees to ensure their survival and enhance their mast-production capabilities (see Making Your Favorite Trees Bigger and Better factsheet [FORFS17-06]).

Cover

'Cover' refers to any type of habitat that an animal considers their temporary or permanent home. Salamanders



Certain animals will prefer pine stands (R) over hardwood stands (L) and vice versa.

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need streams, golden-winged warblers need open shrubby areas, cerulean warblers need older forests, frogs need ponds, and white-tailed deer can thrive in varying types of habitats. To attract a wide va-



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riety of animals to a woodlands, a wide variety of cover is required. If a specific animal is desired, increase that species' specific habitat.

Wildlife's specific habitat needs may depend on the age of the woodlands. Young woodlands are covered in thousands of tree seedlings, bushes, and vines. As woodlands age they provide different types of habitat structures that are desirable for wildlife. Golden-winged warblers nest



Golden-winged warblers need shrubby thickets for breeding but mature forests to raise their young.

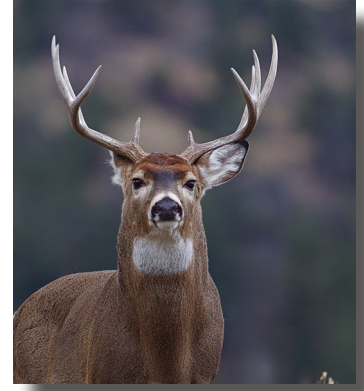
and lay eggs in densely packed young stands of tree seedlings and brush. After the young can fly, they move to mature forests. Disturbances can change the age or successional stage of the woodlands. Natural disturbances such as ice storms, fires, major wind events, or tornadoes may reset the age of the woodlands and attract wildlife that was not present before. Timber harvests and thinnings may be implemented to artificially create disturbance to attract a woodland owner's desirable species.

Dead trees (snags) serve as significant sources of cover and food for wildlife. Woodpeckers and bats use cavities and bark or dead trees to shelter themselves and their young. Dead trees attract large amounts of insects, feeding on the decaying wood, which attracts birds and other animals to feed on the insects. If nature is not creating enough snags, consider creating some through girdling or herbicide application. But follow proper safety protocols (using chemicals or chainsaws), and don't create a hazard tree that could harm life or property.

Water

Whether it is vital for survival (fish) or necessary for drinking (deer), water is an important factor when at-

tracting wildlife. Constructing a large pond or lake could attract a huge amount of wildlife if water sources are not common in the area. But significant water features are expensive to construct and may fall under government regulations particularly where wetlands are concerned. However, constructing a small, shallow pond, one that only holds water in spring, can be valuable breeding habitat for numerous amphibians. Such ephemeral pools can be constructed with small equipment of even by hand. Shallow water impoundments can also be constructed and can provide valuable habitat for waterfowl, wading birds, and furbearers.



White-tail deer and all wildlife species need access to water.

Woodland owners should be concerned about the protection of water resources during forest management activities. Leaving strips of undisturbed woodlands next to streams and lakes is advised to prevent sediment from reaching water bodies and potentially harming aquatic wildlife. Road and trail construction, ATV and horseback riding, and any chemical applications should take place a safe distance away from water.

Woodlands are already a great place for wildlife to live. Small woodland owners should review what habitats are present in their woodlands and compare them to their neighbors. By focusing on improving access to food, cover, or water, landowner's can attract even more of their favorite birds, frogs, bats, deer, or any other animals.



Frogs and other amphibians will be attracted to woodland waterbodies.

For More Information

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife:
fw.ky.gov

Kentucky Division of Forestry: forestry.ky.gov

References

Improving Woodland Wildlife Habitat: Kentucky Woodlands Magazine 2(3):6-9

Attract Wildlife: Backyard Woods 6:1-4