Chapter 13
Wildlife Habitat Management and Enhancement

A guide to the ODNR Wildlife Habitat Management Programs

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR) has established twelve programs for wildlife habitat management and enhancement. The following is an overview of those programs. For complete information, please visit the ODNR Division of Wildlife website at http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Publications/pblist1.htm.

Prairie Grassland Habitat Management

Why plant prairie grass as opposed to the typical non-native cool-season grass such as bluegrass, orchard and brome grass? First, native grassland wildlife species are better adapted to living in a mixture of native grasses and flowers. Second, those same grasses and flowers are better adapted to the soils, weather, and other biological and physical conditions found in Ohio. Third, to plant prairie grass is to restore a priceless part of Ohio's natural history.

Pasture/Hayland Management for Wildlife and Livestock

Habitat change through natural and/or human caused disturbances, such as grazing, has always been an important factor in maintaining quality wildlife habitat. In native grasslands (prairie) throughout North America, including Ohio, large herbivores such as bison, elk, and white-tailed deer have grazed the prairie for eons, creating a diversity of habitat that supported a variety of wildlife from badgers to regal butterflies.

Artificial Nesting Structures for Wildlife

Many of Ohio's wildlife species nest in cavities. Some excavate their own holes while other move into existing hollows in trees. In much of Ohio, natural cavities are too few and of too poor quality to provide good nesting opportunities. Trees with hollows are often the first to be removed from woodlands when firewood is cut or timber stands are improved. Without adequate nesting cavities, areas that otherwise have good habitat will support only a limited number of Ohio's cavity dwelling wildlife. Artificial nesting structures benefit wildlife and provide much enjoyment to the builders. Scout troops, conservation clubs, science and shop classes, and various other groups will find that providing homes for wildlife is both educational and entertaining.

Cool Season Grassland Habitat Management for Wildlife

Grasslands' greatest wildlife value is usually as nesting cover. However, they also furnish food in the form of seed, succulent green plant parts, and prey animals that they attract, such as rodent and insects. These prey species in turn supply food to predators. The barn owl, an Ohio endangered animal, is particularly fond of the meadow voles that thrive in grassland habitat. One of Ohio's best-known wildlife species associated with grassland habitat in the ring-necked pheasant. Pheasants will not nest in woodland or dense brushland. They are strictly grassland nesters. Other wildlife species heavily dependent upon grassland habitat include the bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, meadowlark, Henslow's sparrow, and Savannah sparrow. About one-third of Ohio's wildlife needs grassland to prosper.

Cropfield Management for Wildlife

Ohio farmers have been providing food and cover for wildlife since they planted their first crops on Ohio soils. Today on 11 million acres (45%) of Ohio's 26.2 million acres are actively farmed. An additional five to six million acres of uncropped farmlands are under the control of Ohio farmers. Farmers, therefore, have a tremendous potential to benefit wildlife through their farming practices. Incorporating one or more cropfield management techniques into the overall farm plan will provide the necessary habitat (food and cover) to maintain and possibly even increase populations of wildlife.

Food Plots for Wildlife

The three basic components of wildlife habitat are food, water, and shelter. In Ohio, sufficient water is usually available to sustain wild animals through all seasons. Shelter (or cover) needed for protection, nesting, travel, and loafing by wildlife varies greatly in both quality and quantity throughout the state. In many areas there is ample shelter but unreliable food supplies. This is especially true during the winter. In agricultural areas where fall plowing is uncommon, enough grain is usually available over the winter to feed wildlife. However, food shortages can occur when waste grain is not adjacent to adequate winter cover or become unavailable under heavy snow cover. Most species of farmland wildlife will not travel far from winter cover to feed during bad weather. If food is not within 20-30 feet of cover, it may be out of the reach of wildlife when it is needed most. Fall plowing can also eliminate winter food in some areas.

Old Field Management for Wildlife

Old field habitat is the stage of plant growth between bare ground and forest. In Ohio, old fields are commonly found on abandoned pastureland and retired cropfields. Old fields occur in both bottomlands (flat, low, seasonally flooded areas along rivers and streams) and uplands (better drained lands elevated above bottomlands). Old fields are a valuable habitat type for wildlife in Ohio. They typically comprise many kinds of plants, which furnish key habitat components for a variety of wildlife species. Over 40% of Ohio's resident wildlife species use old field habitat.

Planting Trees and Shrubs for Wildlife

In Ohio, water is normally available in sufficient amounts for wildlife through natural sources. However, in many parts of the state the food and shelter requirements of many animal species are not being met. Changing land uses such as industrialization, urbanization, and intensive farming have reduced the quantity and quality of wildlife habitat. One way to reverse these
trends is for landowners to reestablish wildlife habitats on their properties. Planting trees, shrubs, and vines can provide the food and shelter requirements of many wildlife species. A well planned planting of woody species can fulfill the needs of wildlife while meeting other goals (e.g., recreational opportunities such as bird watching or hunting). Wildlife plantings can also serve as windbreaks, hedgerows, sight and sound barriers, shade producers, erosion controls, and components of a reforestation plan.

Riparian Habitat Management for Wildlife

Riparian habitat is the land and vegetation that is situated along the bank of a stream or river. Such an area is often referred to as a floodplain, streamside habitat, or bottomland forest. Because the topography is flat, it is subject to frequent seasonal flooding. Riparian habitat is one of the richest and most diverse habitat types in Ohio. Even though its dominant plant community is woodland, it usually contains a patchwork of smaller microhabitats such as buttonbush thickets, seasonal spring pools, sedge meadows, and cattail marshes. This mosaic of habitats, together with the surface water and abundant soil moisture, makes riparian land especially appealing to wildlife.

Urban Landscape Management for Wildlife

Today's typical urban landscape is too often characterized by unnatural features as a carefully manicured lawn maintained with chemicals, flower beds containing geometrically arranged marigolds, and evergreens skillfully sculpted to resemble turtles and mushrooms. These artificial
landscapes provide few benefits for wildlife, but they do not have to remain that way. The area immediately surrounding a house can easily be converted to a mini-refuge for native wildlife. Anyone, even with the smallest parcel of land, can help wildlife by creating habitat areas around their urban landscape.

Wetland Habitat Management for Wildlife

Wetlands in the United States were considered wastelands for more than 200 years. Many people viewed them as unproductive lands that needed to be filled or drained to be made usable and profitable. Today, wetlands are beginning to receive the respect and attention they deserve. Wetlands are now viewed as valuable real estate that needs to be protected and perpetuated. State and federal funds are available to restore them. Wetlands have been called the kidneys of the landscape, because they can filter out sediments from surface water runoff and absorb surplus chemicals. Wetlands also replenish groundwater supplies and serve as water retention basins, thus contributing to

flood water control. Wetlands are particularly important to wildlife. Nearly 32% of Ohio's endangered and threatened wild species live in wetland habitat. Over one-third of Ohio's wildlife depend upon wetlands for its survival.

Woodland Habitat Management for Wildlife

Forestlands in Ohio occur in several specific types, identified according to the dominant tree species. Dominant trees are those that make up 50% or more of the canopy or top layer of the
forest stand. The three principal forest types in Ohio are oak-hickory, beech-maple, and elm-ash. Many woodland animals depend upon natural cavities or hollows for nesting and roosting sites. Scarcity of suitable nesting cavities can be a major factor limiting woodland wildlife.

Summary

Although some of the aforementioned programs are not suitable at aggregate producing locations, there are several of these and others that can be implemented. For example, having a litter pickup in and around your plant or creating a Christmas tree disposal site can be two simple ways to improve wildlife habitat.

Other relatively inexpensive examples would be to arrange a bird house building activity with a local boy or Girl Scout troop, plant a food plot, or plant trees or shrubs.

For large projects, such as wetland habitat, there are several grants that are available to supplement the cost of these projects. Although expensive and time consuming, these projects are extremely important to wildlife habitat management and can also generate very positive public relations.

Whatever project your company decides to undertake, the rewards of the time and money spent are valuable to wildlife habitat management and will also provide food, water, or shelter to Ohio wildlife to years to come.

Important Links

ODNR - Division of Wildlife Offices
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Contact/default.htm

ODNR - Wildlife Officers by County
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Contact/officers.htm

ODNR – Wild Kids (Games and information links for kids)
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Kids/default.htm

ODNR - Links (Links to several conservation groups and government agencies)
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Links/main.htm

ODNR - Division of Wildlife Publications
http://www.dnr.state.oh.us/wildlife/Publications/pblist1.htm

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Services (Ohio)
http://midwest.fws.gov/maps/ohio.htm

U. S. Fish & Wildlife Services - Public & Private Grant Programs
http://grants.fws.gov/private.html

USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Services - Ohio
http://www.oh.nrcs.usda.gov/

USDA, NRCS - Wildlife Habitat Management Institute
http://www.whmi.nrcs.usda.gov/

Boy Scouts of America
http://www.scouting.org

Girl Scouts of the USA
http://www.girlscouts.org/

Additional Web Sites

Ohio Woodland Stewards
Ohio State University
http://woodlandstewards.osu.edu/

The Ohio Woodland Journal
ODNR-Division of Forestry
www.ohioforest.org

The National Bird Feeding Society
www.birdfeeding.org

American Bird Conservancy
www.abcbirds.org

Reference Books

The Ohio Nature Almanac — ISBN # 1-882203-53-4
Orange Frazer Press
Edited by Stephen Ostrander

Ohio Wildlife Viewing Guide — ISBN # 1-56044-491-6
Falcon Press
By John A. Ruthven

Woodworking for Wildlife
Homes for Birds & Mammals
To order contact:
Minnesota's Bookstore
117 University Ave.
St. Paul, MN 55155
1-800-657-3757

The Feeder Watcher's Guide to Bird Feeding — ISBN # 0-06273744-9
Harper Collins Publishers
By Margaret A. Barker & Jack Griggs

Birdhouse Book — ISBN # 0-316-81714-7
The Complete Guide to Attracting Nesting Birds
By Donald & Lillian Stokes

Birding In Ohio — ISBN # 0253208742
Indiana University Press
By Tom Thomson