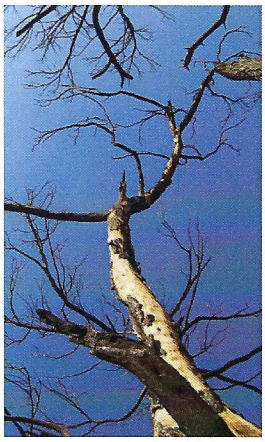
WWW.MYNORTHCAROLINAWOODS.ORG
HEALTHY WOODS FACTSHEET

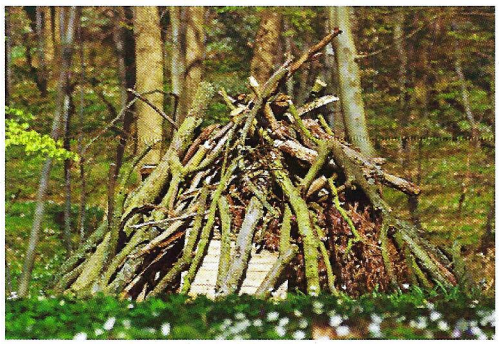
Making Your North Carolina Woods a Welcoming Home for Wildlife

One of the joys of woodland ownership is watching the birds and animals that visit. If you love these wild visitors, there are some easy things you can do to make them feel at home—most of them at little or no cost. Here are a few of the best. Find more on the websites listed at the end of this sheet.



Snags

Rather than carting them away or chopping them up for firewood, consider leaving standing dead trees (snags) right where they are. Birds, animals and future trees will thank you! Snags release nutrients into the soil, provide compost for new saplings to take root, provide homes for nesting woodpeckers and other cavity-loving birds, offer food for insect-eating birds and mammals, and provide denning sites for mammals, reptiles and amphibians. In short, they help keep the ecosystem of your woodland in a healthy balance.



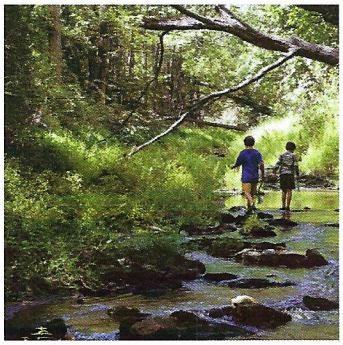
Brush Piles

As you work in your woods, you'll probably be harvesting or thinning trees and cutting firewood. If you want to boost biodiversity on your land while recycling extra trimmings, branches, and logs, you might want to install a few brush piles to encourage some of the more elusive wildlife species that love the most densely vegetated pockets of your forest. These include quail, grouse, wild turkey and pheasant, cottontail rabbits and a host of reptiles and amphibians.

Even on small properties, brush piles add a new dimension for wildlife. They provide shelter and food for birds like thrashers, wrens and towhees that prefer to feed on insects and seeds among the leaf litter on the forest floor. Lizards hide in brush piles to watch for spiders and termites, and snakes use brush piles to ambush rodents. Brush piles attract invertebrates that work to decompose plant fragments, which enrich the soil. This shady micro-habitat attracts moisture-loving creatures such as salamanders and toads that prey on invertebrates. You can enjoy hours of entertainment watching the comings and goings in the miniature ecosystem of a well-constructed brush pile.

Downed Logs

Leaving some downed logs in your woods rather than hauling them away supports a life cycle fueled by the decomposing wood. Many plants, fungi and animals rely on logs as a food source and a place to live. Decomposing logs enrich the soil and serve as "nurseries" where tree saplings and other plants take root. Fungi and invertebrates that live on decomposing logs provide food for a variety of creatures including amphibians, reptiles, birds and small mammals. Logs shelter predators that, in turn, help control insect and rodent populations. Downed logs provide denning sites for foxes, martens, bobcats and bears. Logs that fall into wetlands, streams and rivers provide important habitat for trout, bass, turtles and a wide variety of other aquatic species. Downed logs also help retain moisture in your woods. That's good for salamanders, but it's good for your woods too!



Streamside Habitat

In addition to their role in protecting human health,

the streams and wetlands on your property play an important role in managing your woods for wildlife. Keeping water sources healthy is a key part of managing your woods sustainably. An added benefit is that healthy water sources attract all kinds of birds and animals. 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.



Pesticides

Chemical weed and insect controls can poison waterways and food sources for birds, as well as pose hazards to people and pets. Talk to your forester or North Carolina Cooperative Extension agent about how you can keep pesticide use to a minimum.

Timing is Everything!

Be aware of the places in your woods where animals den, birds nest and turtles and salamanders hide, and avoid disturbing these places whenever possible. Try to time your forest management activities (pruning, thinning, harvesting and prescribed burns, for example) to avoid bird nesting season in the spring and early summer.

Invasive Species

Invasives such as kudzu, miscanthus, Chinese privet, autumn olive and callery pear are an increasing problem in North Carolina. These invaders crowd out native plants that wildlife need for food and shelter. An important part of making your woods a welcoming place for wildlife is to do a good job of managing invasives. For more information on managing invasives, you'll need to consult with a forester familiar with the invasive species most common in your part of North Carolina, or with a Cooperative Extension Service agent who can help you come up with a plan to manage the invasive species on your land.

Learn More!

- **MyLandPlan.org.** This website for woodland owners contains extensive, easy-to-understand information and resources on managing your woods to provide habitat for wildlife. If you want to attract more birds and animals to your land, you can find tips to get you started here: **http://www.mylandplan.org/content/create-home-wildlife**
- **North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.** This website includes many free, printable fact sheets on managing forestland to attract wildlife. Topics include developing wildlife-friendly pine plantations, managing edges for wildlife, low-cost habitat improvement projects and using fire to improve wildlife habitat: **http://www.forestry.ces.ncsu.edu/forestry-wildlife**

Information for this fact sheet was compiled from a variety of sources, including the American Forest Foundation and the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.

