

Songbirds and Your Woodland

The migration of birds mark the changing seasons. Most everyone notices the flocks of geese or ducks heading south for the winter or heading north in the spring. What many people don't notice, however, are the migrations of the smaller songbirds. Many songbirds breed in Maryland's forests in the spring and summer and fly south to overwinter in the Caribbean, Mexico, Central or South America. This group of birds, known as neotropical migrants, includes our state bird, the northern oriole, as well as swallows, vireos, thrushes, flycatchers, warblers, hummingbirds, and many others.

Neotropical migrants can be found throughout Maryland. Except for the hummingbirds, which eat nectar, most do not visit backward bird feeders. Their diets consist mostly of insects, fruits, and berries. Most of these species stay away from developed areas, often requiring large tracts of forest or extensive grassland areas.

The Problem

Over the past decade, biologists have found that these songbirds have declined in numbers. According to a U.S. Fish and Wildlife survey, 60 percent or more of neotropical migrant species in Maryland may be declining. The species declining the most are those that require large areas of forest or grasslands.

Although the causes of these declines are numerous and complex, the greatest factor leading to these declines is believed to be habitat loss. Tropical deforestation in

their wintering areas, loss of breeding habitat here where they breed, as well as destruction of habitat along migration routes have resulted in a deadly combination for these birds. Additionally, much of the remaining forest habitat has been fragmented. Forest fragmentation is the division of forested areas into increasingly smaller, separate tracts. Development of forested areas for housing, malls, and roads is the largest cause of fragmentation.

Forest fragmentation is deadly to species that require forest interior areas for nesting. These species will not nest near edges of the forest. The small woodlots created by fragmentation are more accessible to predators that eat songbird eggs or young, and to the brown-headed cowbird. Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of other species causing the "host" bird to abandon the nest, remove the cowbird egg, or raise the cowbird chick as if it were its own. When this happens, the cowbird chick usually will outcompete the other chicks. Thus, the songbird will raise few or none of its young that year.

What Can Be Done

Recently, biologists and others concerned with this decline in songbird populations have launched efforts to stop the habitat loss.

Partners in Flight is a cooperative effort involving federal and state agencies, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, professional associations, and industry groups. It promotes the conservation of neotropical migrants through habitat protection, management, and education. The Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife

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Division has launched its own conservation program modeled after Partners in Flight. This program will focus on bird and habitat monitoring, research, land management, and education. Another program, Birds in the Balance, sponsored by the National Audubon Society, focuses on promoting policies to conserve neotropical migrant habitat.

Local programs to conserve the habitat of neotropical migratory songbirds rely on the efforts of private landowners, who own 90% of Maryland's forests. By including techniques for the conservation of songbird habitat in forest stewardship plans, landowners can improve the outlook for Maryland's songbirds. Like all wildlife species, songbirds require the four key habitat elements: food, water, cover, and space. However, specific habitat conditions needed to sustain songbird populations are as varied as the birds themselves. Many of these practices will benefit other wildlife species as well.

Practices to improve neotropical migrant habitat can be cost shared under the stewardship incentive program. Consult with your forester or natural resource professional to determine what management activity may be appropriate for your property.

Maryland's Forest Stewardship Program

The 1990 Farm Bill created the Forest Stewardship Program (FSP) and the Stewardship Incentive Program (SIP). The goals of the Maryland Forest Stewardship program have been to encourage, assist and recognize private forest landowners who keep their lands and natural resources productive and healthy. To implement the program the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest Service organized a Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee composed of conservation agencies and organizations to help develop and implement a five-year plan. Specific goals were set for the program in terms of the number and

acres of forest stewardship plans developed. To date, 1566 stewardship plans on 85,615 acres have been prepared. To improve wildlife input into forest stewardship plans prepared for landowners, four stewardship wildlife biologists were hired to work with foresters. Numerous education efforts such as stewardship seminars and demonstration forests have been initiated.

While the FSP is assisting landowners with good forest stewardship planning, the SIP has been instrumental in helping landowners implement the practices called for in the plans. Using SIP 1 also provides cost share assistance to the landowner to have a stewardship plan developed by a private consultant forester. SIP will pay up to 65% of the cost of the nine following practices:

*SIP 1 - **Forest Stewardship Plan Development**

*SIP 2 - **Reforestation and Afforestation**

*SIP 3 - **Forest and Agroforest Improvement**

*SIP 4 - **Windbreaks and Hedgerow Development**

*SIP 5 - **Soil and Water Protection**

*SIP 6 - **Riparian and Wetland Protection**

*SIP 7 - **Fisheries Habitat Enhancement**

*SIP 8 - **Forest Wildlife Habitat Enhancement -**

*SIP 9 - **Forest Recreation Enhancement**

Landowners enrolled in SIP can still qualify for other government incentive programs. Most landowners involved in other forest management programs such as the Tree Farm program can also qualify for SIP funds. For more information about SIP call your local Department of Natural Resources forester or private forest consultant

Maryland's Forest Stewardship Program is providing new tools and opportunities for the more than 125,000 private woodland owners across the state. Timber and non-timber practices that were delayed due to a lack of money can now be implemented. The FSP and SIP will continue to be a major resource and will have an impact on the

Branching Out

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Branching Out is published quarterly and distributed to 7,350 woodland owners, resource professionals, and others interested in forest stewardship. Calendar and news items are welcome. Items must be received by November 1 for the fall newsletter.

The sponsoring agencies' programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, sex, age, religion, national origin, or disability.

Blake a Model Forest Steward

For more than a decade Paco and Linda Blake has been utilizing professional forestry assistance to manage their 65 acre Tree Farm in Charles County. They purchased the land 13 years ago in order to enjoy the peace and quiet of rural living. However, after attending a forestry seminar, their objectives for the land became more specific and conservation oriented. "It's been a cumulative process," Blake stated, "the more information I acquired, the further I went in managing my land." They sought help from the Maryland Forest Service to help develop a forest management plan.

The Blakes' property is managed for the multiple use benefits of hunting, hiking, and timber. The forest is protected from wildfire through an ambitious road/trail system built by the family. The Blake's monitor the health of their forest. Recently, an aerial application to control a gypsy moth was applied using cost share assistance.

Timber harvests are a regular part of the Blake's management strategies. In 1990, about 10 acres of Virginia pine was harvested by the clear cut method. With cost share assistance, seven acres were replanted with loblolly pine, two acres with green ash/yellow poplar, and one acre was allowed to regenerate naturally. With the help of a private consultant forester, the Blakes are planning a selection harvest on a 30 acre stand of sawtimber size oaks. At present, Mr. Blake is negotiating the sale of another 10 acre stand of Virginia pine damaged by ice storms. Although harvesting timber brings a profit, that isn't why Blake does it, he says, "The money it cost to conserve and improve this land makes the profit margin narrower. If I cut down everything I'd make big money, but I'd rather enjoy the land and leave it in better condition for my children."

Paco Blake has been willing to share this experiences with others. He has hosted numerous landowner tours, participated in the Coverts Project and most recently, he represented private woodland owners of Maryland at the first Forest Stewardship Conference in Nebraska. While the diversity of woodland owners and their problems was somewhat overwhelming, according to Mr. Blake, "The overall key to successful stewardship is the same nationwide - have a well written plan with emphasis on landowner objectives and scientifically sound management activities".

National Forest Stewardship Conference

The First National Conference on Forest Stewardship was held at Nebraska City, Nebraska on April 26-29, 1994. More than 200 private forest landowners and forest agency personnel attended the conference which focused on ways to attract more participants into the Forest Stewardship Program and to discuss problems that may deter enrollment. This is a pressing concern since 75 percent of the forestland in the United States is privately owned but only seven percent is under active forest management.

Paco Blake of Charles County attended the conference as Maryland's stewardship landowner representative, along with Donald VanHassent, representing the Maryland Forest Service. Sponsored by the USDA Forest Service and the National Association of State Foresters, the 2 1/2 day conference consisted of presentations on successful state programs, and working groups of 10 to 15 landowners to identify key problem areas that had the greatest impact on stewardship participation.

The more than 900 usable ideas and concerns voiced offered the following specific recommendations to the Forest Service:

- * Offer tax incentives and tax relief (income, property and inheritance) to private forest landowners.
- * Provide educational programs for landowners, professionals and the general public about forestry, stewardship and multi-resource management. Increase the reliance on volunteer programs such as coverts, master woodland owner, master tree farmer, etc.
- * Improve the regulatory environment that does not threaten landowners with unnecessary government control over private property rights.
- * Simply multi-layered government programs, policies and procedures within and among agencies that affect landowners (e.g., cost share programs).
- * Increase the number and strengthen the role of landowner organizations that protect their interests at the county, multi-county, state and national level.

What do you think about these priorities? Write the editor with your comments.

New Woodland Owner Assoc.

A new group called the Maryland Woodland Owners Association is being formed. If you are a woodland owner concerned about regulations, taxes, wildlife management, private property rights, forest practices, fair timber prices and access to experienced loggers, your participation is welcome. This group is not associated with any government or industry organization, but will network with woodland owner associations in other states. If you are interested contact: Sonny Newhall, Rt. 5, Box 100-C, Oakland, MD 21550 (301)334-2686.

Take Note ...

New Publications & Video Resources

The following publications are available free from your local Cooperative Extension Service office: *Marking Forest Products: The Sales Contract* (FS628), *Glossary of Forestry Terms* (FS620), *Where to Get Help* (FS624), *Developing a Forest Management Plan* (FS625), *Resistance of Woody Ornamentals to Deer Damage* (FS655).

Wildlife Management Fact Sheets - 17 illustrated fact sheets on wildlife management, \$10/set. Available from your local Cooperative Extension Service Office.

Biodiversity and Managing for Biodiversity - these full-color publications explain what biodiversity is, why it's important, and how to manage for it. Available free from: Thomas Barnes, University of Kentucky, Dept. of Forestry, 205 Thomas Poe Cooper Bld., Lexington, KY, 40546-0073.

Natural Resources Income Opportunities Video - interviews with small producers of non-traditional products and services to highlight marketing and business concerns. Make check for \$18 payable to the University of Maryland. Send to: MD Cooperative Extension Service, 18330 Keedysville Road, Keedysville, MD 21740, or call (301) 432-2735.

Kentucky Tree Identification - two videos, each approximately 15 minutes long. One covers winter or "leaf off" identification, the other summer or "leaf on" identification. For more information contact: Doug McLaren, Extension Forester, Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40546-2703, (606) 257-2703.

Want to be added to the mailing list? Deleted? Change of address?
Write the editor!

Upcoming Stewardship Events...

October X - Washington County Forestry Field Day - Contact: Paul Campbell, Washington County Forestry Board. (301)432-6582.

October 1 - Dollars From Woodlots: Stewardship & Profitability. Topics include marketing forest products, starting a forest-based enterprise, field tour of ginseng & shiitake mushroom operation. To register contact Garret County Cooperative Extension, 202 South Thrid St. Oakland, MD. 21550. (301)334-1990.

October 14-15 - Maryland Forest Association Fall Forest Festival - Loggers & forestry field day and equipment show. Tuckahoe Steam Park, Easton, MD. Contact: Jack Brodie: (410)397-3131.

October 14-15 - 3rd Annual Conference of the American Paulownia Association. Howard Johnson Plaza Hotel, Hagerstown, MD. Registration fee includes Friday lunch, materials, and Saturday field trip. For registration information and brochure contact your local cooperative extension service office or the *Branching Out* editor.

November 5 - Mid-Atlantic Forest Stewardship Seminar. Held at Hagerstown Community College. Topics include ecosystem management, forest health, deer effects on forest and more. Contact: Terry Poole, Frederick County Extension Service, 330 Montevue Lane, Frederick, MD 21702. (301)694-1594.

November X & X - Delmarva Forest Stewardship Seminars - Two seminars xxxxxx and xxxxxxx. Contact Bob Tjaden, Wye Research & Education Center, P.O. Box 169, Queenstown, MD 21658, (410)827-8056.

November 12 - Central Maryland Forest Stewardship Seminar. Held at Oregon Ridge Park. Contact: Robert Halman, Harford County Estension Service, P.O. Box 663, Forest Hill, MD 21050. (410)638-3255.

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November 11 & 12 - Maryland Forestry Association Annual Meeting. Baltimore, MD. Contact: Susan Reinhart, MFA, (410)823-7215.

December 2 & 3 - Estate Planning Workshops for Landowners - with special breakout session for woodland owners - Two locations: Dec. 2 - Columbia, December 3 - Hagerstown. Contact: Carroll County Cooperative Extension Service, 700 Agricultural Road, Westminster, MD 21157 (410)848-4611.

