

Wildlife and the Land

Adapted from *Tarheel Wildlife: A Guide for Managing Wildlife on Private Lands in North Carolina* for use in the classroom

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Perhaps you enjoy the excitement of hunting and the fruits of the hunt, such as venison stew on a cold winter day. Maybe you look forward to the arrival of the first whip-poor-will of spring, the call of a quail on a summer morning, or the hooting of a barred owl at dawn with an answer from a distant wild turkey gobbler. Enjoying wildlife, whether it is the harvest of a turkey or simply watching butterflies visit a blazing-star wildflower, is one of the rewards of managing a plot of land. The purpose of this article is to help you with this important and enjoyable task.

Wildlife populations reflect land use and social changes. For example, increased area in short grasses such as lawns, closely grazed pastures and manicured¹ landscapes favor Canada geese, bluebirds, and killdeer, all of which have increased in North Carolina. Meanwhile populations of quail, Eastern meadowlarks, and field sparrows that require habitats such as tall grasses have experienced long-term declines. Populations of wild turkeys, white-tailed deer, and black bears, once rare because of severe habitat loss and unregulated hunting, have rebounded because of supplying efforts, compliance with well-designed hunting regulations, and the adaptable nature of these species.



Killdeer

The greatest threat to wildlife today is habitat loss due to development and the intensive land use associated with the production of farm products. Efforts to conserve our wildlife resources must be implemented one woodlot, one hedgerow, and one backyard at a time. If you own a forest, a farm, or a lot and are willing to invest some time and energy into developing and implementing a wildlife management plan, you can enjoy more wildlife. Creating and maintaining wildlife habitat on your property, no matter how small, is an important contribution to the conservation of healthy and diverse wildlife populations across North Carolina.

Why should I manage my land for wildlife?

Our management decisions reflect our personal philosophy toward the land. Aldo Leopold in his book, *A Sand County Almanac*, spoke of the relationship between us and our land. Instead of viewing land as a commodity to be mined for resources, he saw land ownership as a responsibility. This responsibility

¹ manicured: neatly or meticulously trimmed

requires us to use the land to provide for our needs, but, in return, we have the responsibility to leave it in better condition.

Actively managing your land for wildlife has a multitude of other benefits including more wildlife, increased opportunities for viewing and hunting, aesthetics, exercise and just having more opportunities to spend time outdoors.

Wildlife-Friendly Practices

	<p><u>Grassland</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improved soil fertility will contribute to both wildlife and domestic livestock productivity.• Native warm-season grasses provide dependable summer livestock grazing during the often hot and dry summer months, while providing food and cover for wildlife.• Adding a pea or bean plant to grass pastures builds the soil, improves food for livestock and wildlife, and supports abundant insects on which wildlife feed.
	<p><u>Cropland</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Field borders of native grasses and wildflowers or vegetation can provide wildlife food and cover.• Small patches of <u>standing</u> grain along field edges will provide food and cover for wildlife during winter months.
	<p><u>Forestland</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Thinning and burning can transform a pine plantation into a more productive area for wildlife.• Edges where fields meet forest are more attractive to wildlife when a transition zone of brush and shrubs is established and maintained.• Small canopy gaps can make the interior of forests more attractive to songbirds and many species of wildlife.