One example would be a brush pile that is constructed too close to a property boundary where the neighbor raises vegetable gardens and poultry. Brush piles attract cottontail rabbits, weasels, chipmunks and other small mammals that would naturally feed on vegetables and prey on poultry. These mammals could become serious pests to the neighbor, and this scenario could possibly result in great discord between neighbors.

Other factors to consider in keeping with the big picture include:

- Again, beware of introducing non-native, invasive plants, animals, and other species. See our factsheet Working for Biodiversity and Protection from Invasive Species for more information.
- Observe and appreciate your wildlife from a distance. There are laws against domesticating or otherwise “keeping” wildlife as pets. If a wild animal becomes injured or orphaned, contact the RI DEM Division of Fish and Wildlife for direction and assistance with professional wildlife rehbitation. In many cases, a baby animal is “mistaken” as orphaned and “rescuing” it causes the most harm.
- If you are interested in using your woodlands to hunt, see factsheet Working for Alternative Forest Products for more information about laws and legal issues.
- Learn more about Rabies and other diseases such as Lyme Disease and Hoof and Mouth Disease, which can be transmitted by wild animals. Again, the best advice is to avoid approaching wild animals or encouraging them to invade your “backdoor step” by not leaving food scraps, garbage, and pet food in these areas.

What are some examples of things I can do to enhance wildlife habitat on my property?

Use the Record of Woodland Area Plans and Activities sheet to record actions you plan to take and develop a time frame for accomplishing activities. Refer to the list of contacts and resources listed at the end of this factsheet for specific information and assistance with these activities.

- Properly locate and construct a brush pile to provide wildlife cover.
- Locate, protect and enhance mast, den, and cavity trees.
- Encourage the growth of wild apple trees through proper pruning and good tree management.
- Plant a flowering tree, shrub, or vine.
- Deem an area in your woodlands to be left “wild” or “as is.”
- Create or maintain an opening or “edge” area where nearby successional habitat is severely lacking and in a manner that limits forest fragmentation. See factsheet Working with Your Neighbors – Restoring Fragmented Pools for more information.
- Seed an existing opening, roadway, or landing to provide food and cover.
- Enhance or maintain Riparian Buffer Areas.
- Delay the moving of grass openings until mid-July.
- Build a nest box, bat box, or bird feeder.
- Create a snag (standing dead tree) or a “deadwood” tree or tree sprout to provide nesting and perching sites, and nutrient recycling.
- Provide a shallow water source such as a birdbath, constructed garden pool, or water fountain.
- Keep a record or journal of the wildlife observed on your property.

Programs and activities are available to direct persons interested in natural areas, wildlife, birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, forests, wetlands, aquatic, and terrestrial ecosystems. This project is a collaborative of the Rhode Island Division of Forest and Wildlife Management; the University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension Service; and URI College of Environment and Life Sciences, Department of Natural Resources Science.

For more information about laws and legal issues, again, beware of introducing non-native, invasive plants, animals, and other species. See our factsheet Working for Biodiversity and Protection from Invasive Species for more information and assistance with these activities.

A word about domestic pets and wildlife

Cats, dogs, and other small or exotic pets are best factored out of your wildlife habitat plans. Your pets may be both predator and prey depending on the wildlife that inhabits or visits your property. Your cat may cause devastating damage to ground-nesting birds during the spring and early summer before falling victim to a coyote or even an owl. In fact, it is estimated that household pets kill millions of nesting birds each year.

The best approach is to keep your household pets under control. This includes keeping your dog on a leash and confined to a certain “run area” in your backyard. This may also include preventing your cat from entering into an “indoor” cat. Consult with your local veterinarian for more information.

Working for Wildlife Habitat

The things you can do to create or enhance wildlife habitat within and around your backyard and woodlands are endless. They simply depend on what you ultimately decide to achieve and the amount of time, effort and expense you wish to devote.

Here are some questions you might ask in determining your wildlife habitat goals:

- Am I trying to attract a specific wildlife species or group of species such as songbirds, small mammals, or game, or do I just want to enhance overall wildlife diversity, or both?
- Is my major goal the protection of rare or endangered species, species of special interest, or species that may be sensitive to human disturbance?
- Am I planning to allow hunting in my woodlands?
- Will I be interested in wildlife viewing, and if so, where do I want to view them from and at what time of year?
- Is my main goal to encourage wildlife that will provide added benefits around my property by serving, for example, as a natural form of pest control? Or might it create situations that feed on feed orgrubs within lawns and gardens?
- How concerned do I have to be about introducing new wildlife species such as unwanted predators or pest problems, encouraging the spread of disease, and introducing non-native, invasive or exotic species?
- What amount of time, money, & effort am I willing to invest into this project?
- What type of skills and equipment do I have available to help me meet my goals?
- How will my neighbors feel about the new habitat created and the species that use it, and how important is that to me?
- Can I be interested in managing their parcel(s) to meet mutually desirable goals?
- Do my neighbors already have valuable habitat features such as an open field, water resources, sources of food and cover that will adequately serve their wildlife species that I’m interested in attracting?
- Will the cultivation and or harvesting of traditional forest products such as logs, stumps, or alternative forrest products such as Christmas greens, mushrooms, witch hazel and blueberries be part of the plan?
- How important is the way my property looks when I’m done? From my deck? The street?

Once you have established clear wildlife goals you need to determine what you will need to do to reach those goals. Careful consideration needs to be given to the needs of the species desired, and the ability of your parcel to provide it.

Wildlife Habitat

Basically consists of four main elements:
- Food
- Water
- Cover (protection or “shelter” from the elements and predators, and for nesting)
- Space (the territory that species must roam to find adequate food, water, and space (the territory that species must roam to find adequate food, water, and

Looking for, and then providing the elements that are lacking for the desired species, in the right quantities, in the right place and at the right time of year, is the key to your success! The key element that is in short supply is referred to as the “limiting factor.” It may be rather easy to provide the limiting factor for some species, such as a gray squirrel, within a couple of acres located right on your property. Other species, such as ruffed grouse, may require larger tracts of land and the need for you to work jointly with your neighbors. Again, it is always recommended that you look at the surrounding landscape, and any valuable elements may already be present in a close enough range to aid in your own plans. An example would be a nearby stream or...
pond that may serve as an adequate water source, or a nearby cornfield that provides an edge and supplemental food, in which you may find that you would like to create, enhance, or further protect certain features to attract and/or provide a rich source of recycled nutrients to the forest soils and often sprout new seedlings. Properly constructed brushes, tall grasses, and dense stands of foliage are all valuable sources of nesting and escape for many birds and mammals.

About Water... All animal species need clean, fresh water to survive. Your woodlands may have adequate food, cover, and other habitat features, but if it is not located too far away from running or standing water, a variety of wildlife may not inhabit or visit your property. A project as simple as providing a bird bath, man-made garden pool, or shallow tub of water may be all that is necessary to encourage a variety of birds and other wildlife. Depending on the wildlife species you wish to attract, you may wish to have a couple of these water sources placed at varying heights. You may also wish to think about ways to prevent water from freezing during the cold winter months.

One other more involved project may include the development of a natural spring or the construction of a wildlife pond. These activities would require a higher level of financial resources, and most would also require a permit from the RI Department of Environmental Management Office of Water Resources. Professional assistance will be needed to ensure that existing wetlands and water resources are not significantly impacted or altered. See the list of contacts and resources at the end of this factsheet for more information.

Some more involved projects may include the development of a riparian forest fragment, where a transition between different natural areas or habitats meet. Examples include:

- Growing or enhancing riparian vegetation—Reconnecting Forest Fragments for more information. The creation of many small edge areas or openings contributes to forest fragmentation. Your own yard and nearby fields and water bodies can serve as valuable edges. Remember the rule of thumb—look at an area 10 times the size of the area you want to manipulate. Do edge or early forest succession habitats already exist?

Providing cover for shelter, nesting, and perching, is an important attribute of riparian and other natural features. One of the first steps in working for wildlife habitat is to become familiar with and protecting the valuable habitats your property & nearby lands already provide.

Provisioning food. Mast trees & shrubs, and other plants naturally produce fruit, nuts and seeds that are eaten by wildlife. Planting mast trees and shrubs or:

encouraging them through crop tree management—especially along edge areas, can help provide food and attract several species including Wild Turkey, Gray Squirrel, Fisher, Porcupine, and White tailed deer. This method is preferred to direct or artificial feeding of wildlife for several reasons.

- Wildlife species become too dependent on artificial food sources.
- Less aggressive species often “miss out” and don’t get an adequate share.
- Nutrients spread rapidly at these “feeding stations.”
- A larger population than can be sustained under “natural” conditions may be attracted and could starve if artificial feeding is not sufficient or too sporadic.

Artificial feeding stations, such as bird feeders, are best when used to supplement natural food sources and to attract, for example, specific songbirds to a designated viewing area in your woods or backyard.

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