

# URBAN WILDLIFE PROGRAM



NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION

fact sheet, 2007

## INTRODUCTION

Suburban backyards, parks, and greenways do not strike the casual observer as “wildlife habitat,” but hundreds of species of birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles continue to survive, and sometimes even thrive, among humans. Backyards can provide valuable food and nesting space for songbirds like the Carolina wren, bluebird, dark-eyed junco and even Neotropical migrants like the indigo bunting and wood thrush. Little brown bats feast upon the thousands of mosquitoes buzzing around a neighborhood stormwater pond, while treefrogs and salamanders utilize the shrubbery and leaf litter.

Over the past two decades, North Carolina has been one of the most rapidly growing states in the nation with the bulk of the population increase occurring in and around Piedmont urban centers. If not properly planned, this rapid development will degrade our drinking water quality, eliminate biologically functional wildlife habitat, and diminish the quality of life that we now enjoy. As development encroaches into environmentally sensitive areas, living space for wildlife is lost, and run-off from streets and construction projects clouds waterways with silt and pollutants. If our landscape becomes transformed into concrete and steel, we will lose the sound of wind rushing through the trees, the hoot of an owl in the distance, and the popular green vistas that give residents of the Piedmont a sense of place.

## CONSERVATION FOCUS

The N. C. Wildlife Resources Commission, with the help of State Wildlife Grant funds, initiated the Urban Wildlife Program in 2007 to promote open space conservation in the Triangle Region (Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill) through land use planning and land protection.

To better concentrate its efforts, the Commission has chosen to help implement the Triangle GreenPrint, a conservation plan prepared



Kentucky warbler

by the Triangle J Council of Governments that identifies priority areas for land conservation still available in the region. The Commission’s current focus area includes the land between Harris Reservoir and Jordan Lake, and the Urban Project hopes to facilitate the protection of a corridor for wildlife traveling between the two water systems. A conservation corridor would also help to buffer existing conservation lands used for hunting, passive recreation, and water quality protection.

Wildlife species of concern that would benefit from a corridor connection between Jordan and Harris include:

Four-toed Salamander	Wood Thrush
Spotted Salamander	Bobcat
Hooded Warbler	Otter
Kentucky Warbler	Red Bat
Louisiana Warbler	Southeastern Bat
Wild Turkey	Eastern Box Turtle



Bird houses help urban dwellers experience wildlife.



River otter



Left: A Commission biologist talks to local government employees about wildlife-friendly planning.

Above: Natural landscaping can bring wildlife into your backyard.

## WORKING WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

The urban wildlife biologist reviews town and county Land Use Plans, Land Use Ordinances, Park & Greenway plans, and subdivision proposals, and then provides planners with technical guidance on how these planning tools can become more “wildlife friendly.” The Commission recommends that local governments steer growth away from sensitive wildlife habitats, encourage infill and conservation-based development in less sensitive areas, and connect existing parks and open spaces with greenway corridors. Fee-simple purchases and permanent conservation easements are protection measures that are the most highly encouraged for the protection of critical wildlife habitats. By preserving sensitive habitats, the wildlife species that rely on them are also protected. Bottomland hardwoods, their associated

wetlands and streams, and upland corridors are typical sensitive areas in the Triangle Region which, if excluded from development, can also protect the water quality of the region.

## IMPROVING CITIZENS’ QUALITY OF LIFE

The Commission recognizes that contact with nature positively affects the quality of life of the citizens in the Triangle Region. The Urban Wildlife Program is working to help local governments more easily provide that contact. By exposing people to wildlife and natural places, a better understanding of and respect for the environment is fostered. The Urban Wildlife Program is also working to help the Commission better understand and provide for the needs of its non-traditional constituents such as birdwatchers, wildlife watchers and those who simply enjoy a walk in the woods.

## HOW YOU CAN HELP

1. Encourage your local elected officials to incorporate “smart growth” design principles into development ordinances and Land Use Plans.
2. Continue to support bond referenda that protect open space in the Triangle Region.
3. Encourage any developers you know to adopt a “conservation subdivision design” approach. More information can be found at [www.smartcommunities.ncat.org/greendev/subdivision.shtml](http://www.smartcommunities.ncat.org/greendev/subdivision.shtml).
4. Encourage your local elected officials to plan for a biologically functional “green infrastructure” in your community made up of a connected network of parks and greenways.
5. Develop your property into a “backyard habitat area”. More information can be found at [www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/](http://www.nwf.org/backyardwildlifehabitat/).
6. Avoid all non-native invasive plants in landscaping.
7. Donate to the N.C. Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Fund.

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