A Woodcock Comeback?

By: Charles Fergus, Author and Tom Mathews, Retired
Maryland Department of Natural Resources Wildlife Biologist

Most people who own woods with at least some brushy areas or stands of young timber probably have seen or heard woodcock on their land.

At dawn and dusk in spring, male woodcock sound a strident, buzzy peent from open areas such as pastures, log landings, and utility right-of-ways. Then they fly up into the twilit sky and come zigzagging back down while giving out an ethereal clucking like a robin's call, but wilder and more beautiful. The conservationist Aldo Leopold dubbed this display a "sky dance." Conducted to attract female woodcock for breeding, the sky dance is one of nature's grand spectacles.

We don't see much of woodcock in late spring and early summer, as hens and their broods, and adult males, spend most of their time in thick areas feeding on earthworms and other invertebrates, which they tweezer out of moist ground using their long bills. In October and November, hunters and their pointing and flushing dogs pursue woodcock in the stands of young aspen, alder, mixed hardwoods, and shrubs such as hawthorn and crabapple that the birds favor. As fall lengthens, woodcock migrate south to their wintering grounds, mainly in the southeastern and Gulf Coast states.

The American woodcock is also called the timberdoodle. It ranges across the eastern half of North America and can be found in suitable habitat throughout Maryland. The brownish, quail-sized woodcock is actually a shorebird that has evolved to live in upland areas. As their name implies, woodcock thrive in woods but in young, densely growing forest rather than in mature woodland where the trees are large and where there is little low or mid-canopy growth between the mature stems.

Since the 1960s, woodcock numbers have fallen by about 1.2 percent each year not because of predators (hawks, owls, and weasels take woodcock) or hunting, but owing to an ongoing loss of habitat. Some of the species' former habitat has been covered with houses, roads, and shopping malls. But a lot more of the brushland that once hosted woodcock has simply grown up to become middle-aged and older forest, where woodcock don't usually venture.

Fortunately for the woodcock, and for those outdoor-oriented folks who like to watch, listen to, and hunt them, an ambitious new habitat-creation effort has begun reversing that downward population trend. Coordinating the effort is the Wildlife Management Institute (WMI), a respected nonprofit organization, dedicated to sound scientific management of the continent's wildlife resources. Other partners working to create young forest habitat in Maryland include the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Geological Survey, Ruffed Grouse Society, Audubon Society, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation, American Bird Conservancy, and the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies.

Biologists have identified specific types of habitat for breeding, feeding, rearing young, and roosting that woodcock need. Supported by funding from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, WMI has launched a website, www.timberdoodle.org, that is chock-full of information explaining the woodcock's plight and detailing ways of improving and creating habitat that will benefit woodcock along with many
other species of wildlife that need young forest during all or part of their life cycles.

Western Maryland lies within the Appalachian Mountains Regional Woodcock Initiative (which also includes parts of New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia). The Atlantic Coast Woodcock Initiative centers on Bird Conservation Region 30, which stretches from southwestern Maine south through coastal New Hampshire, most of Massachusetts, all of Rhode Island, most of Connecticut, New York’s Long Island, southern New Jersey, the Delmarva Peninsula of Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia (including those counties in mainland Maryland and Virginia bordering the Chesapeake Bay). Other regional initiatives focus on New England, the Upper Great Lakes, and the Atlantic Coast.

Visitors of www.timberdoodle.org can learn about (and later go and see) demonstration areas where managers are using a range of techniques and practices to create woodcock-friendly young forests. Woodcock demonstration areas in Maryland are located on Green Ridge State Forest in Allegany County and at the Mount Nebo Wildlife Management Area in Garrett County.

The best tracts in the effort to restore woodcock numbers likely will be large ones in the hundreds of acres. But smaller parcels, including ones owned by private individuals or land trusts, also can provide important habitat, either by creating a habitat type unavailable in a given area or by linking to neighboring parcels. A private individual with as few as 5 to 10 acres can make a difference.

Do you know, or are you, a landowner who would like to help woodcock and other wildlife, such as bog turtles, ruffed grouse, wild turkeys, whip-poor-wills, indigo buntings, brown thrashers, Eastern towhees, and golden-winged warblers? Contact information is available at www.timberdoodle.org for personnel who can direct landowners to sources of financial and technical aid, including the Maryland Department of Natural Resources, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (Wildlife Habitat Improvement Project grants can be used to create and restore young forest), or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program.

At www.timberdoodle.org you can also download PDF versions of The Woodcock Conservation Plan: A Summary of and Recommendations for Woodcock Conservation in North America, edited by James Kelley, Scot Williamson, and Thomas Cooper; and Best Management Practices for the Central Appalachians Region, which gives details on how best to manage forests for woodcock and other wild creatures that need young, regrowing woodland.

Charles Fergus is the author of Wildlife of Virginia and Maryland and fifteen other books, most of them about nature. A columnist for Pennsylvania Game News, he is currently working on public outreach projects for the Wildlife Management Institute.

Tom Mathews is a retired Maryland Department of Natural Resources wildlife biologist. He is currently working as Maryland’s woodcock habitat biologist in conjunction with the Appalachian Mountains Woodcock Initiative. Contact Tom at tommathews@atlanticbb.net.

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**Tiny Beetle, Big Consequences**

by Nevin Dawson, Forest Stewardship Educator, University of Maryland Extension (Previously printed in the Delmarva Farmer)


Sometimes big things come in small packages. This is the case with the southern pine beetle (SPB). Even though they’re small enough to line up three of them, nose to bottom, on top of a grain of rice, they have the potential to kill large areas of pine forest over the course of several years, and have caused $900 million dollars in damage to pine forests across the South between 1960 and 1990. SPB

SPB generally gets its foothold in stressed or otherwise unhealthy trees. An area of pines killed by SPB generally has a tree at its center that was weakened by some other factor before SPB arrived.
A tree struck by lightning is a common starting place for SPB, but trees affected by drought or disease and stands where trees are too crowded are also common footholds. Once the beetle is able to develop a colony in a single tree, it begins to spread to neighboring healthy trees. With every generation, the circle of infested trees grows a little bit. Beetles that emerge in the spring after winter dormancy tend to travel farther, while each of the three generations of new adults throughout the growing season usually choose a neighboring tree.

Females take the initiative in establishing a colony in a new host tree. After finding a suitable host, a female beetle will burrow through the bark and emit a pheromone that attracts both males and other females. This beetle party is not just for fun though. A tree’s sap usually serves as an effective defense. When intruders try to burrow through the bark, the pressure of the sap pushes them back out, but this only works when there are just a few holes. If hundreds or thousands of holes are punched through the bark, the tree loses much of its sap and there’s no longer enough pressure to stem the attack. The holes are very small and hard to spot on their own, but the sap dries and forms a white or yellow puffy ball surrounding each hole that looks a bit like popcorn. They may be at eye level, but they could also be farther up the trunk.

Females lay eggs inside the tree that hatch after two to nine days. Larvae and adult beetles alike feed on the phloem of the tree, the juicy thin layer just underneath the bark that transports sugars. They make winding S-shaped tunnels that collectively cut off the circulation of nutrients between the leaves and the roots. The tree cannot live once this connection is severed. These S-shaped tunnels indicate that the culprits are southern pine beetles and not one of the less dangerous pine beetles in Delmarva.

The beetles also tend to carry blue-stain fungus, which clogs the tree’s vessels and further restricts circulation. An infested tree’s foliage will typically yellow first, and then turn red and fall. Usually by the time the foliage drops, the beetles have already deserted the tree in search of fresher food. This whole process can happen in as little as two months.

High value landscape trees can be treated with an external application of pesticide. Most of the time, however, the cost is too high, and the infestation is too far along by the time it’s noticed to make treatment a valid option. The only effective control measure in a forested area is sanitation, but unfortunately it’s not as easy as washing your hands. All infested trees must be removed or treated with pesticide on site. Because trees can host beetles for some time before showing any signs or symptoms, it’s likely that the ring of trees just outside the area of dying trees is already infested even though it may look healthy. This buffer should also be removed. The width of the buffer should be equal to the average tree height. The wood may be salvaged if the bark and slabs are disposed of properly, but the stain from the fungus may make it unsuitable for some uses.

Prevention is the best medicine. A stand of healthy vigorous trees is not likely to be attacked, so ensure that tree spacing is adequate. Consider a thinning harvest if trees are crowded.

This beetle is native and is a natural part of our local environment, but large devastating infestations are possible, especially after a mild winter or a dry spring. There was an infestation in the early nineties affecting 3,000 acres in the Maryland counties of Wicomico, Worcester, Dorchester and Somerset, and a smaller infestation in Talbot county in 2005. There is currently a growing infestation in Kent county. Delmarva’s winters are generally cold enough to
reduce the population every year, but our southern neighbors aren’t always as lucky.

If you suspect that you might have a southern pine beetle infestation on your property, act immediately. The infestation will quickly grow and continue to kill trees until you do something to stop it. Contact your county forester, extension agent, or department of agriculture office for help.

New Videos!
From the University of Maryland Extension

Biltmore Stick Video Now Online:
http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu/VideoBiltmore.html

Do you want to learn a simple way to estimate the volume of wood in your forest? Are you confused about how to use a Biltmore stick? Then watch this new video!

University of Maryland Extension recently posted The Biltmore Stick, a six and a half minute video that teaches the steps on how to quickly and easily measure the diameter of a tree as well as the number of logs in standing timber. This information can then be used to estimate the amount of board feet in the tree. And, for a fee of $12.00 (cost includes shipping ad handling), you can purchase a Biltmore stick and accompanying Fact Sheet with simple instructions on use.

A downloadable version of the video is also available. The downloadable version is appropriate for loading onto a hand-held device for use in the field.

So, take a few minutes to view our newest video and learn the proper use of the Biltmore stick. Then, it’s off to the woods. To order a Biltmore stick and Fact Sheet, contact Carol Taylor at 410.827.8056, ext. 135 or email carolt@umd.edu.

4 Minutes to a Better Backyard
http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu/EducationalWBY.html

How much lawn do you need and why do you need it? This video will inspire you to let natural succession take place; let time turn your lawn into a diverse place for recreation and wildlife habitat, not to mention the amount of time and money you will save while being better stewards of the environment. Watch this video and learn how you can manage your property for invasive species, damaging wildlife, and create a healthy environment full of wonder and discovery. Watch 4 Minutes to a Better Backyard at

The Woods in Your Backyard page on our website:
http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu/EducationalWBY.html

Upcoming Webinar
Goats and Sheep - A Weapon Against Weeds

Targeted grazing for invasive species management.

July 22, 2010; 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Invasive species cause environmental damages and losses of up to $120 billion per year nationally. Invasive species crowd out native woodland plants and animals, robbing native wildlife species of crucial food and cover sources. Climbing species can also strangle trees and bring down limbs. What can you do to stem the invasion on your land?

Machines often can’t get to problem areas, manual removal is very labor intensive, and herbicides can inflict collateral damage water, plant, and animal resources.

Targeted grazing with goats and sheep can be a cost-effective and environmentally-friendly method of controlling invasive species on your property. Goats and sheep graze in places that mowers can’t reach and humans don’t want to go, including thickets of both brambles and poison ivy.

Goats eat a wide range of unwanted vegetation, which on the East Cost includes kudzu, Oriental bittersweet, Tree of Heaven, multiflora rose, Japanese honeysuckle, mile-a-minute, and more.

Sheep prefer grasses and forbs. Livestock will graze all day, going through very dense material at about a quarter acre per day per 30 animals. They respect electric fences, making this an easy and effective source of mobile containment.

This webinar is your chance to learn from extension specialists and professionals in the field how to implement this practice on your land. The webinar is free and will be held on July 22 at noon. Contact Carol Taylor to register (carolt@umd.edu or 410-827-8056, ext. 135). A recording will be available at www.naturalresources.umd.edu soon after the live presentation.

Presenters will include Nevin Dawson, Forest Stewardship Educator, and Susan Schoenian, Sheep & Goat Specialist, with University of Maryland Extension; and Brian Knox, President of Sustainable Resource Management, Inc and supervising forester for Eco-Goats.
Enrollment Opens August 1, 2010
General Forestry Course, Fall 2010 Semester

The University of Maryland Extension will offer the General Forestry Course for the fall 2010 semester. Both the paper and online version will be offered. The course begins September 1 and runs until December 15, 2010. Registration opens August 1. To register, go to our website at http://www.mdforest.umd.edu.

As there are no formal classes, you work from the comfort of your home using your own woodlot, a friend’s woodlot, or a public forest. You will learn how to protect your trees from insects, diseases and fire; step-by-step procedures will walk you through a forest inventory and stand analysis; and the details of the forestry business are presented, including tax nuances and the sale and harvest of forest products. Ultimately, the course exercises help you develop the framework for a management plan for your forest.

The cost for this forestry course is $300.00. Included in the cost are copies of the supplemental readings (A Sand County Almanac, The Woodland Steward, American Forests: A History of Resiliency and Recovery, and a small pamphlet entitled What Tree Is That?). The paper version text and appendices is in binder form. Online users receive a CD of the text and appendices. A certificate of completion is awarded when all assignments are completed.

But don’t take our word for it. See it for yourself on our website at http://www.mdforest.umd.edu. There, you can read a lesson from the text, view an interactive exercise, read through detailed course information and FAQs.

For more information, contact Nancy Stewart at the University of Maryland Extension, Wye Research and Education Center, P.O. Box 169, Queenstown, MD, 21658; phone 410/827-8056, ext. 107; or email nstewar1@umd.edu. Remember to mark your calendar; registration opens August 1. Check for details on our website today!

Introducing...

Maryland Woodland Connect
A Network for Maryland’s Woodland Owners

We proudly introduce Maryland Woodland Connect, a Forest Stewardship Education network at Ning.com. Maryland Woodland Connect is a network for property owners in Maryland with an interest in forestry, wildlife and/or natural resources. Our goal is to connect landowners with Maryland Woodland Stewards, Extension educators and possibly other natural resource professionals.

We’ve posted some content to kick-start the site, but it is up to you to ask questions and chime in on discussions to really make this network a valuable resource. Extension faculty and Maryland Woodland Stewards will be on hand to answer technical questions.

We invite you to join and add content such as forum questions, your experiences, events, videos, and pictures. We encourage you to be involved in this new technology. Please tell others about Maryland Woodland Connect and enjoy sharing and networking with other landowners. Please visit the forum at http://mdwoodlandconnect.ning.com.

Thinking About a Natural Resource Enterprise?
This tool will help you plan.

Nowhere does the old adage “failing to plan is planning to fail” apply more than when preparing to launch a new business enterprise or service company. Regardless of the greatness of your product, unless you carefully plan in advance how to operate a profitable, sustainable business, your business success will be limited. The goal of the Maryland Rural Enterprise Development Center (MREDC) is to help you succeed in that planning process. MREDC, an outreach service of the University of Maryland Extension, now includes a new online tool to assess your business plan.

Assessing Your Farm Business Plan is an interactive assessment to assist farmers and agri-entrepreneurs in evaluating the potential of farm business planning success. The tool is also applicable to those planning a natural resource-based enterprise. There are 54 statements in the assessment to which you rate your degree of agreement. The statements
are categorized into nine sections covering topics such as Mission and Goals, Marketing, Implementation Strategy, Human Resources, Inventory, and more. Along with each statement, you will be provided with valuable feedback to give you plenty of food for thought as you plan your enterprise. At the end of the assessment, you are provided with a total score and general recommendations for your business plan. This tool provides you with the opportunity to assess the components of your plan and make revisions before investing your valuable time and resources in the new business.

Assessing Your Farm Business Plan can be accessed online at: http://www.mredc.umd.edu/distanceinteractiveBPA.html.

Emerald Ash Borer Awareness

With summer comes efforts to make residents aware of Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), a destructive beetle that destroys ash trees. EAB was first detected in Maryland in 2003 and has become a serious threat. Find a variety of topics and updates about EAB on University of Maryland Extension’s Forest Stewardship Education website at the EAB home page:

http://www.naturalresources.umd.edu/YourWoodlandThreatsEAB.html

If you suspect signs of an EAB infestation, contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture at 410‐841‐5920; or, University of Maryland Home and Garden Information Center at 1‐800‐342‐2507.

Announcements

Attention High School Students!

Natural Resources Careers Conference
Sunday, July 25 – Saturday, July 31, 2010
Hickory Environmental Education Center
Garrett County, Maryland

The Natural Resources Careers Conference (NRCC) is a weeklong educational conference to introduce high school students to the many career options and regional college programs available in forestry and natural resources. It is sponsored by the Maryland Association of Forest Conservancy District Boards and its Foundation, the Maryland Department of Natural Resources – Forest Service, and Allegany College of Maryland (ACM). The 24 Maryland Forestry Boards recruit and interview candidates from their respective counties and bordering states. NRCC is a successful collaborative effort with many dedicated financial contributors. These donors include the Maryland Forests Association, Bartlett Tree Experts, Davey Tree Expert Company, Glatfelter Pulp Wood Company, Howard County Parks and Recreation, the Western Maryland Resource Conservation and Development Council, and the Mid-Atlantic Chapter of the International Society of Arboriculture. In addition, NRCC is proud to be the first recipient of the Arboriculture Education Program Grant from the Tree Research and Education Endowment (TREE) Fund.

Why should high school students attend NRCC?

For the fantastic educational experience. The NRCC curriculum, taught in classroom and in hands-on field exercises, covers the basics of traditional forestry, urban forestry, arboriculture, wildlife biology, stream ecology and fisheries, hydrology and watersheds, and fire suppression. The Curriculum Director is Steve Resh, Forestry Professor at ACM. He brings with him several of his finest second-year forestry students to serve as team leaders for small groups of participants, enabling high school students to assimilate lots of information in one week’s time. Other classes are taught by professionals in the field.

For the excellent networking opportunities. You will meet peers from across Maryland and the surrounding states that share your passion for the outdoors and environment. You will also make valuable connections with many industry professionals and representatives from seven different regional schools who come to College Night at NRCC to discuss their programs in forestry and natural resources. Participating schools are Garrett College, Allegany College of Maryland, Frostburg University, West Virginia University, Virginia Tech, University of Maryland, and Penn State University.

For the option of earning two college credits before attending college! These 2 credits are offered by ACM in Introduction to Forestry, and will transfer to many 2- and 4-
year college programs. You must be 16 years of age, pay the additional ACM credit hour fees, complete the entire week at NRCC and forest management plan, and pass an exam demonstrating mastery of the concepts and materials.

**For an exceptional financial investment.** The Forestry Boards and the dedicated Association Education Committee members work hard to raise money to cover all or part of the cost of attending the program. The cost per student for NRCC 2010 is a $350 tuition fee and a $100 student activity fee.

**To qualify to earn scholarships.** As a NRCC graduate, you are eligible for one of three $500 scholarships provided by some of our financial contributors. You must apply and meet the specified eligibility requirements.

What effect has NRCC had on past participants? Paul Shogren and the Garrett County Forestry Board took the lead in recently mailing out a survey to NRCC 2005, 2006, and 2007 graduates. Of the 104 polled students, 25 questionnaires were returned. Fifteen of those respondents shared their college/work plans, and of those 15, eight are pursuing college studies in forestry or natural resources.

The application deadline for NRCC 2010 has been extended. For more information and applications, please visit www.dnr.state.md.us/forests/nrcareersconf.html

The Forestry Boards Association is also pleased to announce its brand new website, http://www.marylandforestryboards.org/ which offers students an online application for the first time.

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**Working Landscapes Newsletter**

**Spring 2010 Edition Available**

The University of Maryland's Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc. announces the release of Working Landscapes (Spring Edition), a newsletter promoting viable farms and forests. The newsletter is accessible online at the Harry R. Hughes Center for Agro-Ecology, Inc. website:


This issue of Working Landscapes is dedicated to continuing the efforts of the 2009 public outreach project for gathering strategies and understanding issues related to forest sustainability in Maryland for the benefit of the environment and economics. Inside the newsletter, you will find many perspectives from people whose insights and experiences reflect the issues and continue the momentum. Perspectives include the topics of conservation, local government, academic, land owner, and industry. Finally, there is a piece about understanding forest certification.

You can help continue the momentum by reading and sharing the newsletter, accessible online at:


For more information and a detailed look at the issues, strategies and general comments gathered during the 2009 outreach project, see Mapping a Sustainable Forestry Strategy for Maryland: Report on the public Engagement Process available online at:


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**LEAD Maryland Foundation, Inc.**

**Now Accepting Applications for Class VII (2011-2012)**

LEAD Maryland Foundation, Inc. is accepting applications for the next class of LEAD Fellows, Class VII (2011-2012). Applications must be received (not postmarked) by the LEAD office no later than 4:30 p.m. October 1, 2010.

Application materials are posted as four documents at the LEAD Maryland website, www.leadmaryland.org, on the "Fellowship Program" page. Candidates need to read and complete each to meet application requirements:

- Program Information, including benefits of program participation, and the program calendar
- Application Form
- Statement of Understanding
- References

As there are many benefits to participating in LEAD’s Fellowship program, we hope you will review the application materials and consider applying by October 1, 2010. Please forward the application information to others, as well, who may have an interest in participating in this fellowship program.
Please remember that the responsibility for timely submission of all forms rests with the candidate. Feel free to contact the LEAD office directly if you need more information or assistance (phone 410-827-8056). For more information, please see the LEAD brochure available online at: http://www.leadmaryland.org

Press Release

Maryland Forests Association to Host Landowner Conference on Maryland’s Working Woodlands
November 5 and 6, Gaylord National Resort, Washington, DC.

CONTACT: Karin E. Miller, Executive Director, director@mdforests.org

Maryland Forests Association’s 34th Annual Conference, Friday and Saturday, November 5 and 6, 2010 will be held at the Gaylord National Conference Center in spectacular National Harbor just outside Washington, DC. MFA’s Annual Conference is the place for forest landowners, natural resource professionals, and forestry advocates to gather for networking, learning, and fellowship. This year’s event includes outstanding educational sessions, an exciting field trip to nearby Myrtle Gove Wildlife Management Area, and a unique and inspiring Keynote presentation on the Living Memorials of 9/11... (read complete press release online at link below):


MFA Website: http://mdforests.org/AM2010.html

Did You Know...

... Maryland Recycles Pesticide Containers for free?

The Maryland Department of Agriculture is implementing a pesticide container recycling program for the 18th year.

Read complete article of April 26, 2010 located on MDA’s website:
http://www.mda.state.md.us/article.php?id=25319
For schedule of collection dates and and sites, go to:
http://www.mda.state.md.us/pdf/recycle.pdf

Events

July 22, 2010, 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Free Webinar! Goats and Sheep: A Weapon Against Weeds

Targeted grazing for invasive species management. See article in this newsletter.

Registration required. Contact Carol Taylor to make reservations at 410.827.8056, ext. 135 or email carolt@umd.edu.

November 5 and 6, 2010

Maryland Forest Association 34th Annual Conference

Location: Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, Washington, D.C.

Press Release:

Website:
http://mdforests.org/AM2010.html

University of Maryland Extension programs are open to all citizens without regard to race, color, gender, disability, religion, age, sexual orientation, marital or parental status, or national origin.

Branching Out

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18330 Keedysville Road
Keedysville, MD 21756-1104
301-432-2767

Editors: Jonathan Kays, Ellen Green, Nevin Dawson, and Lori Flook

Published four times per year and distributed to forest landowners, resource professionals, and others interested in forest stewardship.

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- Hardcopy subscription, mail check or money order for $10 per year, payable to University of Maryland to the address above.

Send news items to Nevin Dawson at ndawson@umd.edu or 410-827-8056 x125.