



Why is Diversity Important?



Different species have different needs; they eat different foods, live in different habitats, and raise their young in different places. When all these differences are provided in a certain area or habitat, a diverse group of wildlife can be found in a relatively small area. Habitat diversity leads to species diversity.

The wildlife biologists of James D. Martin Skyline WMA manage for a diversity of habitats ranging from mature woodland, to old-field succession and pine plantations. Visit the mature woodland to see Northern Parula and Black-and-white warblers. Old-field succession supports Prairie Warblers and Yellow-breasted Chats, and a walk through the pine plantations should reveal Pine Warblers. Although these are all wood warblers, each unique habitat supports different species.

In addition to encouraging habitat diversity, wildlife managers are supporting area wildlife through the planting of supplemental food crops. By planting a variety of grain crops, species such as Mourning Dove, Northern Bobwhite, American Goldfinch, Northern Cardinal, Wild Turkey, and White-tailed Deer can all prosper.



Birding on the Edge

One of the most diverse and prolific areas for wildlife is located where two habitats meet, such as at the edge of the forest. In fact, many species such as hawks and owls prefer this edge habitat. Hawks and owls nest and roost deep within the forest but prefer to hunt in the adjacent open

fields and meadows. At dawn and dusk, scan forest edges for Barred and Great Horned owls, and during the day, look for Red-tailed and Red-shouldered hawks. These edges are also worth checking for Wild Turkeys and White-tailed Deer, which prefer the open areas, but need the comfort and security of deep cover.



Cerulean Warbler/Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Bill Dyer

Diversity is Not for Everyone

While many species flourish in a diversity of habitats, some species of wildlife are much more specialized. One of these species, the Cerulean Warbler, prefers large (>1000 acres) areas of mature hardwood. However, such large tracts of hardwoods are in short supply because of fragmentation. This fragmentation has undoubtedly benefited some species, but the Cerulean Warbler has declined drastically as a result.



Ruffed Grouse/USFWS

A Drumming in the Woods

Ruffed Grouse barely extend into northeastern Alabama on a few fingers of the Cumberland Plateau. These fingers enter Skyline WMA making it one of the only places in Alabama where you can hear grouse drumming in the spring. Searching for Ruffed Grouse in Alabama is a real challenge. Keep in mind that they occur at a very low density and you may need to try several times before you are lucky enough to find one.