

# Merkle Wildlife Sanctuary

Full In The Summer

Bare In The Fall

Habitat For All

## Paw Paw Trail

Trees act as habitat in many different ways, whether they have fallen, are still standing, if they are covered in leaves, or completely bare. Their leaves can provide shade for the animals on the ground underneath them, their branches offer stable homes for nesting animals, and some animals may even live in the trunk of a tree. As you walk this trail, you will see many examples of diverse habitats just from the trees alone and learn about the native animals that inhabit them!

1. Even if an animal doesn't use the tree directly, like deer, they are still benefited by the shade a tree provides when they have all of their leaves. The water and air temperatures are reduced, as is the wind, underneath the canopy of a forest. This allows animals, such as rabbits, deer, and box turtles, to seek shelter from the sun and higher temperatures in the summer! These animals may use fallen leaves as a cushioned spot to lay or burrow under.
2. Take a picture of a shady spot or a spot where fallen leaves may have been disturbed.



3. Many different animals will use the branches of a tree to make their homes on! Birds, from songbirds, like a cardinal or an oriole, to raptors, like a bald eagle or an owl, will use twigs, leaves, grass, mud, and/or fur to make their nests on the branches of trees that

are strong enough to support them. Squirrels will even make large nests in the branches as well.

4. Take a picture of a nest or a branch that would provide a stable space for a nest.

5. Other birds and mammals will nest inside the trees themselves! Living and standing dead trees can have cavities in their trunk that animals will use for shelter. Owls, like barred owls and eastern screech owls, and smaller birds, like chickadees and wrens, will use already existing cavities, while woodpeckers will use



their bills to hollow out their own cavities. Mammals, like opossums, raccoons, bats, and grey foxes, will den in hollow trees. While we may not have any hollow trees large enough to support an adult male black bear in Maryland, black bears do like to den in trees! Black bears will often den under tree roots or logs, but might den in a large, elevated cavity for better shelter from rain.

6. Take a picture of a cavity in a tree and take a guess as to what might use it based on the size of it.



7. Many of the animals that would use a cavity in a standing tree, will also use a fallen tree as shelter. Black bears, as well as foxes and coyotes, might find a welcoming den under a larger log. An eastern towhee will make its nest under a raised end of a log to provide protection. Fallen logs are a great spot for many different

insects that help the log decompose. Reptiles and amphibians, like snakes and salamanders, like to be hidden completely by a fallen tree!

8. Take a picture of a fallen tree.
9. Take a moment to look out at the forest in front of you and see all the different mini habitats that trees provide.

Observing the habitats that trees provide in the forest helps us better respect the wildlife that live around us!