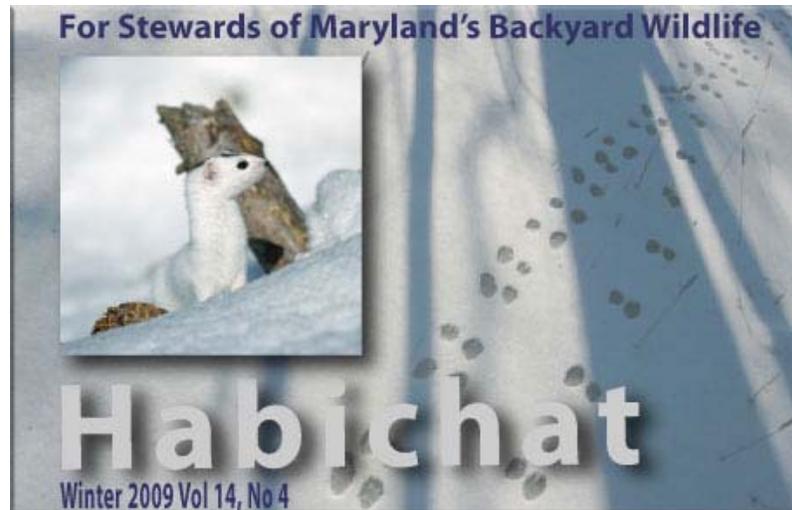


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Habichat

Wild Acres Program



HABITAT - the arrangement of food, water, cover, and space -**IS THE KEY**. This newsletter is a place to share ideas, information, and help answer some of your habitat and wildlife gardening concerns.

We want to hear from you! Letters, e-mail, photos, drawings. Let us know how successful you are as you create wildlife habitat on your property. Complete the online [Habichat Reader's Survey](#).

Write to Me!
Marilyn Mause, Wild Acres Program, DNR Wildlife & Heritage Service, Gwynnbrook WMA, 3740 Gwynnbrook Ave, Owings Mills MD 21117
customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

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Native Plant Profile... American Holly (*Ilex opaca*)

The American Holly is found in the wild primarily on the eastern U.S. coast from Maine to Florida. It is sometimes called the Christmas Holly or White Holly. It is primarily an understory tree in the wild often found with pines. In many states it is illegal to remove American Holly from the wild, due to over collection of the plant for holiday decorations.

Form and Height: Holly can reach 40 feet in height in full sun. Pyramidal in shape with branches to the ground.

Leaf: Simple, alternate, broad leaved and evergreen. Leaves are elliptical in shape, 2"-4" long with spiny toothed margin, leathery; being shiny above, pale below, often yellow beneath. Leaves stay 2 to 3 years on the tree falling in spring pushed off by new buds.



Flowers: Dioecious, with the small white-green flowers 3 to 7 in a brunch, female flowers on separate tree are solitary. Blooms in late spring May to June. In order to get berries it's very important to plant both sexes. One male tree can pollinate several female trees. They are pollinated by bees and even moths.

Fruit: A berry called a drupe, red sometimes yellow, ¼' in diameter with four seeds in each berry. Will stay on trees thru winter, providing essential food for songbirds such as bluebirds.

Twigs: Slender, rust covered

Bark: Light gray, smooth at all ages although can have small warts

Roots: Thick and fleshy

Soil: can tolerate dry to wet, prefers acidic

Growing Conditions: Slow growing, shade tolerant Takes 4 to 7 years to produce berries.

Pests: Few insect pests

Wood: Pale, tough, often used in cabinet work

Shelter for Wildlife: The holly being evergreen serves as year round cover for wildlife

Fruit Serves as Food for: Mourning Dove, Ruffed Grouse, Bobwhite Quail, Wild Turkey, Eastern Bluebird, Catbird, Yellow-shafted Flicker, Blue Jay, Mockingbird, Robin, Hermit Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Towhee, Cedar Waxwing, Black Bear, Raccoon, Striped Skunk, Fox and Gray squirrel, and White-footed Mouse.

Note: White-tailed deer while sometimes eat young foliage and twigs.

Landscaping Notes: Holly can be used as a foundation planting, hedge. Prune in the late summer. English Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) is taller. There are over 1,000 cultivars of American Holly you can plant. Some suggestions are: Cobalt, Cardinal Hedge, Yule, and Canary- which has a yellow berry.

Hollies planted by George Washington at his home are still living, and it serves as the state tree of Delaware. This plant was one of the first plants noted by the Pilgrims in their early writings.

Maryland Wildlife: Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*)

Description: A medium size songbird, 8"-9" in length Males are red with black mask on face. Females are light brown to gray with red highlights on the wings and tail. The crest of feathers on top of the head is found in both species and very distinctive. Bills are thick, conical and reddish in



adult birds. Males are slightly larger. Immature birds look like females but have a gray- black bill.

Range: Found year round in Maryland. Non-migratory, they will move locally, with birds leaving woods and forming loose flocks in open areas. Southern Canada to Mexico and to the central mid-west is the bird's natural range. Over the past 100 years Cardinals have expanded to the north as human modification to the environment, such as the planting of fruit bearing trees and shrubs, have made it more attractive habitat.

Voice: Whistle like cheer-cheer-cheer is heard in the late winter, chips serve as an alarm. Both sexes sing. Female will sing on the nest. It is thought she does this to inform the male of her food needs and status of the nest.



Nesting: April thru August with May being the peak in the mid-Atlantic .These birds can nest as early as March and as late as early September, Produce 2 to 3 broods a year. Three to four white to green eggs as laid in a cup nest, made of thin twigs, bark and brass, lined with grass. Nest is low, no more than 10 feet off the ground in a thicket, hedge or vines. Eggs are incubated by the female for 12 days. Young will stay in the nest for 10 more days before leaving. Male bird brings food to the nest, which are insects to feed both the young and the female. After the young leave the nest they are still feed by their parents for about 25 more days. Juvenile birds form flocks until breeding season the following spring. Birds are monogamous, and sometimes mate a second year.

Habitat: A generalist, who uses woodland under story, thickets, woodland edges, and residential areas planted with fruiting shrubs and trees. Not

usually found in deep forest.

Food: Cardinals eat both plant and animals for food. Feeds primarily on the ground, although will also eat on low perches. Animal food consists of grasshoppers, bugs, and caterpillars. Young are feed entirely an animal diet primarily of insects. Very diverse plant food diet, but especially wild fruits, weed seeds and cultivated grains. The fruit and seeds of grape, smartweed, corn, dogwood, Mulberry, Sumac, Tulip tree, Viburnum, Serviceberry, Ragweed, Greenbrier, Ash, Black berry and Wild Cherry are some of the preferred foods. At the bird feeder, sunflower seeds are the favorite.

Did You Know?

- Cardinals are also known as Red Birds, Va. Nightingales, Va. Red Birds Top-Knot Redbirds and Crested Redbirds.
- This bird DOES NOT USE NEST BOXES.
- Lives about 1 to 2 years in the wild although some have been found to be over 10 years old.
- This is the primary bird that raises the parasitic Brown-headed Cowbird.
- Eats a number of insects that are harmful to crops, such as cut-worms.
- Seven states have the Cardinal as their state bird.
- Male birds are so territorial that if they see a reflection of themselves they will attack it, a common happening with picture windows near their home.
- Named after their color and crest resembling the hat and clothing worn by the clergy.
- The brighter red a male Cardinal is the more reproductive success it will have.
- This bird serves as the mascot of many sport teams.



Cozy in the Cold: Winter Wild Acres Activity for the Children

This activity helps children understand how animals use parts of their environment to protect them from cold and windy winter weather.

Prior to doing this talk to your child about what animals stay active all year long and those that hibernate. Talk about where snakes go, as compared to a deer curling up in a shallow depression with its back against a snow bank or fallen log to avoid the wind. Mice might find an empty bird box to hide in. Some animals will move into the shelter of a stand of trees at night.

You Will Need:

- four or five 35 mm empty plastic film canisters or something similar with a lid
- several thermometers
- liquid gelatin or dry Jell-O powder dissolved in water
- a watch with a second hand.

Directions:

1. Mark the film canisters at the halfway point.
2. Fill each film canister half full with the gelatin or Jell-O mixture.
3. Have your children read about animals in your area that hibernate, and those that stay active all winter.
4. Take the children outside to a spot you have selected. Give them 10 to 15 minutes to look for suitable hibernating or sleeping places for the creatures they have learned about (deer, snake, and groundhog) The spot must be one their animal would use.
5. Give each child a film canister and have them go quickly to their chosen sleeping or hibernating place.
6. On a signal from you, the canisters [representing the animals] are placed in their spots. Begin timing at the signal. As a comparison, leave one canister in an open, unprotected spot on top of the snow or ground.
7. Have your children take their sleeping animal's temperature frequently to see how long it takes for the gelatin to freeze. Have them or you record the data. Repeat the process in different spots using cleaned and refilled canisters.
8. Afterwards, chart the time it took for each creature to freeze and the type of sleeping spot where it was located.
9. Talk about the results. Which sleeping spot worked best, and why? What other adaptations might have helped to keep the animals from freezing?

For a Variation: Have the children test the same sleeping spots this time wrapping various insulations around their "animals", such as a woolen sock, feathers, or fur. Chart and compare the results. You might want to have your children illustrate a poster with some of the places wildlife species use to find shelter from winter weather.

After doing this activity have the children decide what needs to be improved on your Wild Acres to provide better winter cover. Check out the Wild Acres web site for ideas on what to plant or build to accomplish this.

A special thanks to the Canadian Wildlife Federation from which this activity was adapted from their "Below Zero" activity guide.

Mammals in Winters



While turtles, frogs, and salamanders hibernate in the mud below the frost line and many birds migrate south from your Maryland Wild Acre mammals are here throughout the year.



Many mammals' coats become thicker to insulate them from the cold temperatures. Most put on fat to insulate and provide energy for the period of cold and lack of food. Some will hibernate the entire time; many will go into inactive periods of sleep but will wake from time to time if the temperature warms up to eat.

Some mammals mate in the winter, and give birth in the spring when food is more plentiful.

Here is a brief outline of mammals you might find on your Wild Acres or in your area:

White-tailed Deer - Active all winter, deer will often curl up in a shallow depression with its back against a snow bank or fallen log to be protected from the wind. Deer have narrow hoofs that can cut through the crust of snow. Have a winter coat.

▼ Black Bear - Will go into a resting sleep often called "denning". Not a true hibernation as they will sometimes wake up and go outside if there is a warm spell. Female does give birth to her young while in this dormant state.

- Red and Gray Fox. Active all winter. Will stay in a den for a day or so in severe weather. Fox will curl tightly into a ball with the bushy tail wrapped around its head and body. Thick fur will help insulate from the snow.
- Long-tailed and Least Weasels - Active all winter. These animals will turn white in the winter except in southern parts of their range. They will cache small rodents to eat later.
- Eastern Chipmunk - Does not hibernate, but goes through a period of inactivity called torpor. Will occasionally awaken to eat food from its food cache.
- Meadow Jumping Mouse - True hibernator, stays in a sleep until early spring
- Eastern Cottontail Rabbit - Active all winter. Will often make a shallow depression in the ground to sit, usually in a thicket or hedgerow. Does not change the color of its coat like its relative the Snow-shoe Hare which turns white in the winter to help it blend in winter surroundings from its predators.

- Gray Squirrels - Active all winter. They will den up in severe weather for a day or two and rely on nut caches.
- Short-tailed Shrew - This small predator is active year round. It stuns its prey with a toxin that does not kill the prey but immobilizes it and puts it into a comatose state. The shrew will cache this prey in an abandoned mouse nest and use it for fresh food three to five days.
- Bats - Some migrate from the area but others hibernate. Very important to leave hibernating bats alone so as not to wake them and cause them to expend energy that they cannot replace when no food sources are available in the winter.
- Opossum - Active all winter. Will den up for a day or two in severe weather. In its northern range can experience frost bite on its tail and ears.
- Raccoon - Active all winter. Has a heavy winter coat. Mates in the late winter.
- Beaver, Muskrat, Mink and River Otter - These aquatic mammals are active all winter. They have thick winter coats. Mate in the winter to give birth to young in the spring.
- Flying squirrels, voles and various mice species - Will group huddle in the winter to keep warm. Many of these species are solitary the rest of the year.
- Groundhog - True hibernator. Can go into hibernation as late as early December and come out of it in February, although not necessarily Groundhog Day!



This winter get a field guide to animal tracks such as the Peterson Field Guide and take a walk after a snow to see how many tracks and other signs you can find on these mammals. You will be amazed how active they are. Remember the more habitat you have the more you will see.

For additional winter activities for children in nature, visit DNR's [Children in Nature](#) website.

If you enjoyed this issue of Habichat, you might want to check out our online back issues and clickable listing of Habichat articles.
<http://www.dnr.state.md.us/wildlife/wildacres.asp#habichat>

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- Photograph of American Holly Tree courtesy of Larry Stritch, US Forest Service
 - Photograph of American Holly Flowering courtesy of Robert H. Mohlenbrock @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database / USDA NRCS. 1995. Northeast wetland flora: Field office guide to plant species. Northeast National Technical Center, Chester.
 - Photograph of Male Northern Cardinal, iStock image
 - Photograph of Female Northern Cardinal, iStock image
 - Photograph of girl walking in snow, iStock image
 - Photograph of Weasel in Snow, iStock image
 - Photograph of Grey Squirrel, iStock image
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Here is a listing of phone numbers, web sites and organizations that you might find helpful or interesting in your

search for ideas to manage your wild acres. **DNR Online...** Inspired by nature! www.dnr.maryland.gov

Project FeederWatch is a winter-long survey of birds that visit feeders at backyards, nature centers, community areas, and other locales in North America. FeederWatchers periodically count the highest numbers of each species they see at their feeders from November through early April. FeederWatch helps scientists track broadscale movements of winter bird populations and long-term trends in bird distribution and abundance. Project FeederWatch is operated by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in partnership with the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and Canadian Nature Federation. <http://birds.cornell.edu/pfw>

National Wildlife Federation - Details on their backyard habitat program www.nwf.org or call them at 1-800-822-9919.

Native plants - **The Maryland Native Plant Society** offers information dedicated to protecting, conserving and restoring Maryland's native plants and habitats, visit them at www.mdflora.org.

Maryland Cooperative Extension offers home and garden information, tips publications, plant problems, Bay issues, and other links at www.agnr.umd.edu/MCE/index.cfm Their **Home and Garden Information** number is statewide and can be reached at 1-800-342-2507, and from outside Maryland at 1-410-531-1757.

Bioimages, a project of Vanderbilt University, provides educational information to the public on biologically related topics, as well as a source of biological images for personal and non-commercial use. <http://bioimages.cas.vanderbilt.edu/>

Maryland's "**Becoming an Outdoors - Woman Program**" - One of the topics covered in the three-day workshops is Backyard Wildlife. For more information on this program contact Patty Allen at 410-260-8537, or send e-mail to: pallen@dnr.state.md.us

For a free wildlife & native plant newsletter, visit the **WindStar Wildlife Institute** at www.windstar.org and subscribe to the WindStar Wildlife Garden Weekly e-newsletter. You can also visit this website to learn how you can become a certified wildlife habitat naturalist.

For more information on butterflies - visit the **North American Butterfly Association** at www.naba.org

Warm season grasses and wild meadows for upland nesting birds visit **Pheasants Forever** at www.pheasantsforever.org or e-mail: pf@pheasantsforever.org

In an effort to continue to provide quality backyard habitat information we are asking our readers to tell us what you think. Please take a few minutes to answer our survey. This will help us to improve our site so we can continue to deliver the information you want.

[Habichat Reader's Survey](#)

For Additional Information, Contact:

Wild Acres Program
Maryland Wildlife and Heritage Service
Attn: Marilyn Mause
Gwynnbrook WMA
3740 Gwynnbrook Ave
Owings Mills MD 21117
410-356-0941
E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

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