



Habichat

Wild Acres Program

[DNR Home](#)

[Outdoor Activities](#)

[What's Going On?](#)

[Resource Management](#)

[Access
DNR](#)

[Inside DNR](#)



[Native
Plant
Profile:
Elderberry](#)

[Maryland
Wildlife:
Gray Fox](#)

[Let's Go
Owling!](#)

[Insects in
the Snow](#)

[Printer-
Friendly
Version](#)
.PDF File
- Opens
with
Acrobat
Reader

[Habichat
Reader's
Survey](#)

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, 410-356-0941
E-Mail: customerservice@dnr.state.md.us

Native Plant Profile...Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*)



The elderberry can be considered either a large shrub, or a small tree. Height ranges from 8 to 12 feet. Elderberry has a short trunk with multiple stems. It may be pruned to reduce the suckers growing from the base of the plant. In the wild, elderberry grows in large, dense stands in moist places such as marshes, streams, moist woods and rural roadsides.



Other Names: American Elder, Sweet Elder

Leaf: Opposite, feather-like compound leaves that are 6" to 11" long.

Twig: The twigs are noted for their spongy, white pith.

Bark: Bark is smooth and brown; with older plants the bark forms corky bumps.

Flower: Small, white, dense flat-topped clusters, 8" across.

Bloom from late spring throughout the summer. Very showy in display.

Fruit: Berry-like, purple to black in color, 1/4" in diameter, maturing in late summer. The berry clusters are quite juicy and can weigh down the branches.

Landscape Notes: Elderberry will tolerate many soil types and some drought. The plant does best in full sun with moist fertile soil. You can use it in a border or patio planting. There are about 10 species of elderberry in the United States. Some cultivars of *Sambucus canadensis* that may be found commercially are "Acutuloba" and "Aurea" – with red berries and "Adams" – with large berry clusters. Best time to plant elderberry is in the early spring using bare root stock. You may also grow elderberry by seed.





Elderberry provides food for many species of wildlife:

Elderberry fruit: Eastern Bluebird, Indigo Bunting, Cardinal, Catbird, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Eastern Kingbird, Mockingbird, Phoebe, Robin, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker (will also consume the sap), Scarlet Tanager, Tufted Titmouse, Brown Thrasher, Hermit Thrush, Veery, Wood Thrush, Vireos, Cedar Waxwing, Red-bellied and Red Headed Woodpecker, Chipmunk and White-footed Mouse

Fruit and Bark: Eastern Cottontail Rabbit, Grey, Red and Fox Squirrels, Red Fox, and Woodchuck

Twigs and Foliage: White-tailed Deer

Elderberry fruit may be used for human consummation in pies, jelly and wine, if you can pick the berries before the birds do!

Maryland Wildlife: Gray Fox “Tree Fox” (*Urocyon cinereoargenteus*)

Range: The gray fox is found throughout most of Eastern North America.

Habitat: This species of fox prefers deciduous woodlands. It sometimes will forage in old fields for food. Unlike the red fox this creature does not utilize agriculture or open areas. Gray fox do not tolerate humans as much as red fox so tend to be found in more rural areas.

Appearance: Looks very dog like with a bushy tail and pointed ears. Weighs about 8 to 15 pounds, with an average length of 31-44 inches. Males are slightly larger than the females. The gray fox has a grayish, grizzled fur, with red patches on the neck and back, with white at the throat. It does not have the black legs of a red fox. The biggest difference in appearance from the red fox is the gray fox has a black – tipped tail, (the red's is white tipped).





Habits: Gray fox are unique in the dog family for their ability to climb trees. These foxes have semi retractable nails that act like hooked claws. Climbing in trees helps them get food, especially fruit, avoid predators and sun themselves on a limb. They get down from the trees by jumping from limb to limb. These foxes are very nocturnal, but will sometimes hunt in the daytime in thick cover. Grays den up in daytime hours using groundhog burrows, tree cavities, crevices and logs. Have excellent sense of smell and sight.



Behavior: Gray fox are monogamous. They breed once a year in late February to early March. These foxes breed two weeks after red fox, which may account for no cross breeding of these species in the wild.

The tree fox gives birth after 52-53 days of a litter of 3 to 4 pups, although the size of litter can range from 1 to 7. The adult male will help feed and train the young to hunt. At three months old the pups learn to hunt and by 4 months the young are hunting on their own. By the fall the young disperse to live on their own.

Home range of grays is 2 to 4 square miles. These foxes live from 5 to 10 years old in the wild.

Although not as vocal as red fox, the gray's bark is much louder. The tree foxes tracks, as compared to the red, are smaller. Since the gray's nails are semi-tractable, the nails do not always leave an imprint, so the tracks can be mistaken for a cat. If you look closer at the tracks you will see their heel pad is smaller than that of a cat. A gray fox's tracks show a shorter stride, but a wider trail than a red

fox. Like red fox, they will also leave scent posts marking their territory on vegetation, rocks, etc.; however, it does not have the strong smell of the red.

Food: Gray fox eat a variety of food. They eat more vegetable matter than red fox, but their primary diet is meat, including rabbits, small rodents, and insects such as grasshoppers and crickets. The gray fox helps control many rodent populations from becoming pests. They are known to eat apples, persimmons, grapes, cherries, blackberries, pears, corn and sunflowers seeds. Gray fox are not a threat to livestock.

Let's Go Owling!



Owling is a pastime that can involve the whole family. Looking and listening for owls is a wonderful way to develop listening and viewing skills. Owling also develops

patience as it takes several minutes before your eyes adjust to the dark of the native nocturnal world.

When is the Best Time to Go Owling?

- Some owls are active at dawn and dusk.
- Another good time is after 10pm.
- Moon light or moonless nights (owl watchers opinions vary quite a bit on which is best!)
- Two owl species are more easily seen in the daytime.

Short-eared owls, unlike other owls, will frequently hunt in the very late afternoon in meadows or marshes. When the lemming food source in the North is scarce, you may see the **Snowy Owl** in our area in the daytime in pastures, and beach and dune areas.

Some Helpful Owling Tips:

- Dress warmly for the activity.
- Avoid wearing any material that makes noise when you walk.
- Take a powerful flashlight, but use artificial light sparingly, as it will interfere with the ability of your eyes to adjust to the dim light of the moon and the stars.
- It is a good idea to hold the flashlight at eye level when you hear an owl. Don't take the beam of the flashlight wide, this can scare off birds.
- Wait for the owl to come to you or approach slowly.
- A good idea to remember when owling is to look for the owl at half the distance you think it is at.
- You may also wish to take portable recordings of owl sounds with you.
 - Play the recordings or imitate the sounds.
 - Owls are territorial and will react to stimulus as if a real owl was coming into their territory.
 - The calls can be done softly as owls have keen hearing.
 - Using rabbit or rodent sounds, an owl's prey, are also effective in causing an owl to appear to investigate the sounds.
 - It is important to remember to not overuse these sounds, as it might disrupt an owl's breeding behavior in early winter.
 - Five minutes of a hand held player at one site should be your maximum amount.



All you need is a location that has trees: a wooded backyard, forest, or a wooded stream are some good places to try.

- **Screech owls** are vocal in late winter to early spring. You can get quite close to these birds. They often sound farther away than they actually are.
- **Barn owls** prefer open areas. Riparian corridors with fields are good locations to check out. These white owls are often found perched on fence posts. Watch open places between trees to see owls flying.
- **Great Horned owls** can be found in rural and suburban woods that contain pines.
- **Barred owls** are quite vocal and are usually located in swamps, or moist woods.
- To find **Long-eared and Saw-whet owls** search coniferous woods.

Note: Photographs in collage above provided courtesy of Laura Erickson, Staff Ornithologist, Binoculars.com and hostess of BirderBlog.com (<http://www.birderblogger.com>)

Top Row (l-r): Saw-whet Owl, Barred Owl

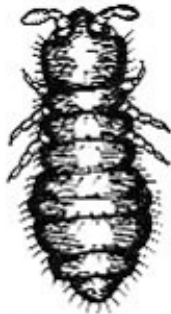
Bottom Row (l-r): Great Horned Owl, Eastern Screech Owl

Photograph of Barn Owl (left), courtesy of Scott A. Smith

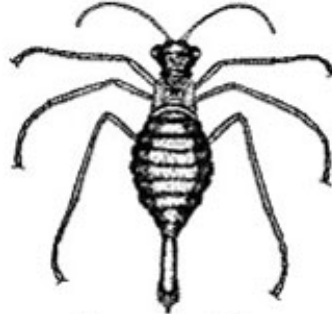
Insects in the Snow

We do not think of insects being active in the wintertime, especially with snow on the ground. Winter is the time where the only signs of insects are the eggs they have laid, waiting for the spring to hatch. Mole crickets are dormant just below the frost line in the soil. Bees remain dormant in hives and ants are in underground chambers. Both are in a slowed metabolic state. Some butterflies, such as the Monarchs have migrated to warmer, Southern sites. Other butterflies and moths are either in cocoons or exist as dormant caterpillars. There are a few that survive as adults in the winter, such as the Mourning Cloak butterfly. You may find them hibernating in a woodpile or flying about on a sunny winter afternoon.

However, some insects are the most active in the winter snow! Why? Because being active and adult in this season gives them a huge advantage. Their predators such as spiders, frogs and birds are either dormant or have migrated.



Snow Flea



Scorpion Fly



Snow Fly

The best time to find these snow insects is in late winter to early spring on a sunny afternoon. Decomposing logs generate heat, as does leaf litter especially near the base of a tree trunk and it is at these sites that you may find the following three species:

- **Snow fleas** are in the insect order commonly called springtails. They are wingless insects that have springing organs, which are short appendages that allow the creatures to “spring” in the air. There are some species of snow flea however that does not have this organ. These insects have long slender bodies no more than 1/8 “ in size. They are often found as grayish dots jumping about the base of a tree on top of the snow. Snow fleas can also be found around maple sugaring buckets. Decaying plant material and algae are their food sources.
- **Scorpion Fly** species found in winter are wingless. The larvae have been laid at the base of a tree, especially in moist woods. The adults about 2/3” in length, emerge in the winter with a beak – like head, and the tip of the abdomen bending up giving the appearance of a scorpion. This harmless insect eats dead or living insects. They can often be found on the top of snow.
- **Snow Flies** are not the common flies that you find the in summer, but are often mistaken for small spiders. They are not spiders, count their legs and you will see they have the six of insect species. The wingless adults walk around on the snow looking for mates. Once the female has mated, she goes into the snow or soil to lay eggs. The snow fly larva are found in the summer in mouse burrows, underground wasp nests or rich organic soil Much of the life history of the snow fly has yet to be studied.

Some hints for hunting snow insects: Warm afternoons are the best time. February is the peak month to find the most activity. Look on the south side of trees and logs to find insects instead of the colder north side. Trees in moist areas, or close to open, running water produce the most finds.

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>

Acknowledgements:

- Photograph of Elderberry tree, courtesy of Steven J. Baskauf, Ph.D., Bioimages, <http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu>
- Photograph of Elderberry flowers, courtesy of Steven J. Baskauf, Ph.D., Bioimages, <http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu>
- Photographs of Elderberry bark, foliage and berries, courtesy of Steven J. Baskauf, Ph.D., Bioimages, <http://bioimages.vanderbilt.edu>
- Photograph of Elderberry tree courtesy of Patrick J. Alexander @ USDA-NRCS PLANTS Database
- Photograph of Gray Fox in winter woodland, courtesy of Dave Schaffer, USFWS
- Photograph of Gray Fox in meadow courtesy of US Dept. of Interior - Bureau of Reclamation
- Photographs of owls in owl collage, courtesy of Laura Erickson, Staff Ornithologist, Binoculars.com and hostess of BirderBlog.com (<http://www.birderblogger.com>)
- Photograph of Barn Owl, courtesy of Scott A. Smith
- Illustrations of Snow Flea, Scorpion Fly and Snow Fly courtesy of Bill Amos, Author; Snow Critters, Published in January 1999 *Micscape Magazine*.
<http://www.microscopy-uk.org.uk/mag/indexmag.html>

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 Karina Blizzard at 410-260-8559 or send e-mail to: kblizzard@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

Wild Acres

Habitat for Wildlife

Wildlife & Heritage Home

Contact Us



Access For All

[Click here for online back issues.](#)

Habichat, the newsletter for Wild Acres participants, is published by the Wildlife and Heritage Service, Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Editor: Marilyn Mause

The facilities and services of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources are available to all without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, age, national origin, physical or mental disability. This document is available in alternative format upon request from a qualified individual with a disability.

[Email us](#) with questions, comments, and suggestions.

© Copyright 1995-2006 Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Up-dated on December 21, 2006