



# Bird-Friendly BMP's for Bottomland Forests in the Carolinas

## Fact Sheet

*The Carolinas are home to a variety of forest dependent birds whose habitat needs vary from species to species. This list of management practices is designed to cover a range of forest conditions that you may want to consider when planning how to manage, or harvest products from your forest. Each practice you implement will depend upon your individual property conditions and management goals. Best used with the Bottomland Baker's Dozen Fact Sheet.*

- 1. Limit Management Activities During the Breeding Season** – Most South Carolina birds breed during the spring and early summer, from late March through July. Late summer, fall or winter harvesting is preferred to protect breeding birds. Choosing to delay harvesting in the summer until August allows breeding birds the opportunity to fledge both first and second broods of young.
- 2. Keep Forest Buffers Along Streams** – Riparian forest buffers along streams, rivers and wetlands, provide prime habitat for a great diversity of plants and animals. Birds use riparian buffers during migration, as well as during the breeding season. Some birds, like the Louisiana Waterthrush, forage and nest ONLY along streams. Where no buffers exist, re-establish them. SC Best Management Practice's guidelines suggest a 50' buffer, but 200 – 300' buffers have the greatest value to songbirds and other wildlife.
- 3. Retain Overstory Trees When Harvesting** – Leaving large-canopied trees of varying types and sizes provides birds places to perch, nest and forage. Keep trees that produce fruits, seeds, or nuts, like black cherry, oaks, hollies, hackberries, etc. These trees will be of particular interest to birds during fall migration and to resident birds during the winter.
- 4. Retain Deadwood** – Snags and downed trees all have significant wildlife value. Dead or dying trees will provide roosting, perching, foraging and nesting sites for dozens of bird species. Let sleeping logs lie – as they are also good for forest regeneration. Leave trees that have cavities of varying sizes and various location on the trunk. **Note:** A professional forester can advise you on how to select trees that will maximize the safety of having snags on your property.
- 5. Soften Edges Between Habitats** – An “edge” can be defined as a place where two differing types of vegetation meet, e.g. deciduous forest meets grassland. Sharp edges, or an abrupt change between habitats, often have negative impacts on songbirds; these impacts are known as “edge effects.” Nest

predation (by animals such as cats, raccoons) and nest parasitism (by cowbirds) are greatest within about 150 feet of the forest edge. Negative edge effects can be reduced by creating irregular edges or by feathering edges. Feathered edges have more trees closer to the uncut forest and gradually fewer trees closer to the harvested area.

6. **Minimize Linear Openings** – Linear openings (like straight roads or ATV trails) in a forest block can serve as pathways for increased predation by animals and parasitism by cowbirds. Minimize the width, number and extent of truck/skidder roads when harvesting. Larger trails and woods roads introduce sunlight into the forest interior that can dry out leaf litter and reduce moist habitat for invertebrates consumed by ground nesting birds. Whenever possible, maintain forest canopy closure over trails and woods roads.
7. **Retain Early Successional Forest Habitat** – Early successional habitat is young forest habitat comprised of tree seedlings and saplings between one and fifteen years of age. Early successional habitat may be accomplished through patch cutting or managing agricultural land as it grows back to forest. Take care to limit patch acreages to between 2 and 10 acres and comprising no more than 10% of a stand. Birds such as the Swainson's, Hooded, and Kentucky Warblers, and the White-eyed Vireo benefit greatly from understory thicket conditions.
8. **Think, Plan and Manage at the Landscape Level** - When and where possible, consider what other landowners are doing and have done in the larger landscape in which your property is located. Think about the cumulative impact your management action will have on an entire large bottomland hardwood forest block, rather than thinking of it as just an isolated action affecting only your property. We can voluntarily act in concert for the betterment of birds and their habitat across large areas if we choose.