

Habitat *works*

CHESAPEAKE WILDLIFE HERITAGE

The newsletter about restoring, managing and protecting wildlife habitat.
Winter 2015



Bumblebees on Purple Coneflower



Habitat Works is published by Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to restoring, managing, and protecting wildlife habitat and establishing a more sustainable agriculture, through direct action, education and research, in partnership with public and private landowners. We welcome your comments and contributions.

Managing CRP/CREP Land and Meadows

by Ned Gerber, Director/Wildlife Habitat Ecologist

The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program is now open again after about a one-year hiatus due to slow Congressional action on a new Farm Bill. Remember that CRP and CREP are by far the most effective programs in the country for restoring significant acreages (over 25 million acres) of wildlife habitat. Most of the permanent wildlife habitat and buffer strips you see on farms were paid for by these USDA Farm Bill practices.

Corn prices have fallen into the \$4 a bushel range from the temporary \$7 range (caused by the unfortunate ethanol craze). This makes CREP very competitive with farming from a business perspective and landowners need to strongly consider enrolling land for both economic and environmental benefits. We thought this might be a good time to discuss managing CREP ground and meadows for wildlife.

The biggest issue that landowners face in managing their CRP land is controlling trees in grass buffers. One easy solution is to enroll buffer areas as “CP-4D” wildlife habitat rather than as “CP 21” grass buffers. The CP-4D practice allows from 10-90% coverage of the land in grasses or woody vegetation (trees and shrubs). The landowner has the flexibility to manage natural succession which has great benefits to many wild creatures. We see the greatest diversity of birds and other wildlife in buffers, meadows and wetlands where there is a good mix of native grasses, wildflowers, trees and shrubs.

Mowing is the most popular vegetation management tool employed in CRP ground. August 15 is the allowable late summer “mowing date” for CREP buffers and other CRP lands in Maryland. The theory is that most ground nesting by wildlife is over by then so mowing will do no harm.

However, while the nesting is over, significant damage is being done to the wildlife resource by mowing ALL the CRP/CREP ground on farms at that time, as is done on a large percentage of CRP land. Box turtles are still active and won't often survive such a mowing.

Bumblebee nests are often found in old mouse nests in uncut meadows and August mowing can destroy these valuable native pollinators. The grass buffers contain valuable nectar and pollen plants like goldenrod, tickseed sunflowers, eupatoriums (joe-pye weed,

(continued on page 2)



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(Managing CRP/CREP continued from page 1)

Eastern Box Turtle courtesy of Bill Hubick



Short-eared Owl courtesy of Larry Hitchens

etc.), New York ironweed, asters, and more, that have not bloomed as of that date and will provide zero pollinator habitat as a result of being cut.

CWH suggests that only walking trails be mown in CRP ground in August. This will give many wildflowers time to bloom, provide pollinator habitat, set seed, and help perpetuate the important floral component of these meadows and buffers. Birds and other wildlife will eat some of the seeds over the winter and others will fall to the ground over time to become part of the soil seed bank helping to grow more flowers in the future. Mowing any significant portion of the CRP ground should wait until later in the winter.

Another factor in mowing all the CRP ground in August (or even later in the fall) is that it deprives native wildlife of important winter cover. Many species of birds such as turkeys, white throated sparrows, field sparrows, and chipping sparrows make heavy use of unmown meadow areas in the winter. Rabbits, foxes, hawks, owls, and many more species of wildlife use meadows as well.

Bear in mind that annual mowing does not kill most trees or other woody growth. If that is the goal, then we suggest

spot spraying with a low toxicity herbicide like Garlon that only kills broadleaves, not grasses. Small numbers of trees can be easily killed over winter by basal bark treating them with a Garlon solution. Controlled burning, strip discing and spraying selective herbicides via boom truck or helicopter are other methods commonly used to manage vegetation in CRP land. No one method will be 100% effective in any one year.

CREP was designed to improve both water quality and wildlife habitat. We do not understand why landowners are allowed to convert all (or most) of their CRP land to lawn eight months out of the year? Mowing 30-50% of the land in March of each year on a two-year rotation would be sufficient to set back woody growth, which is the goal of most landowners.

The decline of wildflowers in buffer strips and meadows over the 10-15 year life of a CRP contract is a problem for landowners, pollinators and other wildlife. Usually the grasses get too thick and a properly timed spraying of patches or strips (with FSA permission) with a grass herbicide and reseeding will rejuvenate the flowers. Wildflowers can be no-till drilled into the thinned areas of grass or frost-seeded on bare ground in February and March.

This is a good time for landowners to consider managing CRP land in a more wildlife-friendly manner. In this way carefully timed mowing, spot spraying, and flower reseeding can become an important part of the farm's plan to help wildlife while benefitting water quality. Please call CWH to discuss options, prices and benefits to the wildlife resource from properly timed use of various techniques to maintain your meadows.

Canterbury Wetland Restoration

Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage has completed a wetland restoration at our Canterbury Farm near Easton, Maryland. The six-acre restored wetland is located at the southeastern most portion of the property along Canterbury Drive.

Canterbury Farm was donated to CWH in 2008 by Mrs. Martha Ann Healy. In

2001, CWH restored 100 acres of wetlands on the farm. The entire 149-acre farm, including the restored habitat, is protected from development and reconversion to agriculture through a conservation easement. Over the years, the farm has become one of the most important waterfowl sanctuaries in Talbot County.

The new six-acre wetland will complement the previously restored wetlands. It is a shallow, emergent wetland that will help filter pollutants and provide habitat for a host of wildlife. Funding for the restoration came from the USDA's Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, Marcia Brady Tucker Foundation and our generous members.



This photograph shows the wetland immediately post-restoration before it filled with rainwater.

One year later, the wetland is becoming a dynamic ecosystem providing tremendous benefits to wildlife and improving water quality in Trippe Creek and the Tred Avon River.



Utility Rights-of-Way: an asset or a lost opportunity?

In the United States there are between 8 and 10 million acres of utility ROW, comprising potential unique wildlife habitat opportunities in property that is owned or accessed by electric utility companies. An additional 4-6 million acres are operated by oil and gas companies.

Recognizing the potential for this unique habitat within power line rights-of-way (ROW), in 1994 Conectiv Power Delivery (CPD) and Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage (CWH) formed a 15-year partnership in various research projects in Maryland, Delaware and New Jersey. From that liaison, in 2007 CWH evolved a partnership with Integrated Vegetation Management Partners (IVMP), a newly created NPO, formed by Rick Johnstone, former forester for CPD. Since then CWH has collaborated in vegetation studies with IVMP in several states throughout the US.

The following is adapted from an article submitted to the Utility Arborist Association Magazine, Sept 2014.

by Richard A. Johnstone, President, IVMPartners, Newark, DE

Michael R. Haggie, Consulting botanist, Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage, Easton, MD

A huge opportunity is lost by utilities ignoring the benefits of Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM). In over 10 years of documenting habitat changes on utility rights-of way (ROW) managed with IVM, the results have consistently shown that selective herbicide use, properly timed with conventional brush cutting, can control target trees and invasive plants, reduce costs and improve habitat for birds, bees, butterflies and other wildlife. These methods are conducive to reducing the risk of wildfire, erosion and stream sedimentation and an opportunity for utility-agency partnerships. Biologists and Foresters employed by US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, Army Corps of Engineers and the Navajo Nation have all embraced IVM when presented with the indisputable facts of improved energy reliability coupled with improved wildlife habitat.

Utility rights-of-way (ROW) traverse thousands of miles of our beautifully diverse landscape to deliver energy to homes and businesses. Vegetation growing on these 12 million acres of ROW land in North America must be maintained to provide safe, reliable, and economical power. This vast acreage can serve as home to countless birds, pollinators, amphibians and other wildlife when trees and brush are managed

with a combination of methods to convert vegetation back to “old field” or prairie type habitat. This selective vegetation management is termed “**integrated vegetation management**” or **IVM**.

A pollinator expert from US Geological Survey made the following comment during a recent field workshop at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center on an electric transmission ROW managed for 2 years with IVM:

“Most people mistakenly think we need more forests in Maryland, when we have more forested acres than we did 100 years ago. What we lack is old field and native prairie habitat, such as that found in this transmission ROW, which is perhaps the best pollinator habitat in the Mid-Atlantic States.”

Also a US Fish & Wildlife Service biologist endorsed IVM with this observation:

“IVM allows old field habitat to be maintained with minimal disturbance,



providing important nesting sites for a suite of birds that have evolved to breed only in early successional habitats. IVM along power line ROWs can help offset the loss of this habitat.”

An Arizona workshop resulted in the acceptance of IVM by the Navajo Nation for improving wildlife habitat while being sensitive to cultural sites. The Clean Water Branch of the Navajo EPA actually issued a research grant to study IVM for improving rangeland grasses, controlling invasive and problem plant species, and reducing erosion and sedimentation. A 2014 IVM Workshop in high-desert Southwest habitat pointed out to USDA and BLM that a transmission corridor can act as a firebreak when vegetation is managed to low growing, cool burning prairie grass and wildflowers.

The idea of electric and gas delivery being an environmental enhancement is viewed as a fairy tale. Utility websites will seldom find any mention of the positive environmental attributes of electricity or natural gas delivery; such as ROW corridors being wildlife greenways and aesthetically pleasing nature trails. It seems that utility communication with public agencies, regulators and conservation groups is conducted only when necessary for obtaining permits for new ROW construction or for rate cases. When the

utility is attacked for fragmenting forests and cutting through sensitive habitats, their Real Estate and Environmental Departments are mum. Not-in-my-back-yard (NIMBY) mentality is the norm as communities feverishly fight any new transmission or pipeline construction near homes.

So these questions need to be asked:

- 1. Does your utility only hire professional foresters and biologists for permitting new facilities and not for directing IVM?**
- 2. If foresters are employed, are they directing the IVM program or are Engineers and Asset Managers deciding maintenance activities while the professionals are relegated to contract administrators?**
- 3. Since IVM is a long term commitment, why is necessary funding withheld to meet short term budget projections?**

The best defense is a good offense. When is your utility going to go on the environmental offense by adopting, practicing, funding and publicizing IVM?



Tiger Swallowtail

Ask Andi:

Questions and answers about wildlife by Andi Pupke, Education and Outreach Director

Q: What DOES the Fox say—REALLY?

R: The Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) is the most common species of fox worldwide. It makes a wide variety of vocalizations and is highly vocal. However, unlike the claim of a recent popular song, it does NOT make sounds like “ring-ding-ding-ding-dingeringedging” or “wa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pa-pow.”

The most commonly heard vocalizations of the Red Fox are a quick series of barks and a screamly variation of a howl. All fox vocalizations are higher pitched than a dog’s vocalizations. The barks of a fox sound something like ow-wow-wow-wow, but are very high pitched and almost yippee. It can be mistaken for an owl hooting. The bark sequence is thought to be an identification system since studies show that foxes can tell each other apart by their calls.

The screamly howl (which sounds like a hoarse WOOOW) is most often heard during breeding season in the spring. It is horrible—enough to bring your kids running inside in the evening! It has been described as a shrill, hoarse scream of anguish. This call is thought to be used most often by vixens (female foxes) to lure male foxes to them for mating. Occasionally, males have also been found to make this sound.

The bark and scream are very loud so they are often heard. However, most fox vocalizations are quiet and used for communication between individuals in close proximity. The most unusual vocalization is called “gekking” It is a guttural chattering with occasional yelps and howls, like an ack-ack-ack-a-woo. “Gekking” is heard amongst adults in times of aggression. Red Foxes are very territorial so there are many encounters of individuals that could promote aggressive behavior. The kits (young) will also make this sound when playing.



Red Fox courtesy of Larry Hitchens

An alarm call can, if you are close to the source, sound like a cough. Farther away, it sounds like a sharp bark. The alarm call is mostly used by fox parents to alert young of danger. Typically, fox parents communicate with kits through body gestures, but they will also make huffing, coughing and clucking noises. Submissive foxes, when greeting a dominant fox, will sometimes make a piercing whine. This vocalization can elevate in volume and become shrieks.

Foxes are out and about during the day, but most of their hunting and other activities are nocturnal so we mostly hear them in the dark. We can easily mistake noises a fox makes for that of other animals—so that may be the reason few people do know what the fox says.

Thanks to the Photographers!

CWH would like to express our appreciation to the photographers who allow us to use their amazing photographs on our website and facebook pages and in our publications.



Wood Duck
David Judd



White-throated Sparrow
Larry Hitchens



Delmarva Fox Squirrel
Bill Hubick



Great White Egret
Sam Lozen

Larry Hitchens of Hitchens Photography: In 2007, Larry purchased his first full frame camera and a super telephoto lens and began pursuing his hobby in earnest. He says that, “There’s something very peaceful and relaxing going out on some distant marsh or beach and photographing some of nature’s most beautiful creatures.” His favorite subjects are birds of prey, eagles, owls, hawks and falcons. Larry hopes to capture more images of the wildlife using the existing woodlands and restored wetlands and meadows on properties owned or managed by CWH. Visit his website at www.hitchensphotography.com for a look at his beautiful work.

Bill Hubick Photography: Bill is a naturalist and photographer based out of Pasadena, Maryland. He travels from the hills of western Maryland to the tidal salt marshes of the Eastern Shore for “endless opportunities for photography and nature study.” He and Jim Brighton co-founded Maryland Biodiversity Project (www.marylandbiodiversity.com) in 2012 and that effort has become the most comprehensive state atlas of living things in the United States. He is an eBird reviewer for Maryland and the Chair of the MD/DC Bird Records Committee. Bill has allowed CWH to use his images for a number of years and we are most grateful. You can view his amazing photography at www.billhubick.com.

David Judd of Delmarva Photo: David began photographing waterfowl on CWH’s restored wetlands a number of years ago and has provided us with some wonderful images. He says, “I love to see the images used in CWH publications. It is great to see the images used as tools to promote conservation and preservation.” David specializes in waterfowl and whitetail deer photography and his images have been used as cover shots on national and regional magazines and published recently in *North American Whitetail* and *Ducks Unlimited*. He started doing wildlife photography because of a love for the outdoors and says, “I will never forget the feeling of being bombarded by wood ducks while in a photo blind at the Canterbury property many years ago.” (Canterbury is located near Easton, Maryland and owned by CWH.)

Bald Eagles
Donna Tolbert-Anderson



Donate Stock and Receive a Charitable Deduction

Donating appreciated stock is an excellent way to support CWH, the Bay and our wildlife. This type of donation is very simple and allows you to take advantage of tax laws to maximize your gift to CWH and reduce your taxes.

For example, Mrs. Jones purchased stock for \$5,000 several years ago. Today, this stock is worth \$10,000. She decides to donate the stock to Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage and receives a charitable deduction for the full fair-market value of the stock (\$10,000). In the 33% tax bracket, the deduction saves her \$3,300 in income tax. Additionally, by donating the appreciated stock, she avoids paying capital gains tax of \$750 (15% of the \$5,000 gain). The actual cost of her gift is reduced more than \$6,000 (\$10,000 less the \$3,300 tax deduction and less the \$750 capital gains avoidance).

Please call our office and talk with Chris Pupke to learn more about this easy method to support CWH!

Sam Lozen of Prints Charming Photography:

Sam fell in love with photographing wildlife and nature when just a teenager. Many years later, having established her own photo studio in 1986, she is still capturing the pastoral landscape of Maryland's Eastern Shore. She has been capturing images of wildlife and landscapes at CWH restored wetlands and meadows since early this summer. We are grateful to Sam for her assistance and kindness in allowing CWH to keep these photos in our library for future use. You can visit her website at www.printscharmingphoto1.com.

Donna Tolbert-Anderson of Capturing Nature's Images:

Donna captures many of her photographs near her home on Maryland's Eastern Shore where a wide variety of habitats support abundant wildlife throughout the year. Donna's hope is that her photographs, "...might bring the viewer to a greater awareness and appreciation of the birds and animals right here in our midst." And that: "Such an appreciation could inspire us to a greater desire to preserve and protect the wildlife that grace our fragile planet, and thereby give us a role in reducing their decline." You can view Donna's beautiful photos at www.capturingnaturesimages.com.

Go Green!

Receive Newsletters Electronically

Won't you please help CWH save trees and use more of our funds to benefit wildlife and the Chesapeake Bay by having your copy of the CWH newsletter, *Habitat Works*, delivered to you via email.

Just send an email to info@cheswildlife.org with "Newsletter by email" in the subject line. Please include your name and address in the message (so we are sure we have the correct person in our mailing list). Upon receipt of your email, a reply will be sent to confirm your request for an electronic version of the newsletter.

THANK YOU!

BOARD PROFILE: Stanley P. Watkins, Jr., M.D.

Stanley P. Watkins, Jr. joined the CWH Board in 2013. He is a partner at the Annapolis Oncology Center and an Associate Professor of Clinical Oncology at Johns Hopkins Hospital. A graduate of Cornell University and the University of Cincinnati, College of Medicine, Dr. Watkins is board certified in Internal Medicine and Medical Oncology.

An avid sportsman, Stanley enjoys spending time at his Spencer Farm on Herrington Creek, a tributary of the Chester River in Kent County, Maryland. Fifteen years ago CWH restored approximately 40 acres of wetlands on the farm. Those wetlands attract a host of wildlife, including waterfowl.

CWH's Board President, Ralph V. Partlow III said, "CWH is fortunate to have someone with Stanley's knowledge and enthusiasm on our Board. He brings

a respected and experienced voice to the organization."

In addition to his practice in Annapolis and his teaching at Johns Hopkins, Dr. Watkins is the current Chairman of the Maryland Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan. He is also the former Director of the Oncology Center at Anne Arundel Medical Center and the Anne Arundel Medical Research Institute.

"Stan has been a great steward of the Spencer Farm and he enjoys doing much of the work himself," said Ned Gerber, CWH's Director/Wildlife Habitat Ecologist. "He is that rare landowner that appreciates a wide diversity of wildlife habitats from restored wetlands to scrub/shrub thickets valuable to woodcock and other migratory birds. We are glad to have him working with us at CWH!"



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Sunset over a restored wetland at CWH's Bailey's Neck Farm.