

Urban Forestry and Wildlife

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Urban wildlife is any wild animal that lives in an urban environment or in an urban/rural interface. These species have often adapted to utilize forested corridors between developed areas to meet their habitat needs. **Corridors** are areas of continuous habitat that permit animals to travel securely from one area to another. Urban forests often are diverse in shape, size, and composition, and include parks, wooded buffers, greenways and conservation-oriented natural areas.



Example of an urban forest (left) and a high contrast edge (right)

Due to their locations, many urban forests tend to be small, and have high edge to interior ratios; that is, they are longer than they are wide with more edge than interior space. In addition, urban forests often have **high contrast edge** which is an edge between extremely different successional stages. These types of edges are also known as **hard edges**. Edges attract many different wildlife species because the variety of food, cover, and other habitat requirements are arranged close together. This is due to the increased interspersion of vegetation along the edges. White-tailed deer benefit from increased edge habitat.

Urban wildlife can provide many benefits in an urban setting including recreation, education, and pest control. However, urban wildlife can also carry disease and/or cause human-wildlife conflicts.

Examples of wildlife which use urban forests in Maryland can be found below.

Mammals:

- Beaver
- Big brown bat
- Eastern gray squirrels
- Groundhog
- House mouse (non-native)
- Raccoon
- Red fox
- Opossum
- White-tailed deer

Birds:

- American crow
- American robin
- Blue jay
- Chimney swift
- European starling (non-native)
- House sparrow (non-native)
- Mourning dove
- Northern cardinal
- Rock dove (non-native)

Reptiles & Amphibians:

- American toad
- Eastern rat snake
- Garter snake
- Red-eared slider (non-native)



Raccoon by Ken Thomas

In addition to the species listed above, migratory species often use urban forests as stopover habitat between their long distance travels. Species such as red-eyed vireos, indigo buntings, and more will often utilize urban forests in Maryland while traveling to their breeding or winter habitat.

Habitat management is the key to encouraging wildlife in an urban location. Therefore, urban forests can be managed in a way that benefits wildlife. Examples of ways to increase wildlife usage of urban forests include:

- Conserving and planting native vegetation
- Creating and conserving buffer strips and corridors for wildlife
- Reducing turf grass and replacing it with native trees, shrubs, and flowers
- Ensuring a diversity of plant species, flowering and fruiting seasons, heights and ages of trees
- Using natural and man-made elements of the land, such as snags, gravel pits, and storm-water basins, for wildlife habitat
- Installing nest boxes