Information and Education Session

Development of a Backyard Wildlife Habitat Model

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Abstract: Most landowners have an inadequate knowledge about how to improve habitat for wildlife on their properties. A Backyard Wildlife Habitat Model was developed to teach landowners how to create a natural home for wildlife in their backyards.

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Suburban and urban development continues to encroach on natural areas. As natural areas are eliminated, so are wildlife. To ensure an abundance of wildlife for future generations, the loss of our natural habitats must be mitigated. One approach to habitat restoration is through the development of backyard wildlife habitats. Backyard habitats are easy to achieve, and the results benefit property owners as well as wildlife.

With approximately 440,000 ha of suburban and urban areas in Mississippi, I wanted to teach landowners how to create a natural habitat for wildlife on their property. Realizing that "actions speak louder than words," I designed a model with removable trees, shrubs, flowers, water sources, bird houses, etc. The model allowed me to give landowners direct hands-on experience in landscaping for wildlife.

I gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Regina Hopper (Color-AD Designs, New Albany, Miss.) to the development of this model.

Methods

Display Board

The display board was constructed to represent a sodded yard. A separate 91.4 × 182.9-cm light green felt cloth was fitted and sewed securely around each of 2 61.0 × 81.3 × 5.1-cm styrofoam boards. The felt boards were then attached by sewing together the overlapping seams on one of the 81.3-cm sides of each board. This gave a total display dimension of 122 × 81.3 cm, and also allowed the board to be folded in half for easy storage and transportation. Total cost of the display board was about $35 (1988 prices), including seamstress labor costs.

Model Components

The model components consisted of the following: a house with sidewalks and driveway; evergreen and deciduous trees, shrubs, and hedges; flower beds; pastures; meadows; rail fences with vines; ponds; nest boxes; bird feeders; bird baths; and snags. The components, constructed from felt cloth, were shaped similar to those in the landscape plan drawings in Cerulean et al. (1986) and Dillon (1981). In addition, natural colors were used to distinguish components (e.g., green for deciduous vegetation and olive green for evergreen vegetation). The cost of the components will depend on the quantity made. Generally, a sufficient number of components can be made for under $25.

Model Utilization

The model was developed to teach landowners how to create a backyard wildlife habitat. This was accomplished by providing workshops on landscaping for wildlife to interested clubs and organizations.

At the beginning of the workshop, participants were informed that a backyard wildlife habitat plan should consider the 4 basic needs of wildlife: food, water, cover, and areas in which to reproduce and raise young, and that a successful habitat would provide a year-round supply of these elements. In addition, participants were advised that a landscape design should also consider the area covered by houses and other structures; a family's space requirements; plant size, shape, color, and adaptability; soil type and moisture; and areas of sun and shade.

Then, keeping these points in mind, the participants used the model to plan and design a backyard wildlife habitat. I soon learned that it was important to stress the need to manage for diversity, because most participants were interested in just attracting a few specific birds or animals. I informed them that providing a wide variety of habitat elements would attract the greatest number of birds and animals to their yards.

Discussion

The model can be used by agencies or individuals interested in promoting the development of backyard wildlife habitats. The National Wildlife Federation's Backyard Wildlife Habitat Program recognizes people who improve habitat for wildlife on their properties. Landowners who provide food, water, cover, and reproductive areas for wildlife can have their yards certified as official Backyard Wildlife Habitats. In addition, many state agencies now have nongame wildlife programs that promote the development of urban areas for wildlife.

One goal of conservation agencies and organizations should be to increase public awareness and appreciation of the value of their properties as wildlife habitat. The Backyard Wildlife Habitat model provides one method by which to convey this message.

Literature Cited

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