

Habitat arrangement important

Ask a wildlife biologist what you can do to improve wildlife habitat and most will tell you to increase habitat interspersion, says Mark Biggs, Delaware County soil conservationist.

Habitats are the vegetation covers, like woodlots or fence rows, where animals live, he says.

Habitat interspersion refers to the arrangement of habitats on an area. Most wildlife species require a scattered pattern of several types of cover within their range in order to feed, nest, hide and survive.

Small animals like rabbits or quail that can't travel long distances need all their required cover types within a small area, say less than 10 acres.

Modern intensive agriculture has tended toward large row-crop fields, with the elimination of many covers such as woodlots, wetlands, fence rows and meadow crops.

This reduction in the amount and diversity of habitat is the principal reason for declining farm wildlife populations, Biggs says.

What can be done to increase habitat interspersion?

Create a number of different covers within easy access to the animals, he says. Retain woodlots, fence rows and wetlands.

Keep field sizes small and use a crop rotation that includes small grain and hay. Strip cropping and seeded terraces also provide some diversity.

Because of easy access, wildlife will utilize the edge areas between cover types much more than the interiors of large fields. Small fields with a diversity of different crops and cover types will most benefit wildlife, Biggs says.

WILDLIFE HABITAT INTERSPERSION

By Mark Biggs, Soil Conservationist
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Ask a wildlife biologist what you can do to improve wildlife habitat and most will tell you to increase habitat interspersion. Habitats are the vegetation covers, like woodlots or fencerows, where animals live. Habitat interspersion refers to the arrangement of habitats on an area. Most wildlife species require a scattered pattern of several types of cover within their range in order to feed, nest, hide, and survive. Small animals like rabbits or quail that can't travel long distances need all their required cover types within a small area, say less than 10 acres. Modern intensive agriculture has tended toward large rowcrop fields, with the elimination of many covers such as woodlots, wetlands, fencerows, and meadow crops. This reduction in the amount and diversity of habitat is the principal reason for declining farm wildlife populations.

What can be done to increase habitat interspersion? Create a number of different covers within easy access to the animals. Retain woodlots, fencerows, and wetlands. Keep field sizes small and use a crop rotation that includes small grain and hay. Stripcropping and seeded terraces also provide some diversity. Because of easy access, wildlife will utilize the edge areas between cover types much more than the interiors of large fields. Small fields with a diversity of different crops and cover types will most benefit wildlife.

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