

# Managing Small Forest Patches *for Birds*

A Guide for Ohio Landowners

Despite global conservation efforts, populations of many bird species have declined over the past century. Many of these species rely on forests for part of or all their lives. Although a variety of birds may require large tracts of forests for nesting, during other stages of their life cycle, they can benefit from small patches of forest scattered throughout a non-forested landscape. Our guide is written for landowners and managers of small forest patches seeking to improve habitat for birds. Recommendations are based on multiple research studies conducted in Ohio and similar small-patch forest ecosystems through the Midwest and eastern North America.



## *What is a patch?*

Ohio was once covered in forest, but since European settlement, much of the landscape has been deforested. Forests have regrown throughout southeastern Ohio, but in the rest of the state, forest remains in the form of small forest patches (2.5-250 acres/1-100 ha), scattered throughout an agricultural and urban landscape. Small forest patches can vary greatly in tree and shrub species composition and structure.

## *How are small patches important to birds?*

Generally, the more forest cover that is available in the surrounding landscape, the more functional individual forest patches will be for birds. Fortunately, even small forest patches within less-forested landscapes, when dominated by native species of trees and shrubs, can be important habitat for resident and migrant birds throughout their full annual life cycle: breeding, migration, and wintering. During the breeding season, these patches provide nesting habitat, abundant food sources for young birds, and cover from predators. In migration, small forest patches provide food and cover when birds need to stop to rest and refuel. Finally, in winter, birds rely on the cover from small forest patches to protect them from winter weather and predators, and they can find food in the small patch such as berries, seeds, and nuts.



OHIO BIRD  
CONSERVATION  
INITIATIVE



## *Landowners have the power!*

The value of a forest patch to birds strongly depends on patch size, tree species composition, the forest structure, and the surrounding landscape. There are several management practices to improve forest patches, however. The first step is to contact a local natural resource professional and develop a management plan for your property. Then, where applicable, include the following practices:

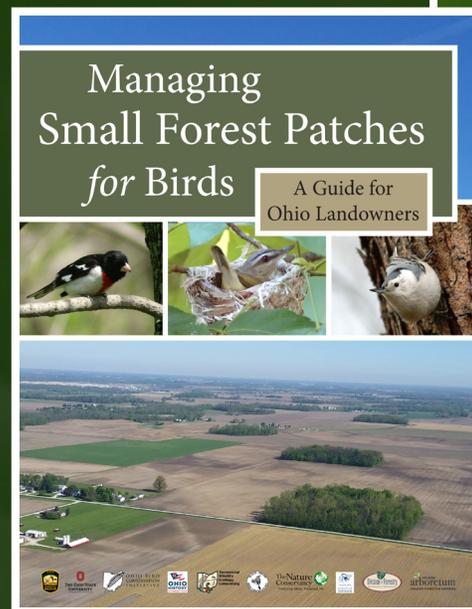
1. Remove and control invasive plant species
2. Manage for native fruiting shrubs, trees, and vines
3. Manage for a diversity of tree species
4. Manage for high abundance and diversity of native insects
5. Enhance vertical structure within the small patch
6. Reduce “hard” edges along forest patches
7. Create shrubby or forested corridors to connect patches
8. Create small canopy gaps in patches greater than 20 acres
9. Create brush piles, leave some dead trees standing
10. Limit browse and grazing damage from deer and livestock
11. Consider successional stage
12. Leave wet forests intact and allow for standing water

Before starting any management, work with a local natural resource professional (state forester, private lands biologist, soil and water conservation district forestry and wildlife specialists, extension agent, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Farm Service Agency employees) to develop a management plan for your property and to find sources of financial assistance, if necessary.



To obtain a copy of the guide, as well as additional resources related to managing forest lands for birds, visit:

<https://obcnet.org/>



Photos front: Yellow-rumped Warbler (Matthew Shumar), Small patch aerial view (Laura Kearns). Back: Red-headed Woodpecker (Matthew Shumar), Rusty Blackbird (Keith Williams), aerial view (USDA-FSA-APFO Aerial Photography Field Office)

