



# Wildlife 101

## *Why You Should Care and How to Tell What Wildlife are in Your Woodlands*

by Matthew Springer

### **Wildlife in Kentucky**

Kentucky, with its many geographic features and habitats, is extremely diverse. The number of wildlife species present within the state is almost equally as diverse. We have more than 350 bird, 15 bat, 56 reptile, 57 amphibian, and several more game-mammal species such as white-tailed deer, bear, elk, and squirrels. Each of these species plays an important role within the environment—an ecosystem service that a lot of the time isn't noticed until they are no longer present to perform it.

### **Recreational Enjoyment and Potential Income Source**

With so many natural resources present within Kentucky, one that is sometimes overlooked by landowners is wildlife. Wildlife provide multiple recreational enjoyment opportunities, from bird watching and photography to hunting and trapping. With this in mind, it is easy to see how wildlife possess both intrinsic and economic values to landowners. Recently, the economic value has been increasing. Hunt leasing is an option growing in popularity across the country that may offer a means to collect income on a prop-

erty. Income rates vary depending on: the size of the individual property; amount of forested areas; oldfield, grassland, and agriculture acres; the location in the state; the different species of wildlife present on the property; and the amount of opportunities for hunters to create their own hunting experiences. These opportunities may include the opportunity to plant food plots, use of ATVs, or camp on the property. The average hunt-lease income within Kentucky is \$10 to \$20 an acre annually, however rates can go as high as \$30 to \$40 an acre for highly valued properties. If your strategy is eventually to harvest the trees on your land, you know that economic benefit may take decades to realize, so hunt leasing may offer a more consistent income over time. Understanding the wildlife resource you have on your property will aid in getting a fair market value for your property if you choose to go this route.

### **How Do I Determine What Wildlife I Have?**

To determine what wildlife are on your property, you can use multiple methods ranging in time, effort, and cost. Each has its upsides and downsides, but all provide you with more information about the wildlife utilizing your property. Some basics you may need to help with identifying the wildlife you find are a pair of binoculars, a field guide or two, and the ability to spend some time in the woods. Here is a quick breakdown of a few methods you can utilize singularly or in tandem:

### **Taking a slow and observant walk**

Nothing can beat the combination of enjoying your property while trying to learn a little more about it. This is why a slow but observant walk through your property can tell you a lot about what wildlife species you have present. Paying close attention for tracks or scat can reveal a lot about what mammals are utilizing your land. Listening to the birds that are singing in the spring is very good indicator of those species that are present but having a pair of binoculars will aid in identifying birds outside of the breeding season. Bringing a field guide or multiple guides with you will help as you learn what species you encounter. The



*Knowing whether you have a large population of game species on your property allows you to market your land if you desire to hunt lease it.*



*Simple tools, such as binoculars or field guides, can provide you with a good starting point to determine which wildlife are on your property.*

*Photo courtesy: Matt Springer*

downside to this method is that it is dependent on your property's layout, trails and access, and how well you can detect the signs and songs of species.

### **Trail cameras/game cameras**

Trail cameras, sometimes referred to as game cameras, are an excellent tool to determine what wildlife you have on your property. Placing these cameras at game trails, along logging roads, or near food or water sources would all be excellent places to get pictures of the many species that are using your property. Being in Kentucky also allows you to legally create feeding stations for deer, which helps increase your odds in detecting some wildlife on your property. While it is legal to feed deer, the intentional feeding of bears is not legal in Kentucky. Using cameras to survey your property does have the upfront cost. Good cameras will run about \$100 each plus batteries and memory cards, but they will

be able to be used for years. There are more expensive models that do perform well but for simply identifying what species are on your property, they are not necessary. To perform a good survey of your property, you will want to have a camera setup for every 100 to 200 acres. However, you can somewhat get around this by moving cameras around to different parts of your property after a few weeks. These cameras provide an



*Using trail cameras is a simple, relatively inexpensive, and enjoyable way to survey the wildlife on a property.*

*Photo courtesy: Laurie Thomas*

interesting look into the daily activities of wildlife and can produce some really interesting pictures. In addition, they can help to monitor for trespassers on your property. If you are interested in using cameras for both wildlife and security purposes you may want to purchase a camera that has an infrared flash or black flash to help keep the camera hidden at night.

### **Hiring a consulting wildlife biologist**

Another option to survey your property is to hire a wildlife biologist consulting company. This method is usually used when you are trying to determine whether there are any potential issues with endangered species prior to major development or land changes. This method is not a commonly used one for individuals who just have a curiosity about the wildlife on their property as it is not a cheap tool. Contacting a biologist can be done by performing internet searches for environmental or wildlife consulting. An option similar to this that is free to Kentucky landowners of 25 acres or more is to consult with a private lands biologist from Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR). By utilizing this resource you can obtain a wildlife management plan for your property and ask them questions relating to what wildlife are most likely present given your region and habitat available. Those plans can provide you advice on strategies to potentially attract wildlife you may desire and potentially help you locate farm-bill programs that can provide income or cost-share for management activities.

### **Summary and Potential Resources**

Overall, wildlife possesses both an intrinsic value and may potentially provide landowners with an annual income source if hunt leasing is used. Knowing what wildlife you have on your property may change your future management strategies and goals for your property. And really, it never hurts to know more about the property you have invested money, time, and effort into.

Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources:  
<http://fw.ky.gov/Wildlife/Pages/Landowner-Services.aspx>

#### **About the Author:**

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