



Lesson 3: Young Forest Wildlife: American Woodcock

Theme

Focusing on conserving one “umbrella” species can help protect many other animals that utilize their same habitat.

Learning Objectives

In this lesson, students will learn about how the unique characteristics of a young forest support a wide range of species. In this lesson, students will learn how the American woodcock, has adapted to live in young forests. Students will also learn about the interconnectedness of the resources within a habitat. Students will be aware of how the RIDEM Division of Fish & Wildlife helps protect Rhode Island’s natural resources.

Corresponding Activities for this Lesson

- Habitat Circles Game
- Reading Aldo Leopold’s “Skydance”

Materials

- Young Forest Wildlife PowerPoint
- Bobcat pelt/skull replica
- Laminated black racer shed
- Cottontail rabbit skull replica

Lesson

1. **Ask students if they can remember from the last lesson what a young forest is and who lives there.**
 - Young forests are made up of tightly grouped shrubs and small trees. They last less than 20 years before changing into mature forests and are important for many different kinds of wildlife. American woodcock use the shelter of young forests for nesting and rearing their young. The food water and shelter in young forests are important to the survival of our native young forest species. What would happen if one of those resources disappeared?
 - Play Habitat Circles Game



2. Show the young forest wildlife slide.

- Explain that many animals use young forests because they provide a safe place to hide from predators with their thick and tangled brush and lots of food in the form of berries and other plants.
- Today we will focus on a young forest species that needs a little extra help, the American woodcock.

3. Show students the American woodcock slides. Ask the class to describe the woodcock and explain what each body part helps him with.

- Very large, flexible beak for digging for worms
- Tongue with rough edges
- Wings for flying
- Camouflage coloration for protection/hiding
- Big eyes to find food/see
- 360° field of vision
- All of these adaptations help the woodcock to survive
- Ask the class if anyone has had to adapt before (Ex. Had to put on more clothes to stay warm, learn a new language, etc.)

4. Have students read the folk names for the woodcock on the slide or write names on the board:

- Peentmeister, Timberdoodle, Hokumpoke, mudbat, bogsucker
- Ask students to try to read names – save bogsucker for last.
- Ask students what bogsucker might mean.
- Woodcock love to eat worms, spiders, crickets, beetles and ants from muddy areas around wetlands.
- Remember woodcock have a specially adapted long, flexible beak to get food.

5. Explain that woodcocks migrate – another adaptation

- Migration is the seasonal movement of an animal from one place to another
- Ask the class if they know of any other animals that migrate. (Ex. Ducks, geese, elephants, whales etc.)
- Why do these animals migrate? (To find food, avoid harsh weather/seasons, to have babies)



6. Read the “Skydance” excerpt by Aldo Leopold.

- Ask the class what sound the woodcock made in the story-PEENT!
- Explain that the woodcock does this in the springtime to try to find a mate
- Once they find a mate they lay about 4 eggs right on the ground
- Ask the class why the eggs need to be camouflaged – predators
- Fox, skunk, crow, mink, racoon, snake, owl – will eat adults, too!

7. Explain that the RIDEM clear cuts areas periodically to replicate the natural clearing that would occur as a result of hurricanes or flooding.

- The map on the slide shows the Great Swamp Management Area.
- The sections are dated by year of the last clear-cut. You can see each patch is at a different stage of forest succession.
- The DEM will continue to rotate cutting through these sections to ensure that there are always various stages of forest present in this area.
- The current sections of young forests will only last about 25 years before turning into a mature forest and will no longer be useful to young forest wildlife.

8. What is an umbrella species?

- Umbrella species are animals that, when protected, indirectly protect other animals that share their same habitat. Just like when you hold an umbrella over your head, it protects some of the space around you as well. Even though we may not be aiming to protect the songbirds, mammals and reptiles that live in a young forest, when we conserve habitat for woodcock we help all of the animals that live around them in the same way!
- The American woodcock is an umbrella species because they protect all of these other animals that share young forest habitats!

