Introduction

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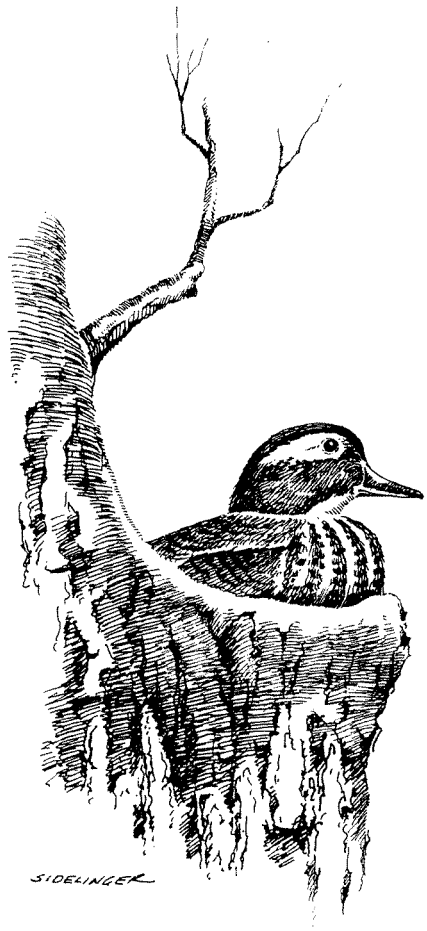

The temperate climate, productive soils, and lush forests of the South support an abundant and diverse wildlife community. But these forests and the wildlife that inhabit them have never been stable. They have continually been molded by a variety of forces. Early, during the Pleistocene period, drastic periodic climatic shifts wrought wholesale changes to the nature of southern forests. And more recently, floods, ice and wind storms, insects and diseases, and interactions of the vertebrate species themselves have played a continual role in the dynamics of these forests.

ARRIVAL OF HUMANS

Influences on the forest communities were enhanced with the arrival of the first humans over 10,000 years ago. It appears that the first human inhabitants of the region preyed upon and eliminated megafauna of the region, such as the mastodon. Southern wildlife became primary food for people of the region. Burning of the forests by natives was common. The effects of humans on southern forest systems became even more pronounced with the invasion of European settlers in the 1700s, and became more severe in the 1800s and early 1900s, as their population swelled. With settlement came exploitation of the forests and associated wildlife with little regard for the future. Settlers cleared forests for wood products and to create openings for their crops. The vast mature upland longleaf forests were cleared, as were the bottomland cypress forests. The American chestnut was eliminated from the Appalachians by the introduced chestnut blight. And to feed the expanding pioneer families, game was harvested at will.

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The temperate climate, productive soils, and diverse forests of the South support an abundant and diverse wildlife community *(US Forest Service)*.

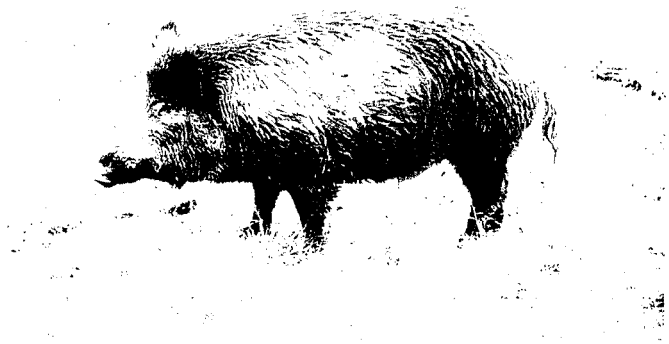
Southern forests have always been dynamic, and continue to be influenced by a variety of natural and anthropogenic forces. Right: Flooded bottom *(J. Neal)*, Bottom right: Wild Hogs *(J. Meyer)*.

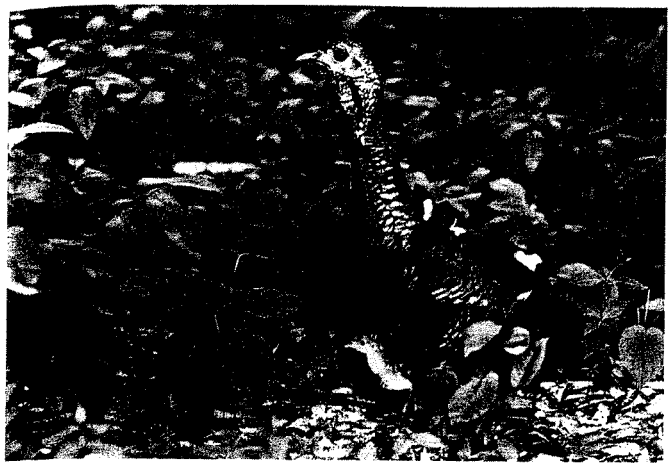
In this era of settlement and exploitation, a few wildlife species, such as the passenger pigeon, were lost.

But later, in the 1900s, began the realization that natural resources were exhaustible and threatened, there began a conservation awakening. With this conservation movement came the initiation of regeneration, in some form, of the region's forests and restoration of important game species, such as the white-tailed deer and wild turkey.

CHANGES CONTINUE

Southern forests have always been dynamic, and there continue to be changes. Natural events, such as hurricanes, still affect southern forests. And the human population of the region and its widespread influence continue to grow. Mostly introduced pests are profoundly affecting southern forest ecosystems. Some noteworthy examples illustrate. The Chinese tallow tree continues





Several species of wildlife of southern forests, such as the wild turkey, have been successfully restored *(B. Healy)*. The status of some others is unknown.

to proliferate in the deep South. Negative effects on plant communities are being wrought by the balsam wooly adelgid on Fraser fir stands in high elevations and by the gypsy moth on Appalachian oak forests. And wild hogs and their influence continue to expand in the South and elsewhere.

THE BOOK

Wildlife are natural components of southern forests and function in various ways in the forests systems. Also, wildlife is very important to the people of the region. Wildlife hunting and viewing are important recreationally and economically. There is much interest in protecting and managing southern wildlife. Although we have developed substantial information, generally, it is piecemeal and widely dispersed. In this book we chronicle the general history of southern forests and associated wildlife to its current status, present information on habitat relationships of southern wildlife, and offer practical guidelines for habitat management. This publication should benefit wildlife. It should be helpful to forest land managers of the South for assessing forest land suitability for various species or communities, determining how various land and forestry management practices affect wildlife, and for managing land for target species or communities.

Generally, the area of coverage in this book is the 13 southeastern states; bounded to the north by Virginia and Kentucky, and to the west by the forested eastern portions of Oklahoma and Texas. We present information on landscape-scale relationships and provide relative density estimates for key species by county. Several hundred species of vertebrates inhabit southern forests. Because of that large number, space limitations, and availability of information, emphasis is given to key game species, endangered species, and species and ecosystems of concern. For individual species or species groups this book should provide an introduction to and overview of habitat relationships. More detailed information for birds is contained in Hamel (1992) and Finch and Stangel (1992), and for amphibians and reptiles in Wilson (1995). Also, this book should identify gaps in our information, such as with reptiles and amphibians, and hopefully will inspire further research.

The book is divided into 10 general sections with 31 individual chapters. Although there has been an effort to maintain consistency among chapters, there are some differences. Each chapter author(s) is an expert on their subject; and writing style, area of coverage, perspective, and conclusions vary somewhat between chapters. We hope this book helps readers to better understand, appreciate, and enjoy southern wildlife.