

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

State of the birds

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The children on our street often congregate in the yard with the best play set, but recently the bright yellow slide in the yard was ruled off limits. Not because it isn't safe, rather a chickadee made a nest in a birch stump next to the base of the slide.

Chickadees are one of a handful of Eastern forest birds that successfully adapt to urban and suburban areas, however the situation has not been as good for many birds over the past forty years. A recent report on the state of birds in the U.S., written by the nation's leading bird conservation organizations, looks at trends of various suites of bird species over recent decades.

The bad news for the Southern Appalachians is that birds of eastern forests have declined since 1968, and if there is any bright side it's that the decline seems to have leveled off, though at numbers well below 1968 levels. The reasons attributed to this decline aren't surprising – rapid development, fire suppression leading to catastrophic wildfires, invasive species such as the hemlock woolly adelgid. Declines are seen in birds that require mature forests, as well as birds that need open, disturbed areas.

The report's findings aren't all negative. Although forest, grassland, and arid-land birds have declined, wetland birds, especially waterfowl, have increased dramatically in response to years of a strong focus on wetland management.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.