

Wildlife

When we think of wildlife here in Saddle Ridge, the frequently seen and more charismatic critters most easily come to mind. Deer, turkeys, black bear have been seen by most landowners and some have been lucky enough to even catch a fleeting glimpse of a bobcat. But, look a little more deeply and the real breadth of wildlife will reveal itself. Think of the incredible natural heritage of the Great Smoky Mountain National Park and then realize that we have a considerable share of that natural wealth right here in Saddle Ridge. A majority of the plant and animal species that are present in the lower elevations of the park are also found in forests that surround our homes in the foothills of the Smokies. What's more, our community actually plays an important role in protecting the resources of this world renowned park.



Forests

Forests are a good start to understanding the diversity of life in our community, since the majority of our plants and wildlife are associated with these forests. The complex combination of variety of trees, shrubs and other plants that occur in our forests is related to the particular topography, soils and slope orientation and prior history of human use. Our forests fall broadly into several categories. Oak-hickory dominated forests are most common and can be seen throughout Saddle Ridge. Cove hardwood forests occupy the cooler coves, ravines and north-facing valleys. Good examples can be seen on the lower portions of Waters End Road. Pine-oak forests occur in narrow strips along ridges. Examples of these forests can be seen along Sky Top Road, and Foothills Parkway.

Some approximate numbers of species for each animal group that could be found in Saddle Ridge are as follows:

- 45 mammals
- 100 birds
- 4 turtles
- 8 lizards
- 7 frogs and toads
- 13 salamanders
- 19 snakes (2 venomous species)

Did you know?

The Smoky Mountain region is the global center of salamander diversity. Most people are probably not aware of these small and somewhat secretive animals but they are everywhere.

Streams, Lakes and Wetlands

Saddle Ridge is dissected by numerous small streams. Many of these streams start as springs and seeps in the heads of hollows and valleys. These cool headwaters may support aquatic insects and minnows dart in stretches with year round flow. Saddle Ridge has two lakes created by the impoundment of streams. While the upper lake is deeper and cooler, both lakes have similar species of fish. Largemouth bass, bluegill

and other sunfish are common in both. Fish tend to be stunted because of overpopulation pressures.

The swamp area near the large lake provides habitat for a host of wetland species. Wood ducks, kingfishers and great blue heron are commonly seen birds. Watch for migrating blue-winged teal that swing through in small flocks during early fall as they travel to the Caribbean and beyond. Our resident Canada geese are a result of a relatively recent expansion in the range of non-migratory race of Canada geese throughout parts of this country.

Muskrats can be seen swimming in the lakes. Beaver dams that are easily visible from Chilhowee Loop provide wetland habitats and improve water quality by trapping sediments. Beavers are making a comeback in East Tennessee after being largely over trapped in the region. Beavers are common in the Little River and make their way upstream to our lake. The otter is another mammal that is recovering in east Tennessee and occasionally present in Saddle Ridge

Nearly all surface water from Saddle Ridge eventually flows past the waterfall and into Reed Creek. Aquatic surveys in this gentle stream reveal that it is in very good shape, supporting species of fish and other life that indicate high water quality. Reed Creek empties into the Little River which flows into Fort Loudon Lake, formerly known as the Tennessee River, several hundred miles later our Saddle Ridge water is mingling with the muddy waters of the Mississippi eventually passing New Orleans and mixing with the salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Did you know?

Your chances of being bitten by a poisonous snake are extremely small and very few people die from such a bite. And more people die from lightening strikes than snake bites. Both copperhead and timber rattlesnakes live in Saddle Ridge

-Alex Wyss