

Succession: From Field to Forest

Succession is a natural process. Over many decades a field will become a forest as different species of grasses, shrubs and trees replace each other in a natural parade of plants. As an area changes and matures the plants become more complex and specialized. An **abandoned field** colonized with wildflowers, grasses and sedges is slowly overgrown by **shrubs**. Laurel, azalea and huckleberry, in time are replaced by a **softwood forest**. Species of pine and cedar are in turn, slowly overtaken by a **hardwood forest**. In our region of Maryland, this forest would consist of Beech, Maples and Oaks. As the forest grows and matures; the increasing diversity of plants create many different **layers** in the forest.

Many different kinds of plants and animals take advantage of the different stages of succession due to the different kind of habitats that are available during those times. Some species are only present in one particular stage of succession, while others benefit from multiple stages and can be found overtime in the same area.

The **EASTERN MEADOWLARK** prefers to forage and nest in open grassy or abandoned fields.

The **EASTERN COTTONTAIL** is more flexible in its habitat choice and can be found in either fields, shrubs or forests.

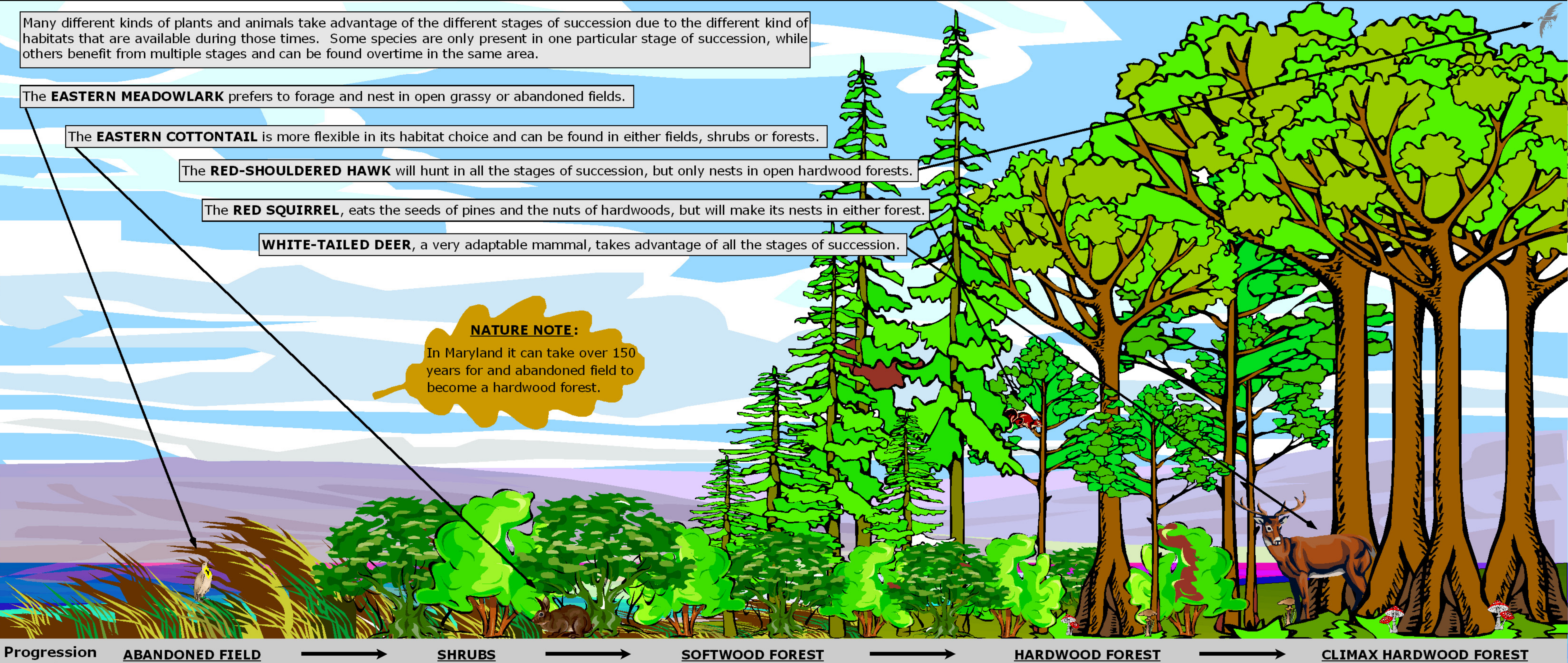
The **RED-SHOULDERED HAWK** will hunt in all the stages of succession, but only nests in open hardwood forests.

The **RED SQUIRREL**, eats the seeds of pines and the nuts of hardwoods, but will make its nests in either forest.

WHITE-TAILED DEER, a very adaptable mammal, takes advantage of all the stages of succession.

NATURE NOTE:

In Maryland it can take over 150 years for an abandoned field to become a hardwood forest.



Progression of Time ABANDONED FIELD SHRUBS SOFTWOOD FOREST HARDWOOD FOREST CLIMAX HARDWOOD FOREST



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