

HABITAT FACTORS INFLUENCING USE OF  
UPLAND AND WETLAND FORESTS BY BREEDING VEERIES  
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## ABSTRACT

Efforts to protect the wildlife habitat value of wetlands typically focus on wetland-dependent species; facultative species are seldom considered. In this study, I examined the importance of forested wetlands as breeding habitat for one common facultative species, the veery (*Catharus fuscescens*), by comparing relative use of contiguous upland and wetland forests at 3 10- to 12-ha sites in southern Rhode Island. Habitat use was documented by plotting the locations of veeries in 30-m x 30-m grid cells at each site. Sixteen surveys were conducted at each site over 2 breeding seasons. Grid cells were categorized as high-use or low-use based on the number of surveys during which a veery was observed in each cell. Habitat data collected from randomly selected cells were used to identify key factors influencing veery habitat use and to evaluate published upland and wetland Habitat Suitability Index (HSI) models for the veery. Veeries used wetland forests to a greater degree than upland forests at 2 sites ( $P < 0.05$ ), and to a similar degree at the third site. Medium (1.0-3.0 m) deciduous shrub cover appeared to be a key habitat factor influencing the use of upland habitats by the veery. The performance of the published upland HSI model was improved by substituting medium deciduous shrub cover for total deciduous shrub cover. Evaluation of the published wetland HSI model produced inconclusive results. Wetland forests appear to provide more suitable breeding habitat for the veery than upland forests at some locations. Wetland managers and regulatory agencies should consider the veery, and possibly other facultative species, when evaluating the wildlife habitat function of wetlands and when assessing the potential impacts of land use changes.