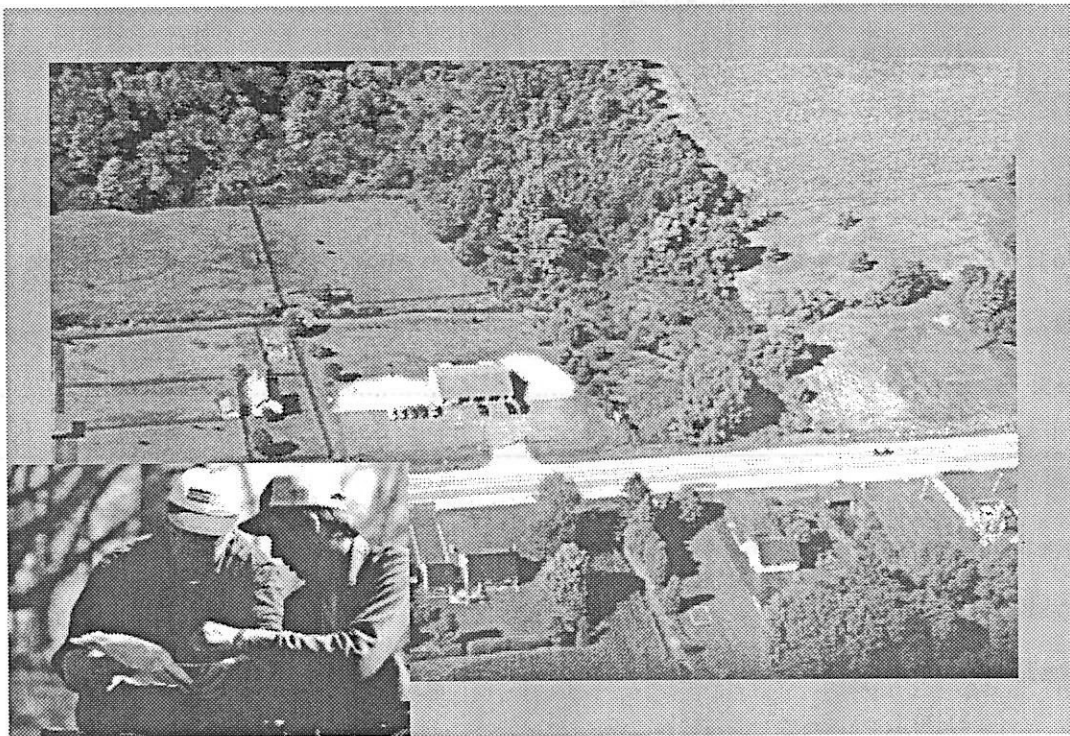


Site Selection Process and Landowner
Contact Methodology for the
Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study



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Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	2
2.0	Site Selection Process	2
	2.1 Patch Size and Distribution	2
3.0	Landowner Contact Methodology	3
	3.1 Landowner Follow-up	4
	References	4

Table 1:	Number of Patches surveyed for birds in each size category in each Trial Landscape	2
Table 2:	Number of Patches surveyed for flora in each size category in each Trial Landscape	2
Table 3:	Summary of Landowner Consent	4

Appendices

Appendix A - Request for Permission to Access Property

Appendix B - News Release

Appendix C - Results from Field Visits

1.0 Introduction

The following sections outline the site selection process and landowner contact methodology used in the Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study (OCTES). Section 2 discusses the methods employed by the OCTES Team in selecting vegetation patches for the field assessments (bird and flora surveys) and Section 3 discusses the details of landowner contact, from the introductory letter to landowner follow-up. Both sections outline methodologies which can be used by other agencies, municipalities and/or interest groups involved in similar natural heritage or ecosystem studies.

2.0 Site Selection Process

Oxford County was divided into eight trial landscapes (study areas) according to characteristics such as soils, geology, physiography and topography (see Nethercott, 1997). Within each trial landscape, vegetation patches were selected to represent the range of patch sizes present in the eight trial landscapes. The range of patch sizes is identified in Tables 1 and 2. It is noted that not all eight trial landscapes have the same number of patches or the same size class distribution.

Landowner consent was obtained to survey the selected vegetation patches. If landowner permission could not be obtained for all or most of a patch, then an alternate patch was chosen. In some trial landscapes, field surveys could not be completed due to the lack of landowner consent. This is evident when the total number of patches surveyed for birds and flora is compared with the totals in parentheses, which represent the original target number of patches.

Some vegetation patches originally identified as single units were divided into smaller patches along gaps such as roads, railways, service corridors and rivers. For logistic reasons, some larger patches were broken into sub-units for the survey, and the information collected was later combined for analysis. The division of the patches into sub-units was not always consistent between the two observers; therefore, the number of patches and size class distribution differ slightly between the bird and floral surveys. All but one of the vegetation patches were visited for both the bird and floral surveys.

2.1 Patch Size and Distribution

The number of patches surveyed for breeding birds and flora in each size category in each trial landscape are presented in Tables 1 and 2. Although most of the

patches are the same for both surveys, some differences are apparent among the smaller patches. These differences have been accounted for as larger patches were broken down into separate sub-units more often for the flora survey.

Table 1: Number of patches surveyed for birds in each size category in each Trial Landscape.

Birds:

Trial Landscape	<4	4-10	>10-20	>20-30	>30-40	>40 (ha)	TOTAL
1	1	3	2			3	9
2a	3	4	1	2			10
2b	2	5	2	1			10
2c	6	1	1			1	9
3	1	1	1	2		1	6
4	2	2	1			1	6
5	1	4	2	2			9
6	4	2	2			1	9
TOTAL	20 (22)	22 (19)	12 (16)	7 (5)	0 (5)	7 (9)	68

Table 2: Number of patches surveyed for flora in each size category in each Trial Landscape.

Flora:

Trial Landscape	<4	4-10	>10-20	>20-30	>30-40	>40 (ha)	TOTAL
1	4	3	1			3	11
2a	3	4	1	2			10
2b	2	5	2	1			10
2c	6	1	1			1	9
3	1	1	1	2		1	6
4	2	2	1			1	6
5	1	4	2	2			9
6	4	2	2			1	9
TOTAL	23 (22)	22 (19)	11 (16)	7 (5)	0 (5)	7 (9)	70 (Bowles, 1997)

3.0 Landowner Contact Methodology

The landowner contact methodology incorporated information and ideas from other landowner contact programs as well as input from the OCTES Team. The contact process was aimed at achieving a high landowner consent rate as well as attaining or enhancing a partnership between the primary project partners and the landowner. Some of the landowners in the eight trial landscapes were also asked to participate in a landowner perceptions and attitudes survey by the University of Guelph. The intent of this survey was to partially address the cultural component of OCTES as well as understand and integrate the role of landowners in natural heritage systems planning. The methods and data of this survey can be found in the document, *The Role of Landowners in Natural Heritage Systems Planning: An Oxford County Case Study*, 1997, I. Vandershot, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario.

In the early stages of the study, landowners within each of the eight trial landscapes were contacted to request access to their properties. This task was moved ahead in the project schedule in order to place greater emphasis on obtaining landowner consent. The UTRCA's past experience with similar studies has shown that the success of a study is largely dependent on the success of the landowner contact program. Considerable time and effort was spent in designing a process which would yield high consent rates.

Property assessment records were obtained through the County of Oxford for all landowners within the eight trial landscapes. UTRCA staff identified all properties that contained a portion of a vegetation patch (i.e., woodland or wetland) based on the 1:10,000 scale assessment role maps provided by the County. For each property selected, a landowner number was assigned to the property for internal use. A computer data base was created to record the names and mailing addresses of the landowners, the location of their properties and the trial landscape number. Packages were generated and mailed to 300 landowners, representing 371 properties in the study areas.

Special attention was given by the OCTES Team to developing a mailing package that clearly identified the reason for contacting landowners (see Appendix A). The landowner contact letter was carefully structured to explain why the study was important; who the study involved; why a particular site was chosen; when field visits would occur; what would be required of the landowner; and how landowners could get involved in the study. The language of the letter was positive, friendly and professional. A woodland graphic was

selected and shown on the letter to represent the area of interest. A fact sheet was also created to provide additional information on the study and general facts about Oxford County. The consent form was carefully designed to avoid confusion when selecting yes or no consent. A comment section was added to allow landowners to ask questions or state comments about the study, without requiring a long distance telephone call. A self addressed, postage paid envelope was included in the mailing package to ensure there would be no financial cost to the landowners when returning their completed consent form(s).

Most of the packages were mailed at the end of October 1995. Some packages for landowners in the Town of Otterville were mailed one month later after staff received a smaller scale map to accurately determine the lots affected by a vegetation patch. Consent forms began to arrive back at the UTRCA administration office within a few days after they were mailed. Approximately 10 landowners phoned staff within two weeks of receiving the letter, either to confirm some of the information contained in the letter or to voice concerns regarding the study. Some forms were not completed due to incorrect addresses or change of ownership. Most of these forms were re-mailed with the correct addresses. The UTRCA followed up the landowner packages with a news release intended to remind or prompt individuals to return their consent forms (see Appendix B).

By the end of February, 1996, approximately 43% of the consent forms were returned to the UTRCA. For those landowners who did not return their forms, the OCTES Team initiated landowner contact by telephone. This process immediately followed the selection of vegetation patches for field survey. Telephone calls were also made to those landowners requiring 24 hour notice prior to a site visit. UTRCA staff with past experience in landowner contact assisted the OCTES Team by giving instructions and helpful hints on personal contact with landowners. For those landowners who gave verbal consent, the date and time of the telephone call was recorded as well as the approximate date of the field visit. Depending on the nature of the telephone conversation, additional information and consent form(s) were mailed to landowners to confirm details. Two landowners in this study were contacted by a personal visit only because they did not have telephones in their homes.

Table 3 summarizes landowner consent obtained for this study. The average response rate, which consists of both "yes" and "no" consent, was 68%, with rates ranging from 46% to 79% in the eight trial landscapes. The positive response to our request to access properties in the eight trial landscapes was greater than anticipated. The increased detail and information provided to the landowners, combined with a communications plan

and personal contact by telephone, may have had an overall positive impact on the consent rates. However, this presumption does not apply to Trial Landscape 3. A possible reason for the low, mainly negative response rate there may be related to a number of factors including the timing of this study in relation to the release of environmental policies in the Draft County of Oxford Official Plan. Other reasons may have been more local in nature.

Table 3. Summary of Landowner Consent

Trial Landscape	Consent Yes (%)	Consent No (%)	Total Response (%)	Total Number of Properties
1	45	33	78	58
2a	43	36	79	28
2b	54	15	69	61
2c	49	15	64	33
3	20	26	46	101
4	61	3	64	33
5	39	28	67	18
6	62	13	75	39
Total	47	21	68	371 (total sum)
Average				

*Averages are rounded to the nearest half percent (0.5%).

3.1 Landowner Follow-up

Following the completion of the field surveys and data analysis, a landowner follow-up package was developed and mailed to landowners participating in the study. The package consisted of a thank you letter, a woodlot fact sheet, and a map of the targeted trial landscape (see Appendix C). The primary purpose of the letter was to thank landowners for granting permission to access their properties for the field surveys. In addition, the letter described the information collected on the landowner's property (or properties) during the field visit and elaborated on the data contained on the fact sheet. The goal of the study was reiterated and a name and telephone number of a contact person was included for any questions regarding the letter and/or material. The map of the landowner's trial landscape was also included to identify the boundaries of the study area and the patch size classification system.

Landowner follow-up is an integral part of a successful landowner contact program. The information package that was provided to landowners was intended to assist them in understanding the importance of their woodlot(s) and other woodlots in Oxford County. Landowner contact will continue to be an important aspect of the OCTES study as final reports are completed and newsletters, workshops and/or open houses

are scheduled. Long term landowner follow-up will be key to developing and maintaining a positive relationship with the landowners in this study.

References

Bowles, J. *Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study: Life Sciences Report.*

Hilts, S.G., et al., 1991. *Natural Heritage Landowner Contact Training Manual.* Natural Heritage League, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario.

Hilts, S.G. and T.C. Moull, 1985. *Landowner Contact Pilot Project Final Report: 1984.* Department of Land Resources Science, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario.

McLellan, P.W. and M. Garscadden, 1984. *A Proposal for a Landowner Notification Programme for Ontario.* Produced for the Natural Heritage League, Ontario.

Nethercott, D. 1997. *Assessment of Abiotic Resource Information: An Evaluation of Abiotic Resources for the Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study.* UTRCA.

Vanderschot, I. 1997. *The Role of Landowners in Natural Heritage Systems Planning: An Oxford County Case Study.* Thesis, University of Guelph, Ontario.

Appendix A

Request for Permission to Access Property



[The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to low contrast and scan quality. It appears to be the main body of the document, likely containing the request for permission to access property.]



October 18, 1995



Dear

RE: Request for Permission to Access Your Property

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, Grass Roots Woodstock and the County of Oxford are jointly involved in a study of woodlands and wetlands in Oxford County. It is called the Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study (OCTES). The information gathered through this study will assist the County of Oxford, Conservation Authority and landowners in planning for a healthy natural environment for the future. A healthy environment provides many benefits such as improved water quality, continuous ground and surface water flows, fertile soils, healthy aquatic habitat and a diversity of wildlife and plants. The purpose of this letter is to request your permission to allow Conservation Authority staff to enter your property to collect information for this study.

Based on groupings of characteristics such as soils, groundwater and geology, the Conservation Authority has chosen eight specific areas within which to complete further study at the field level. The woodland or wetland on your property is within one of these areas. As such, we require consent for access before starting field work at your site. Conservation Authority staff will visit a number of properties where we have received consent to collect additional information on woodland and wetland patches. This information will be used to determine how each woodland and wetland contributes to the overall natural area system. Each site visit would be scheduled with your permission. Site visits are planned to occur during the spring and summer months of 1996. The information collected from each site will be provided to the landowner following completion of the project at the end of 1996.

We recognize that many of the remaining woodlands and wetlands in the County of Oxford are existing due to the strong stewardship values of the landowners. We hope to support past accomplishments through this study and foster a conservation ethic throughout the County. Your involvement would be greatly appreciated.

Please complete and return the enclosed consent form, including your telephone number and the name of a contact person. We request that forms be returned to our office within two weeks of receipt. If you have any questions concerning this study, please contact Kelly Wright or the undersigned at (519) 451-2800 between 8:15 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday to Friday. If we are out of the office or your call is after work hours, please leave a message (voice mail ext. 261 or 236) and we will return your call. If you wish us to contact you, note any questions regarding this study on the consent form.

Yours truly,
UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Susan Grigg, Ecology/Biology Specialist
SG/KW/sg
Encl.

OCTES FACTS

- ◆ Funding for this study of woodlands and wetlands within Oxford County was gained through the Ivey Foundation of London, the County of Oxford and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority.
 - ◆ *Woodlands* is a general term that collectively refers to areas occupied by trees, treed areas, woodlots and forested areas. By definition, *woodlands* are complex ecosystems of different tree species, shrubs, ground vegetation and soil complexes that provide habitat for many plants and animals.
 - ◆ *Wetlands* are lands that are seasonally or permanently flooded by shallow water as well as lands where the water table is close to the surface; in either case the presence of abundant water has caused the formation of hydric (wet) soils and has favoured the dominance of water tolerant plants. The main types of wetlands are fen, bog, marsh, swamp and pond.
- ◆ We will be using the information gathered to find out the health of the *ecosystem* of Oxford County, in definition the health of the systems of plants, animals and microorganisms that function together with the non-living components of their environment.
- ◆ Landowners are being asked to allow access to the woodland and/or wetland area of their property so that we can study how these patches of natural area contribute to the overall health of the environment within the County of Oxford.
- ◆ A quote from a traveller in 1837 describes the original habitat of Oxford County:

"Oxford, or rather Ingersoll where we stopped to dine and rest previous to plunging into an extensive pine forest called the Pine Woods...The forest land through which I had lately passed, was principally covered with *hard timber*, as oak, walnut, elm, basswood. We were now in a forest of pines, rising tall and dark, and monotonous on either side... These seven miles of pine forest we traversed in three hours and a half, and then succeeded some miles of open flat country, called the Oak Plains, and so called because covered with thickets and groups of oak, dispersed with a park-like and beautiful effect; and still flowers, flowers everywhere."(Jameson, 1838; from *Winter Studies and Summer Rambles in Canada Volume 2*).
- ◆ This study will determine the existing condition of the ecosystems, given the cultural (human) impacts that have taken place during the last 200 years. Historical surveys from the late 1700's show that 75% of Oxford County was forested. Between 1837 and 1960, over half of this forest cover was removed by settlers for agriculture, timber production and settlement. Current statistics show that today, only 8% of the land base remains in forest cover.
- ◆ Through this study, many partnerships are being established between agencies, groups and the public in Oxford County. The Grand River, Long Point Region and Catfish Creek Conservation Authorities, whose watersheds extend into Oxford County, and other agencies such as the Ministry of Natural Resources are involved. The Oxford County Federation of Agriculture and Christian Farmers Federation have been informed about this project, and will be kept up to date on our progress.

LANDOWNER CONSENT FORM FOR ACCESS TO PROPERTY

Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study

Please complete and sign this form and return it in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope.

Permission is granted for qualified personnel, contracted by the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, to be on lands described as Lot _____ Concession _____ in the Township of _____, owned by _____ from the dates of February 1, 1996 to November 30, 1996 for the purpose of conducting natural area studies. I understand that I will be contacted to arrange the date and time of the field site visit(s).

Please check the appropriate box below, sign and date:

- Yes**, the undersigned allows access to the above noted property

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Check if 24 hour notification prior to each site visit is required

- No**, access is refused to the above noted property

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Contact Person(s): _____

Telephone Number: _____

Note any questions or concerns that you require answered regarding this study below.

Please be assured that Conservation Authority staff and their consultants carry full and complete liability coverage while working on private property. Thank you for your assistance with this study.

For office use only

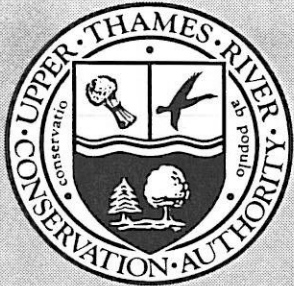
Trial Landscape # _____

Landowner # _____

Appendix B

News Release





Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

R.R. # 6 London, Ontario N6A 4C1

Telephone (519) 451-2800

Telecopier (519) 451-1188

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

November 15, 1995

Contact:

Lisa King, Ecosystem Planner or Dave Martin, Community Education Coordinator

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (519) 451-2800

Landowners Key to Success of Study

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority is coordinating a two year study of woodlands and wetlands in Oxford County. Eight study areas have been selected to represent the entire County. Within these areas, nearly 300 landowners have been asked to allow UTRCA staff to examine the wooded areas on their properties. The information collected will indicate how their woodlands and wetlands contribute to the environmental health of Oxford County.

The UTRCA is relying on the consent of these landowners to ensure the success of the project. "An important part of the study is landowner cooperation," said Lisa King, Ecosystem Planner with the UTRCA. "We realize that, in many cases, remaining woodlots and wetlands owe their existence to past stewardship efforts by landowners."

The information collected will help the Authority advise landowners and the County about how best to improve the quality of natural habitats. Some landowners are interested in participating in restoration projects down the road.

"Everyone gains from a healthy environment," emphasized King. "There are many benefits, including improved water quality, continuous ground and surface water flow, fertile soils, and a diversity of plants and animals."

The project is supported by many other partners. The Ivey Foundation has granted 50% of the cost through the "Biodiversity in Forest-Dominated Ecosystems" fund. The UTRCA and the County of Oxford are each providing 25% towards the \$89,000 project. The County is also providing base mapping services. Grassroots Woodstock is acting as a link with the community. Three other Conservation Authorities, the Grand River, Long Point Region and Catfish Creek, and the Ministry of Natural Resources are providing data from previous studies.

Appendix C

Results from Field Visits

[The following text is extremely faint and illegible due to low contrast and scan quality. It appears to be a list of field visit results or a detailed report, but the specific content cannot be transcribed accurately.]



January 10, 1997

FIELD(FIRST NAME) FIELD(LAST NAME)
FIELD(STREET)
FIELD(CITY_PROV) FIELD(POSTAL CODE)

Dear Landowner:

Re: Results from Field Visit to your Property

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority and its partners would like to thank you for your involvement in the **Oxford County Terrestrial Ecosystems Study (OCTES)**. As promised, we are providing you with information about what we found during our field visit to your property.

With the permission of landowners, information has been collected on a total of 96 properties in eight "trial landscapes" (study areas) across the County. The information collected on woodlots in each of the trial landscapes will be used to establish goals for creating a healthier natural environment in Oxford County. A map of your trial landscape and a fact sheet for your woodlot are attached.

Lists of plants and breeding bird species were compiled for each woodlot visited. A scoring method was applied to the **plants** to give an indication of the quality and health of your woodlot. This average "conservatism" score is on the fact sheet. The average conservatism score for all the woodlots in this study was 4.2, with scores ranging from 3.0 to 4.8. The higher the score, the more likely that your woodlot is reasonably undisturbed and of high quality relative to other woodlots in the study. Other data recorded during the field visit include a list and brief description of major **vegetation community types**. This information gives an indication of habitat diversity, moisture, age and other conditions of a woodlot. The number and type of vegetation community types found in your woodlot are listed on the fact sheet.

The number and types of **birds** present in a woodlot during the breeding season provide additional information on quality and health. Some bird species, especially some long distance migrants, require large areas of undisturbed habitat in order to breed. These are known as "forest interior species" and their presence indicates a woodlot of special importance to the County. The total number of birds and total number of forest interior birds found in your woodlot are recorded on the fact sheet.

We hope the information enclosed is of interest to you. The UTRCA is currently preparing a final report for OCTES detailing our objectives, methodologies, results and recommendations. Again, we thank you. Your participation in this study has been greatly appreciated. If you have any questions regarding the information enclosed, please do not hesitate to contact the undersigned at **(519) 451-2800**, extension 246.

Yours truly,
UPPER THAMES RIVER CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

Lisa King, Ecosystem Planner

Encl.

OXFORD COUNTY TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEM STUDY WOODLOT SUMMARY FACT SHEET

Patch :

Trial Landscape :

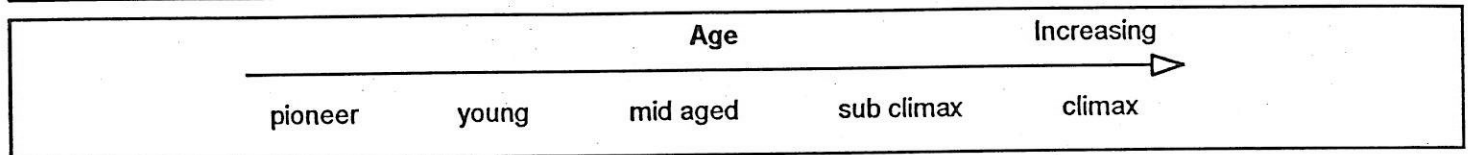
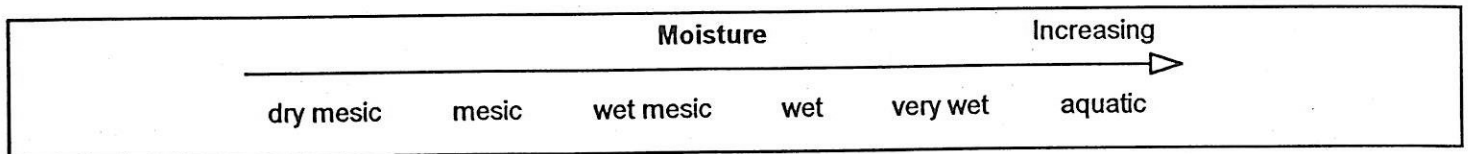
Area :

ha

AVERAGE CONSERVATISM SCORE :

DOMINANT VEGETATION COMMUNITIES

Community Type	Dominant Species	Moisture	Age	Landscape



BIRDS

Total number of Bird Species recorded :

Total number of Forest Interior Bird Species recorded :

Forest Interior Birds