

Shady Valley

program



Bog turtle in Shady Valley. Photo © Byron Jorjorian

About Shady Valley

Located in far northeastern Tennessee, Shady Valley is a broad, flat bowl of green fields ringed by the Blue Ridge Mountains. This high-elevation valley (2,800 feet) was a refuge for numerous plants and animals during the last Ice Age. When the ice sheets retreated, wetland meadows (or bogs) fed by creeks and streams were left. These mountain bogs once covered more than 1,000 acres on the valley floor, sheltering many rare plants and animals. The Nature Conservancy has been working to conserve the lands and waters of Shady Valley since 1978.



Shady Valley, Johnson County
1st Congressional District

Why We Work Here

The high-elevation wetlands of Shady Valley are globally rare remnants of a once vast system of mountain bogs and marshy meadowlands in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This unusual place is home to many rare plants and animals more commonly known to northern environments. For example, Shady Valley is one of only two places in Tennessee where wild cranberries grow naturally.

The Nature Conservancy has worked successfully to preserve and restore the few mountain bog sites still remaining in Shady Valley. These restorations have been identified as the single most important factor in the long-term protection of rare wetland species like the wild cranberry and the bog turtle in Shady Valley. Visitors are invited to view our work in progress at our four nature preserves.



Orchard bog cranberries. Photo © Gabby Call/TNC



Orchard Bog. Photo © Byron Jorjorian

Our Preserves

Today the Conservancy has 4 preserves in Shady Valley, encompassing more than 700 acres. About two-thirds of the acreage is in mountain land and one-third is in restored wetlands on the valley floor. These preserves are open year-round, dawn to dusk.

Orchard Bog and Quarry Bog: Our restoration work in Shady began at Orchard Bog in 1997. Today this preserve encompasses 169 acres along Beaverdam Creek. Its wetlands contain rare plants such as wild cranberry, tawny cottongrass, and Nuttall pondweed.

The site also draws many birds, especially during spring and fall migrations. About 2 miles downstream along Beaverdam Creek, Quarry Bog contains 65 acres of wetlands and also harbors numerous birds and other wildlife.

Schoolyard Springs: The Conservancy acquired this preserve in 1998. The 22-acre property features a pond and surrounding marsh fed by artesian springs. Schoolyard Springs is a relic of forested ponds that once dotted the valley floor. An elevated boardwalk allows visitors to view the springs without getting wet.

John R. Dickey Birch Branch Sanctuary: Donated in 1996 by Marie Dickey Kalman, this 469-acre preserve was originally purchased by Mrs. Kalman's grandfather, Dr. John R. Dickey.

Within this preserve are steep, forested hillsides, rocky streams, and rolling fields. It is surrounded on all sides by the Cherokee National Forest and conservation easement lands. Four trails range in difficulty from moderate to strenuous. **Visitation to this gated preserve is by appointment only.**

Our Conservation Projects

Stream and Wetland Restoration: In 1997, the Conservancy embarked on east Tennessee's largest wetland restoration project. Today the Conservancy owns and manages more than 230 acres of restored streams and wetlands in Shady Valley.

Bog Turtle Tracking: The wetlands of Shady Valley are the only location in Tennessee where North America's smallest turtle still thrives in the wild. Since 2001, scientists have been tracking the movements of these turtles in Shady Valley using small radio transmitters in a partnership involving the Conservancy, the Knoxville Zoo, and the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency. These studies have shown that the restored wetlands are expanding the turtles' range and numbers in the valley.

Bringing Back the Red Spruce: The red spruce, an evergreen usually found in more northern climates, was once abundant throughout Shady Valley. Unfortunately, land clearing nearly obliterated the red spruce. By 2005, only one mature tree with cones was left. Before that tree died, Conservancy staff collected its seeds and propagated them. Today young red spruce trees are now growing once again in Orchard Bog Preserve, where one day they will tower over the wetlands as they did long ago.

Native Cranberry Nursery:

Shady Valley's high elevation and cool temperatures made it an ideal habitat for wild cranberries, which once dotted the bogs that covered hundreds of acres in the valley. Now that The Nature Conservancy's wetlands restoration projects are well-established and thriving, the Conservancy has joined forces with the Shady Valley Ruritan Club to create a cranberry nursery stocked with cuttings from Shady Valley's few remaining wild cranberry populations. Once the plants have matured in the nursery, volunteers will plant them in Orchard Bog Preserve.

For information on how you can support the Conservancy's work, please call our Philanthropy Department: (615) 383-9909.

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