



Wetland Animals

In North Carolina



THE BASICS

Who lives in a wetland?

Think about all the animals you've seen where you live. There are a lot of animals that live in North Carolina. Our wetlands make a great home for many kinds of animals. Animals can find good food and shelter in wetlands! Some animals can't survive anywhere but wetlands. Some baby animals need wetlands too. Wetlands are the perfect places for those baby animals to grow and learn how to find food.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

The availability of water and wide range of plants in wetlands make them a cozy place for many animals to live.

Most types of animals you can think of that are native to North Carolina, no matter their size, can be found in a wetland. Bugs, frogs and salamanders, fish, birds, snakes and turtles, and mammals like mice, squirrels, deer, and bears all like to use wetlands. In fact, 70% of the endangered species in our state depend on wetlands to survive! Wetlands provide them with the space they need to live and get food. Wetlands are also a great place for migrating animals to rest. For example, Tundra Swans migrate from their nesting grounds in Canada all the way to eastern North Carolina to spend their winters in our state's wetlands.



Bullfrog



Great egrets



Banded water snake



LET'S GET TECHNICAL

Wetlands are unique habitats for various species of wildlife and are excellent homes for species at all trophic levels.

All three wetland criteria (water, soil, and plants) provide different benefits. The water provides a habitat for aquatic animals and also a source of drinking water for land animals. The soil is home to tons of crawling insects and other macroinvertebrates, and provides the nutrients for many plants. The plants provide food for many animals, while also sheltering them from predators and extreme weather.

Invertebrates

Worms, insects (e.g., butterflies, dragonflies, damselflies, craneflies, mosquitoes, deer flies), crayfish, snails, and clams love wetlands because they are full of dead plant material to eat, and water that they need. Some of these animals like to burrow in the soil and under leaf litter, some like to live on or near the surface of the water, and some like to feed on other animals in the wetlands.

If you like to eat shellfish, you can also thank wetlands for acting as nurseries for clams, oysters, crayfish, and more! North Carolina's shellfish industry brought in over \$47 million in 2017, a value achieved in part by the state's wetlands.

Vertebrates

Amphibians in particular are very dependent on wetlands for their survival. Salamanders, frogs, and toads like to lay their eggs in ephemeral (temporary) pools found in wetlands, where there are

no predators present to eat their eggs. North Carolina has some of the richest amphibian diversity in the nation, with over 90 species of amphibians! Many reptiles are found in wetlands as well. Snakes, turtles, and lizards roam the land searching for food and shelter.

Mammals live in wetlands too. They are the most visible critters and often what gets everyone the most excited. A wide variety of mammals use wetlands for habitat because of the good plant cover and availability of water. Otter, beaver, coyotes and bobcats, deer, bears, elk, muskrats, and other small mammals can be seen in North Carolina's wetlands.

North Carolina's wetlands are full of birds! This is because they are excellent sources of food, water, and shelter for birds. Egrets and the great blue heron are large wading birds that build nests near wetlands and feed in their shallow waters. Migrating birds like snow geese or falcons will stop in our wetlands to take a rest from flight and refuel. Many types of ducks rely on wetlands during migration or year-round to raise their young and feed. One-third of the worldwide population of Northern Pintail ducks overwinters on Lake Mattamuskeet, a large wetland in eastern North Carolina.

Wetlands are like big cafeterias for the animals within them. The high diversity of animals in wetlands makes for a full food web. Abundant invertebrates provide a strong foundation as prey species whose predators in turn also make great prey for larger animals. Many species in North Carolina depend on wetlands to provide the food and space they need to survive.



Zebra swallowtail



Crayfish



Green tree frog



River otter



Elk

SUPPLEMENTAL LINKS

Glossary: <http://www.ncwetlands.org/wp-content/uploads/NCWetlands-Glossary-of-wetland-terms.pdf>

Curriculum: 1.L.1, 4.L.1, 5.L.2, 8.L.3



CITATION

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www.ncwetlands.org

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