

# VIEWING WILDLIFE AT SWEETWATER WETLANDS

Our presence in the outdoor environment is very obvious to the local animals. We may not see them, but they are quite aware of us. Our movement, behavior, and even our smell influence how animals react to our presence. When visiting Sweetwater Wetlands and other outdoor sites there are some very simple things we can do to be more successful in observing nature.



**USING YOUR SENSES.** Most humans rely on their sense of sight to gather information about their environment. Try adjusting the way you look at things. Instead of looking for specific shapes, relax your eyes a bit and try to detect motion. Can you spot a well-camouflaged animal hiding in the vegetation? Anything under water? When it comes to detecting wildlife, we can be more successful if we use some of our other senses as well. Some animals can be detected by smell. Also, listen carefully. Many birds at the wetlands hide among the cattails and bulrush. However, these birds can be very vocal! Listen carefully

for the metallic call of the red-winged blackbird or the chatterly trill of the marsh wren. You might hear the wings of a dove as it flies overhead or the splash of a turtle slipping into the water. Or you may hear a bird or small mammal rustling in the dry leaves under a shrub. Remember, your own silence will help you better detect the sounds in nature.

**BE AN ANIMAL.** Imagine what you would be doing if you were an animal at this location. Where would you hide? What would you eat? What kinds of things would frighten you? If you think like an animal, chances are you will be more sensitive to where to look to see one. You might also realize that your own human presence is potentially frightening: how can you be more considerate of the animals? Remember: you are now in their habitat!

**SLOW AND STEALTHY.** In nature, animals primarily run to escape danger or chase prey. When they detect another creature moving quickly, it's only natural that they would run away or try to hide. Move slowly and be conscious of how you step. Do you tromp along or can you be stealthy? When approaching a pond or going around a blind corner, slow down and approach quietly. Remember, stay calm and quiet and you could see some amazing wildlife behavior.

**WHAT ARE THEY DOING?** When you do see wildlife, take your time to observe its behavior. It's one thing to see a coot swim by but it's quite another to watch as it drags a piece of cattail all the way across a pond to build its nest. Animals exhibit all kinds of nesting, courtship, territorial and feeding behavior. They do all these incredible things right in front of our eyes! But we must be still and observe and see not only the animal but also what it is doing.





### ACTIVITY: SENSING WILDLIFE

Search for signs. Sometimes wildlife remains quiet and hidden. But we know they're there. Looking for signs of wildlife is fun and challenging. Each species has its own distinct tracks and scat (feces). You can learn these and identify wildlife by its signs! Look for other signs like grasses matted down that might show where an animal rested. Chewed prickly pear is often sign of javelina or pack rats. How many different animals can you detect by their signs alone?



*Directions: Can you match the animals with the signs they leave? Draw a line from each animal to its tracks and / or scat. (Note: Only mammal scat is included.) Look for these signs at Sweetwater Wetlands!*



COYOTE



GREAT BLUE HERON



DUCK



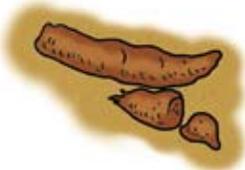
GAMBEL'S QUAIL



BOBCAT



RACCOON



## SWEETWATER THROUGH THE SEASONS

Sweetwater Wetlands, like anywhere, changes through the seasons. What you might or might not see during your visit depends on the time of year you go. Below are just some of the things to look for during the different seasons of the year.

### SPRING

- catkins on cottonwoods and willows
- birds building nests
- courtship displays
- blooming plants
- insect activity
- migrating birds

### SUMMER

- trees fully leafed out
- young coots
- dragonflies
- baby rabbits
- mosquitoes
- quail in pairs with young
- breeding frogs and turtles
- aquatic insect activity
- snakes
- lush vegetation
- red-winged blackbirds
- lizards
- lots of insects



### FALL

- eclipse (drab) plumage in ducks
- quail in coveys
- leaves falling from trees
- lots of dragonflies
- insect behavior
- lots of bullfrogs
- migrating birds

### WINTER

- small wintering birds
- yellow-headed blackbirds
- cattail going to seed
- sunning turtles
- leafless trees
- saltbush gone to seed
- brown and downed rushes
- lots of northern shoveler ducks



## MY VISIT TO SWEETWATER WETLANDS

Are you ready to visit Sweetwater Wetlands? One way to prepare for any field trip, is to study the plants and animals you might see there. This will help you know what to look for and where in the habitat to look for it. Use field guides such as the *Plants and Animals of Sweetwater Wetlands*. Develop a mental image of that plant or animal and you just might recognize it when you see it, even if you have never seen it before!



*Directions: In the space below, make a list of ten organisms (plants and/or animals) that you expect to see during your visit to Sweetwater Wetlands. Refer to the *Plants and Animals of Sweetwater Wetlands* at the end of this book and the lists in *Sweetwater Through the Seasons* (previous page), to help you with your list. Be sure to consider the time of year of your visit. Beside each plant or animal, list where in the habitat you expect it might be found.*

NAME OF ORGANISM:

PREFERRED HABITAT:

1

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## ACTIVITY – GUIDED JOURNALING



*Directions: Choose one of the organisms you see Sweetwater Wetlands. Take time to observe that organism and use this space to describe and draw that organism in more detail. (Note: If you are not planning a visit to the wetlands, choose an organism that you could see there and answer the questions.)*

Name of your organism:

.....

Where exactly did you see your organism:

.....

In which wetland zone(s) is your organism typically found:

.....

Describe adaptations your organisms has to help it survive in its habitat:

.....

If your organism is an animal, what was it doing when you saw it? (Describe its behavior.):

.....

Draw your organism. Include features such as distinctive characteristics, colors and markings.





## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

This may include poems, drawings, leaf rubbings..... Use your Imagination!

