

Keep Texas Wild

WONDROUS WETLANDS

Diversity rules where water meets land.



» WET + LAND = WONDERLAND

WHAT DO YOU CALL PLACES with soggy soil, shallow water and plants with wet feet? Wetlands! Wetlands help keep our homes from flooding and our water from getting gross. Since they also supply lots of different kinds of food for lots of different kinds of animals, you can also call wetlands nature's best supermarkets. When many different animals live in one place we say there is "diversity." Where water and earth meet, living conditions are especially good for animals at the bottom of the food chain. That's great news for animals further up on the food chain because that means they'll have plenty to eat. Texas has two main types of wetlands: freshwater and coastal. Diversity rules at both, but since coastal wetlands have some salt in the water, they attract different kinds of critters than freshwater wetlands.

Pied-billed grebe eating a crawfish.

» FRESHWATER WETLANDS «

THINK OF FRESHWATER WETLANDS as giant sponges. When it rains, not all water can soak into the ground, so wetlands give it a place to go. They also give wildlife an awesome place to live!

AMERICAN ALLIGATOR

WE ALMOST LOST this giant reptile to extinction, but thanks to protection first provided by Texans in 1969, you won't see the words "American alligator" on the endangered species list anymore. Hooray!

GREAT EGRET

GRAB YOUR METER STICK and take a good look at it. That's how tall this kind of white egret stands. This dramatic bird makes an "S" shape with its neck as it flies.

ALLIGATOR SNAPPING TURTLE

NATURE GAVE SNAPPERS the ability to pull a sneaky trick: A bright-red, worm-shaped piece of flesh acts as a lure to attract unsuspecting prey. When animals come too close to investigate ... SNAP!

GREEN TREE FROG

THESE BRIGHT GREEN AMPHIBIANS would rather walk away from danger than jump. You might not always notice their white lips, but when you do, it'll be at night since these frogs are nocturnal.

WATER STRIDER

IT MIGHT SEEM AS IF THESE ZIPPY DUDES wear roller-skates, but it's their hair-covered legs that let them zoom all over the water's surface. When striders catch a meal, they use sucking mouthparts to feast on the insect's body fluids. Who needs teeth, anyway?

ALLIGATOR GAR

THEIR SCIENTIFIC NAME IS "SPATULA," which means "spoon" in Latin, because their snout looks like, well, you guessed it ... a spoon! Like other fish, they get oxygen from the water through their gills.

FRESHWATER WETLAND PLANTS

MANY WETLAND PLANTS have hollow tubes that send oxygen down to their roots. That would be kind of like you blowing air down your legs so your toes could get some oxygen.

»COASTAL WETLANDS«

COASTAL WETLANDS form at the Gulf of Mexico, where Texas rivers end. Only certain kinds of animals can live in coastal wetlands because the water has some salt in it.



WHOOPING CRANE

EVERY YEAR about 250 whooping cranes migrate an amazing 2,500 miles from Canada to the coastal wetlands of Texas for the winter. Sixty years ago only 16 of them lived in the wild. Whew! That was a close call!

FIDDLER CRABS

FIDDLER CRABS, which always move sideways, have one little pincher and one big one. Their name comes from the way they move the big one — as though they're playing a fiddle! That big pincher plays such a big role in scaring away predators and attracting a mate that if it breaks off, the small one grows big and takes its place.

BLUE CRABS

LOOKING ALMOST LIKE ALIENS from outer space, these crustaceans have compound eyes on top of their heads that let them see in almost every direction! They also have five pairs of legs, although one set is really a pair of pinchers.

LIGHTNING WHELK

AMERICAN INDIANS USED TEXAS' official state shell as tools. Inside these shells with the cool lightning designs live carnivorous, snail-like animals that chomp on other coastal wetland creatures like oysters and clams.

BABY SHRIMP

ONE FEMALE CAN RELEASE 100,000 to 1,000,000 eggs! Amazing! Then, 24 hours later those eggs will hatch. But, since baby shrimp make a favorite meal for many animals that live in our coastal wetlands, not even half of them will survive long enough to become adults.

COASTAL WETLAND PLANTS

WHAT DO SEAGRASS MEADOWS, marsh grasses and fiddler crabs all have in common? The tunnels that fiddler crabs build under the sand provide oxygen to the roots of the grasses.

ILLUSTRATION BY EMILY COOPER



Spike's Activity Page



» KEEPING IT WILD



PHOT © LARR

EVEN IF IT'S usually dry where you live, you could still live near a wetland. Puddles that last for two or more weeks sometimes form special kinds of temporary wetlands called vernal pools.

Next time it rains, look for puddles near your home or school. When you find one, check to see:

- Are things swimming around in the puddle?
- Has the puddle been there for two weeks or more?
- Could the puddle be a vernal pool providing a home for new life?

Even temporary wetlands can create habitat for certain critters!

» WILD WORDS

WETLAND AWESOME TOGETHER



1) How many times did we use the homophones "too" and "to" in what you read about wetlands on previous pages? Give an example of how you use each word in a sentence. Use one of our sentences or create your own.

2) How many times did we use the homophones "their" and "there"? Given an example of how you use each word in a sentence. Use one of our sentences or create your own.

3) How many compound words can you find? Count each one only once. (Remember: A compound word is two words put together to make a new word. Example: wet + land = wetland)

» WILD SCIENCE



MENTIONS OF MATTER

1) Do you know the three states of matter? Write them here:

2) Find at least once when we mentioned each state of matter in the section called "Freshwater Wetlands."

- a) Example of a liquid:
- b) Example of a solid:
- c) Example of a gas:

3) Find at least once when we mentioned each state of matter in the section called "Coastal Wetlands."

- a) Example of a liquid:
- b) Example of a solid:
- c) Example of a gas:

NEXT MONTH: Wild Weather



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