

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Salt Plains

National Wildlife Refuge

Nature Trail



**Welcome:
Salt Plains
NWR**

Salt Plains National Wildlife Refuge is one unit in a system of over 500 refuges scattered throughout the United States which provides nearly 93 million acres of wildlife/wildland habitat. Salt Plains was established in 1930 as a refuge and breeding ground for birds. It provides habitat for approximately 300 species of birds and 30 species of mammals. The 32,030 acres is divided into almost equal parts of nonvegetated salt flat, open water, and vegetated land (marsh, woods, grasslands, and cropland). Farming, grazing, prescribed burning, and wetland draining/flooding are management tools used to enhance the habitat for wildlife. Many ponds and marshes have been built to encourage the growth of wild millet, alkali bulrush, smartweed, and other moist soil plants that waterfowl use for food.

Squirrel
FWS photograph



Viewing Tips

Dawn and dusk are the best times to see wildlife.

In warmer climates, little is moving on hot summer afternoons or on windy days.

Observe from the sidelines. Leave "abandoned" young animals alone. A parent is probably close by waiting for you to leave. Don't offer snacks; your lunch could disrupt wild digestive systems.

Try sitting quietly in one good location. Let wildlife get used to your presence. Many animals that have hidden will reappear once they think you are gone. Walk quietly in designated areas, being aware of sounds and smells. Often you will hear more than you will see.

Teach children quiet observation. Other wildlife watchers will appreciate your consideration.

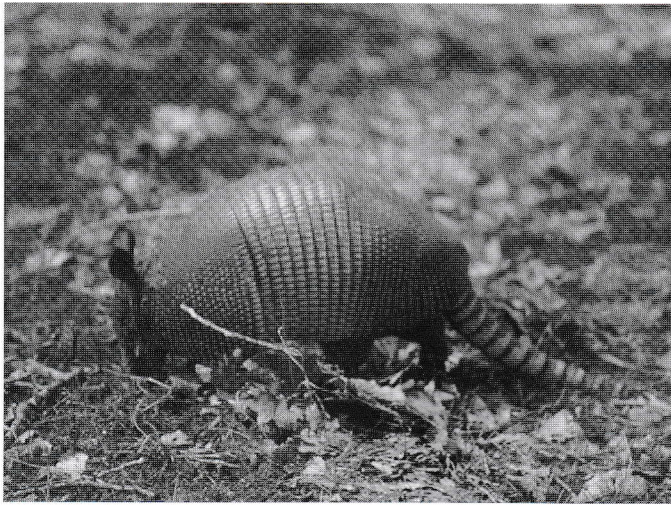
Look for animal signs. Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests left behind often tell interesting stories.

A large diversity of birds and mammals are found on the refuge year round. Species such as the white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, and the cardinal are likely to be observed anytime. Winter seasonal visitors include ducks, geese, cranes, and bald eagles. Summer brings endangered interior least terns, egrets, herons, and pelicans among others. Peak fall and spring migration of ducks, geese, and sandhill cranes on the refuge can number nearly 100,000 birds.

Eagle Roost Nature Trail

We invite you to enjoy this short 1¼-mile trail through a variety of wildlife habitats characteristic of northern Oklahoma. Following the numbered posts, use this guide to learn about the area and to discover how refuges play a critical role in preserving our nation's wildlife resources.

Please use caution while enjoying the trail and beware of poison ivy. Leave no traces of your visit—place litter in the trash receptacle provided.



Armadillo
FWS Photograph



*Sandhill cranes on flooded
wheat field*
FWS Photograph

Wildlife In Many Forms



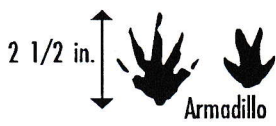
This area attracts a variety of puddle ducks: mallards, green-winged teal, and wood ducks. The plants in the water are an important food source for the ducks, while the trees provide shelter. Other forms of life use this habitat including red-eared turtles, frogs, and mosquitoes.

On The Edge



Slightly different wildlife are attracted to this area. Thousands of shorebirds and long-legged wading birds feed in the large and shallow Sand Creek Bay. Sandhill cranes, ducks, and geese seek safety on the open water, where they can easily spot predators across the bay and make their escape.

You are at the edge of two habitats, where the wooded zone meets the bay. Animals from both habitats merge here, making it an ideal place for predators such as hawks to seek prey, and for scavengers such as opossums to find a meal.



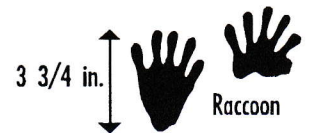
Armadillo



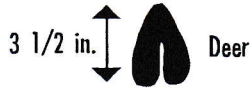
Coyote



Skunk



Raccoon



Deer

Common Tracks on the Trail



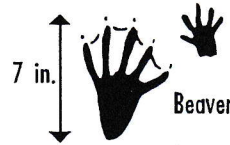
Bobcat



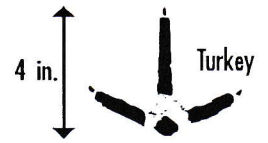
Opossum



Dog



Beaver



Turkey

Eagle Roost Pond



At one time, golden and bald eagles roosted in the trees lining this pond. Today, these majestic birds roost elsewhere on the refuge.

Golden eagles and young bald eagles look very much alike, with their dark brown feathers streaked with white. After four or five years, bald eagles mature and display white head and tail feathers.

Wildlife Signs



Animals often leave signs that tell of their activities. Numerous tracks or a worn trail indicate a preferred route to a food source, watering hole, or den. Scat found along the trail will indicate what the animal has been eating. Look for hair, bones, or seeds in scat samples. Watch for tracks and scat of deer and coyote.

Look for beaver-cut trees and crossings. Wood cut by beavers has a chiseled look to it, with a cone-shaped tip. A beaver crossing is a smooth and narrow trail, free of vegetation. The beaver's tail drags on the soil, smoothing away tracks and other shallow indentations.

Flooded Food



These pools usually dry up during the summer months. Plants spring up at the edge of the water and follow its retreat. When rain refills the pool, the plants are submerged, providing important food for ducks that arrive in the fall.

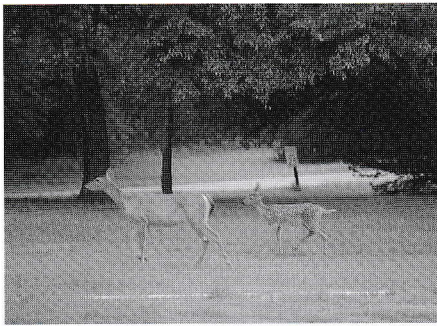
Refuge staff sometimes help this natural cycle along. Water is drained from a pond through large tubes before the ducks arrive. The ducks' favorite food plants are grown on the mudflats and then the tubes are closed. Rain fills the basin or water is pumped in just before the ducks arrive to ensure a plentiful food source.

Look across the pond to the farm field in the distance; deer are often seen grazing there.

Habitat Change



As you walk, notice the change of elevation. This incline leads from marsh habitat into forested zones. Shrubs replace cattails as the low-growing plants, while elm replaces willow as the dominant tree species. The cottonwood is adapted to both habitats. Plants, like animals, have certain habitat requirements.



White-tailed deer
FWS Photograph

**Little Marsh
Overlook**



The diverse plant life surrounding this pond attracts a variety of birds. Herons and egrets hunt for fish among the large, round leaves of the American lotus. Wood ducks nest in the boxes perched above the water. The boxes resemble hollowed-out nesting trees.

Habitat Variety



Some animals require more than one habitat to live. Deer browse for annual forbs and grasses on the grassland, but seek shelter in wooded areas. Beaver forage for willow and cottonwood bark and small twigs on land, but construct their lodges in the water. How many 'habitats' do you require?

**Sandhill
Ecosystem**



Sandhill plum thickets and red cedar trees dominate this area. The thickets provide excellent food and shelter for bobwhite quail and other birds.



Raccoon
FWS Photograph

Islands Linked

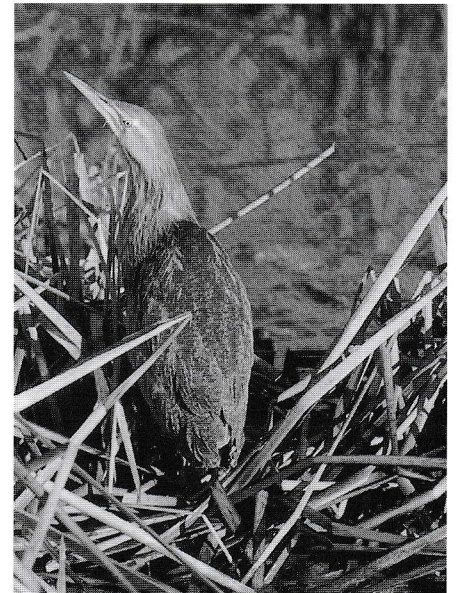


Each habitat you have passed through can be thought of as an island with specific natural boundaries and particular types of animals. As you have learned, each habitat is critically linked with the others. Salt Plains NWR is an island full of special habitats surrounded by a sea of agricultural lands.

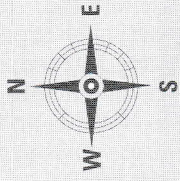
The refuge is linked to other wildlife refuges by the path of migrating waterfowl. Our mission is to protect and enhance these habitats for waterfowl and other wildlife. Visit the refuge often and enjoy this valued natural heritage.

We hope you have enjoyed the nature trail. For additional information, visit the refuge office weekdays from 7:30 am - 4:00 pm or call 580/626-4794.

Brochures and information on other refuge attractions are available at all times at the headquarter's office foyer. Please do not discard brochures—return to rack when finished or place in recycle box at end of auto tour route.



Least Bittern
FWS Photograph



Salt Plains NWR Nature Trail



Scale in Miles