

More Than Just Birds

Although birds make Cheyenne Bottoms special and significant, marsh mammals, reptiles and amphibians abound here, as well. About 44 species of mammals have been documented at Cheyenne Bottoms.

While some species of mammals reside near or at the top of the food chain, like the bobcat or coyote, most are prey for a number of different carnivores. The many species of mice and rats are preyed upon by mink, fox, badger and of course the coyote and bobcat. Nineteen species of turtles and reptiles have been observed on the wildlife area. Because these species are difficult to observe, there may be others yet undocumented. Turtles and reptiles eat aquatic plants, insects, crayfish, fish, amphibians, snakes, turtles, bird eggs, small birds and small mammals. While eight species of amphibians have been found on the Bottoms, more probably occur. Amphibians begin life as eggs deposited in water. Adults are more terrestrial but still dependent on water. Amphibians eat aquatic and terrestrial insects, tadpoles, fish, frogs and toads.

Diverse species call the Bottoms home



Red-eared slider basking in the sun
KDWPT Photo



Massasauga, KDWPT

Be on the Lookout

There are many species of turtles, reptiles and amphibians commonly seen at Cheyenne Bottoms, but few receive more attention than the massasauga rattlesnake. The massasauga is a small rattlesnake and is the only venomous snake found on the wildlife area. They prefer the dry open land along the dikes, where they are often seen. They feed mostly on small rodents, frogs, lizards, other snakes and bird eggs.



Muskrat, KDWPT

Motion and Change

The muskrat may look like a big rat, but don't let looks put you off. If there is beauty in utility then muskrats are beautiful wetland denizens. These amazing creatures perform an essential function by eating cattails and using the stems for their lodges. While cattails provide valuable wildlife cover, left uncontrolled, a marsh often becomes a monoculture of cattails. Large, dense stands of cattails are not much good for most birds and mammals. If there is no diversity of plants, there can be no diversity of wildlife. Optimum habitat for a rich diversity of nesting marsh birds is 50 percent open water and 50 percent vegetation in patchy, interspersed patterns. Muskrats help create this desirable pattern through their cutting of the cattails.