

Blackbird State Forest is home to many species of animals. This display allows you to see some of the more common species in a natural setting—a typical beaver pond.

To learn about each of these animals, please press the corresponding button.

White-Tailed Deer

Odocoileus virginianus

Description: The white-tailed deer is our most common large mammal and is easily recognized by its most distinctive feature, the large white tail or "flag" that is often all you see as the animal bounds away. In Delaware, adults weigh between 100 and 250 pounds. For several months of the year, male white-tailed deer, known as bucks, are easily recognized by the presence of antlers. The young deer, known as fawns, have white spots on the reddish brown coat to help camouflage them on the forest floor.

Diet: White-tailed deer are herbivores and eat a variety of plants including leaves and stems, grass, acorns, wild fruits, soybeans, and corn.

Habitat: White-tailed deer live within a variety of habitats, including forests, fields, and swamps. They prefer dense areas, such as young forests, for shelter.

Predators: Humans are the only major predator for white-tailed deer in Delaware. Many are killed by collisions with vehicles, as well as harvested by hunters.

Environmental Role: While white-tailed deer are the number one game animal in the United States, their population has risen dramatically due to the lack of natural predators and stricter hunting laws. These high populations have led to crop damage and over-grazing of some forests, particularly young forests (seedlings and saplings).



American Beaver

Castor canadensis

Description: Beavers are about 3 ft long, weigh up to 70 pounds, and have a flat, thick tail that is about 1 foot long. They are also known for the sharp teeth, which like all rodents, continue to grow their entire lives. Their ears and nostrils can close while the beaver is underwater. While swimming, transparent eyelids protect their eyes. Beavers can close their mouth by closing a flap located behind their teeth, allowing them to chew while holding their breath.

Diet: Herbivores (plant-eaters); they eat tree bark, leaves, roots, twigs, and water plants.

Habitat: Beavers are famous for the dome-shaped lodges they build in ponds and streams using sticks and mud. The only entrances to the lodge are underwater. If the water is too shallow for a lodge, the beavers will build a dam downstream to create deeper water. The water in the pond must be deep enough so that the pond bottom won't freeze in winter, blocking the lodge's entrance.

Predators: Young beavers have many predators including hawks, owls and otters. Young adults are also vulnerable to attacks from dogs and coyotes each spring as they seek new territories. By the early 1900s, beavers were nearly eliminated in North America due to the draining of wetlands and hunters trapping them for their fur.

Environmental Role: Beavers often create wetlands by building dams in ponds and streams. Wetlands are very important to our environment because they are home to many plants and animals, including almost half of the endangered and threatened species in North America. Wetlands also act as the earth's "kidneys" as they help to clean our water.



River Otter

Lutra canadensis

Description: River otters weigh up to 25 pounds and are about 2–4 feet long, including a 12–18 inch tail. They are members of the Mustelid family, which includes skunks, weasels and badgers. Otters are well-suited for a life in the water due to their long, muscular (streamlined) bodies and webbed feet.

Diet: Otters eat a variety of foods including fish, snakes, turtles, frogs, insects, and crayfish.

Habitat: Otters live in dens that are often dug into the bank of a stream or they may use an old beaver lodge, muskrat house, or even a hollow tree. Otters require a large amount of space to live and can roam as far as fifty miles along a stream.

Predators: Otters have few predators other than humans.

Environmental Role: People enjoy watching the playful antics of river otters, and as a result work hard to protect their habitat and food supply (shellfish populations). Many other animals in the same habitat benefit from the effort to safeguard the river otter.



Mallard Duck

Anas platyrhynchos

Description: The mallard is the most common duck in North America. The males and females are easy to tell apart--males are well-known for their green colored heads, white neck bands, and purple-brown breast feathers, while females are a mottled brown. Mallards are agile fliers who can take off almost vertically.

Diet: Mallards are omnivores. They enjoy a variety of seeds and grains including corn, wheat, barley, wild rice, and the seeds of aquatic tree species (water oak, elm, hackberry, etc.). They will also eat insects, small fish, tadpoles, frogs, and fish eggs. Mallards are known as "surface feeding" ducks because they seek food by dipping and dabbling their bills just under the surface of the water instead of diving below the surface.

Habitat: Mallards prefer living along shallow bodies of fresh water. They build their nests on the ground among dead grasses, reeds, edges of ponds, in marshes, and among dense stands of phragmites. During the summer, mallards spend much of their time asleep on water banks.

Predators: Mallards have only three defenses from predators: swimming, flying, and camouflage. They are also susceptible to attack from mammals, such as foxes.

Environmental Role: Most of the mallards commonly seen in Delaware are semi-domesticated and live in public parks; however, the majority of mallards in the U.S. are wild, migratory ducks born in the Midwestern U.S. These wild ducks play an important role in our wetlands, and it is important that we continue to protect these areas for the well-being of mallards and other wetland species.



Canada Goose

Branta canadensis

Description: The Canada goose is very common throughout North America, and is easily recognized by its dark head and distinctive white "chinstrap." Their bodies are generally grey above and white below, and they range in size from 22–45 inches in length. Canada geese are perhaps best known for their loud, honking behavior during fall migration; the spectacle of a flock flying in their long, irregular "V" formation is a classic signal of the changing seasons.

Diet: Canada geese eat mainly grasses, sedges, berries, corn, wheat, and other plants.

Habitat: The Canada goose's breeding range is vast, stretching from the Yukon east to Newfoundland, and from the far North of Canada down to the Southern United States, and even to northeastern Mexico. Canada geese nest in a simple depression in the ground that is lined with grass and feathers. They prefer to stay close to water bodies. A growing percentage of the goose population has lost their migratory habit. These non-migratory birds make their homes in office parks, golf courses, and other public spaces year round.

Predators: Canada geese are a popular game bird for hunters during their annual migrations. The young are particularly susceptible to foxes.

Environmental Role: Canada geese are well-adapted to suburban sprawl, and their abundant numbers can create a nuisance in urban areas.



American Wigeon

Anas americana

Description: American wigeons are sometimes referred to as "bald-pates," a nickname referring to the distinctive white crown found on males. Both male and female wigeons have a white breast, large white wing patches, and bluish bills with dark tips.

Diet: During the breeding season, American widgeon feed mainly on aquatic grasses and water-insects. In the winter, they prefer juicy vegetation, such as wigeongrass.

Habitat: American wigeons only winter in Delaware (they breed in Canada and Alaska). They spend most of their time near marshes. Although these ducks prefer to graze on land, they build their nests near water in vegetation.

Predators: Wigeons are prized by hunters for their meat. Foxes prey upon the young.

Environmental Role: Wigeons need a variety of aquatic plants because unlike other ducks, they do not feed on cultivated crops (wheat, corn, etc.).

