

# **INFORMATION FOR THE PRESS**

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### **NEW CIRCULAR ON WILDLIFE OF ATLANTIC COAST MARSHES**

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Birds and other wild creatures of salt marshes and their conservation are subjects of a circular recently issued by the U. S. Department of Agriculture on "Wildlife of the Atlantic Coast Salt Marshes." W. L. McAtee, of the Bureau of Biological Survey, author of the publication, also describes the vegetation of importance to animals of the marsh.

Most of the vegetation yields food or nesting material, and all of it provides cover for wildlife. Eelgrass and widgeongrass, submerged plants of water areas in salt marshes, are first-rate wild-fowl foods, the circular points out. In areas where drainage has partially or completely destroyed the widgeongrass, or disease the eelgrass, a proportionate decrease has been noted in the waterfowl depending on them for food.

Among birds of the salt marshes, members of the rail family abound. They are retiring and elusive, however, and being most active in the early morning and twilight hours are seldom seen by transient observers. They feed chiefly on insects, snails, and small crustaceans, occasionally moving inland to fatten on the wildrice of fresh marshes. As game birds they are protected by law, but an open season is provided for hunting them.

Black ducks and blue-winged teals nest and breed in salt marshes from Virginia north, and the black ducks may be seen in the marshes along the entire coast in winter. The bluewings frequent the marshes from Maryland south during the cold months. The Canada goose, brant, and snow goose are migratory visitors all along

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the Atlantic coast, and the stately white whistling swan annually flies from an Arctic breeding ground to winter in marshes and sounds from New Jersey to the Carolinas.

About 40 varieties of shorebirds are known along the Atlantic coast, and of these a large number feed or even live in the marshes. Familiar kinds are the sandpipers, curlews, and plovers. Gulls, sparrows, swallows, and grackles also are frequently seen.

Among the larger birds, the osprey, or fish hawk, and the bald eagle may be observed in the marshlands. The osprey feeds chiefly on fishes, which it catches by diving into the water. The bald eagle is by preference a scavenger, feeding mostly on dead fishes and other animals that it finds on mud flats and beaches. Vultures and crows also are regular feeders in these areas.

Reptiles are comparatively few, but alligators occasionally sojourn in salt water for short periods and may be found at times near the landward edge of marshes from North Carolina southward. The diamondback terrapin, highly valued for turtle soup, is a natural denizen of salt marshes from New Jersey southward. In the South Atlantic regions the cottonmouth moccasin, a dangerously poisonous snake, also visits the marshes. It is semi-aquatic and a good swimmer, and its bite, if not followed immediately by proper treatment, may cause death. This snake is not aggressive, however, and bites only when molested.

No fur-bearing or other mammal inhabits the salt marshes exclusively. Muskrats and meadow mice may be present in the marshes at all seasons but in colonies that are outposts of extensive inland ranges. The meadow mice feed largely on vegetable matter and in salt marshes can do no harm. They furnish a large proportion of the food of the hawks and owls that hunt over the marshlands.

Circular, No. 520, may be obtained at 10 cents a copy from the Superintendent of Documents, Washington, D. C.