



Bald Eagles

POINT OF INTEREST

BALD EAGLES ARE WELL-KNOWN TO AMERICANS AS THE NATIONAL EMBLEM OF THE UNITED STATES. HOWEVER, THIS MAJESTIC BIRD OF PREY WAS ONCE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION IN THE LOWER 48 STATES, LARGELY DUE TO POISONING FROM THE PESTICIDE DDT. PROTECTION UNDER THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT, ALONG WITH REINTRODUCTION AND MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS, AND THE BANNING OF DDT, LED TO THE RESTORATION OF BALD EAGLE POPULATIONS; BALD EAGLES HAVE NOW BEEN REMOVED FROM THE ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST, BUT ARE STILL PROTECTED UNDER THE MIGRATORY BIRD ACT.

EVEN THOUGH BALD EAGLES RANGE THROUGHOUT NORTH AMERICA, OUR RESIDENT BIRDS IN FLORIDA ARE SMALLER THAN THOSE NESTING IN NORTHERN AREAS LIKE ALASKA AND CANADA. THIS IS ENTIRELY DUE TO CLIMATE; NORTHERN BIRDS CAN USE THE LARGER BODY MASS TO STAY WARM IN THE HARSH CLIMATE, WHILE THE SOUTHERN BIRDS CAN STAY COOLER BY HAVING LESS BODY MASS TO COOL.

HERE AT CEDAR POINT ENVIRONMENTAL PARK, BALD EAGLES HAVE THE OPTIMAL HABITAT FOR NESTING AND SUCCESSFULLY FLEDGING YOUNG:

- TALL, LARGE-CROWNED SLASH PINE TREES OFFER STABILITY FOR THEIR HEAVY NESTS, AND PROVIDE EASY ACCESS FOR FLIGHT TO AND FROM THE NESTS;
- THE ADJACENT WATERS OF LEMON BAY PROVIDE PLENTY OF FISH TO EAT, IF THERE ISN'T AN OSPREY AROUND WITH A FRESH CATCH TO STEAL.

BALD EAGLES ARE KNOWN TO HARASS OSPREY UNTIL THEY DROP THEIR CATCH; THE GRACEFUL EAGLE WILL THEN SWOOP DOWN TO TAKE ITS PRIZE.



BALD EAGLE CHICKS



CHARLOTTE COUNTY
Parks & Natural Resources



Fiddler Crabs



FIDDLER CRABS ARE NAMED FOR THE LARGE, FIDDLE-SHAPED CLAW OF THE MALE CRAB. THEY ARE A SMALL CRAB, RARELY LARGER THAN TWO INCHES ACROSS. FIDDLER CRABS ARE FOUND ALONG SALTWATER BEACHES AND BRACKISH INTER-TIDAL MUD FLATS, LAGOONS AND SWAMPS.

LIKE ALL CRABS, FIDDLER CRABS SHED THEIR SHELLS (MOLT) AS THEY GET BIGGER, THEN DEVELOP A NEW LARGER SHELL TO GROW INTO. IF

THE LARGE FIDDLE CLAW IS LOST TO A PREDATOR OR DURING A STRUGGLE, MALES WILL DEVELOP THE LARGE CLAW ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE AFTER THEIR NEXT MOLT.



ADULT FIDDLER CRABS SEARCHING FOR FOOD

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE IMPORTANT ROLES FIDDLER CRABS PLAY?

- FIDDLER CRABS ARE EATEN BY MANY LARGER PREDATORS, SUCH AS THE BLUE CRAB, EGRETS, HERONS, AND OTHER MARSH BIRDS SUCH AS RAILS AND RACCOONS.
- THROUGH THEIR AVID BURROWING AND FEEDING ACTIVITY FIDDLERS HELP AERATE THE SOIL AND STIMULATE THE TURNOVER OF IMPORTANT NUTRIENTS.
- FIDDLER CRABS ARE A GOOD ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATOR DUE TO THEIR SENSITIVITY TO ENVIRONMENTAL CONTAMINATES ESPECIALLY INSECTICIDES; THEIR DISAPPEARANCE CAN WARN OF DEGRADED ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY.

LOOK FOR THESE LITTLE CRITTERS ALONG THE MUD FLATS WHEN EXPOSED AT LOW TIDE. THEY ARE USUALLY SEEN RUNNING AWAY AND BACK INTO THEIR HOLES, WHILE THE MALES DISPLAY THEIR LARGE CLAWS IN WARNING.

POINT OF INTEREST





Oak Scrub Hammock - Eastern Towhee

ANOTHER NAME FOR OAK SCRUB HAMMOCK IS XERIC, MEANING VERY DRY, HAMMOCK. THIS IS A PLANT COMMUNITY IN AN ADVANCED SUCCESSIONAL STAGE WHERE FIRE HAS BEEN ABSENT FOR MANY YEARS. IN FACT, OAK SCRUB HAMMOCKS ONLY DEVELOP IN AREAS THAT HAVE BEEN PROTECTED FROM FIRE FOR 30 OR MORE YEARS. THE MAIN REASON FOR THE LACK OF FIRE IS THE SCARCITY OF HERBACEOUS (NON-WOODY) PLANTS, AND THE RELATIVELY FIRE RESISTANT OAK LITTER. WHEN FIRE DOES OCCUR, IT IS NEARLY ALWAYS CATASTROPHIC AND MAY CAUSE THE OAK SCRUB HAMMOCK TO TRANSITION INTO ANOTHER COMMUNITY TYPE.

EASTERN TOWHEES, A WHITE, BROWN AND BLACK SONGBIRD, ARE COMMONLY FOUND IN OAK SCRUB HAMMOCKS. THEY ARE LIKELY ATTRACTED TO THE DENSE SHRUBBERY IN WHICH THEY NEST, AS WELL AS TO THE DRY LEAF LITTER WHERE THEY ARE OFTEN HEARD NOISILY SCRATCHING THEIR WAY AROUND IN SEARCH OF A MEAL. THEIR DIET CONSISTS OF:



LEFT: MALE EASTERN TOWHEE
RIGHT: FEMALE EASTERN TOWHEE

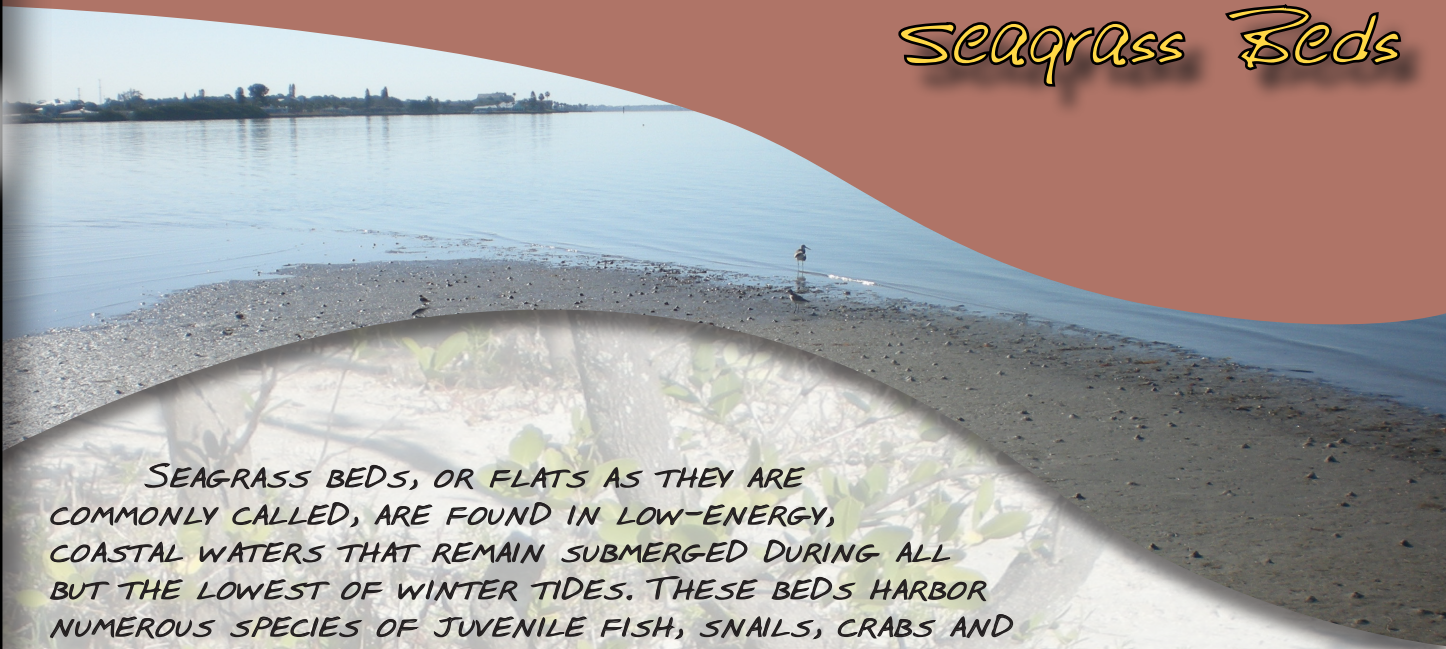
- GROUND DWELLING BEETLES,
- GRUBS,
- ANTS,
- EARTHWORMS, AND
- A VARIETY OF SEEDS AND BERRIES.

LOOK FOR THIS BEAUTIFUL BIRD DURING YOUR VISITS TO CEDAR POINT ENVIRONMENTAL PARK, AND SINCE THEY ARE A YEAR-ROUND RESIDENT OF FLORIDA YOU CAN EXPECT TO SEE THEM ANYTIME OF YEAR. AS IN MANY SPECIES OF SONGBIRDS, THE FEMALE IS DULLER THAN THE MALE; SHE IS BROWN ON THE HEAD AND BACK WHERE THE MALE IS BLACK.





Seagrass Beds



SEAGRASS BEDS, OR FLATS AS THEY ARE COMMONLY CALLED, ARE FOUND IN LOW-ENERGY, COASTAL WATERS THAT REMAIN SUBMERGED DURING ALL BUT THE LOWEST OF WINTER TIDES. THESE BEDS HARBOR NUMEROUS SPECIES OF JUVENILE FISH, SNAILS, CRABS AND BIVALVES. THE DIVERSITY OF ORGANISMS IN THE SEAGRASS BEDS DRAWS LARGER ANIMALS LOOKING FOR A GOOD MEAL; THIS INCLUDES MANATEES, MARINE TURTLES AND LARGER FISH SUCH AS SPOTTED SEA TROUT, STINGRAYS, SHEEPSHEAD, REDFISH, SNAPPER AND SNOOK.

ADULT SNOOK IN SEAGRASS BEDS ARE TYPICALLY FEEDING ON THE ABUNDANT BAY ANCHOVIES, PINFISH AND SHRIMP. IT IS NOT ONLY THE ADULT SNOOK THAT USE THE SEAGRASS BEDS; DURING THEIR FIRST YEAR JUVENILE SNOOK USE THESE BEDS AS A NURSERY WHERE THE DENSE GRASS BLADES PROVIDE HIDING PLACES AND FOOD IS ABUNDANT.

SEAGRASSES ARE RELATIVELY SLOW GROWING LEAVING THEM HIGHLY VULNERABLE TO DISTURBANCE.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE THREATS TO SEAGRASSES?

- SUNLIGHT BEING BLOCKED BY ALGAE BLOOMS, OIL SPILLS AND SEDIMENT IN THE WATER.
- SCARRING FROM BOAT PROPELLERS, ANCHORS AND BOAT GROUNDINGS.

SINCE SEAGRASSES ARE NOT EASILY RESTORED, IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT THEM IN THEIR NATURAL STATE.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROTECT SEAGRASSES?

- LIMIT FERTILIZER USE NEAR THE WATER.
- PLANT NATIVE VEGETATION ALONG THE SHORELINE.
- PRACTICE SAFE AND CLEAN BOATING.
- USE CHARTS TO AVOID RUNNING AGROUND OR SCARRING SEAGRASSES.



SEAGRASS BED AT LOW TIDE

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