

**To increase your enjoyment of Riverbend Ponds Natural Area, remember to:**

- Keep pets on leashes;
- Bring binoculars and field guides;
- Look for tracks in the mud or snow;
- Listen for animal sounds;
- Visit in different seasons to see a variety of flowering plants and migratory animals;
- Pick up all litter, including fishing line.

To learn more about other City of Fort Collins natural areas, visit [www.fcgov.com/naturalareas](http://www.fcgov.com/naturalareas) or call 416-2815 and ask for the brochure *Nature Next Door*.

For a guided nature walk with a City of Fort Collins Master Naturalist call 416-2480.

To contact a Natural Areas and Trails Ranger call 416-2147.  
For life-threatening emergencies call 911.



## What to see at **RIVERBEND PONDS NATURAL AREA**

The City of Fort Collins Riverbend Ponds Natural Area is 226 acres of ponds, marshes, wet meadows, riparian forest, shrubs and grasslands. It is home to a wide variety of plants and animals

Enjoy the many trails here. To learn more about this natural area, take this brochure and follow the self guided Sunfish Nature Trail around Big Pond. Look for posts with a numbered sunfish symbol. Please replace this brochure at the end of your walk so others may use it.



# SUNFISH NATURE TRAIL



## 1 Wetlands and Marshes Are Full of Life

Look at the ground on either side of the boardwalk. It may not always look wet, but water is just below the surface. Don't step off the boardwalk - it compacts the soil, tramples the plants and gets your feet wet! The plants here are mostly cattails, sedges and rushes which need wet roots. Listen for chorus frogs singing in early spring.

## 2 What's Hiding in the Cattails?

Look for minnows, muskrats, frogs and Virginia rails among the abundant cattails. In summer, dragonflies zip around looking for insects to eat. In winter, painted turtles hibernate under the mud.



Virginia Rail

## 3 Birds Love the Big Pond

This is the largest pond here. In summer, double-crested cormorants perch, with wings outstretched in the sun, on partially submerged trees. Other birds nest on the islands, safe from foxes, raccoons and other predators.



Double-Crested Cormorant

## 4 Look at the Tree Stump with Holes in It

Standing dead trees, called "snags," are extremely valuable for a variety of animals. First, insects bore into the soft wood, then birds dig in to eat the insects, and then squirrels, raccoons and more birds use the cavities for shelters, dens and nests.



Osprey

## 5 Lots of Birds Nest Here

Great blue herons stand very still in the shallow water. When an unsuspecting fish swims by, the heron strikes like lightning. Ospreys patrol overhead looking for a fishy meal to take back to their platform nests. Northern flickers excavate nesting cavities in the tall cottonwoods. Black-billed magpies build stick nests which may be used by great-horned owls. Look for orioles' sock-like nests hanging from branches. Be sure to pick up fishing line so birds don't use it in their nests - unnatural materials seriously harm or kill wildlife.

## 6 Look Closely

The Cache La Poudre River flows close to Big Pond. The different habitat types at Riverbend Ponds - wetlands, ponds, shrublands, grasslands and riparian forests - make this place a home for a wide variety of wildlife.

You might see both white-tailed and mule deer in this area. They use the river corridor to move safely from one area to another, and there's plenty for them to eat.



White-Tailed Deer

## 7 Cottonwood Trees are Connected to Rivers

This is a female cottonwood tree (*Populus deltoides*). Notice its large triangular-shaped leaves and spreading nature. In late spring, it releases millions of seeds - each attached to a piece of "cotton." The seeds are released when the water in the river is at its highest, providing lots of moisture for germination. Can you spot other cottonwood trees along the river?

## 8 Why are There Trees in the Pond?

The ponds at this natural area were created when gravel was extracted. After the mining was completed, some trees became established before the ponds filled with water. The tops of these trees stick up out of the water. Trees and stumps provide perches for birds to rest or search for insects and fish. Some birds nest on these dead trees, safe from land predators.

## 9 Rabbitbrush Provides Food and Shelter

Most of the woody shrubs to the east are rabbitbrush. They are loaded with bright yellow flowers in late summer and fall. Butterflies and other nectar feeders feast on this abundance. Sparrows shelter in rabbitbrush and eat its seeds all winter long.



Butterfly on Rabbitbrush

## 10 Watch and Listen for Red-winged Blackbirds

Red-winged blackbirds can be seen here year round, but are most noticeable in spring and summer. Males are black with bright red wing patches and proclaim their territory by singing from the tops of cattails. Females are streaky brown and are usually very quiet.