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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Blackwater

*National Wildlife
Refuge*

Reptiles & Amphibians

Northern Redbelly Turtle
Rachel Woodward/
USFWS

The vast marshes and bordering swamps of Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge offer ideal living conditions for an array of reptiles and amphibians. These cold-blooded animals become dormant in winter, but as spring approaches, the wetlands come alive with the sounds and activities of these creatures. All of these animals, from the smallest salamander to the largest snapping turtle, are an important part of the rich assortment of wildlife that reside in the Blackwater ecosystem.

Reptiles

Reptiles are cold-blooded vertebrates including turtles, snakes and lizards. Reptiles are characterized by bodies with dry skin (not slimy) and scales, or scutes. They usually lay eggs.

Turtles

Northern Redbelly Turtle (*Pseudemys rubriventris*), Common, 10-12.5". Has a smooth, elongated shell that is olive-brown to black with red vertical forked lines. Prefers larger bodies of fresh water and basks like the smaller painted turtle. Largely vegetarian.

Eastern Painted Turtle (*Chrysemys p. picta*), Common, 4-7". The most visible turtle on the refuge can be seen in the summer and fall basking on logs in both fresh and brackish water. Has a smooth, flattened, olive to black shell with yellow borders on seams. Limbs and tail are black with red stripes. Feeds on aquatic vegetation, insects and other small animals

Eastern Box Turtle (*Terrapene c. carolina*), Common, 4.5-7". This turtle is brown to black all over with highly visible lines of yellow- orange. The turtle's shell closes completely when limbs are retracted. Can be seen in the woodlands and is a slow and deliberate mover. Feeds on fruits, plants and small animals.



Eastern Painted Turtle



Eastern Box Turtle
Melissa Zarou/USFWS

Diamondback Terrapin
Rachel Woodward/
USFWS

Eastern Mud Turtle
(*Kinosternon s. subrubrum*), Common, 3-5". Another bottom-loving swimming turtle that likes land as well. Found in brackish marsh and fresh water. More common than the musk turtle, which it resembles with its muddy olive to black coloring.

Common Musk Turtle
(*Sternotherus odoratus*), Common, 2-5". Aquatic, bottom-loving species found in freshwater areas. Has two light stripes on head and markings on chin and throat. Smooth, light olive to black shell. Commonly called a stinkpot and named for a musky secretion exuded when handled.

Northern Diamondback Terrapin
(*Mcclaclemys t. terrapin*), Common, 4-9". Shell coloration is highly varied with concentric rings of gray, brown, yellow, green, blue or black with spotted gray head and limbs. Inhabits salt marsh and brackish water areas, and likes to bask. Feeds on fish, crustaceans, mollusks and insects.

Snapping Turtle
(*Chelydra serpentina*), Common, 8-18", 10-45 lbs. This large turtle prefers freshwater ponds and marshes. Recognized by light brown to black color, large head, and saw-tooth ridged tail. Aggressive on land, seldom so in water. Feeds on vegetation as well as small animals and carrion.



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Snapping Turtle

Melissa Zarou/USFWS



Turtles are commonly seen basking in the sun on the refuge.

Spotted Turtle
(*Clemmys guttata*), Common, 3.5-4.5". Small turtle with bright yellow spots on a smooth dark brown or black shell. Inhabits shallow freshwater areas. Frequently observed on roads in the spring. Likes to bask and is not aggressive.

*Lizards and
Skinks*

Northern Fence Lizard
(*Sceloporus undulatus hyacinthinus*)
Common, 4-7". Skin is rough, light brown to gray with dark vertical/horizontal bands on back and tail. Favorite habitats are rotting stumps and logs. Tree climbers that feed on insects and other invertebrates.

Ground Skink
(*Scincella lateralis*), Uncommon, 3-6". A small, brown skink with a dark stripe on back. As name implies, this skink is terrestrial and seldom climbs. Will enter shallow water to escape predators and feeds on insects.

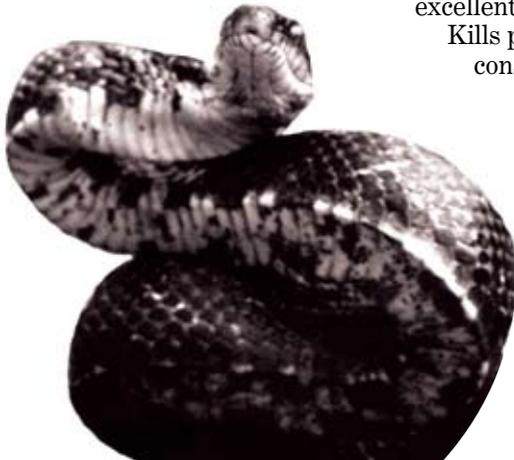
Five-lined Skink
(*Eumeces fasciatus*), Common, 5-8.5". A smooth, olive to black body, and black with white to yellow striping. Mainly terrestrial, but may occasionally climb trees. Prefers a damp habitat of cutover woodlands with rotting stumps or logs.

Broadhead Skink
(*Eumeces laticeps*), Common, 6.5-12.8". A distinctive, large, tree-dwelling skink that has olive-brown body and orange-red head.

Snakes

Black Rat Snake
(*Elaphe o. obsoleta*), Common, 42-72".
A shiny black snake with white chin and throat, and checkered belly.

A large snake usually seen on the ground, though an excellent climber.
Kills prey by constriction.



*Black Rat
Snake*
USFWS

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Black Racer

Northern Black Racer
(*Coluber c. constrictor*), Common, 36-60". Smooth, black snake with white on chin and throat. Active during day. Feeds on rodents, birds, snakes, frogs and insects.

Rough Green Snake
(*Opheodrys aestivus*), Uncommon, 22-32". Pale green-bodied, semi-aquatic and an excellent climber. Food consists of spiders, small insects and their larvae.

Eastern Garter Snake
(*Thamnophis s. sirtalis*), Common, 18-26". This dark-colored snake with three yellow stripes down its body is common in fields, woods and marsh edge habitats. Feeds on small animals from earthworms to frogs.

Eastern Hognose Snake
(*Heterodon platirhinos*), Uncommon, 20-33". A hissing snake with upturned snout and varied coloration. Underside of tail is lighter than body. Prefers sandy areas. Feeds mainly on toads; also eats frogs, tadpoles and insects.

Eastern Kingsnake
(*Lampropeltis g. getula*), Common, 36-48". A shiny, black snake with cream chained crossbands and white/yellow checkered throat and chin. Secretive and terrestrial, though likes to swim in borders of swamps. Nocturnal in hot weather. Eats snakes, turtle eggs, rodents and birds.

Redbelly Water Snake
(*Natrix e. erythrogaster*), Common, 30-48". This thick-bodied snake is reddish-brown above, and red-orange on its belly. The lower half of the head is usually orange, with a yellow throat patch. Aquatic, though often wanders well away from water in hot, dry weather. Likes to bask on logs or brush and is an adept swimmer and diver.



Northern Water Snake

Northern Water Snake (*Nerodia s. sipedon*), Common, 24-42". Has red-brown to black markings on back and sides on a gray or brown body. Seen in freshwater wetlands, where it eats frogs, salamanders and small fish. Aggressive, but not venomous like the Water Moccasin it resembles (not found this far north).

Northern Copperhead (*Agkistrodon contortrix mokasen*), Uncommon, 24-36". The only venomous snake on the refuge. Has copper brown crossbands on a light or medium brown background. Mice are its principal food.



Copperhead

Other reptiles that may occur on the refuge:

Red-eared Slider (Turtle)
(*Trachemys scripta elegans*)

Southern Ringneck Snake
(*Diadophis p. punctatus*)

Eastern Ribbon Snake
(*Thamnophis s. sauritus*)

Eastern Worm Snake
(*Carphophis a. amoenus*)

Eastern Milk Snake
(*Lampropeltis t. triangulum*)

Corn Snake
(*Elaphe g. guttata*)

Amphibians

Amphibians have two pairs of limbs for walking or swimming, and usually moist skin. They have no external scales. Amphibians are salamanders, toads and frogs, and derive their name (amphibious double life) from their adaptation to a life both in the water and on land.

Salamanders and Newts

Marbled Salamander (*Ambystoma opacum*), Common, 8.9-10.9". Stout, thick-tailed, and black with gray/silver markings and a black belly. Subterranean except during brief breeding season in autumn. Eats earthworms and other invertebrates.

Redback Salamander (*Plethodon c. cinereus*), Common, 2-4". Terrestrial, with red stripe from head to tail on a dark body. Nocturnal, hiding under objects by day. Feeds on insects and spiders.

Red-spotted Newt (*Notophthalmus v. viridescens*), Uncommon, 2.3-4.8". Has black ringed reddish spots on an olive body, with yellowish belly. Largely aquatic, except in the land stage, or *red eft*. May remain active all winter in aquatic form, even under ice.



Red-spotted Newt

Toads

Eastern Spadefoot (*Scaphiopus h. holbrookii*), Common, 2-3.5". Smooth skin, bulging eyes, and a horny black spade on hind feet. Found in areas with sandy soil.

Fowler's Toad (*Bufo woodhouseii fowleri*), Common, 2-3". Abundant throughout all refuge habitats. Has three or more warts on back on a brown/olive body. Eats insects.

Frogs

Northern Cricket Frog (*Acris c. crepitans*), Common, .3-1.4" A small non-climbing frog with dark stripe on thigh. Lives in water with cover vegetation.

Northern Spring Peeper
(*Pseudacris c. crucifer*) Common,
.8-1.3". Small swamp or wet woods
frog with smooth tan/brown skin and
a brown X on back. Seldom seen,
but piping call is heard in breeding
season.

Chorus Frog
(*Pseudacris triseriata feriarum*),
Common, .8-1.5". Small treefrog with
three dark stripes down body. Live in
shallow water and low vegetation.

Green Treefrog
(*Hyla cinerea*), Common, 1.3-2.3". A
long-legged, smooth-skinned, vivid
green frog seen in trees and fresher
wetlands.

Gray Treefrog
(*Hyla versicolor* and *Hyla*
chrysoscelis), Common, 1.3-2". Gray
and warty, dark blotch on back, and
white spots below eyes. Seen in small
trees and shrubs.

Bullfrog
(*Rana catesbeiana*), Common, 3.5-6".
A large frog with a bright green head
and green/brown body with dark
splotches. Lives in large bodies of
fresh water. Feeds on insects.

Southern Leopard Frog
(*Rana utricularia*), Common, 2-3.5".
Has a pointy nose, white belly, and
oval spots on body. Lives in fresh
water and marsh edge habitats.

Pickerel Frog
(*Rana palustris*), Common, 1.75-3".
Has square spots in parallel rows
down back and yellow/orange on inner
surface of hind legs. Lives in fresh
water, brackish marsh, fields and
wood margins.

Eastern Narrowmouth Toad
(*Gastrophryne carolinensis*)

Green Frog
(*Rana clamitans melanota*)



Green Treefrog



Bullfrog

Other
amphibians that
may occur on
the refuge:

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Blackwater is one of more than 550 national wildlife refuges administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat, and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands of the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages national fish hatcheries, and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals, and threatened and endangered species.

Reptile & Amphibian guides are available for further reference at the visitor's desk as well as the refuge library.

