

# Wildlife in Central Florida Lakes

Central Florida's numerous lakes and adjacent wetlands provide support for a great diversity of wildlife. Approximately 30 species of wading and migratory birds are found on central Florida's lakes. Florida is an important stopover for migratory birds fleeing the cold winters and has a large migratory bird community in the winter months.

Wildlife habitat and aquatic plant communities are intricately linked in Florida's lakes. Vegetation around the shoreline and in the water provides shelter and food for many small animals. Small mammals such as marsh rabbits, muskrats, otters, mice, etc. make their homes around our lakeshores. Our lakes are also home to a large variety of reptiles and amphibians ranging from the American alligator to the green tree frog.

Even urban lakes provide a valuable green effect with vegetation buffers and walking paths. Among an urban setting, our lakes provide an opportunity to see and enjoy wildlife and a respite from the noise and clamor of the city.

## Softshell Turtle

This turtle can grow a shell a couple of feet in diameter. It has a distinctive pointed nose and a relatively long neck for a turtle.

## Wood Stork

These unmistakable birds are found around many of our lakes. They feed on small fish, shrimp and crawfish they find by moving their sensitive bills along the bottom of the lake.

## Great Egret

This is the large white bird with the yellowish bill that wades slowly through the shallows in search of a meal.

## Midge (Blind Mosquito)

These harmless insects can form annoying swarms after the adults emerge from the water. The young live in water, like mosquitos, and thrive in lakes with poor water quality.

## Marsh Rabbit

This dark-furred relative of the eastern cottontail inhabits wood and marsh edges, and feeds on tender vegetation.

## Dragonfly

The nymph of the familiar family of insects lives underwater, where it preys on insect larvae and other small creatures. The young are eaten by fish. Adults are eaten by birds.

## Common Moorhen

One of the most common swimming birds in area lakes. It eats aquatic vegetation, and small snails, worms and insects.

## Banded Water Snake

This non-poisonous snake is common and may be mistaken for a cottonmouth moccasin.

## Great Blue Heron

Lake wading bird that eats fish, snakes and other small animals.

## Round-tailed Muskrat

This small rodent is a seldom-seen resident of the evergrown areas around the lake's edge.

## Purple Gallinule

This is unquestionably the most colorful bird on the lakes. Its long, thin toes allow it to walk across floating vegetation, such as lotus and water lilies.

## Bluegill

A native game fish.

## Grass Carp

A variety of wood-eating fish brought into many lakes to control aquatic plants.

## Black Crappie

A small game fish that eats smaller fish and crustaceans.

## Brown Bullhead and Yellow Bullhead

These are species of catfish that are common in Florida lakes.

## Mayfly

One of the several species of insects found in lakes. The young live underwater; adults emerge and live on land during a brief life cycle in which they mate and lay eggs.

## Largemouth Bass

A popular sport fish that is plentiful in many lakes.

## Blue Tilapia

They were introduced to central Florida lakes in the mid-1960s.

## American Alligator

Alligators are the largest predator on any Florida lake and feed on fish and other small animals.

## Freshwater Shrimp

Another small crustacean that lives in the lake.

## Crawfish

This crustacean looks like a small lobster and is sometimes found near shore.