

## What are Wetlands?

**Wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world, comparable to rain forests and coral reefs.**

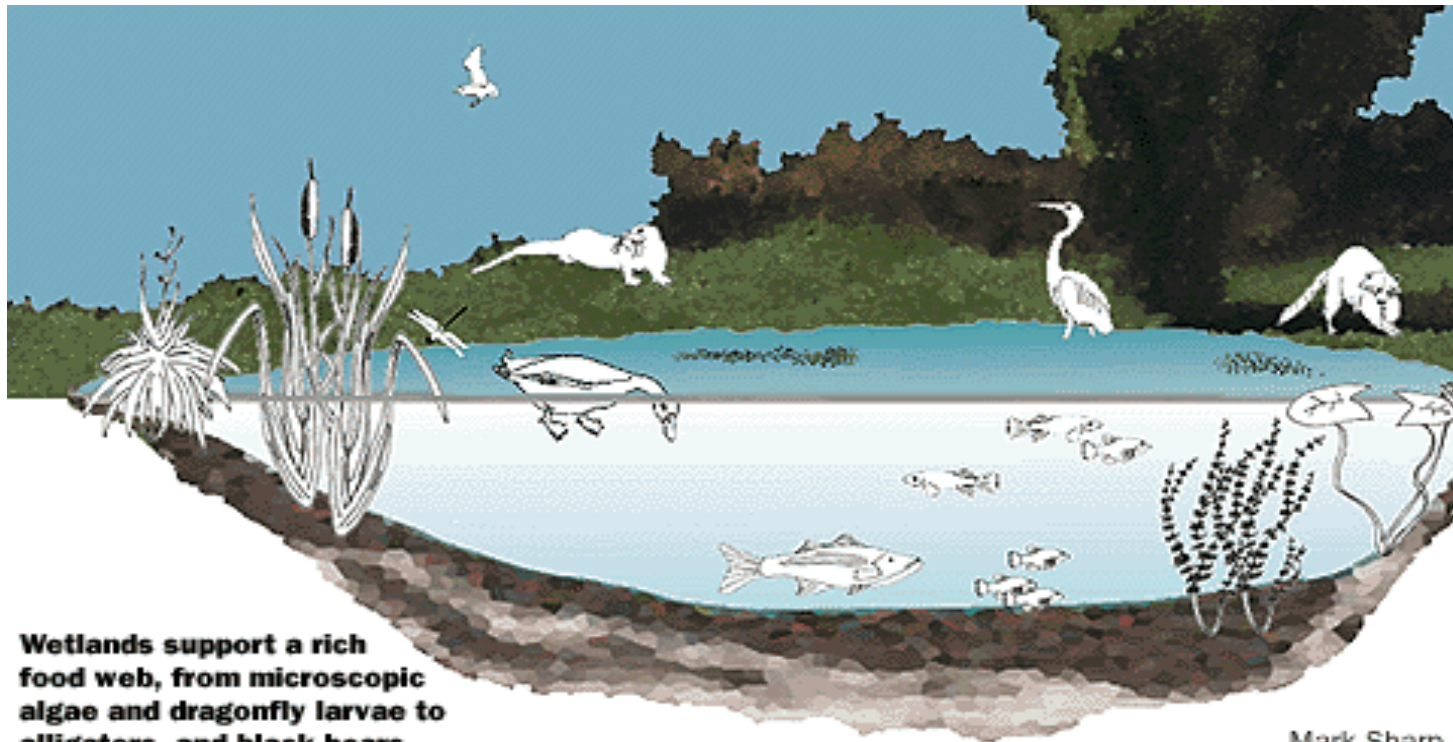
A large number of many types of species of microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals can be part of a wetland ecosystem.

Wetlands can be thought of as "biological supermarkets." They provide great volumes of food that attract many animal species. These animals use wetlands for part of or all of their life-cycle.

Dead plant leaves and stems break down in the water to form small particles of enriched, organic material.

This enriched material feeds many small aquatic insects, shellfish, and small fish that are food for larger predatory fish, reptiles, amphibians, birds, and mammals.

**Wetlands play an important part in the connections between organisms in their physical surroundings.** The combination of shallow water, high levels of nutrients, and their productivity is ideal for the development of organisms that form the base of the food web and feed many species of fish, amphibians, shellfish, and insects. Many species of birds and mammals rely on wetlands for food, water, and shelter, especially during migration.



**Wetlands support a rich food web, from microscopic algae and dragonfly larvae to alligators, and black bears.**

Mark Sharp