

Magic Muck

Fueling Wetlands Wildlife

Few people visit Cheyenne Bottoms to glimpse the humble bloodworm. But this tiny red wriggler is one big reason these wetlands draw millions of eye-dazzling migratory birds each year. Beneath every flotilla of pelicans, every majestic crane, lies an intricate web of abundant and unheralded wetlands life.

It takes a lot of food to satisfy the millions of birds that migrate through here twice a year. Billions of bloodworms (midge larvae), feasting on decaying plant matter, become fodder for refueling shorebirds. And bloodworms are just one key strand in the wetlands food web. Cranes eat frogs, pelicans eat fish, coots eat wetland plants—all fueled by the muck. As you feast your eyes on the birds and wildlife here, remember the teeming life that supports them beneath the wetlands' surface. There is magic in our muck!



American Bittern
Ted Lee Eubanks



Snowy Plover/Ted Lee Eubanks

Snowy Plover

The snowy plover is one of the few shorebirds that breeds here, nesting on wetland salt flats and muddy shores. Carefully watch this plover as it feeds. You may see it tremble one foot in the mud to encourage its prey to reveal itself.



Dry mudflats/J. S. Aber

Motion and Change

Along the Byway, wetland water levels constantly shift. The wetland community thrives on these changes. In a dry summer, thousands of acres dry up and vegetation decays, enriching the muck. In wet years, these same bottomlands resemble expansive lakes, rippling with wildlife.



Funded in part by the Federal Highway Administration through the Kansas Scenic Byways Program.