WHY THE WETLANDS ARE IMPORTANT

THEY ARE CARBON SINKS - The prairie grasses are not just your average grass. Their roots can stretch up to 14 feet below the ground and are capable of storing carbon dioxide (CO_2), which is an important greenhouse gas. By sequestering this CO_2 out of the atmosphere and into the ground, the pothole region is acting as a carbon sink – and helping to protect the planet against climate change.

THEY PROVIDE AN IMPORTANT HABITAT FOR MANY BIRD SPECIES - Over 200 bird species depend on the wetlands to provide a safe place to feed, mate, and raise their young. Every spring, flocks of birds arrive to the prairie pothole region after long migration journeys. Half of all the ducks in North America make the prairie wetlands home for the entire spring and summer months.

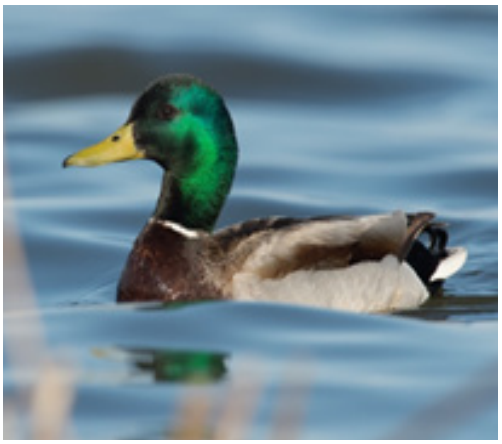
THEY PROTECT THE LAND AGAINST FLOODS AND DROUGHTS - Wetlands can control the level of water in the land to help avoid natural disasters. During heavy rainfall water is captured and stopped from flowing further downstream which could otherwise result in flooding. During dry periods, the water retained in the many potholes prevents water shortages and droughts.

IT IS A VERY UNIQUE ECOSYSTEM - The many habitats and ecological niches provided by the array of potholes and grasslands enable the prairie wetlands to be home to a multitude of interesting plant and animal life. All this life is intricately interconnected, even the bird poop provides nutrients for the plant species in the potholes!

THEY PROVIDE CLEAN WATER FOR MANY SPECIES (INCLUDING HUMANS!) - The wetlands help clean the water we enjoy at beaches, lakes, rivers, and even the water we drink. They can filter the runoff from agriculture, ensuring that aquifers and groundwater are constantly filled with uncontaminated water, which is used by around 50 million people.

THE ANIMALS WHO LIVE THERE HAVE IMPORTANT ECOLOGICAL ROLES - The birds that occupy the prairie wetlands can connect even distant ecosystems together, by eating seeds from one area of land and then pooping them out over another throughout their entire migration route. These seeds, plus the nutrients in the poop enable the plants to sprout and help the land to thrive.

ANIMAL FACTS



MALLARD

- Mallards are probably the most easily recognized of all the duck species, common throughout North America and Europe in all ponds and parks.

- They are very fast and strong fliers. Migrating flocks of mallards have been known to travel up to 55 miles an hour!

- The sounds of duck quacking that you will be familiar with is the sounds of a female duck. Male ducks do not quack, they make a much quieter, raspy noise.

- They are able to detect the Earth's invisible magnetic field using a special protein in their eyes, which helps them to navigate during long migrations.

YELLOW WARBLER

- They are one of the most widely distributed warbler species and have been known to nest as far North as the Arctic Circle.

- Yellow Warblers are very small birds, and only weigh as much as 3 pieces of paper!

- Their nests will sometimes be occupied by the parasitic species Cowbirds, but the Yellow Warbler will build up to 6 layers on nest floors to cover up the Cowbirds eggs.

- They migrate mostly during the night so must learn constellation maps in order to help them navigate.

- Yellow Warblers must find a mate once they have reached the prairie wetland region, and males will defend their nesting territories by singing.

SANDHILL CRANE

- They are well known for their elaborate dances, which involve spreading their wings, bowing their heads, tossing sticks, and leaping into the air.

- The cranes mate for life (which can up to two decades!) and these dances help strengthen their pair bonds as well as being a way to warn against predators.

- Their unique call is deep, sounding almost like a trumpet, and is due to their very long tracheas (windpipes) that stretch down the length of their necks.

- They are amongst the oldest living birds on Earth, and the earliest Sandhill Crane fossil ever found is estimated to be 2.5 million years old!

- The young will accompany their parents on their first migration, learning the routes and landscape markers along the way before they become adults themselves.

OTHER ANIMALS IN THE FILM

- Owls are fearsome predators (which we saw in the film!), and they have many incredible features that help them hunt, including excellent night vision, super strong talons, and special feathers which help them fly silently through the night.

- Bison are the largest land-dwelling mammals in North America and can weigh between 1200 – 1800 lb. They spend most of their day eating the prairie grasses and plants, and each adult bison can eat up to 24 lbs of vegetation per day!

- Western honeybees have slowly been returning to the prairie pothole region and can be found on every continent on Earth except Antarctica.

- Ground squirrels whistle and chirrup to communicate to other members of their colony, and researchers have discovered they can produce ultrasonic alarm calls!

- Yellow Warblers must find a mate once they have reached the prairie wetland region, and males will defend their nesting territories by singing.