

Cattail Marsh Habitat



The Dallas Harris Memorial Walk winds through a wetland filled with cattails (*Typha latifolia*), a native plant that thrives in shallow water. Cattails filter runoff, reducing nutrients and sediments before the water reaches the river. They also help prevent bank erosion during high river flows. Although a single seedhead can be packed with over 250,000 seeds, cattails also reproduce by horizontal stems called rhizomes. Rhizomes put down roots and send up shoots of new plants. Nutrients stored in the rhizomes through the winter fuel rapid early spring growth.

Cattail marshes also provide food, shelter, nesting habitat for many species of wildlife and birds. You

will see—and hear—many red-winged blackbirds here; yellow-headed blackbirds prefer larger marshes with deeper water so watch for them in cattails along the pond edges of open ponds.

During the spring mating season, mostly-black males often sit high on tall cattails surveying their territories, calling loudly, flashing their bright red wing patches, and aggressively chasing away intruders. The brown-streaked females incubate eggs in grass nests often lashed to cattails or other vegetation close to the water. The marsh is rich in high-protein insect larvae (especially dragonflies, mayflies, and caddis flies), providing food for birds, fish, and other aquatic wildlife.



Red-winged blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*): above: female; right: male. Below: Yellow-headed blackbird: (*Xanthocephalus xanthocephalus*)

Photos: Jane Rohling

