



## Wetland Books for Kids and Teachers

The Arkansas Multi-Agency Wetland Planning Team (MAWPT) has been working with member agencies on helping teachers incorporate wetlands into their curriculum, and many teachers have asked about wetland books for children. We decided to see what's available, and were amazed to find that prominent bookstores in Little Rock did not carry any wetland books. Relying on the internet, we bought copies of as many wetland children's books as we could find, and reviewed them. The books are being donated to the library at the Cook's Lake Environmental Education Center. The following reviews represent some of the best books we could find; scoring is on a 5-heron scale. We were looking for books that covered many facets of wetlands, but most wetlands books for children are predominantly about biology. The appropriate age range is based on information from Amazon.com, where any of these books can be purchased (though surely not the only place). If any teachers out there know of other wetland books, please feel free to contact the MAWPT so we can get the word out. We intend to publish this list and other new teacher's resources at our website soon.

**One Small Square: Swamp** by Donald Silver, ages 4-8. This book offers an excellent presentation of plants, animals, and other life of cypress swamps and mangrove swamps. It contains beautiful drawings, entertaining prose, and a lot of biological detail. The authors don't oversimplify, but still write to the younger grade levels. There is a nice index/glossary at the end, and some suggested activities to help explain the material. This is strictly a book about biology, and does not go into hydrologic or chemical wetland functions.



**Wetlands (First Reports)** by Shirley Gray, ages 4-8. This book is designed for younger kids, and there are some oversimplifications and slight inaccuracies as a result. For instance, the definition of wetland on the first page is inaccurate; wetlands needn't be flooded, and needn't have water near the surface all year. However, in many respects, this is a good introductory book, especially for younger kids that might find America's Wetlands a little long. It is mostly about biology, but includes some discussion of other functions. It also covers a description of the Everglades, wetland losses in the U.S., and the concept of creating new wetlands.



**America's Wetlands** by Frank Staub, ages 9-12. This book offers a good basic introduction to different types of wetlands in the U.S., with an emphasis on the roll of wetlands as habitat, though hydrologic, nutrient cycling, and particulate retention functions are also mentioned. Many terms are defined, and there is a glossary in the end. The themes of habitat loss and the need for conservation are present throughout the book.



**Habitats: Swampland** by Brian Ableman, ages 4-8. This book is a tour of the animals (and a few plants) of the Okefenokee Swamp. It describes a list of species, with some rather nice photographs (except for the dead cypress trees) and some rather uninspiring drawings, and offers tidbits about animal behavior.



**Wading Into Wetlands (Ranger Rick's Nature Scope)** by National Wildlife Federation, for adults. Unlike the other books on this list, this book is intended as a resource for teachers, not students. There is a lot of excellent information. Activities range from interpreting graphs to art projects, recipes using foods that rely on wetlands, and reading understanding biases in newspaper articles on wetland issues. I particularly like the activity on page 11 that creates a wetland model to illustrate the importance of wetlands in flood control and water purification. Activities are suitable for a range of ages. There are only a few pages actually dedicated to swamps, but this is a very useful book. It covers many topics relevant to wetlands, not just biology. I would recommend pairing this book with a supplement that has nicer drawings or photographs to help spark student's interests.



**Wetland (Exploring Earth's Biomes)** by April Sayre, ages 9-12. This book offers a good overview of wetlands. It divides wetlands into freshwater swamps and marshes, bogs, and saltwater marshes and swamp. It describes each of these systems with interesting facts, and the illustrations are nice, though not as numerous as in some other books. The last chapter is fairly unique among wetland books for this age group. It discusses many functions of wetlands, the dependence of people on wetlands, threats to wetlands, the future of wetlands, and issues around wetland law and mitigation. Other books might mention flood control and water purification as functions, but this book goes into more detail, and includes topics such as climate stabilization.



**Wild and Swampy** by Jim Arnosky, ages 9-12. While it is yet another introduction to the animals of cypress and mangrove swamps, this book has a personal feel as the author explores and nice illustrations. It is one of the few books that correctly describes cottonmouths as venomous rather than poisonous. It is almost strictly about animals.



**Marshes & Swamps** by Gail Gibbons, ages 4-8. The illustrations in this book are likely to appeal to young kids, and the text offers a nice explanation of marshes and swamps, both saltwater and fresh water. Some points on hydrology and erosion control are covered, in addition to the biology. The last page has a very nice presentation of wetland facts.



**Discover Nature in Water and Wetlands** by Elizabeth Lawlor, for adults. This book is probably most useful as a teacher's resource; it contains a lot of great information and activities. I think it could also be used a reference material for older children. The first chapter is on the nature of water, and I had hoped that there would be a nice transition between the physical sciences and

the biological sciences; but alas this is once again not the case. The next 200 pages are on biology, and instead of becoming a nice introduction to the topic of wetlands, the chapter on water becomes a non sequitur. That said, the biological information provided in the book is excellent, and goes well beyond the usual cypress-alligator-great blue heron level. The drawings are black and white, but very nicely done. There is very detailed information on plants and animals ranging from oaks to ferns to dragonflies to beaver. There is no discussion of wetlands as ecosystems, how the players interact, of the functions of the ecosystem as a whole. Still, the information of the natural history of individual species makes it a good reference book in a wetland library..



**The Mississippi River** by Maria Ruth, ages 9-12 This is an *excellent* book. It presents the aquatic and wetland ecosystem of each reach of the Mississippi, from the headwaters, through the floodplain forests and to the delta. It goes far beyond “gee whiz” factoids and explains ecosystem and riverine processes: the formation and filling of oxbow lakes, ephemeral pools in floodplains, formation of the delta, and how human activities have affected these processes. Topics include floods, water quality, levees, beaver dams, water quality, and biology, including a suite of animals and plants, from insects to amphibians, fish, and birds, from phytoplankton to cypress trees. This book helps to put the wetlands in the Mississippi Delta portion of Arkansas within a larger context of the Mississippi watershed. On a scale of five herons, it’s a 6.



It appears that some other books have been published since these were purchased and reviewed, but this list should help teachers start their wetland libraries. ♪