

MAMMALS

There are a wide variety of mammals that can be seen in and around Osprey Lake. Both those that spend a good portion of their life in water and those who don't!

Especially around dawn or dusk you may see muskrat, beaver, mink or even river otters swimming in these waters. A mound of herbaceous plant material at the edge of the lake is likely a muskrat home. If the mound includes mostly woody material and mud, the residents will be beaver. All these can be found in bank dens as well.

A beaver is the only animal besides man that can alter their habitat to suit themselves, by damming up streams to create ponds and lakes. Stay alert as you walk around the Oxbow, and you will likely see beaver cut stumps that look like sharpened pencils. Some can be quite large! Some beaver cuttings have been observed more than 10 feet high in the trees at the Oxbow! Don't be alarmed! These were not 10-foot-tall beaver, but only beaver swimming on the surface and cutting trees while the Oxbow was in flood stage.

Several species of bats may be seen catching night flying insects on the wing at dawn or dusk! During the day, they roost in hollow trees or under loose bark. Each night, one bat can eat several thousand insects. This makes them extremely valuable ecologically and economically as they save farmers and gardeners billions of dollars each year in insecticide costs!

The largest mammal in Indiana, white-tailed deer, can be seen at almost any time the area is not flooded. Coyote, raccoon, opossum, striped skunk, fox, squirrels, chipmunk, cottontail rabbit, least weasel and even bobcat could also be seen in the area.

Smaller, harder to see mammals include meadow voles, shrews, and several species of mice. They tunnel under the grass and provide food for some of the larger mammals, snakes and birds of prey that are common hunters in the Oxbow. It is amazing how these small mammals can survive in the floodplain! Some may climb trees during flooding while others scurry to higher ground.

All of our mammals are secretive and can be difficult to observe but leave signs of their presence. Watch for tracks in the snow or mud and also the scat they leave behind.

For more information, visit www.oxbowinc.org or call 812-290-2941.

For assistance in the event of an emergency, please call 911 (make sure you advise you are in Indiana) or the Dearborn County Sheriff's Dispatch at (812) 537-3431.