



WHO LIVES IN A SALT MARSH?

By Lauren Parmelee, Senior Director of Education

Salt Marshes are special wetland habitats found next to the ocean that are flooded and drained by the tides. Salt marsh soil is very wet and spongy because it is made up of deep mud and decomposing plant matter. We are lucky to have these important habitats here in Rhode Island as they provide a home for many birds and wildlife species.

The birds in a salt marsh are always busy.

Osprey hover over marsh creeks hunting for fish. **Tree Swallows** swoop through the air, catching mosquitos and flies. **Willetts** circle around loudly calling “willet, willet, willet” to distract predators away from their nests. **Herons** and **egrets** stand very still waiting for lunch to swim by.

Smaller creatures also call the salt marsh home – but you have to look closer to find them!

Fiddler crabs are fun to watch as they scurry about. The male crab has one big claw and one small claw. He waves his big claw around to attract the female crabs and uses his small one to eat. When he moves them together, it looks like he is playing a fiddle!



Peter Green

Osprey with fish



Striped Killifish



Mummichog

Salt marsh periwinkles graze along the surface of the peat eating algae and cordgrass, but climb up the grasses to escape hungry young **blue crabs**. **Ribbed mussels** bury in the peat and filter tiny pieces of food from the water. People don't eat this type of mussel because they taste like the mud they live in! **Striped killifish**, **mummichogs**, young **striped bass**, and other fish find food and shelter in marsh creeks. Watch out for those birds, little fish!

Bring some binoculars and head to a salt marsh to observe the birds and wildlife that call it home. Audubon's Emilie Ruecker Wildlife Refuge in Tiverton, Touisset Marsh Wildlife Refuge in Warren, and Lathrop Wildlife Refuge in Westerly provide well-groomed trails next to beautiful salt marshes. On Jamestown, enjoy a view of Audubon's Foxhill Salt Marsh from an overlook at Fort Getty. Please be respectful of these fragile habitats by being careful and staying on the trails.



Stephen Tierney

Tree Swallows



Blue Crab



David Uliss

Willet

