

Shorebird Smorgasboard

Shorebirds are a grouping of birds that includes sandpipers, plovers and other similar species. You will see these active birds darting across the mud, probing and picking as they feed on worms in the substrate.

You may think of these as beach birds, and you would be correct, but they also frequent mudflats and shallow water like that found at Cheyenne Bottoms. In fact, at least 39 species of shorebirds have been seen here at the Bottoms. Sometimes they number in the tens of thousands at a given time.

Experts have estimated that in some years, 45 percent of all shorebirds in North America stop at Cheyenne Bottoms to refuel during spring migration north! Clearly, Cheyenne Bottoms is critical for the shorebirds of North America. For this reason Cheyenne Bottoms is designated as a Hemispheric Reserve by the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.



Cheyenne Bottoms rich in food



Yellowlegs
KDWPT Photo



American Avocet, KDWPT

The Avocet

During the late spring and summer months, look for a tall shorebirds with long, odd looking, up-turned bills. These are American avocets, and they nest at Cheyenne Bottoms.

Avocets strut through the water on stilt-like blue-gray legs, skimming food from the surface of the water by swinging their curved bills back and forth. By August, the avocets' peach-colored necks and heads begin to turn light gray, and the birds become striking black and white.

Motion and Change

Why is Cheyenne Bottoms such an important refueling stop for shorebirds? One major reason is the abundance of midges and their larvae. Midges resemble mosquitoes but are really a small, non-biting



Dowitchers feeding on bloodworms, KDWPT

fly. During the warm months you can see clouds of midges swarming around you and your vehicle following a hatching period. These little critters are high in protein and are a major reason why shorebirds find Cheyenne Bottoms to be the equivalent of an all-you-can-eat restaurant. The mud-dwelling midge larvae are called "bloodworms." They are a key component of the marsh because they help decompose plant and animal matter in the marsh bottom while adding nutrients to fertilize the rich wetland vegetation. You can watch the shorebirds picking these little worms out of the mud bottom as they traverse the mudflats. In good years nearly 50 bloodworms per square inch are available for shorebird dining.

