

Story Ideas

Great Bend, Kansas



Cheyenne Bottoms – Midpoint on the Central Flyway

■ The Central Flyway is a route for annual bird migrations that stretches from the coastline of South America to the Arctic. Cheyenne Bottoms, the largest inland marsh in the interior United States, is “right smack in the middle of this route” (Nancy Leo, Kansas Ornithological Society), providing a place to feed, breed, and rest for waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, and songbirds. Approximately 45% of all migratory shorebirds nesting in North America stage at Cheyenne Bottoms. Here, birders have seen 333 of the 471 species recorded in Kansas.

Bird Banders Defined Central Flyway

■ Two local men have been pivotal in documenting the movements of migratory birds who travel the Central Flyway. Ed Martinez, formerly an employee of the Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, chuckles, “I banded anything that had wings out there except the insects.” He follows in the footsteps of Frank Robl, who started a banding station in his spare time in 1924; his hobby eventually became a major source of information on the habits of migrating birds that use Cheyenne Bottoms. Robl’s complete banding records are archived at the Barton County Historical Society in Great Bend.

75 Tons of Bloodworms Fuel the Journey North

■ The main food source for birds is the bloodworm, a larvae form of the midge. The mucky areas of the marsh host 50 to 100 insects per square inch, thus 50-75 tons of bloodworms are available during each month of migration, notes ornithologist Rob Penner of The Nature Conservancy. In drought years, some birds travel as far as the Arctic Circle without another significant stop.

Kansas Wetlands Education Center Educated the Next Generation

■ Located just seven miles from Great Bend, this center serves as a launching spot for the exploration of Cheyenne Bottoms. The staff conducts educational programs in area schools, and offers on going tours of the wetlands and a lecture series for adults. It operates as a partnership between Fort Hays State University, Kansas Department of Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism, and Great Bend Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The Raptor Center

■ The Raptor Center, located at the entrance of Great Bend’s Brit Spaugh Zoo, is a treatment center for injured birds. Through glass, visitors can observe veterinarians at work in the state of the art surgical suite. Visitors can also use the touch screen technology of eBird Tracker, developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology to record bird sightings in the region. Admission is free.

■ Interactive exhibits will prepare visitors to travel the Wetlands and Wildlife National Scenic Byway, which stretches from Cheyenne Bottoms to Quivira National Wildlife Refuge, demonstrating opportunities for hiking, biking, paddling, photography, and birding.

For more information: We will be happy to supply photographs, contact information for interviews, tours, guides, background information, and assistance with travel arrangements.

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