

Powhatan Creek is a 23 mile tributary that flows into the James River at historic Jamestown Island. The creek is tidal for a distance of 4 miles upstream from the James River and averages a depth of 6 feet at high tide. This area is recognized as one of the most environmentally significant and biodiverse natural resources on the Virginia Peninsula.

In colonial times, the creek offered abundant resources for meeting basic human needs. This ancient waterway was used by the Powhatan Confederacy of Indian tribes, including Chief Powhatan and his daughter, Pocahontas. In 1607, Captains Christopher Newport and John Smith explored the area while establishing the first permanent English settlement in North America.

The creek is an access point to the 3,000 mile Captain John Smith Chesapeake National Historic Watertrail. It provides a magical place to kayak and canoe while observing birds, native plants, and other wildlife. Now it's your turn to paddle this ancient waterway and experience the same wonders as the Native Americans and early settlers.



Bald Eagle
30 to 37 inches, wingspan 7 to 8 feet; national bird of U.S.; white head and tail on adults; juveniles are mostly dark overall with more and more white as they age reaching maturity by age 5; seen soaring overhead and perched in trees near the water's edge.



Northern Cardinal
8.75 inches, state bird of Virginia; males are a vibrant red with a crest and heavy orange bill; females are a tan with red along the wings and tail; both have black markings on the face.



Double-crested Cormorant
32 to 33 inches, large black waterbird that may have colorful skin on its face, throat, and neck; seen standing erect on posts or docks or swimming low in the water with only neck and head visible.



Eastern Bluebird
7 inches, males are a vivid blue with a rusty red breast and white belly; female is duller with only a tinge of blue and rust with the white belly.



Great Blue Heron
45 to 47 inches, large, long-necked, long-legged wading bird with a dagger-like bill; blue-gray color camouflages well when fishing or perched in a tree.



Eastern Kingbird
8.5 inches, slate gray bird with white throat and belly; white band across end of tail; can be seen on reeds or grasses.



Belted Kingfisher
16 inches, large head and bill, blue-gray with a white abdomen and a bushy crest; female has a rusty breast band; seen perched near water or hovering on rapidly beating wings ready to dive into water.



Royal Tern
20 inches, mostly white with a large orange bill; in spring, the top of the head is all black with a crest; later, the front of the head is white with some black behind.



Vulture, Black
25 inches, wingspan less than 5 feet; large and black with featherless black head; short, square tail and white patches near the tips of the wings; often seen soaring high, perched in trees or on posts, sunning with wings outstretched, or feeding on the ground.

Vulture, Turkey
26 to 27 inches, wingspan 6 feet, larger than black vulture with featherless red head; longer, rounded tail; wings are a V-shape while soaring; often seen with Black Vultures.



Red-winged Blackbird
8.5 inches, male is black with red or red-orange stripes on the shoulders; female is brown with streaks often in large flocks.



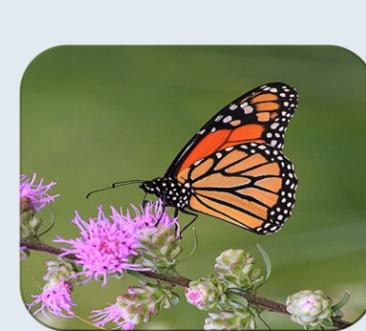
Osprey
23 to 24 inches, wingspan up to 6 feet; black backs and white bellies, crest, and face with a black mask; plunges feet first to capture fish; wings resemble gulls when flying; nests on trees in Sandy Bay; seen often in trees along all of the creek.



Red-tailed Hawk
19 to 22 inches, brown hawk with light rust-colored tail; light breast with a darker lower band.



Black Saddlebag
2 inches, with clear wings which have dark saddlebag-like spots.



Monarch
3.5 to 4 inches, orange-brown butterfly; frequently seen in late summer and fall migrating to Mexico in large groups.



Eastern Pondhawk
1.5 inches, male dragonfly is blue and female is emerald green; both have clear wings.



Familiar Bluet Damselfly
1 to 1.5 inches, male has a blue body; females are less colorful.



Ebony Jewelwing
1.5 to 2.0 inches, a dark damselfly that can look metallic green or purple.



Skippers
1 to 2 inches, small butterflies that feed on a favorite food, Swamp Milkweed, which is depicted in the picture.



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail, Virginia State Butterfly
4 to 6 inches, typically yellow with black tiger stripes; some females are dark with a blue pattern near the edges.



Common Buckeye
2 to 2.5 inches, spots give it its name; seen frequently in late summer flying in small groups.



Cloudless Sulphur
2 to 3 inches, pale lemon-yellow butterfly with small dot on the wings, seen frequently in late summer.



Arrow Arum
4 to 8 foot leaves, can grow to be 4 to 8 feet tall; arrow-shaped leaves on stalks; grows at marsh edge; blooms in late spring.



Loblolly Pine
60 to 110 feet, most common pine tree in Virginia; often the tallest tree in a landscape; loses lower branches as it grows; needles come in sets of three and are up to 10 inches long.



Sweet Autumn Clematis (Introduced)
12 to 15 feet, vine with fragrant white flowers; often found covering bushes; leaves are dark green, shiny, and smooth; can be invasive and crowd out other plants; blooms in late summer.



Swamp Rose
3 to 6 feet, found in swamps, marshes, and along the bank; blooms in the summer and pea-sized rose hips form after blooming.



Pickerelweed
2 feet above water, leaves are arrow shaped with rounded bottoms; long spikes of purple flowers attract bees and butterflies May to October.



Groundsel or High Tide Bush
6 to 12 feet, mounding shrub found in salt marshes with white flowers in late summer; female plants have fluffy, silvery seed pods.



Narrow-leaved Cattail
Up to 10 feet, cattail species that tolerates the tidal marsh salinity; leaves are flat and very narrow.



Virginia Seashore or Saltmarsh Mallow
Up to 3 feet, Looks like hibiscus with smaller flowers; blooms summer into fall.



Trumpet Vine
Up to 35 feet, has a woody vine that covers trees or whatever is in its path; orange to red flowers in late summer; a favorite of hummingbirds.



Soft Rush
Up to 3 feet, stems are smooth and round; grows in large clumps at the water's edge; blooms during summer.



Sourwood or Sorrel Tree
30 to 40 feet, small tree with crooked branches; can live 100 to 200 years; white clusters of flowers in July and pale yellow seeds in fall; bees use flower pollen to make honey.



Northern Water Snake
Up to 55 inches, non-venomous common snake that can be tan, brown, or gray with banding.



Wax Myrtle or Bayberry
12 to 20 feet, multi-trunked evergreen shrub with green flowers in the spring; female plant forms small, blue berries in the fall.



Phragmites (introduced)
Up to 15 feet, tall, invasive species that quickly crowds out sensitive native marsh plants.



Giant Cordgrass or Spartina
Up to 10 feet, and large grass; common in tidal marshes; seedhead has 20 to 40 spikes.



Fiddler Crabs
Up to 2 inches, seen at low tide; come in a variety of species.



Wild Rice
3 to 4 feet above the water, grows well in shallow, slow-flowing water. Often, only the flowering head of wild rice rises above the water; a source of food and environmental cover; food source for birds and other aquatic wildlife.



Atlantic Rangia Clams
Up to 2 inches, inhabit a mixture of low salinity, brackish water, sandy mud, and vegetation; non-selective filter-feeder; found from the Mexican Gulf to the Chesapeake Bay.



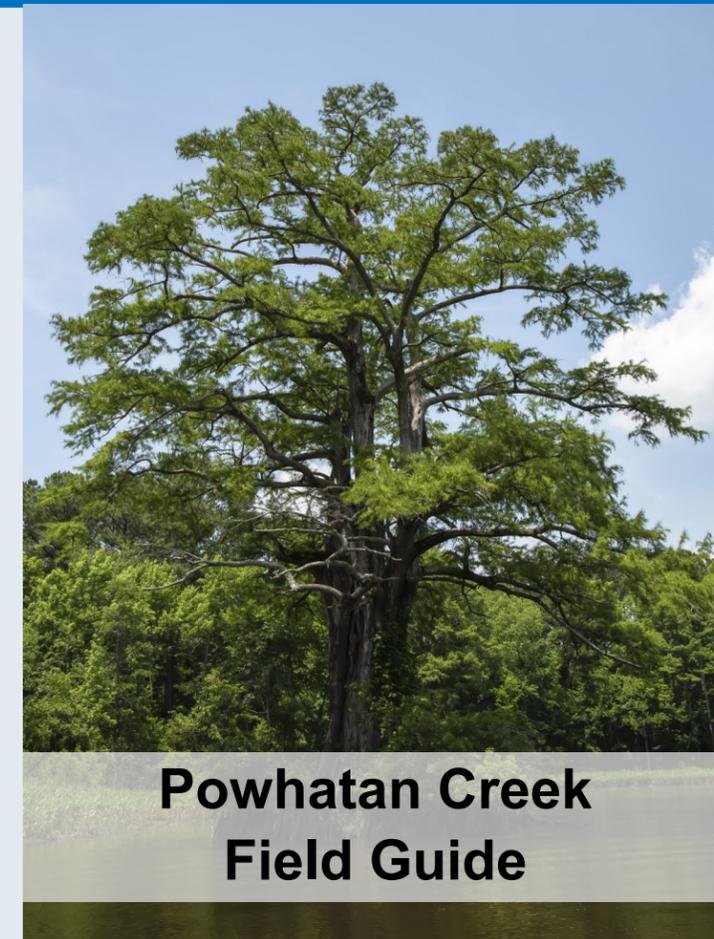
Bald Cypress
50 to 70 feet, conifer tree that loses its needles in the winter; known for its knees that rise above the water.



Beaver
Up to 66 pounds, has a large, flat tail.



Muskrat
Up to 4 pounds, swims with head above water and has a long, rat-like tail.



Powhatan Creek Field Guide

This field guide was created in partnership with the James River Association RiverRats, Virginia Master Naturalist Historic Rivers Chapter, and James City County. Many thanks to Craig Metcalfe and Judy Jones for spearheading this project.

Photographs courtesy of Felice Bond, Shirley Devan, Gary Driscoll, Judy Kinshaw-Ellis, Cathy Flanagan, Adrienne Frank, Cheryl Jacobson, Judy Jones, Seig and Alice Kopinitz, Teta Kain, Les Lawrence, Jeanette and Keith Navia, Wendy Nelson, and Brian Taber.

Map courtesy of Kim Hazelwood

