

Salt Marsh Harvest Mouse

The Delta Ecosystem

Delta Visitors:

Every year, millions of ducks and geese come to visit the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta and stay over winter. The Delta is a major resting spot along the Pacific Flyway — the bird migration route running north to south along the western edge of North America. One of the largest of these frequent flyers is the Sandhill Crane. Famous for its comical courtship "dance", this shy bird spends the winter looking for food in the fields surrounding the Delta waterways.

Connect the dots to draw a picture of this celebrated Delta guest!



A Delta Monster?

No... there aren't any *real* monsters in the Delta, but there are some *really big* critters lurking in its waters! This animal can grow up to 20 feet and weigh over 1,000 pounds! Its cousin, seen swimming about this page, doesn't get quite so big.

Unscramble the letters below to find out who this gentle giant is. The answer is on the bottom of this page.

NRUTGOSE
the WHITE

What is an Ecosystem?

An ecosystem is a group of plants and animals in their surroundings interacting and working together as a unit.

The Bay-Delta ecosystem is the largest place on the west coast where the fresh water from the rivers mixes with the salt water from the ocean. There are 54 different species of fish, 225 birds, 52 mammals, and 22 reptile and amphibian species living there, many of which are threatened or endangered.

Why Is the Delta Ecosystem Important to Us?

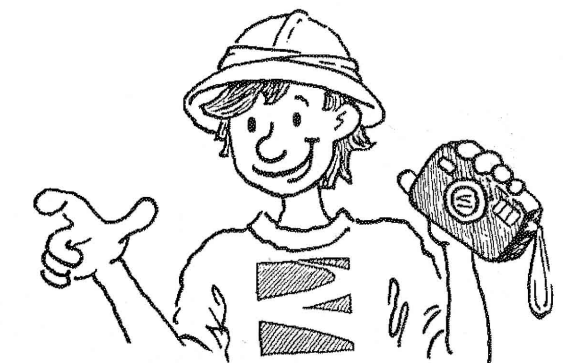
The Delta ecosystem and its surrounding wetland habitats provide multiple uses.

These include:

- farm land for crops;
- water for household, drinking, agriculture, cities, and businesses;
- water storage;
- water filtration and purification.

Restoring the Delta Ecosystem

A healthy Bay-Delta system is important to the wildlife that live there, as well as for the water quality and water supply reliability to California as a whole. The Ecosystem Restoration program is one of four shared goals of the California Bay-Delta Program. The purpose of the program is to improve the health of the Bay-Delta system through saving and fixing the places where fish, birds and other animals eat and live.



What can YOU do to Help?

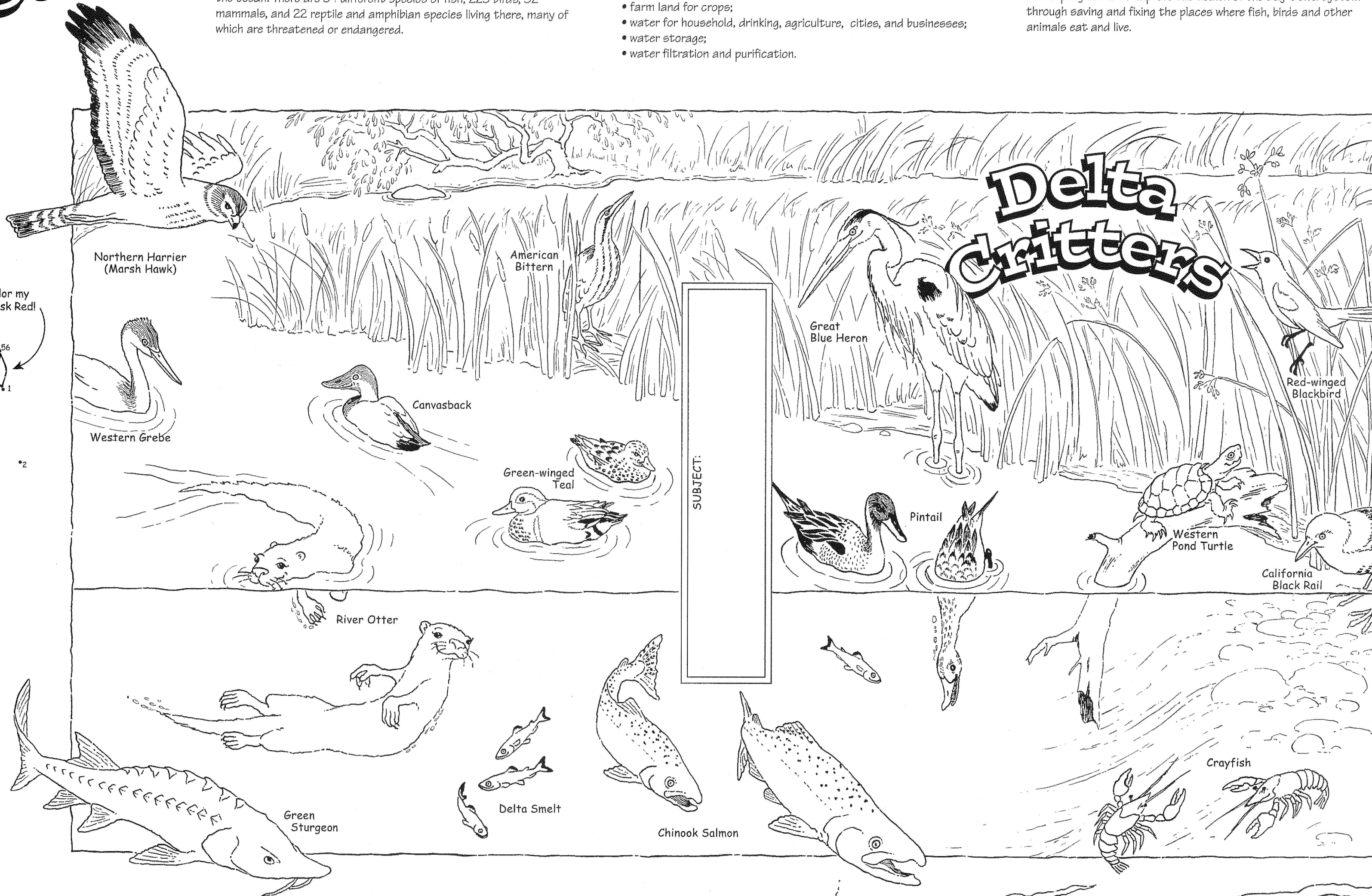
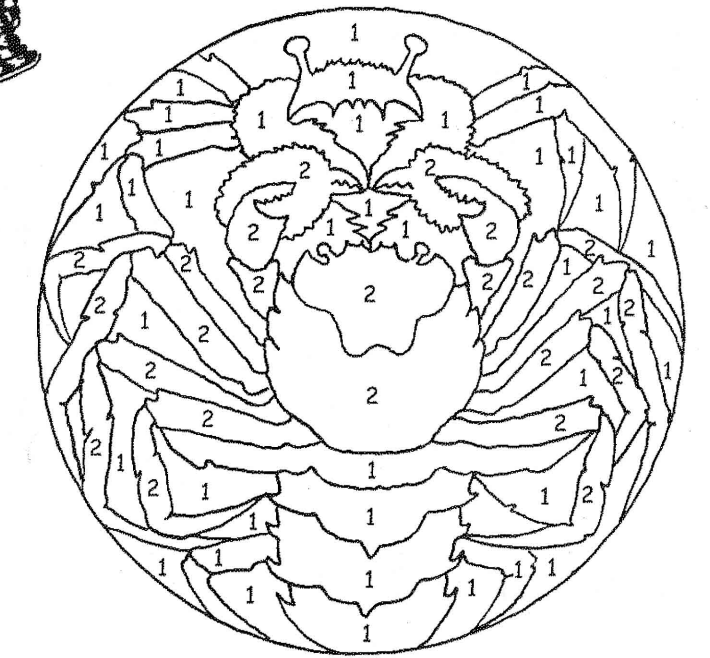
The Delta is a special place to visit and see. Here are four things you can do to protect it:

- 1) Put trash in its proper place; don't litter.
- 2) Take pictures of the plants and animals you see rather than removing or displacing them.
- 3) Leave the area the way you found it. Don't dump plants or animals in the waterways.
- 4) Save water! The water we use affects the Delta's ability to function properly.

Alien Invaders!

Over 200 non-native species — which include animals, plants, and microscopic organisms — have been introduced to the Delta and stayed. A great majority of these non-Californian species have upset the natural balance of the ecosystem by competing and crowding out the California natives. One of these troublesome pests is hidden in the picture below. Follow the instructions to find out what it is. (The answer is at the bottom of the page.)

Instructions: Color each numbered area using the following code:
1—Blue 2—Brown



Fishy Maze:

The Delta is vast maze of islands and waterways that provide the pathway for adult salmon to spawn upriver and their young to travel back to the ocean as they grow. Besides being a pathway, the Delta gives the young salmon a place to eat, grow, and adapt to the saltier ocean water, giving them a better chance for survival.

Our friend Sally Salmon has just spent the summer out in the Pacific Ocean and needs to navigate her way back to the freshwater stream from where she hatched. See if you can help her find the way home to "HAPPY RIVER".



Additional copies can be ordered online at <http://www.water.ca.gov/education/catalog.cfm>

Answers: Delta Monster: the White Sturgeon / Alien Invaders: the Chinese Mitten Crab