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EDWARD K. LOVE CONSERVATION FOUNDATION CYPRESS SWAMP
New exhibit in 1904 Flight Cage commemorates World's Fair centennial

To enter a cypress swamp is to experience a world of sunlight and shadows, the silence of a white ibis wading in still water as it fishes or the noise of a great egret defending its territory. When visitors enter the Edward K. Love Conservation Foundation Cypress Swamp, which opened in June 2004, they enter a world both mysterious and mesmerizing.

The Zoo's Cypress Swamp, located in the historic 1904 Flight Cage built for the World's Fair, showcases 16 species of North American birds – from the roseate spoonbill and yellow-crowned night heron to the snowy egret and double-crested cormorant - that thrive in cypress swamps along the Mississippi River. The swamps of southeastern Missouri and southern Illinois are wetlands, carved out by the meandering Mississippi over thousands of years.

Healthy swamps are full of life, both above and below the water's surface. Swamps are vitally important because thousands of animal species rely on swamps at some point in their lives, whether it's as a "nursery" where youngsters get their start, a permanent home or a place through which they migrate.

What makes a swamp a swamp? Swampland is covered by water for all or part of the year. It supports trees and shrubs, as well as the majestic cypress tree. Cypress trees can survive in standing water because their roots, or "knees," grow straight up out of the water. Some scientists think the cypress knees help the roots to breathe. Others say the knees, together with the trees' swollen trunks, help anchor the trees below the water.

At the Cypress Swamp exhibit, a winding pathway transports visitors to a floating bridge and viewing pier. Hardwoods, shrubs, aquatic plants and cypress snags are planted lushly along the way. Pools and rock outcroppings complete the natural habitat.

In the swamp are North American bird species that live and thrive in cypress swamps, including the blue-winged teal, bufflehead duck, canvasback duck, hooded merganser, ruddy duck, northern pintail duck and North American wood duck. Other colorful additions are the black-crowned night heron, yellow-crowned night heron, green heron, great egret, cattle egret, roseate spoonbill, snowy egret, double-crested cormorant and white ibis.

Admission to the St. Louis Zoo and Cypress Swamp is free.

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