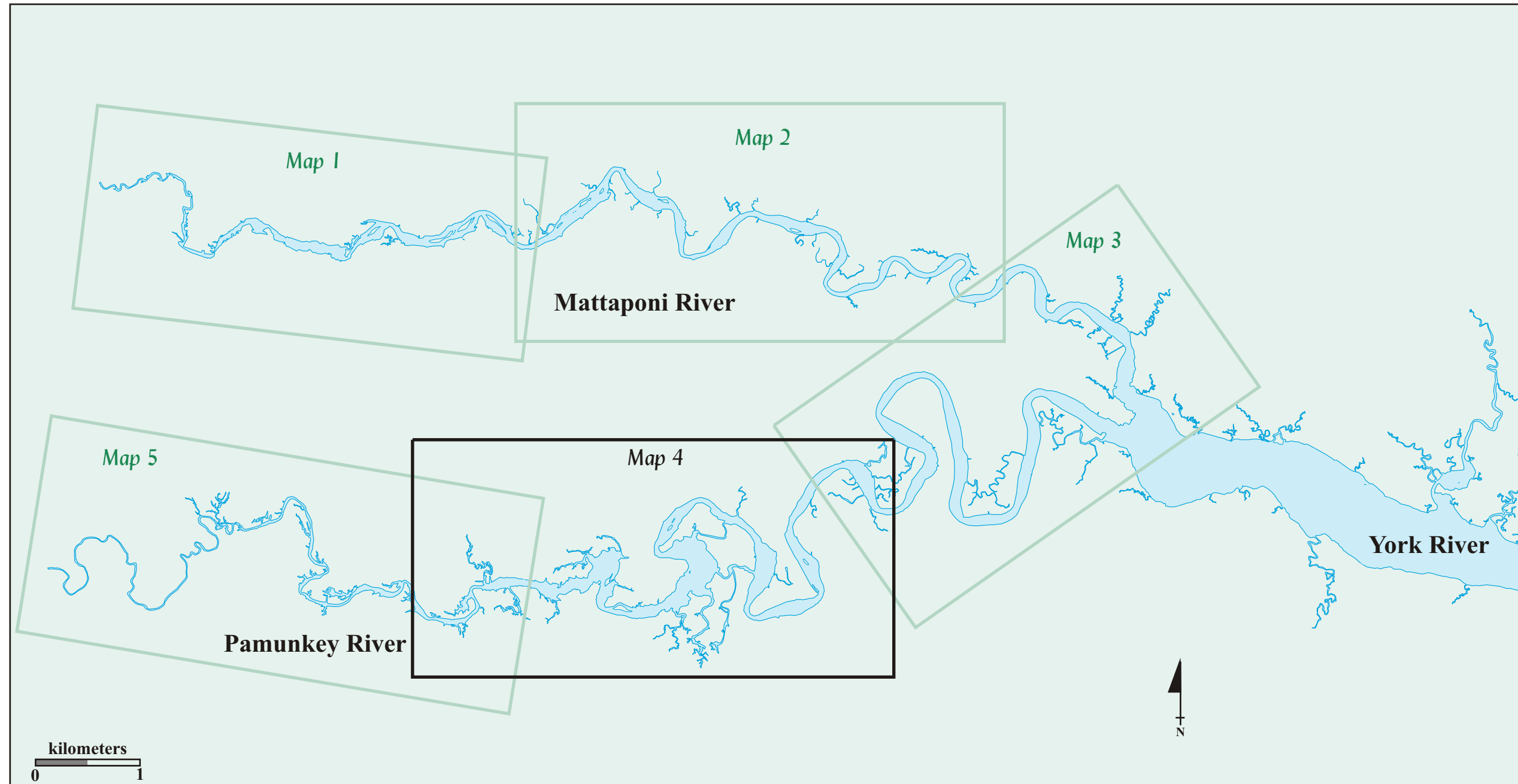


Mattaponi and Pamunkey Rivers

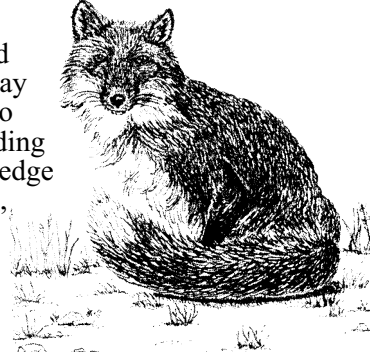
— Map Guide —



— What You Might Find on this Part of the River —

Red Fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

Early morning and sunset paddlers may be lucky enough to spot a red fox feeding along the water's edge on insects, berries, mice, and voles. The red fox is the more commonly seen fox of the two that inhabit the Chesapeake region, sporting silky rust-red body fur and a white underside, with a bushy tail of red and black fur tipped in white. Its swift feet and lower legs are black.



The body of this nocturnal creature reaches about 25 inches at maturity, and the tail, another 15 inches. At about ten pounds, the red fox is one of the smaller members of the canine family. Both the male and female pups are raised in small dens found near the river's edge.

The red fox is known for its cunning and clever behavior and its ability to elude the most able of hunters. It has adapted well to changes in the watershed and is commonly found in more developed regions.

Arrow arum (*Peltandra virginica*)

Long, pointed leaves shaped like arrowheads give this freshwater marsh plant its name. You will encounter this prominent, fleshy leaf along shallow stretches and tidal flats, where its stalk grows out of the mud. The flower covers a narrow sheath and opens May through July. Its green berries hang from a spike when fully mature.

Sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*)

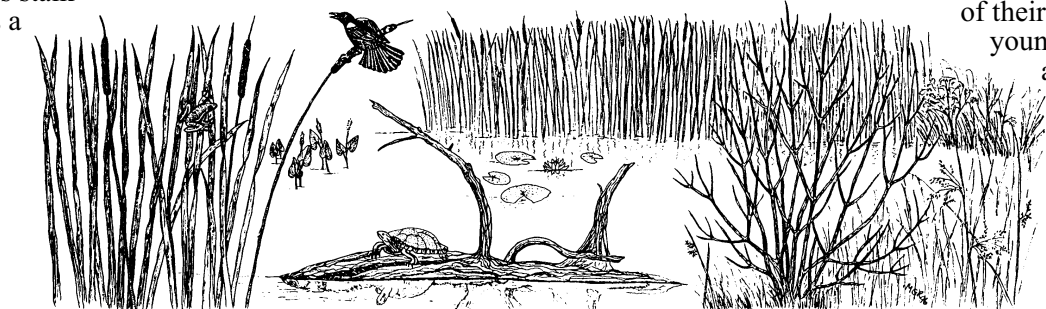
Sycamores are truly magnificent trees, growing to 50 meters in height, and known to reach an age of 100 to 500 years, or more! When immature, the creamy white bark tells you of its youth, but as it ages, the distinctive brown and mottled outer bark begins to cover the white, only to peel off in large chunks in the upper tree. The older bark near the base remains dark, while the upper two-thirds is usually white. As they mature, sycamores provide hollow trunks and large cavities that offer shelter for birds, opossum, and raccoon. Often found in communities with birch, maple, and black gum, sycamores prefer saturated, wooded wetlands.

Red-winged Blackbird (*Agelaius phoeniceus*)

A common escort of fresh and brackish marshes is the red-winged blackbird—abundant here on the Mattaponi and Pamunkey rivers. Listen for its joyful call, “oak-la-ree,” from its perch on a signpost or tall grasses of the upper marsh.

The female, like others of her genus, sports a dull plumage of brown with dark streaks on her breast. The male wears a patch of scarlet fringed with yellow on its wing shoulder. The red-winged blackbird is a medium sized bird with a long tail and sharp, pointed bill.

Once pressed almost to extinction because of the crop damage it did, the red-winged blackbird is still considered a nuisance by farmers, but appreciated as a natural predator of other birds, bugs, and worms.



Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*)

Residents and visitors to the Mattaponi and Pamunkey watershed are greeted frequently by the boisterous honking of geese lifting off from marsh platforms or flying in formation overhead. Many a duck hunter has admitted to spending long, chilly hours in a blind just for the opportunity to watch these magnificent seasonal visitors, with nary a thought of actually harming one.



The Mattaponi and Pamunkey rivers lie in direct path of the Atlantic Flyway—one of four major routes traveled by migratory birds over North America. As a result, paddlers who explore area marshes and feeder creeks during late fall are almost guaranteed a glimpse of one of the large number of geese who winter here. Canada geese feed on grasses and plants of the freshwater marsh which are abundant on these rivers. Adults reach about ten pounds.

Geese are born with uncanny navigational skills and appear to use large landforms, the stars, and the sun to guide them during migration. Traveling at 50 miles per hour in a “V” formation behind a single goose, each member of several family groups positions itself at equal spacing behind, riding the updrafts created by the wings of the bird directly ahead and to its inside.

Canada geese mate for life and spend nearly all of their time together. In spring, young goslings are raised among the reeds and grasses of backwater marshes and, when it's time to head north, find their place instinctively in the “V” formation.