**A Wetlands Food Web Story**

**Directions: Read the story below. Choose any 10 of the bold-faced organisms and make a food web to show their feeding relationships.**

On a bright spring day the sun shines onto the forest floor and warms the water in the nearby swamp. The warm weather and the moist soil cause plants to sprout.

Up through the dead and decomposing leaves (humus) of the forest come **spring beauties**, **larkspur**, and **wild phlox**. In the woods, the old **oak trees** unfold their new leaves, and within a matter of days the leaves begin to produce food by photosynthesis. **Mushrooms** pop up around rotting logs, and **beetle larvae** feast on the mushrooms and decayed wood. Along the edge of the swamp, **wild irises** begin to emerge from the still water. The surface of the dark, swamp water is soon coated with a green layer of tiny **duckweed plants**.

Soon the spring warmth triggers the emergence of linden looper caterpillar eggs, and these young **caterpillars** crawl onto the tender oak leaves and begin feeding. In the swamp, the **cypress** and **water tupelo** have begun to produce new leaves, all the better to hide the nest of bright yellow **prothonotary warblers**. The hungry babies are fed a constant diet of looper caterpillars and any other insects the parents can find. The new tree and understory growth allow a female **deer** to eat well; in turn, she provides food to her fawn.

**Earthworms** tunnel through the moist earth, leaving behind little piles of soil in which wildflower seeds will sprout. **Aphids** find the young oak leaves juicy and nourishing (they stick their needle-like mouthparts into the leaves and suck the sap) and **lady beetles** find the aphids equally yummy. A bright green **tiger beetle** walks along sunny forest paths in search of its dinner – a green-clouded **swallowtail caterpillar** that has fallen off its food plant (**spicebush**). A tiger beetle strays too near the water’s edge, and becomes dinner for a large **bullfrog**. **Spiders** spin silken webs in the branches of the cypresses to catch unsuspecting **midges** that have just emerged from the swamp, where they grew fat as larvae while eating **algae**. A lazy **raccoon** searches for beetle larvae, animal carcasses, or even ripening **blackberries**. As the season progresses, the young warblers must be wary of **owls** and **hawks**, the deer and fawn wary of the **hunter**, and the bullfrog wary of a passing **great blue heron**. All casualties of the woods and swamp ultimately end up as dinner for a large **turkey vulture**, or for the myriads of **bacteria** and **fungi** that blanket the forest and swamp.

Adapted from: [www.natureillinois.org/natwrks.htm](http://www.natureillinois.org/natwrks.htm)