



JSC's Animal Kingdom

NASA Johnson Space Center is a 1,580-acre facility that is home to more than engineers, astronauts and other personnel. Numerous species of animal life can be found inside the center's gates. JSC is also a wildflower refuge.

JSC is located in the Gulf Coast prairie and marsh ecological region of southeast Texas near Clear Lake and only a few miles from Galveston Bay. A large part of the developed areas of JSC contain planted trees and vegetation. The undeveloped areas are mostly grasslands, as it was before JSC opened in the 1960s.



The center's wildlife includes deer, opossums, squirrels, skunks, snakes, koi (Japanese fish) and a large assortment of feathered friends. There has even been a documented sighting of a bobcat onsite.

To help JSC employees live with their animal neighbors, the JSC Safety Action Team created a Wildlife Committee to help educate JSC employees on how to coexist safely with wildlife and provide information on seasonal wildlife issues.

The wildlife at JSC comes in all sizes. Deer are the largest wild animal species on site. A study conducted by Texas A&M University estimates that there are 160 to 174 deer at JSC. With JSC surrounded by an eight-foot fence, most deer live onsite with very few coming in from the outside.

The majority of wild animals onsite are much smaller. One of the most abundant groups is squirrels.

Rabbits can be seen hopping around the center and the occasional opossum or skunk can be seen making its way from one set of shrubs to another.



Wide varieties of birds enjoy the landscape at JSC. Songbirds such as mockingbirds, American robins, and cardinals can be heard serenading in the trees as birds of prey patrol the skies. The birds of prey include red-tailed hawks, red-shouldered hawks and northern harriers.

The center sees an increase in the bird population each fall and spring due to migration. Warblers and hummingbirds pass through on their way to and from their winter vacation spots.

JSC's mall is the site of several ponds filled with koi and provide safe haven for ducks. The ducks are wild, but find the center a good place to call home. The ponds can also attract snakes. Both non-poisonous and poisonous snakes reside at the center. All four types of U.S. poisonous snakes – rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, copperheads and coral snakes – are found in the Houston area.

On rare occasions, an alligator may be found sunning itself in one of the canals located at the edges of the center.

Not all of the animals onsite are wild or roaming free. JSC is taking part in a program with the Houston Zoo to breed the Attwater's Prairie Chicken. This endangered species is native to this ecological region. The prairie chickens are held in captivity at JSC for breeding.



People who drive down Saturn Road near JSC's main gate can get a good look at another captive species – the Texas Longhorn. The number of steers, heifers and calves roaming the range – a 60-acre tract of land just west of the Rocket Park – varies throughout the year.

The Longhorn Project, developed jointly by JSC, the Clear Creek Independent School District, the Houston Livestock Show & Rodeo and the Texas Longhorn Breeders Association of America, provides local high-school students with a one-of-a-kind learning environment that combines Western heritage with state-of-the-art technology.

The natural Texan habitat at JSC isn't limited to animals. JSC is now a test site for a new program called Sustainable Landscapes, developed by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower

Center in Austin and the American Association of Landscape Architects. The sustainable landscape will support the culture and values of the local



community, improve and restore desired wildlife habitat, and contribute to the overall health of the local ecosystem. The designated wildflower areas were seeded in the fall of 2005.

The Sustainable Landscapes program brings several potential benefits to JSC and its

workforce. Wildflowers could reduce grounds keeping expense by reducing the need to mow and water. Working conditions for employees will also improve with the natural beauty that native flowers provide.



Wild mammals that may be found at JSC

- White-tailed deer
- Domestic/feral cat
- Raccoon
- Opossum
- Striped skunk
- Nine-banded armadillo
- Nutria
- Eastern cottontail
- Fox squirrel
- Various bats
- Rats
- Mice
- Bobcat
- Coyote



Bird species that use JSC trees and grasslands

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|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Red-tailed hawk | American robin |
| Red-shouldered hawk | Inca dove |
| Barred owl | Blue jay |
| Eastern screech owl | Cardinal |
| Common crow | Common grackle |
| Killdeer | Rock dove or pigeon |
| Eastern meadowlark | Starling |
| Mourning dove | Sparrow |
| Loggerhead shrike | Turkey vulture |
| Mockingbird | Various migrating birds |

Birds that use JSC water habitats

- Egret
- Heron
- Mottled duck
- Belted kingfisher
- Purple Gallinule



Amphibians and reptiles

- Snake
- Turtle
- Lizard
- Skink
- Alligator
- Gecko



Captive Species

- Texas longhorn cattle
- Attwater's prairie chicken
- Koi



**Source: Baseline Biological Resource Report, Johnson Space Center, September 2005*