

# Water-Loving Wildlife

The lower portion of Oak Creek is an oasis. A lush ribbon of green weaves through a dry landscape, creating a riparian area. The streamside habitat improves water quality by storing, then slowly releasing, water and filtering sediment. Riparian areas, now less than 1% of all habitats in Arizona, offer essential food, water, and shelter, especially for wildlife.

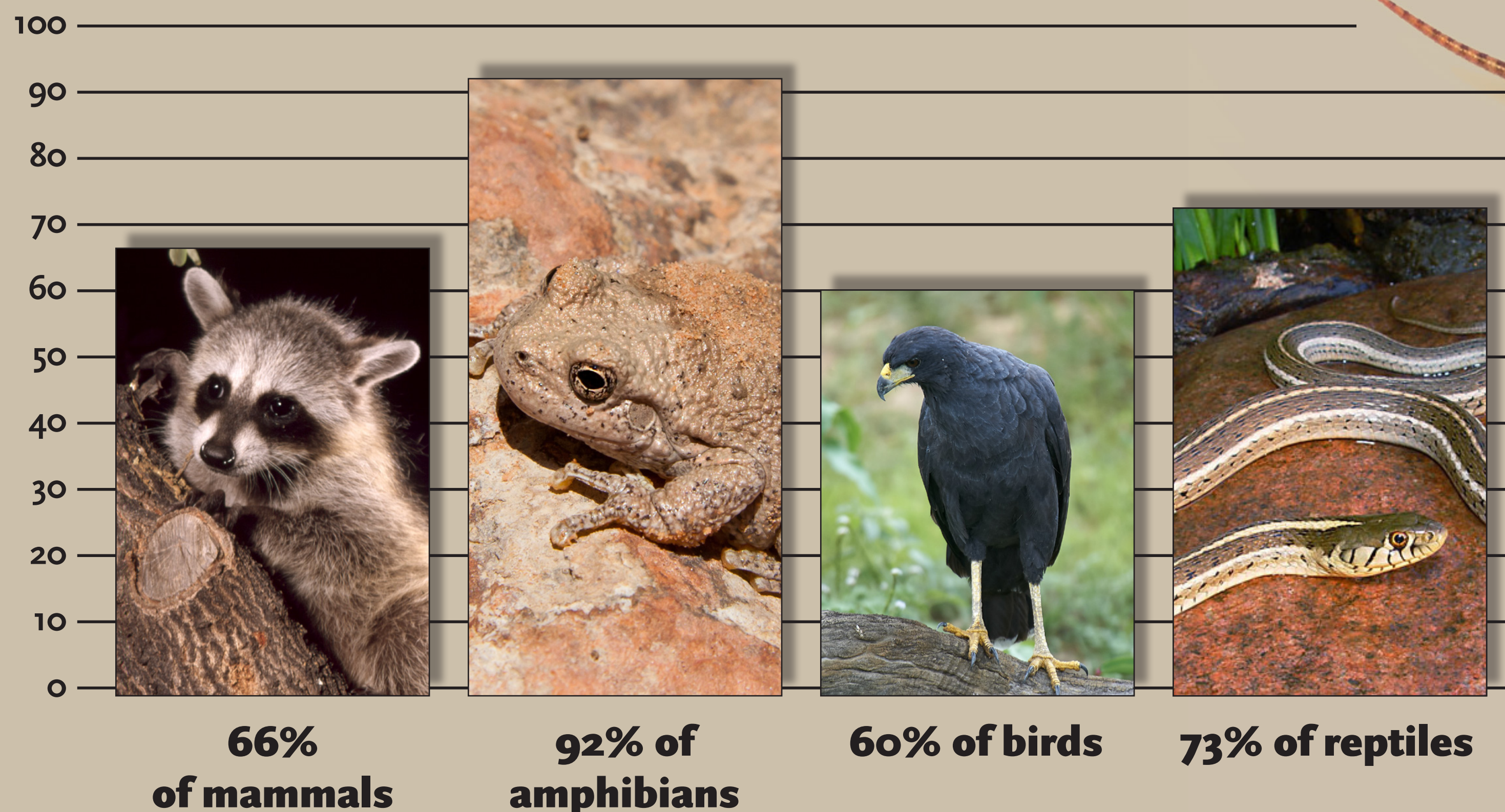
Keep an eye out for birds moving among the cottonwood, sycamore, ash, mesquite, and hackberry trees that line the creek. Each spring, colorful migratory birds follow this verdant corridor. In summer, **common black-hawks** nest along the creek. Look up to the treetops for a glimpse of red **summer tanagers**, and watch for **belted kingfishers** as they cruise up and down the creek looking for fish.

Some reptiles and amphibians call Oak Creek home, too. Narrow-headed and northern Mexican **gartersnakes** move along the banks and forage in the water. Frogs, such as the **canyon treefrog**, and toads, like the **red-spotted toad**, live in and beside the creek. Non-native creatures exist in many habitats, including the relatively pristine Crescent Moon Ranch area, resulting in **bullfrogs** and **crayfish** that eat the native aquatic species.

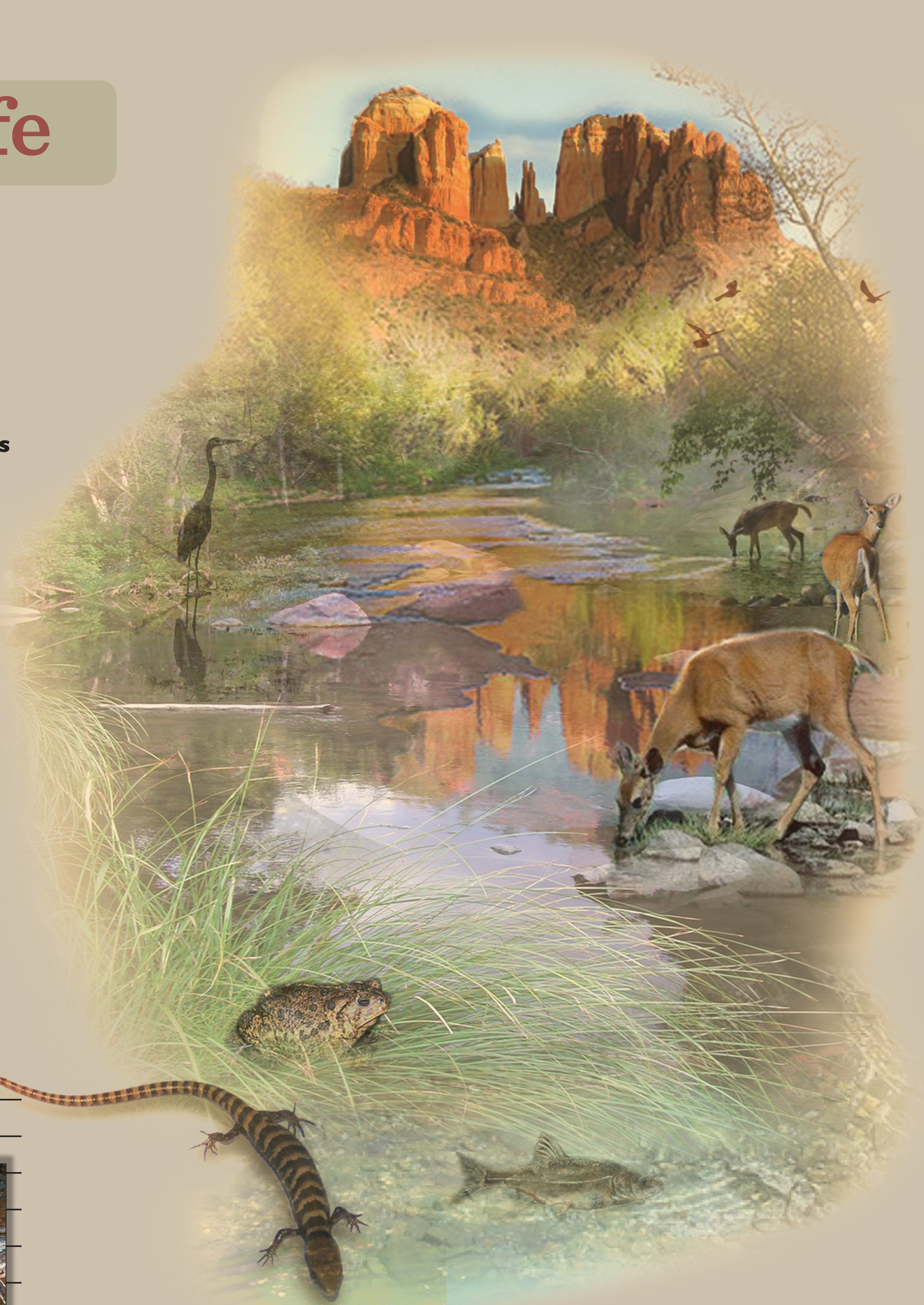
Mammals also frequent the area. **Raccoons**, **muskrats**, and **river otters** prowl in and around the water. The southwestern river otter disappeared in the early 1900s; the subspecies seen here today was introduced from Louisiana in the 1980s.

**Less than 1% of public land in the West is riparian.**

**Over 90% of Arizona's riparian areas have been lost since EuroAmerican settlement.**



**The majority of Arizona wildlife species utilize riparian habitats.**



## Respect Wildlife

- Observe wildlife from a distance. Use binoculars to get a closer look.
- Never offer food to a wild animal. Pack away all food at your campsite.
- Help care for wildlife habitat. Stay on designated trails, and do not remove or damage any plants.
- Always keep pets on a leash.