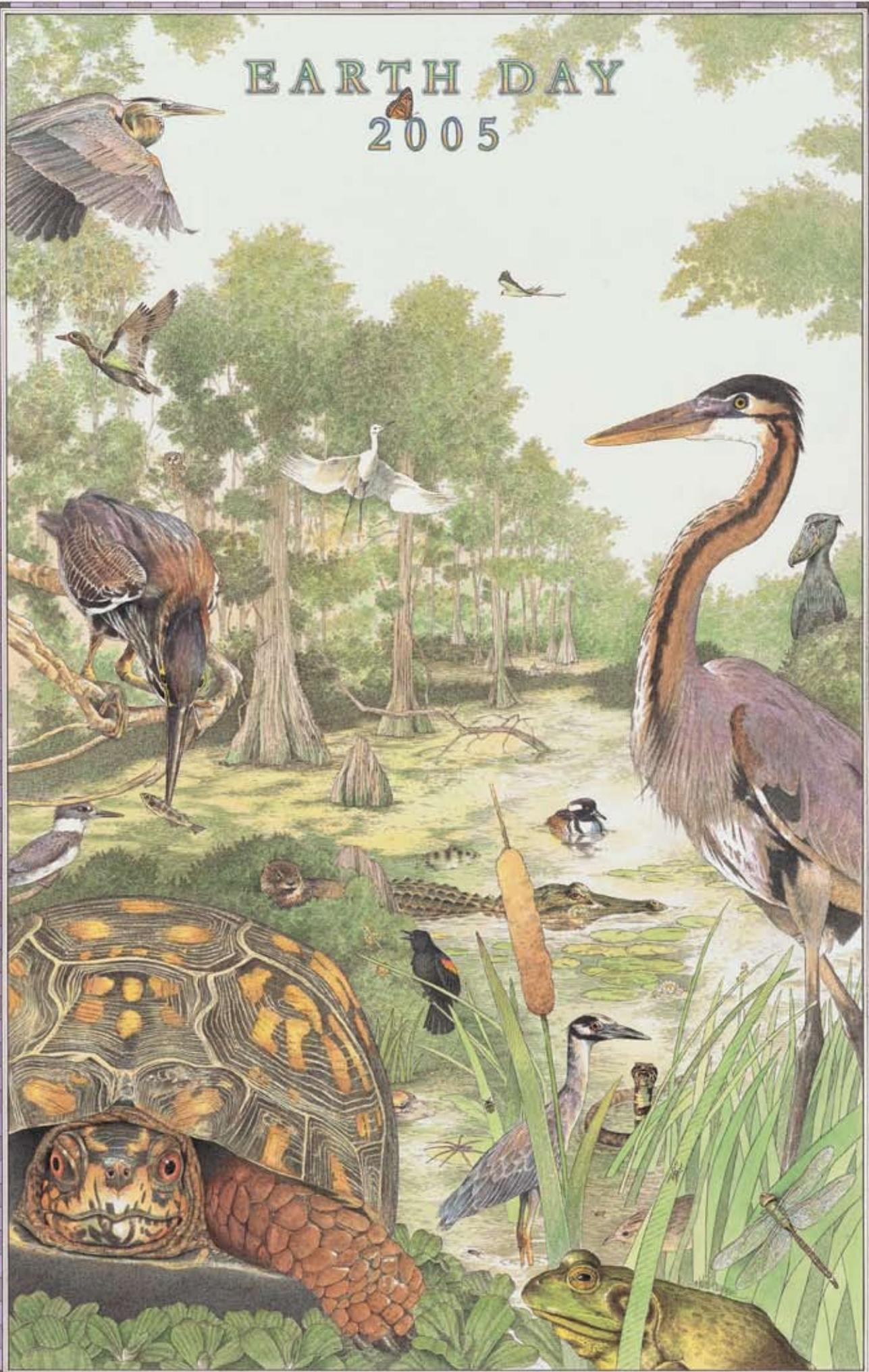


EARTH DAY 2005



 Wetlands—marshes, swamps, bogs, vernal pools, floodplains, and other wet habitats—are areas of the earth that are inundated or saturated by water during all or part of the year. They are found in every part of the world and in every climate. Interior wetlands are located where surface water collects or where underground water rises to the surface. Coastal wetlands are created by tides.  A spectacular diversity of species lives in wetland ecosystems. Their inhabitants include microbes, plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, fish, and mammals. Many species of birds and mammals rely on wetlands for food, water, and shelter, especially during migration and breeding.  Wetlands are essential to human existence as well, providing:  *Flood control*, holding heavy rainfall to prevent possible flooding downstream  *Clean water*, filtering excess nutrients and pollutants before runoff reaches open water  *Groundwater replenishment*, recharging underground aquifers that billions of people depend on for drinking water  *Shoreline stabilization*, protecting against erosion as wetland plants hold soil in place and absorb the energy of waves  *Climate change mitigation*, storing significant amounts of carbon that, if released by the destruction of wetlands, could contribute to global warming  *Economic benefits*, providing natural products such as fish and shellfish, timber, edible plants, and medicines derived from soils and plants.  Wetlands are among the most important and productive ecosystems on earth. 



Preserving them is vital.