

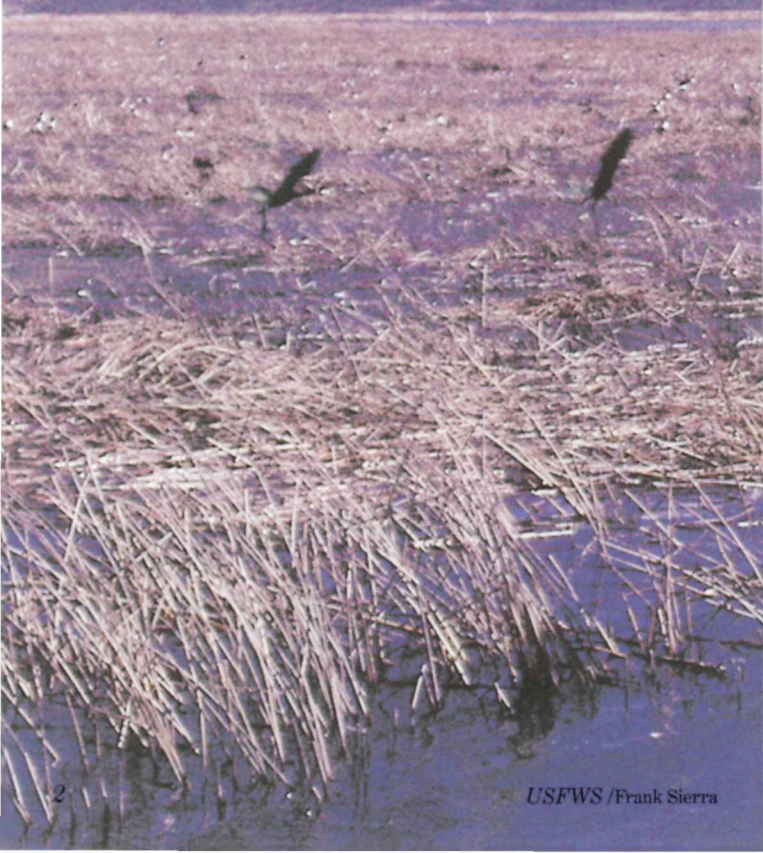
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear Lake

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



This vast bulrush marsh is a remnant of the old, much larger Dingle Swamp that once dominated the valley. It provides food, water, and shelter for aquatic wildlife of all types in the Bear Lake Valley.



About the Refuge



One of over 500 National Wildlife Refuges in the United States, Bear Lake Refuge was established in 1968 to protect and manage habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds.

Bear Lake Refuge is located in southeast Idaho, seven miles south of Montpelier.



Surrounded by mountains, it lies in Bear Lake Valley at an elevation ranging from 5,925 feet on the marsh to 6,800 feet on the rocky slopes of Merkle Mountain. The refuge office is located in the town of Montpelier.

Seasons

Summers at Bear Lake are cool with temperatures seldom exceeding 90 degrees. At night, summer temperatures generally drop below 50 degrees. From mid-November through mid-April, snow and ice cover the refuge. Annual precipitation varies from 10 to 12 inches.

American bittern.



Diverse Habitat

The 18,000-acre refuge is comprised mainly of a bulrush marsh, open water, and flooded meadows of sedges, rushes and grasses. Portions of the refuge include scattered grasslands and brush-covered mountain slopes.



USFWS/R. Sjostrom

Dingle Marsh

Bear Lake Refuge encompasses what is locally referred to as Dingle Swamp or Dingle Marsh. Along with Bear Lake proper, the marsh was once part of a larger prehistoric lake that filled the valley. As it drained and receded, Dingle Marsh was reduced from 25,000 acres to less than 17,000 before it became part of the refuge.

Sandhill crane on nest.



Abundant Wildlife

Waterfowl

The interspersed bulrush, open water and uplands provides ideal habitat for numerous waterfowl species. Common nesting species include the Canada goose, redhead, canvasback, mallard, gadwall, cinnamon teal and northern shoveler. In a typical breeding season, the refuge will



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Cinnamon teal.

produce 4,500 ducks and 1,800 geese. Trumpeter swans are also nesting on the refuge.

Colony-nesting

The refuge provides valuable habitat for 12 species that nest in colonies in bulrush. These include the white-faced ibis, snowy egret, black-crowned night-heron, great blue heron, double-crested cormorant, California gull, Franklin's gull, Caspian tern, Forster's tern, black tern, western grebe and eared grebe. Each species requires specific conditions for its nesting site.

Forster's tern.
(right)

Great blue heron.
(bottom, right)

Snowy egret.
(below)



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USFWS/Randy Lennom

Notable Species

Sandhill Cranes

Sandhill cranes are frequently observed on the refuge. Chances are good you will see crane pairs with young during the summer. In late September, flocks of 200-500 cranes often feed on refuge grainfields.



White-faced Ibis

Bear Lake Refuge harbors one of the largest nesting colonies of white-faced ibis, a species now quite rare in the United States. Up to 5,000 adult ibis may be present in the spring. Because of its relative scarcity, management activities give the white-faced ibis special consideration.



The refuge's shallow water and mudflat areas provide habitat for willets, avocets and stilts. Elusive rails are also present along with that master of camouflage, the bittern. Both are easiest to spot in the spring before vegetation is too tall and in the fall after hay has been cut.

Shorebirds



Black-necked Stilt.
(right)

American avocet.
(bottom, right)

Willet. (below)



Other Wildlife

Refuge habitat supports a rich variety of other migratory birds such as hawks, owls and many species of songbirds. Refuge biologists have identified 161 bird species which use the refuge. A separate bird list brochure is available, or take a look at the refuge's bird checklist at <http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov>.

Northern shoveler.



USFWS/Dave Menke

Hundreds of mule deer winter along Merkley Mountain and one or two moose are present during most seasons in refuge willows. Smaller mammals often seen are muskrats, skunks and cottontail rabbits. Residents less frequently seen vary from small meadow voles to beavers, coyotes, badgers, mink and weasels.

Mule deer doe.
(right)

Coyote.
(bottom, right)

Great horned owl.
(below)



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Priority Species



Trumpeter swan.

Because the refuge and surrounding area had always provided excellent goose nesting habitat, management originally emphasized Canada geese. Today, priorities have shifted to four other species whose populations have declined from historic levels: redhead and canvasback ducks, trumpeter swans and white-faced ibis.

Marsh Restoration



The Outlet Canal control structure regulates water levels in the marsh.

*Below:
Spring marsh burn.*
USFWS/Terry Gladwin

Since the turn of the century, human uses have led to the degradation of the quality of wildlife habitat on the refuge. Muddy water caused by carp feeding and silt from the Bear River have reduced water quality and resulted in a decline in wildlife use on the refuge. Today, you may notice water quality and wildlife differences between the Salt Meadow and Rainbow Units compared to other locations on the refuge.

Management is attempting to correct some of these problems. Diked units have been constructed to stabilize water levels for duck nesting, reduce the amount of silt deposited by the Bear River and exclude carp from the units.

Crops

The refuge cuts hay to provide short cover that is flooded in the spring to create feeding sites and rearing areas for waterfowl, sandhill cranes and ibis.

The refuge also cultivates several fields around the edge of the marsh to provide food crops of barley and alfalfa for waterfowl and sandhill cranes. They are planted on a rotation schedule to reduce the need for chemical fertilizers and herbicides. Up to 1,000 geese and 500 cranes use these crops during



USFWS/R. Sjostrom

Grainfield.

the spring, summer and fall. These farming operations also help reduce off-refuge crop damage caused by migratory birds.

Weed Control

Control of non-native, invasive weeds is another key management operation. Weed pests have few natural controls and can quickly replace native Idaho plants. The refuge uses selected herbicides to keep these problem plants under control.

Undisturbed Habitat

The refuge also maintains abundant habitat in an undisturbed, natural state. These areas provide tall, dense vegetation for species that prefer seclusion for nesting. It also provides escape cover from predators, such as striped skunks, raccoons, red foxes and mink.

Fire

Prescribed fire is used periodically in the more densely vegetated areas of the marsh. It creates open water ponds in the marsh after re-flooding and recycles nutrients which increases plant growth, resulting in improved habitat and markedly increased use by waterfowl.



Plant fills vital needs



White-faced ibis eggs in bulrush nest.

The dominant vegetation covering much of the deeper portions of the marsh is bulrush. The round-stemmed plants grow up to seven feet tall. Bear Lake's dense stands of bulrush, or "tules" as they are commonly called, play a vital role in the refuge environment.

Bulrush provides life needs for a diversity of migratory birds and small mammals. It affords shelter from the elements and cover for escape from predators. It provides concealment for nest sites and it is used for nesting

material. Various wildlife species eat the plant's seeds, stems and roots. The tall stems serve as perches for certain birds to sing and establish their territories. In addition,

the vastness of the bulrush marsh contributes to the seclusion needed by many species for successful nesting.

Ibis and Franklin gull colony nesting in bulrush.



Canada geese.



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USFWS/R. Sjöstrom

When?



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American kestrel.

Plan your visit according to the season and time of day. Wildlife is generally more active in mornings and early evenings than in the afternoon.

Spring, summer and fall are good times to take advantage of the refuge's excellent viewing opportunities. The months of May and June are especially prime times to see a lot of wildlife activity including young Canada goose goslings scurrying to follow their mothers.

Where?

Often the best bet is to drive along the Wildlife Observation Route around the Salt Meadow Unit; there you should see a variety of waterfowl, waterbirds and shorebirds. You may hike on all refuge roads which are open to vehicle travel. Driving the roads which encircle the refuge provides broad vistas of habitat and good chances to see wildlife.

Ruddy duck.



USFWS/Dave Menke

How?

Your car is an excellent observation and photographic blind. Staying in your car will often avoid scaring wildlife and provide you with better viewing opportunities.

Use binoculars and spotting scopes to bring animals "closer" to you without disturbing them.

Binoculars, camera, insect repellent, bird identification books, water and a lunch will contribute to a pleasant visit.



Spring

Spring at Bear Lake comes late, with some ice still on the refuge marsh through late April. The early migrants such as Canada geese, mallards and northern pintails arrive in early March. From mid-March



Redhead.

to early April spring migration peaks as the ice slowly recedes and open water begins to show in the ponds. Ducks including canvasbacks, redheads and lesser scaup are abundant at this time. Sandhill cranes can easily be seen, usually as pairs preparing to nest. Canada geese

begin nesting in April, and the peak of their hatch is May 10-15. April and May see the arrival of thousands of Franklin's gulls and white-faced ibis. Large numbers of herons, egrets, bitterns, terns and grebes establish nesting sites in the marsh. Shorebirds such as the American avocet and black-necked stilt are some of the last to arrive.

Mallard.



© Gary C. Will

Summer

During June the early duck broods of mallards and canvasbacks are already hatching out, quickly followed by redheads, ruddy ducks, cinnamon teal, shovelers and gadwalls. As June progresses into July, marsh vegetation increases in height, making it more difficult to see the various bird species. White-faced ibis nest on the refuge in large numbers; watch for their numerous small feeding flocks flying low over



USFWS/R. Sjostrom

Canada geese with brood.

the marsh to flooded fields around the valley. Sandhill cranes nest near marsh edges, and crane chicks can be seen if you look carefully. Black and Forster's terns, as well as Franklin's gulls are frequently seen overhead

feeding on insects and diving for small fish.

Grebes (western, Clark's, pied-billed and eared) are commonly seen in the canals and ponds. Double-crested cormorants,

California gulls and white pelicans are also frequently observed within the refuge marsh.



© C.H. Trost

Clark's grebe with chicks.

Fall/Winter



Bald eagle.

Fall comes early in the high-elevation Bear Lake Valley. September brings hundreds of sandhill cranes which gather on the refuge to feed in refuge grainfields. Young ducks learn to fly by late September. Waterfowl, mostly from Canada, pass through the valley on fall migration from mid-September through mid-November. Freeze-up of refuge marshes is early, usually by mid-November. Most birds leave the valley after freeze-up to avoid the snowy, cold winters—notable exceptions are rough-legged hawks and bald eagles which winter in the area.

In 1995, the refuge acquired the Thomas Fork Unit, a wetland located along the Bear River just north of Highway 30 near Border, Wyoming. Historically, it is recognized as the place where pioneers on the Oregon Trail crossed the creek as they headed west toward Montpelier.

Migration Stopover



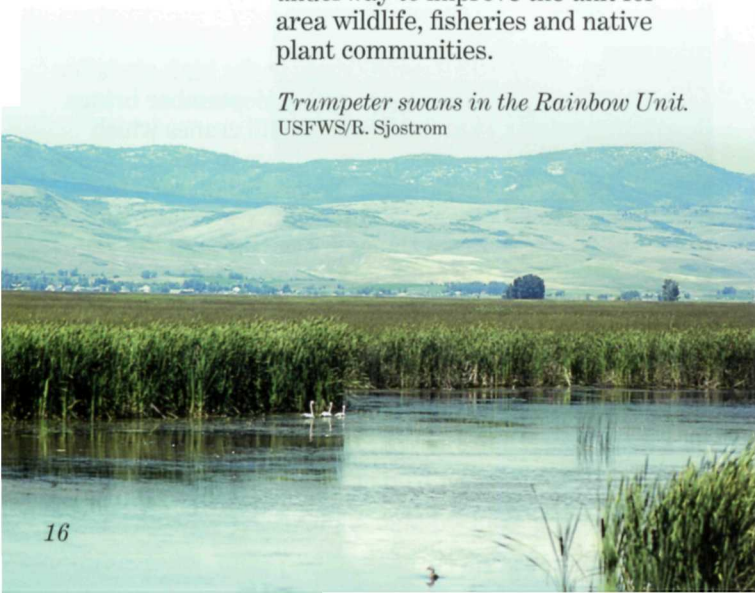
Great horned owl owlets feeding.

The unit comprises 1,015 acres of protected wetlands, stream bank willow habitat and meadow grasslands along Thomas Fork Creek. It is a valuable migration stop for sandhill cranes and other migratory birds. It also serves as an important preserve for native plant communities, such as riparian habitat (stream bank willows), and provides fisheries habitat for the Bonneville cutthroat trout.

Research

To maximize protection of these resources, this unit is closed to the public. Research efforts and habitat management programs are underway to improve the unit for area wildlife, fisheries and native plant communities.

Trumpeter swans in the Rainbow Unit.
USFWS/R. Sjostrom



Native Americans

Artifacts found along creek channels and within the marsh tell us Shoshone

Indians used Bear Lake Valley for grazing horses and hunting, and the Bannock Indians may have also visited the valley. Buffalo bones and skulls have also been found in the marsh.



According to historical sources, ranchers using Bunn Island in the early 1900s removed a "carload" of buffalo bones in order to proceed with hay cutting.

Canal System

Around that same time, the Utah Power and Light Company built a canal system and pumping station as part of a water storage and power generation system. The system diverted the Bear River through the marsh and into Bear Lake for storage until released for use downstream. Because of the storage system, the marsh water fluctuates from a full level in the spring to a lower level in the fall.



Newly hatched Canada geese goslings in the refuge marsh.

Naming Bear Lake

An early trapper, Donald McKenzie, is given credit for naming Black Bears Lake. The name was later shortened to Bear Lake, for which the valley, county and refuge were named.

Activities

Refuge Hours



Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge welcomes visitors year-round for DAY USE ONLY. At times, large portions of the refuge are closed to public entry to minimize disturbance to wildlife, particularly during the nesting season.

Wildlife Observation and Photography



The refuge provides excellent opportunities to view wildlife. Visitors may drive the public roads that encircle the refuge, or use the roads and trails at the north end of the refuge. The Salt Meadow Unit Wildlife Observation Route is open to vehicle and foot travel year-round, although it may be impassable in the winter.

Two accessible wildlife photography blinds are available for visitor use March 15 - September 20.

Hiking



Hiking is permitted on all roads open to vehicle travel. General hiking is permitted July 1 - January 20 in areas of the refuge marked on the map as seasonally open. Horseback riding is allowed only on roads and trails shown on the brochure map.

The accessible walking trail is open March 15 - September 20.

Access

Please respect the property rights of others. Permission should be obtained from adjacent landowners before crossing private land to enter open portions of the refuge.

Cross-country Skiing and Snowshoeing



Those who choose to enjoy the refuge in this manner are welcome. Use areas and dates are the same as those for hiking.

Use of any motorized vehicles and bicycles is permitted only on the roads and trails shown on the map in this brochure. You may park at any road's edge in a manner that does not obstruct traffic or in designated

Vehicles and Parking



Parking, *continued*

parking areas. Refuge roads may be snowed in December to mid-March.

Boating



Boating is permitted only in those areas shown as open to boating on the map in this brochure. Motorized and non-motorized boats may be used September 20 - January 15.

The Canoe Trail is open July 1 - September 20.

Pets



Pets must be leashed, except dogs used for hunting during the waterfowl or upland hunts. Hunting dogs must be under the owner's control at all times.

Weapons



Individuals may possess, carry and transport concealed, loaded and operable firearms on the refuge in accordance with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32). Target shooting and sighting-in weapons are not permitted.

Prohibited Activities



No camping, overnight parking, fires, fireworks or collecting objects of antiquity, including Indian artifacts.

Area Services

The Bear Lake Valley has numerous services and accommodations available to visitors within a short driving distance. Further information may be obtained from:

Bear Lake Convention
and Visitors Bureau
69 N. Paradise Parkway, Bldg. A
P. O. Box 471
Garden City, UT 84028
435/946 2197 or 1 800/448 BEAR(2327)
www.bearlake.org

Area Services,
continued

Camping



Public and private campgrounds are available nearby. Caribou National Forest maintains several public campgrounds, and private campgrounds are available throughout the valley.

Hunting

Licenses

All hunters must carry a valid State hunting license and all required State and Federal stamps, validations and permits.

Seasons

Dates, hours and bag limits for species listed below correspond to State regulations.

Species

Ducks, geese, coots, mergansers, snipe, gray partridge, sage grouse and cottontails may be hunted. All other species of wildlife are protected and may NOT be killed.

Ammunition

Approved nontoxic shot is required for hunting all species.

Personal Property

All personal property including boats and decoys must be removed from the refuge at the end of the day.

Alcohol

The use or possession of alcoholic beverages while hunting is prohibited.

Hunting Areas and Regulations

Hunting is permitted only in those areas designated as open to hunting on the map in this brochure and is subject to the following regulations.

Motorized and non-motorized boats are allowed in the hunting area September 20 - January 15.

Airthrust boats are prohibited.

The south boundary of the hunting area within Mud Lake is delineated by a row of orange buoys.

Hunting, continued

Temporary blinds of natural vegetation may be constructed, but such blinds shall be available for general use on a first-come, first-served basis. Construction of permanent blinds is prohibited.



The Refuge's two **Accessible Hunting Blinds** are available to disabled sportsmen on a first come first serve basis **one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunrise**. After this time, they are available to the general hunting public to use. These blinds are **open for use Sept. 20 - Jan. 20** per State Hunting regulations.

Fishing

Fishing

Fishing opportunities are available. However, the refuge is not noted for its game fisheries. Fishing is more popular in the nearby mountain streams and adjacent Bear Lake.

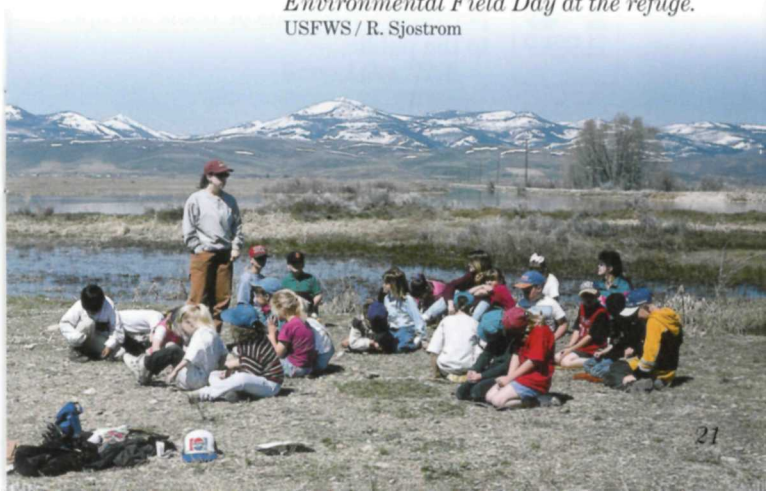
Licenses

All anglers 14 years of age and older must carry a valid State fishing license.

Seasons and Limits

Dates, bag limits, legal species and other regulations correspond to the State regulations.

A local school group enjoying Environmental Field Day at the refuge.
USFWS / R. Sjostrom



Fishing, *continued*

Fishing Areas

Fishing is permitted only in the north portion of the Outlet Canal and immediately north of the Lifton Pumping Station, as designated on the map in this brochure.

Boats

Boating is not permitted in the fishing area.

Signs Protect Resources

To provide optimum freedom for visitors while also protecting wildlife interests, refuge signs grant or restrict certain activities. Please respect the following signs:



This sign delineates the refuge boundary. You may enter the area only as permitted by refuge regulations.



The area beyond this sign may be hunted as permitted by refuge regulations.



The area beyond this sign may be fished as permitted by refuge regulations.



This area is closed to ALL entry. No hunting, fishing or hiking is permitted. No roads or trails are open to the public.



The area beyond this sign is closed to ALL hunting. Firearms are prohibited. You may enter the area only as permitted by refuge regulations.



This emblem, designed by conservationist J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Visit Other Refuges



Southeast Idaho National Wildlife Refuge Complex

The Southeast Idaho NWR Complex administers five units of the Refuge System: Bear Lake, Camas, Grays Lake and Minidoka NWRs, and Oxford Slough Waterfowl Production Area. Each has wildlife recreational opportunities. For more information, call:

Bear Lake NWR
(208) 847-1757

Camas NWR
(208) 662-5423

Grays Lake NWR
(208) 574-2755

Minidoka NWR
(208) 436-3589

Oxford Slough WPA
(208) 847-1757

Southeast Idaho NWR Complex
4425 Burley Drive, Suite A
Chubbuck, ID 83202
(208) 237-6615

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear Lake National Wildlife Refuge
Deliveries: 322 North Main St.
Mail: P.O. Box 9
Montpelier, ID 83254
208/847 1757

Idaho Relay Service
TTY 1 800/377 3529
Voice 1 800/377 1363

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
<http://www.fws.gov>

Refuge Bird Checklist
<http://www.npwrc.usgs.gov>

Nationwide Refuge Information
1 800/344 WILD

Visitors with disabilities may
be reasonably accommodated
upon request and/or receive an
alternative format publication.



September 2011 Update

*Adult white-faced ibis,
non-breeding plumage.*
©Gary Kramer

Bear Lake

National Wildlife Refuge

