

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Eastern Shore of Virginia

*National Wildlife
Refuge*



Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, located at the southern point of the Delmarva Peninsula, was established in 1984 for migratory and endangered species management and for wildlife-oriented recreation. The 752 acres of maritime forest, myrtle and bayberry thickets, grasslands, croplands, fresh and brackish ponds are occasionally used by threatened and endangered species such as bald eagles and peregrine falcons.

Each fall, migrating birds stage, or gather in large groups, on refuge land until favorable wind and weather conditions permit an easy crossing of the Chesapeake Bay. This "funneling effect" provides excellent viewing opportunities for visitors between late August and early November.

Peregrine Falcon

© Michael Colopy



Eastern Bluebird

© Kent Minichiello



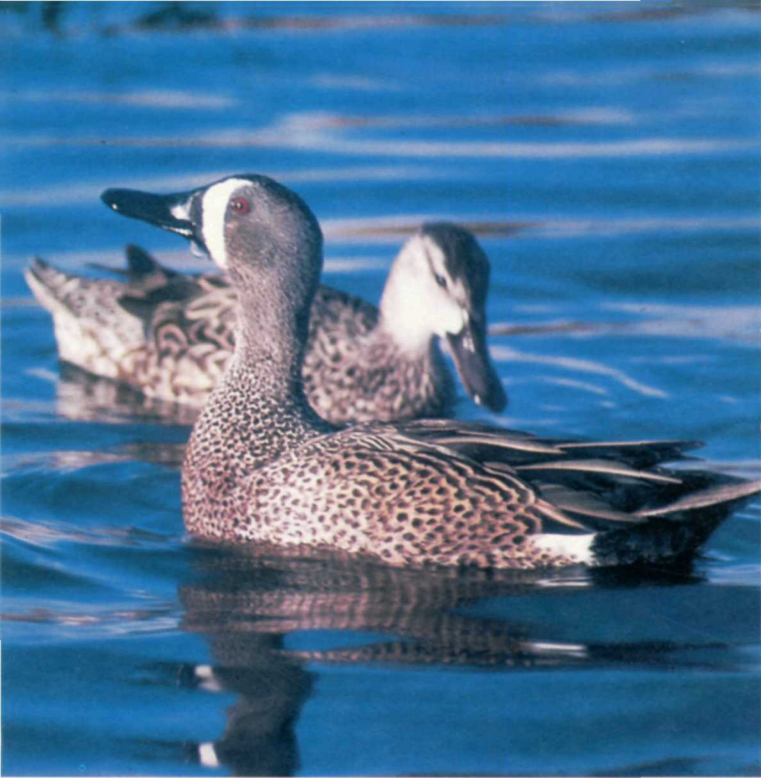
Past Uses of Refuge Land

Written history of the area dates back to the earliest colonial times, when refuge uplands were farmed and wetlands and waters were hunted and fished. The strategic location at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay encouraged military uses of the area in the years before the refuge was established. At the beginning of World War II, much of the land which is now refuge was acquired by the federal government and named Fort John Custis, after a prominent eighteenth century resident of Northampton County. During the War, large bunkers housed 16-inch guns designed to protect naval bases and shipyards in Virginia Beach and Norfolk. In 1950, the U.S. Air Force acquired Fort John Custis, renaming it the Cape Charles Air Force Station. Radar towers and additional buildings were built by the Air Force, which occupied the area until 1981.

Refuge Wildlife Resources

The varied habitats of the Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuge – from open water to dense woodlands – provide for a diversity of wildlife species that changes constantly with the seasons. Hawks, falcons, and songbirds are common on the refuge from late August to early November. From late November to mid-January, American woodcock zoom and twitter as they fly from woods to fields at dusk.

During the winter days, “northern harriers” or “marsh hawks” fly low over fields in search of rodents, while American kestrels perch on power lines, keeping a watchful eye open for prey. After sunset, snow geese and swans are often heard overhead. Throughout the year, black ducks and great blue herons feed in refuge marshes.



Blue-winged Teal

USFWS photo by Phil Norton

With the arrival of spring, marsh and shorebirds such as glossy ibis, snowy egrets, and willets search for food in shallow waters and moist grassy areas. Resident bobwhite quail frequently scurry along road edges. From spring until fall, ospreys may be seen nesting on platforms installed by refuge staff. Refuge woodlands provide year-round homes for chickadees, great horned owls, screech owls, warblers, woodpeckers, and wrens.

Common mammals that make their home on the refuge include grey squirrels, cotton-tailed rabbits, raccoons, river otters, opossums, red foxes, and white-tailed deer. Rodents such as meadow voles serve as prey for raptors and coyotes.

Management Improves Wildlife Habitat

Refuge staff are involved in restoration efforts designed to increase the diversity and quality of available migratory bird habitat. Since the refuge was established, most of the military buildings have been removed and replaced with grasses, shrubs, and other vegetation that provide food and cover for wildlife.

In some parts of the refuge, ponds have been created to increase the amount of freshwater wetlands for waterfowl, wading birds and shorebirds. In addition to osprey platforms, nesting structures have been erected for owls, bluebirds, and wood ducks.



Peregrine Falcon

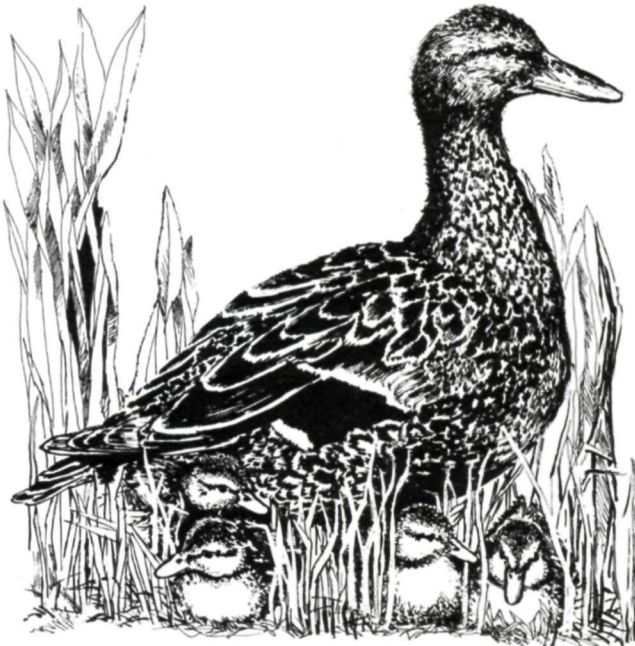
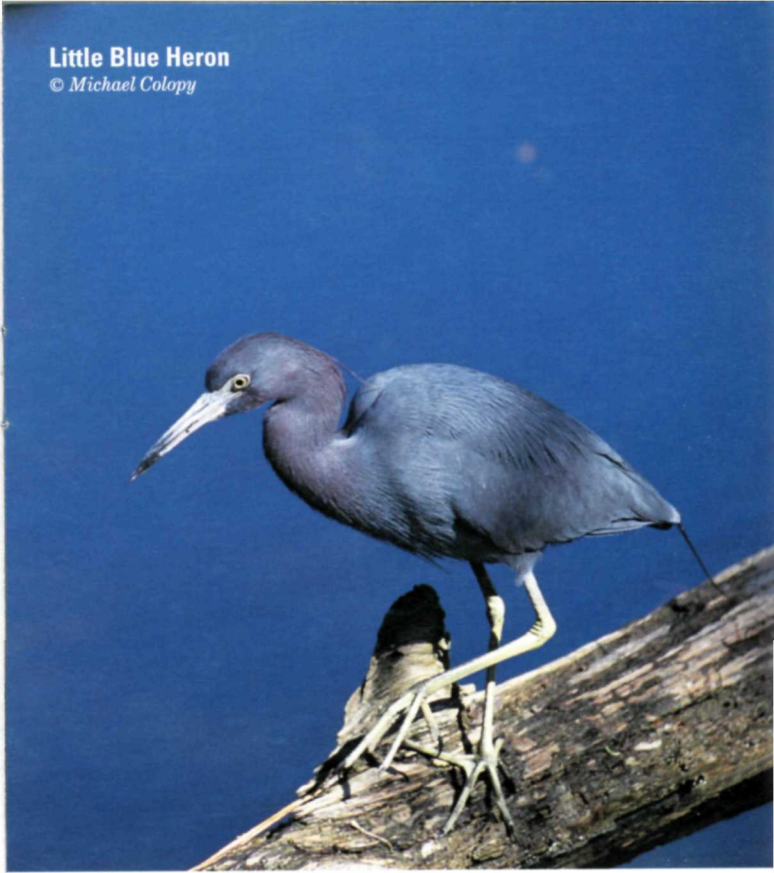
Visitor Activities

A logical starting point for those who visit Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuge is the visitor center, located just north of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge Tunnel. Here, visitors can see exhibits and short videos on the critical habitats of the area and wildlife management activities that occur on refuges. There is a wildlife viewing area that overlooks a freshwater pond and an auditorium where wildlife videos are presented.

Visitors who want a closer look at the refuge may walk the 1/2-mile interpretive trail which loops through mixed hardwoods, past an old graveyard, and to the top of a World War II bunker where a panoramic view of refuge marshes, barrier islands, bays, inlets, and the Atlantic Ocean may be seen. From the visitor center, visitors can walk the 1/2-mile butterfly trail which leads to the interpretive trail. The refuge also has a photography blind on Fitchett Road that overlooks a freshwater pond.

Little Blue Heron

© Michael Colopy



Mallard with brood

Regulations Protect Visitors and Wildlife

The refuge is open during daylight hours only.

Permitted activities include wildlife observation, photography, nature study, and hiking on the trail and along some roads. Please watch for signs which close some areas to visitors. Pets must be kept on a leash.

Prohibited items and activities include metal detecting, firearms, picnicking, and collecting plants, animals, or artifacts.



Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge
5003 Hallett Circle
Cape Charles, VA 23310
Telephone: 757/331 2760
Hearing impaired visitors may call the Virginia Relay
Service at TDD/800 828 1140

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov>

Eastern Shore of Virginia is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.

The Service also manages national fish hatcheries, and provides federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research technical assistance, and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.

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American Kestrel (Photo by Rick Kline)