

EASTERN SHORE OF VIRGINIA

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

WELCOME

Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge, located at the southern tip of the Delmarva Peninsula, was established in 1984 as a refuge for endangered and threatened species and migratory birds. Lying at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay its 656 acres are a mix of maritime forest, myrtle and bayberry thickets, grasslands, croplands, fresh and brackish ponds, and tidal salt marshes.

The refuge is important to migrating birds because the peninsula acts like a geographic "funnel" in the fall as birds fly south. Millions of these migrants "stage" until favorable winds blow to assist them in crossing the bay.

Eastern Shore of Virginia is a haven for several of the nations endangered species. Bald eagles and peregrine falcons are regularly seen over the refuge during the fall migration.

HISTORY

Written history of the area dates back to the earliest colonial times. The land was farmed and the wetlands and waters were hunted and fished. The strategic location encouraged fortification and just prior to WW-II the government acquired these private lands. Fort John Custis was built as a coastal defense facility with 16 inch guns. After the war it became Cape Charles Air Force Station. The station closed in 1980. With development looming the Service and local people moved to protect the area and the refuge was created.

WILDLIFE

The varied habitats of Eastern Shore of Virginia - from open water to dense woodlands - produce a diversity of wildlife in a panorama that changes by numbers and species with the seasons.

Birds

The best time to view large numbers of hawks, falcons, and songbirds is between late August and early November. From late November to mid-January, American Woodcock may be seen zooming or heard twittering as they fly from the woods to the fields at dusk. After sunset, snow geese and swan may be heard overhead. All winter, northern harriers, or "marsh hawks", are seen flying low over the fields searching for rodents, and kestrels are seen on the power lines keeping a keen and watchful eye open for prey. Through the year, resident black ducks and great blue herons may be seen feeding in the marshes.

Many marsh and shore birds arrive in the spring. Glossy ibis, cattle egrets, and willets are seen searching for food in the shallow waters and moist grassy areas. Ospreys are conspicuous from spring to fall - nesting on platforms placed on the refuge.

Resident bobwhite quail are frequently seen scurrying along the edges of the roads.

The refuge woodlands provide year-round homes for great horned owls, screech owls, warblers, woodpeckers, and flycatchers. A complete list of the birds is available.

Mammals

The refuge harbors a variety of mammals including grey squirrels, cotton-tailed rabbits, raccoons, river otters, opossums, red foxes, and white-tailed deer. There are many rodents, like the meadow vole, which provide food for the raptors and for coyotes - yes, coyotes are found here in small numbers!

MANAGEMENT

Migratory Birds

Refuge programs designed for migratory birds include restoration efforts to increase the diversity and quality of the habitat. We have removed many military facilities and then planted wildlife food plots and food and cover shrubs. There is cooperative farming of some fields, and strips are mowed in other fields to help improve and diversify habitat.

Ponds have been created to increase the amount of fresh water wetlands for waterfowl, wading birds, and shore birds. Nesting structures have been erected to provide for owls, blue birds, wood duck, and osprey.

VISITOR ACTIVITIES

Walking Trail - Loops through mixed hardwoods... goes around and through an overgrown WW-II bunker complex... goes on top of the bunker to a 60-foot overlook for a view of marshes, barrier islands - Smith Island to the east with its lighthouse and Fisherman's Island to the southwest, a portion of which is Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge -, the bays and inlets between the islands, and the distant Atlantic Ocean...the trail also loops past a settlers graveyard to a marsh overlook. Total of 1/2-mile. Visitors are reminded pets are not permitted on the trail.

Visitor Contact

Station/Museum - Opened on request with advanced notice from visitors during normal office hours (see below). Decoys, carvings, wildlife art, and wildlife and natural history exhibits for viewing.

HOURS

Headquarters - Open 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday-Friday. Closed on all Federal holidays.

Outdoor Facilities - Open daily, 1/2-hour before sunrise to 1/2-hour after sunset (year-round).

REGULATIONS

Applicable Federal, State, and Local laws and regulations are enforced.

Please comply with all regulatory signs.

Permitted - Wildlife observation, photography, nature study, confined pets, and hiking on the trail and along some roads.

Prohibited - Alcoholic beverages, metal detecting, firearms, picnicking, and collecting - plants, animals, or artifacts.

U.S.
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Eastern Shore of Virginia is one of more than 430 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 resource management programs 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.

For further information contact:

Refuge Manager
Eastern Shore of Virginia NWR
RFD 1, Box 122 B
Cape Charles, Virginia 23310
Telephone: (804) 331-2760

Take Pride In Your Refuge
Its A Special Place

