

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Merritt Island

*National  
Wildlife  
Refuge*



*The National Wildlife Refuge System is the most extensive network of lands designated to protect and conserve wildlife and wildlife habitat. The refuge system stretches across the U.S. from the Arctic Circle in Alaska to the tropical waters of the Caribbean and the South Pacific. These lands encompass 562 refuges and more than 150 million acres. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service administers this impressive network of lands to preserve wildlife and wild lands for future generations.*

**Welcome to America's Most Unique Wildlife Refuge**  
Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge is a place like no other. The 140,000 acre refuge shares a common boundary with NASA's Kennedy Space Center, where man began the exploration of space. The Island's mild climate enables many temperate and subtropical plants to intermingle providing habitat for rare and unusual species of wildlife.

The refuge manages habitat for over 500 species of wildlife. Supporting one of the highest numbers of endangered and threatened species found within the National Wildlife Refuge system, testimony that nature and technology can coexist and thrive.



Jim Angly

*Osprey chicks*

### **History**

Over the millennia, human occupation of the island has ebbed and flowed. Archaeological data suggests the island was home to at least seven distinct Indian cultures beginning as early as 7,000 BC. Their burial mounds and shell middens remain today as mute reminders of past civilizations. Spanish explorers, British colonists, pioneer citrus growers, and civil war troops all contributed to the history of Merritt Island.

*Roseate Spoonbills and Black-necked stilts (summer time) are a common sight.*



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The ever-present salt marsh mosquito kept the island largely uninhabited until the early 1960's, when NASA began to acquire the land that is now John F. Kennedy Space Center. In 1963, the acquisition was complete and NASA turned lands not vital to the space program over to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today, this 43 mile long barrier island is managed by the Department of Interior as a National Wildlife Refuge and a National Seashore.

### **Habitats for Wildlife**

A wide variety of habitats exists on the Refuge, ranging from freshwater impoundments to vast saltwater estuaries. Gradually the marshes give way to hardwood hammocks, pine flatwoods, scrub, and coastal dunes. This diverse landscape provides habitat for more than 350 species of birds, 31 species of mammals, 117 species of fish, 68 species of amphibians and reptiles, and over 1,000 species of plants.

The most productive, and therefore diversified wildlife areas are marshes. Scrub is habitat unique to Florida, and one of the most important habitats for endangered species in the state. The refuge is one of the most important sea turtle nesting beaches in the United States.



*This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*



Jim Angly ©

*Merritt Island NWR has one of three strong hold populations of the threatened Florida scrub jay.*

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*Loggerhead sea turtle*

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*Torching a prescribed fire in a refuge marsh.*

## Management

Fire and water are primary management tools used at the refuge. Historically, wildfires were a natural part of the ecosystem and occurred every three to ten years. Prescribed burns mimic wildfires

for the many beneficial effects. Fire improves habitat and availability of food for many species like the Florida scrub jay, gopher tortoise, and indigo snake. Water control structures are used to manage the water levels in certain

impoundments. The different water levels create wildlife diversity as each species has different habitat needs.

## Endangered Species

The refuge manages habitat for over 500 species of wildlife. These habitats support one of the highest numbers of endangered and threatened species found within the National Wildlife Refuge system.

## Visitor Opportunities

The Visitor Information Center is highly recommended for first-time visitors. The center offers wildlife and habitat displays and a nature-based bookstore to purchase educational resources. Call the visitor center at 321/861 0669 for operating hours. The center is located four miles east of Titusville on SR 402 (Exit 220 off I-95).

## Refuge Fees

Purchase of a Refuge Daily Pass for \$5.00 per vehicle is required to enter Black Point Wildlife Drive. The daily fee for individuals entering by foot or by bicycle is \$1.00.

Jim Anguy ©



*The snowy egret is one of ten egret and heron species found on the refuge.*

Children under the age of 16 are admitted free. To launch a boat at Bair's Cove, Beacon 42 and Bio Lab boat ramps requires purchase of a Refuge Daily Pass. The Pass is valid at all refuge fee sites and is collected on an honor system at each fee area. Cash or check is required. Credit cards are not accepted. Canaveral National Seashore Passes are accepted. The Merritt Island NWR Annual Pass is \$15.00 and it can be upgraded to a Canaveral National Seashore's Annual Pass for an additional \$20.00.

Visitors carrying a current Federal Duck Stamp, Refuge Annual Pass or America the Beautiful Federal Recreational Lands Passes (Senior Pass, Annual Pass, or Access Pass) are not required to pay the daily entrance fee but must display their pass. All passes admit pass holder and all passengers in a single, private, non-commercial vehicle. Passes are available for purchase at the refuge visitor center during regular operating hours by cash or check only.

## Wildlife Drive

Black Point Wildlife Drive is a seven-mile, one way, self-guided auto tour through salt and freshwater marshes. A Refuge Daily fee of \$5.00 is collected on a honor system at the drive's entrance. For details see Refuge Fees.

The drive offers several stops, which are described in a brochure. Wading birds, shorebirds, raptors, waterfowl, alligators, otters, and other wildlife can be seen. The Cruickshank Trail and Tower are located at stop #9 on the drive, and offers views of the surrounding marshes. The entrance to the drive is located on SR 406, one mile east of the intersection of SR 402 and SR 406.

## Foot Trails

Hiking the seven foot trails is most pleasant in the fall, winter and early spring. The 1/4-mile boardwalk loop behind the visitor center has interpretive panels. Oak Hammock Trail (3/4 mile round trip) and Palm Hammock Trail (2 miles round trip) share a common parking lot 1-mile east of the Visitor Center. Oak Hammock Trail has interpretive signs. The Wild Bird Trail (1/4 mile round trip) is located at Stop 4 and Cruickshank Trail (5 mile loop) is located at stop # 9 on Black Point Wildlife Drive. The Pine Flatwoods Trail (1 mile loop) located at the north end of the Refuge on SR 3 traverses a pine flatwoods ecosystem. The Scrub Ridge Trail (1-mile loop) is located north of SR 406 on SR 3.



Merritt Island NWR is home to the largest population of Florida's east coast manatees.

## Manatee

The endangered west indian manatee frequent this spot at Haulover Canal year round but is most likely to be seen in the fall and spring. The Manatee Observation Deck is located on SR 3 on the northeast side of Haulover Canal, 10.5 miles from the Visitor Center. Bairs Cove Boat Ramp is an alternate viewing site.

## Boating

An excellent way to view the refuge is by canoe or kayak. Motor boats, canoes, and kayaks may be used for hunting, fishing, and other recreational uses. Boat launching is limited to designated launch areas. No personal watercrafts or air thrust boats are allowed in refuge waters. A

## Fishing

\$5.00 Refuge Daily Pass is required to launch a boat from Bairs Cove, Bio Lab and Beacon 42 boat ramps. For details see Refuge Fees.

Merritt Island NWR is a great place for saltwater anglers to try their luck at catching sea trout, red drum, black drum, snook, and tarpon. A fishing brochure with a free permit describing the refuge regulations and a map can be obtained at the Visitor Center. Other regulations are set by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

## Hunting

Waterfowl hunting is allowed on the refuge on Saturdays, Sundays, Wednesdays and certain federal holidays from mid-November through mid-January. An early teal season is usually set for one week in late September. A hunting brochure describing refuge regulations and permits can be obtained at the Visitor Center.

## Canaveral National Seashore

Canaveral National Seashore is managed by the National Park Service and is located 7.5 miles east of the refuge's Visitor Center. A daily entrance fee of \$5.00 per vehicle is required. The Refuge Daily Pass is accepted for entry. For details, see Refuge Fees. Call the National Park Service at 321/267 1110 for more information.

The refuge and seashore encompass 43 miles of undeveloped beach.



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## Satellite Refuges

Merritt Island NWR manages two satellite refuges.

### St. Johns NWR

There are two separate units, one is located west of I-95 near Titusville, and another is north of Highway 528. This refuge was set aside for the Dusky Seaside Sparrow, which

is now extinct. The refuge is now managed for freshwater marsh habitat and is home to black rails and many other marsh birds. The refuge is not open to the public, although public facilities are being planned.



*Female alligator guarding her nest.*

### Lake Woodruff NWR

The biological diversity of the wetlands provides nesting, overwintering and stopover habitat during migration for neotropical songbirds, migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds and raptors. The nature trails and levees along the impoundments are excellent areas for walking, hiking, bicycling, wildlife observation and photography. Environmental education, fishing and limited hunting opportunities are available.

## Refuge Regulations

All recreational use is limited to daylight hours year-round. Portions of the refuge may be closed from time to time due to NASA's launch activities.

- Airboats, jet skis, wave runners and ATV's are prohibited.
- Persons possessing firearms on National Wildlife Refuges must comply with all provisions of State and Local laws.

- Carrying, possessing fireworks or explosives is prohibited.
- Glass beverage containers are prohibited.
- Feeding, enticing or disturbing manatees, alligators and other wildlife is prohibited.
- Littering is prohibited. Please take your litter off the refuge.
- Camping and fires are not permitted on the refuge, but is available to scout groups by permit only.
- Pets are permitted but must be on a leash and under control by owner at all times. Clean up after your pet.
- Horses are not permitted on the refuge but are permitted at the North District of Canaveral National Seashore by permit.
- Releasing of any wild or domestic animals is prohibited.
- Searching for or collecting artifacts, natural features, animals and plants is prohibited, other than legally taken fish or waterfowl.
- Fishing and crabbing is permitted in the Indian River Lagoon, Banana River, Mosquito Lagoon, refuge impoundments and interior lakes except in the NASA security area and along Black Point Wildlife Drive. State regulations apply and a self-issuing refuge permit is required which is available at the visitor center, entrance kiosks and on the refuge website. Night fishing is by boat only. A special use permit is required for commercial fishing.
- Waterfowl hunting is permitted November through January in designated hunt areas. Refuge permits are required and all state, federal, and refuge regulations apply.



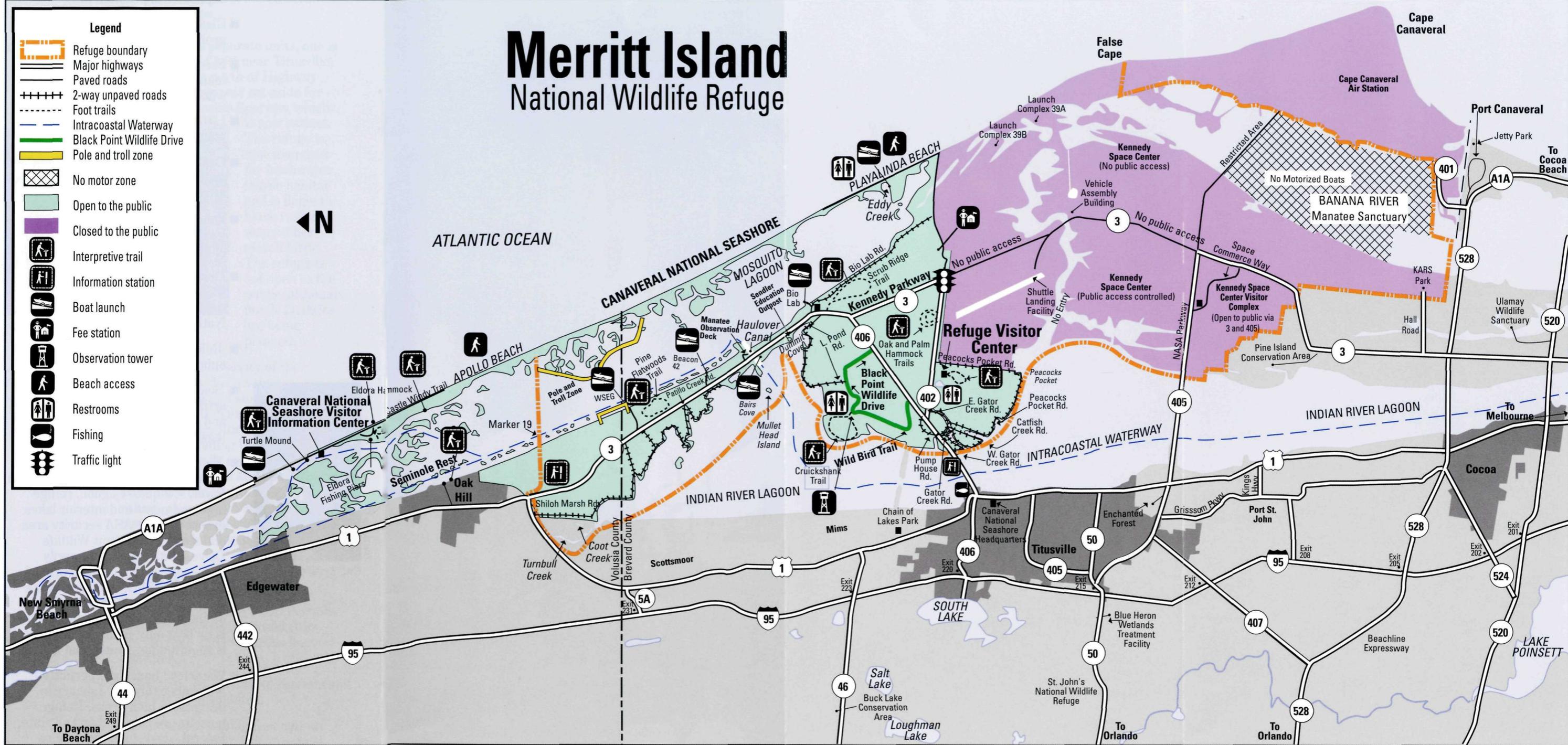
Jim Angil ©

*Gulf Fritillary*

# Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge

**Legend**

- Refuge boundary
- Major highways
- Paved roads
- 2-way unpaved roads
- Foot trails
- Intracoastal Waterway
- Black Point Wildlife Drive
- Pole and troll zone
- No motor zone
- Open to the public
- Closed to the public
- Interpretive trail
- Information station
- Boat launch
- Fee station
- Observation tower
- Beach access
- Restrooms
- Fishing
- Traffic light



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