

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Pea Island

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*





*Pea Island  
National Wildlife  
Refuge was  
established in  
1937 by an Act  
of Congress and  
a Presidential  
Executive Order.*

*Situated on  
Hatteras Island on  
the Outer Banks  
of North Carolina,  
it was established  
to provide habitat  
for migratory  
birds, primarily  
waterfowl, and  
other wildlife.*



*Snow geese in North Pond at sunset.*  
Michael Halminski ©





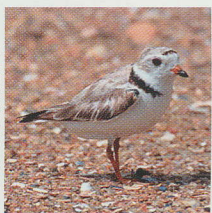
*This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

Pea Island's boundaries extend from Oregon Inlet southward to the village of Rodanthe, extending from the ocean to the sound on both sides of a 12-mile stretch along North Carolina Highway 12. The 5,834-acre refuge is comprised of ocean beach, barrier dunes, salt marshes, fresh and brackish water ponds and impoundments, as well as tidal creeks and bays. The refuge also contains 25,700 acres of Pamlico Sound waters, which are closed to migratory waterfowl hunting under a Presidential Proclamation. The land portion of the refuge ranges in width from a few hundred yards to a half-mile and in elevation from zero to approximately eight to ten feet above sea level.



Michael Halminski ©

*Right: Snow geese in North Pond. Below: Adult piping plover.*



Michael Halminski ©

Until the late 1930's, the Outer Banks barrier islands were wide, flat, sand-fans that received regular, if not frequent, over-wash by Spring tides. The construction of sand dunes by the Civilian Conservation Corps, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and the Department of the Interior temporarily stabilized the islands and enabled development.

Prior to its purchase and establishment as a wildlife refuge in 1937, Pea Island was owned by members of several private, waterfowl hunt clubs.

On Pea Island, a series of artificial ponds were built in the shadow of the artificial dune system. These impoundments form the hub of the management program that makes Pea Island the wildlife oasis it is today.

## Why is it called "Pea Island?"



Paul Rebmann



Gary Walton

At one time, a majority of the greater snow goose population wintered on what is now Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge. Historically, these birds foraged in the natural dunes and along the sound shore. In the dunes, they found a small plant whose tiny pink and lavender flowers matured to form beans that were packed with energy. These "dune peas" provided a predictable food source for the wintering geese; the refuge was literally the "pea island" for snow geese. Today, many snow geese still winter on the refuge, joined by thousands of other migratory birds. They still feast on the dune peas that grow in abundance and other vegetation encouraged to grow through management of the water levels on the wet areas of the refuge.

## It's for the Birds!

Pea Island is midway on the Atlantic Flyway and is a much used and valued feeding and resting area for numerous species of wintering waterfowl, migrating shorebirds, raptors, and wintering wading birds. The diversity and abundance of bird life on the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge explains its reputation as a "birder's paradise."

*Above, from top: Strophostyles helvula (beach or dune pea), namesake for Pea Island; lone semi-palmated sandpiper in winter plumage. Below: Marbled godwits and willets on Atlantic shore.*



Michael Halminski ©





Michael Halminski ©

*Above: Brown pelican prepares for landing; below: hundreds of sanderlings feed in the Atlantic surf.*

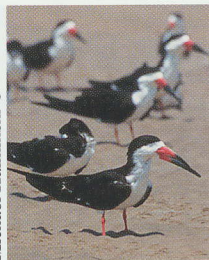
The Outer Banks bird list boasts over 365 species.

Thousands of Canada and snow geese, tundra swans, and 25 different species of ducks winter on the refuge each year. Many other interesting species may be found at Pea Island during the winter months and during the spring and fall migrations.

Throughout the summer months, several species of herons, egrets, and ibises find safety and suitable trees and shrubs for nesting in the impoundment and marsh areas along the Pamlico Sound. Terns, gulls, black skimmers, willets, black-necked stilts, as well as other wading and shore birds, nest on the refuge.



Michael Halminski ©



Michael Halminski ©

*Above: Black skimmers.  
Right: Snowy egret in marsh;  
below: Bald eagle.*



Michael Halminski ©

An observation record sheet, located on the front porch of the Refuge Visitor Center, allows visitors to record rare and unusual sightings. Many avid birders check this sheet before venturing onto wildlife trails or the beach.

Of course, non-bird species prosper, as well. Resident species of mammals, such as the river otter, create paths or slides between the fresh water impoundments and the salt marsh. Muskrats build their homes in the marsh from mounds of grass. Other mammals, such as raccoons, opossums, minks, and both cottontail and marsh rabbits find the diverse habitats of the refuge to their liking.

### Endangered and Threatened Species

Piping plovers inhabit the refuge beach and dune areas during their migrations as well. This bird has been documented to nest on the refuge and other Outer Banks beaches.



USFWS

Bald eagles occasionally visit the refuge, usually during the warmer months of the year. The ocean, ponds, and sound provide good food sources for these fish-eating birds.



Loggerhead sea turtles lumber ashore on dark summer nights to lay their eggs in the warm sand of the refuge beaches. Pea Island lies on the northern edge of the nesting range for these giant turtles. Though there are relatively few nests laid here, these nests may be extremely significant since the sex of the turtle is determined by the temperature at which the eggs are incubated. These northern nests may produce most of the males for the entire population!

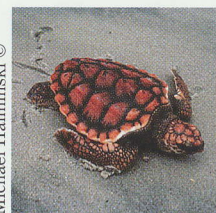
- On Pea Island, human's technical know-how and nature's processes are carefully blended to provide natural foods for wildlife. Critical habitat protection is a high priority.

- Wet areas are managed to encourage natural production of food for wildlife and to attract targeted species to a capture site for banding.

- Prescribed burning and mechanical brush control are used to favor plants beneficial to wildlife and to restore more historic plant communities.

- "Closed Area" signs mark areas where disturbance is considered a critical factor in maintaining optimum habitat or to protect bird and sea turtle nest sites.

- Water levels in impoundments are seasonally manipulated by opening and closing water control structures in concert with pumping and wind tides at the right times of the year. This mimics the optimum proportion of dry and wet periods found in natural wetlands and encourages maximum food production. Timely flooding in the fall produces optimum feeding grounds for wintering waterfowl. Timely drawdowns of the water



Michael Halminski ©

## Providing Habitat through Management



Michael Halminski ©



Michael Halminski ©

*From top: Loggerhead yearling; Beach mallow; American pintail.*



Michael Halminski ©

*Above: Dowitcher. Below, from top: snow geese graze in New Field; Pea Island beachscape.*

in the spring produce optimum feeding grounds for migrating shorebirds.

- Monitoring wildlife populations from ducks to sea turtles helps biologists to plan better management strategies.
- Law enforcement is necessary to protect precious wildlife resources and to ensure visitor safety. You can help by obeying refuge regulations and reporting those who don't.
- Public information is a very important management tool. People will not help to protect what they do not understand and appreciate.



Stephen J. Krasemann



Michael Halminski ©





Michael Halaminski ©

## Pea Island's Beach

The almost 13 miles of pristine beach provide excellent opportunities for wildlife observation, swimming, surfing, shelling, sunbathing, surf fishing, or just strolling in the fresh ocean breeze. Surf or sound anglers may take home a catch of speckled and gray trout, spot, flounder, bluefish, red drum or striped bass. Please check regulations for what is in season and catch and size limits.



Michael Halaminski ©

Above, from top: Surf fishing on Pea Island; Barn owl hunts over dunes along Atlantic Coast.

*Interpretive Kiosks*  
Up-to-date information on public facilities and their locations; regulations; and interpretive descriptions of some of the wildlife you may see are available in several locations.

*Observation Platforms*  
Several ramped platforms and towers are associated with North Pond and offer excellent opportunities for wildlife observation.

*Photo/Observation Blind*  
Pea Island offers more serious wildlife observation enthusiasts a blind. Please inquire at the Visitor Center. The access path may be wet or flooded, so wading shoes or boots are recommended.

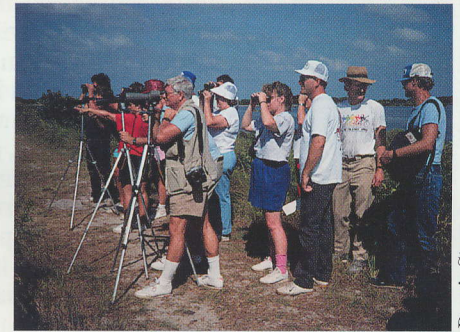


Michael Halaminski ©



Bonnie Strawser

*Top: Kayakers on Pea Island's Pamlico Sound. Left: bicyclists brave NC Highway 12. Right: Pea Island is know as a "Birders' Paradise."*



Bonnie Strawser

*The North Pond Wildlife Trail* which has its trailhead at the Visitor Center, offers a quick and easy way for prime wildlife viewing. Several overlooks and a two level observation tower provide binocular spotting scopes for your use.

The adventuresome visitor may choose to wander the additional three to four miles of service road around North Pond to the Salts Flats Wildlife Trail and return to the Visitor Center along North Carolina Highway 12.

The Salt Flats Wildlife Trail is a half-mile, fully disabled-accessible trail on the north dike of North Pond. A small parking lot is adjacent to NC Highway 12 approximately two miles north of the Visitor Center.



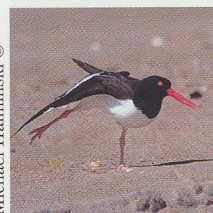
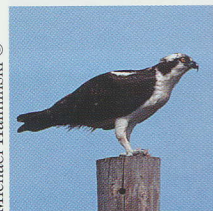
## Pea Island Visitor Center and Gift Shop

The Pea Island Visitor Center is located four and a half miles south of Oregon Inlet on North Carolina Highway 12, or eight miles north of the town of Rodanthe. Pea Island's Visitor Center is unique in that a group of refuge volunteers formed a non-profit group and raised the money to build it! These volunteers, and others who have joined their ranks, continue to provide the manpower to keep the Visitor Center open seven days a week throughout most of the year.

The Center offers interesting and intriguing exhibits of sea turtle nests, shorebirds, birds of prey, and other native wildlife. It also offers a picture window and scope overlooking North Pond to enable disabled persons an opportunity to view wading birds, shore birds, and nesting osprey. The Visitor Center also has several birding programs available on a computer so visitors can get assistance in identifying the many birds they are apt to see on the wildlife trail.

The refuge non-profit support group, the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society, operates a Gift Shop in the Visitor Center. Besides providing a service for visitors by offering a wide variety of educational items and gift ideas with wildlife and nature as the focal point, the Gift Shop raises funds to support refuge programs. All profit from these sales is donated to the refuge.

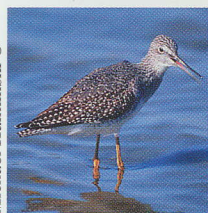
The book selection here, long regarded as one of the finest at any public Visitor Center, features several varieties of bird guides, as well as books about nature, conservation, the ocean, and the unique typography and geography of the Outer Banks. A special section of children's items features numerous books and tapes on all aspects of nature and the environment by both



*Above, from top: Osprey; American oystercatcher; scarlet tanager.*



Michael Halminski ©



Michael Halminski ©

*Above, from top: rufous-sided towhee; yellowlegs.*

local and national authors. The Gift Shop also features cassettes and CDs that offer a narration for driving tours of both Pea Island and Alligator River National Wildlife Refuges and tapes and CDs of the Charles Kuralt Trail, which encompasses all of the national wildlife refuges in eastern North Carolina.

The National Wildlife Refuge Passport Book and the stamp documenting your visit to this refuge are also available at the Visitor Center.

The Visitor Center is open from 9 am to 4 pm, seven days a week from April 1 through November 30, and Thursdays through Sundays from December through March.

New Inlet provides an appropriate spot to launch a shallow-draft boat to fish or paddle the waters of the Pamlico Sound. New Inlet also provides easy access to the salt marsh for educational groups or adventuresome families.

### You Can Help

- By obeying refuge signs and following refuge, state, and federal regulations, you will be doing your part to support this refuge in its efforts to help wildlife.
- By carrying out your own trash or picking up litter left by others.
- By protecting the sand dunes; walk only along established paths.
- By joining the Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society. Your dues and donations not only support refuge programs, but also assist the Society in having a louder voice for Refuge advocacy. Please consider joining today!





Redheads in Pamlico Sound.

Michael Halminski ©



CLOSED AREA: New Field Pond and the area south of the Wildlife Trail and west of NC Highway 12 to New Inlet are closed to all public entry.

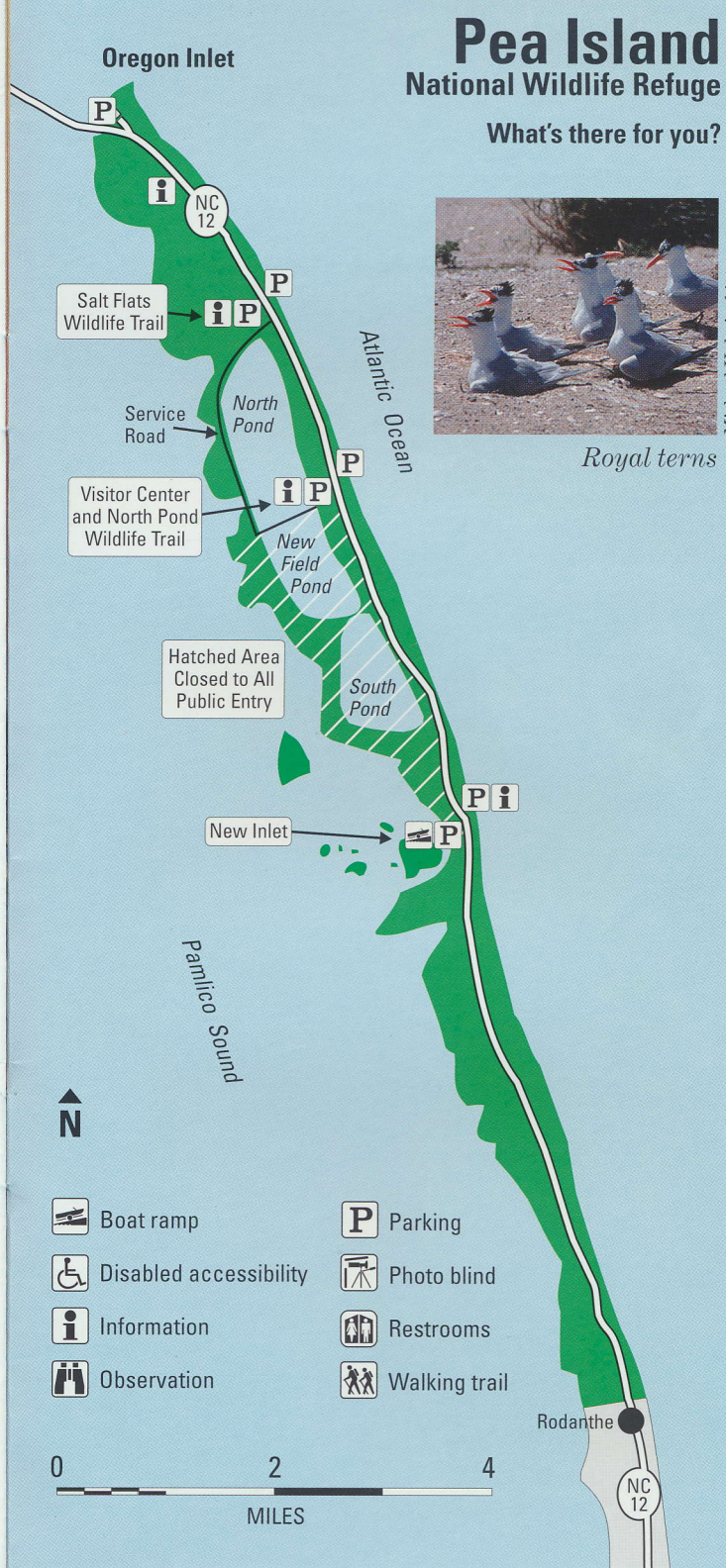
# Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge

What's there for you?



Royal terns

Michael Halminski ©



Boat ramp



Disabled accessibility



Information



Observation



Parking



Photo blind



Restrooms



Walking trail

0

2

4

MILES

Rodanthe

NC 12



**Coastal Wildlife Refuge Society**

**P.O. Box 1808**

**Manteo, NC 27954**

**252/473 1131 ext. 230**

**peaisland@fws.gov**

**coastal-wildlife@outer-banks.com**

**<https://www.outer-banks.com/coastalwildlife/form.cfm>**

**Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge is administered by:**

**Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge**

**P.O. Box 1969**

**Manteo, NC 27954**

**252/473 1131**

**<http://peaisland.fws.gov>**

**U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service**

**1 800/344 WILD**

**<http://www.fws.gov>**

**October 2008**



*Cover: Black-necked stilt  
pair with nest, courtesy of  
Michael Halminski ©*



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