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September 2006



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Stewart B. McKinney

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*

Roseate tern

©Paul Fusco



*Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge consists of ten separate units located along the coast of Connecticut from Westbrook to Greenwich. Refuge lands include eight islands, barrier beaches tidal saltmarshes, shrublands, and upland habitats. Due to its location within the Atlantic Flyway, the refuge provides important resting, feeding, and nesting habitat for many species of wading birds, waterfowl, songbirds, shorebirds, and terns, including the endangered roseate tern and threatened piping plover.*

**Salt Meadow Unit Marsh**

*Photo by Ann Kilpatrick, USFWS*

## Why a Wildlife Refuge?

In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established Pelican Island as the first national wildlife refuge to be “a preserve and breeding grounds for native birds.” His order protected pelicans, egrets, herons, and other birds from plume hunters and egg collectors.

The Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge (refuge), administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), was established by an Act of Congress in October 1984, in part for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources.

Though many refuge units in Connecticut are small in acreage, their importance to wildlife, especially migratory birds, is enormous. These small blocks of undeveloped salt marsh, grassland, and coastal forest provide thousands of birds with essential migratory and nesting habitat along a highly developed coast.



*Black-crowned night heron*

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## The purposes of the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge are to:



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*Blue-winged warbler*

## Salt Meadow Unit

Enhance the populations of herons, egrets, terns, and other shore and wading birds within the refuge.

Encourage natural diversity of fish and wildlife species within the refuge.

Provide for the conservation and management of all fish and wildlife, within the refuge.

Fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States respecting fish and wildlife.

Provide opportunities for scientific research, environmental education, and fish and wildlife-dependent recreation.

The Salt Meadow Unit, Connecticut's first National Wildlife Refuge, was acquired in 1971 under authority of the Migratory Bird Act by private donation. Ester Lape donated her land to protect the wetlands, perpetuate the property as a wildlife sanctuary, and provide opportunities for environmental awareness.

Consisting of 316 acres of salt marsh, forest, grassland, and shrubland in Westbrook, this unit serves as the headquarters and a visitor contact site. The interpretive trail offers people a chance to watch the amazing courtship flights of American woodcock, nesting Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows, and neotropical migratory birds as they rest and feed on their way to northern breeding grounds in spring and wintering areas in fall.

Menunketesuck Island, a 4-acre, rocky, shrub-covered upland island was added to the Salt Meadow Unit in 2005. Least terns, common terns, and American oystercatchers nest on Menunketesuck Island. The intertidal area is a significant foraging spot for migrant shorebirds, which roost on the island at higher tides.



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*Eastern kingbird*

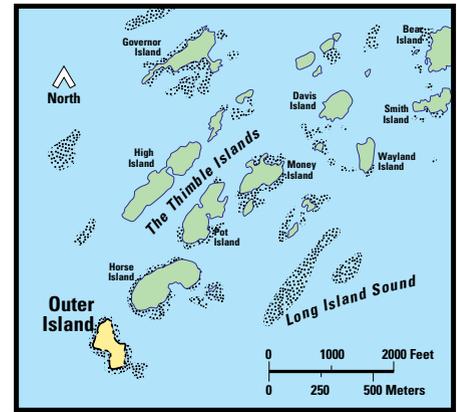
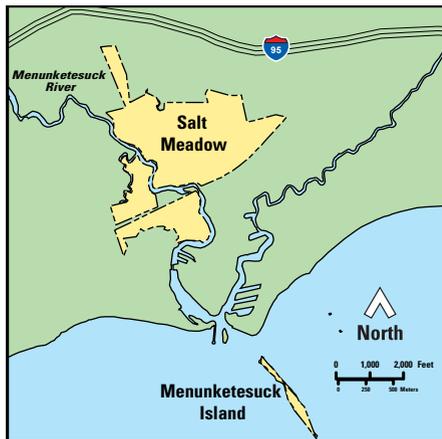
Both the Salt Meadow Unit and Menunketesuck Island were recognized as Important Bird Areas for their high quality nesting and migratory habitats.

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*Snowy Egret*

**Directions:** The easily accessible Salt Meadow Unit is located one-half mile south of Interstate Highway 95 between exits 64 and 65 on Old Clinton Road in Westbrook. This unit, excluding Menunketesuck Island, is open to the public throughout the year from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Access to Menunketesuck Island may be restricted during the nesting season; please contact the refuge office for more information.



*Outer Island is an important nesting habitat for long-legged wading birds such as this Snowy egret.*

### Outer Island Unit

Outer Island, located off of the coast of Branford, is the southernmost of the Thimble Islands. It was privately owned until 1995 when Elizabeth Hird donated it to the Service to protect the island's natural resources and provide access for education and research. This five-acre island, composed of granite outcroppings, boulder and cobble beaches in the intertidal zone, and small salt marshes provides habitat for both migrating and nesting birds. Approximately half of the island is closed year-round to serve as a sanctuary for birds.

The refuge and Connecticut State University formed a partnership that allows island access for education and research via a special use permit. The public may visit the island on most



© Richard Asarisi

*Lesser yellowlegs*

summer weekends when a docent from the Friends of Outer Island is present and during special events.

# Stewart B. McKinney *National Wildlife Refuge*



**CONNECTICUT**

Hartford

New Britain

Waterbury

Danbury

New Haven

Clinton

Bridgeport

Norwalk

Salt Meadows Unit  
Headquarters

Falkner Island Unit

Outer Island Unit

Milford Point Unit

Great Meadows Unit

Norwalk Islands Unit

Calf Island Unit

Long Island Sound

Long Island

*Falkner Island Lighthouse is the second oldest lighthouse in Connecticut.*



© Paul Fusco

*Falkner Island Lighthouse*

### **Falkner Island Unit**

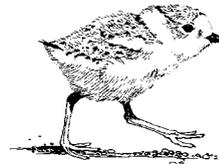
Rocky shores, shrublands, and grasses cover this five-acre island, located three miles off the coast of Guilford. From early May through early August, Falkner Island is home to more than 95 percent of the nesting common terns (over 2500 pairs) in Connecticut. The island is also the site of one of the most significant roseate tern colonies in northeastern North America, and is the only regular nesting location for this federally endangered species in the state. Due to these distinctions, Falkner Island was designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon Connecticut in 2001. Each year refuge staff and volunteers closely monitor the number of breeding pairs and nesting success. Access to the island is by permit and during the annual fall open house hosted in partnership with the Faulkner's Light Brigade friends group.

*Least tern with chick*

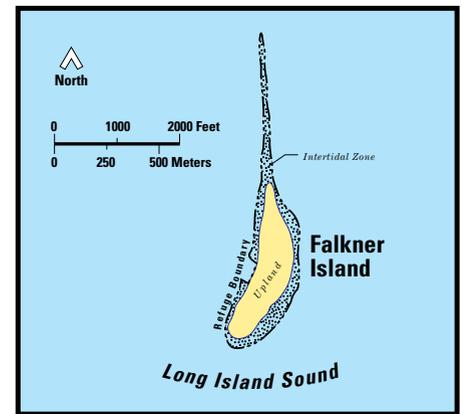


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*The Milford point unit is an important staging area for many species of migrating shorebirds.*



*Piping plover chick*  
© Julie Zickefoose



### **Milford Point Unit**

Located at the mouth of the Housatonic River, Milford Point is considered one of the best bird watching areas in Connecticut. The mudflats, sand bars, and marshes provide waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds with a safe haven for feeding and resting during their long spring and fall migrations. Over 50 species of shorebirds, wading birds, and waterfowl use this 23-acre refuge unit. The barrier beach, which protects the salt marsh from high tides and storms, provides essential nesting and feeding habitat for several protected species including piping plovers, least terns, and American oystercatchers. An observation deck at the refuge entrance offers visitors a year-round overview of this unit.

*Directions:* The Milford Point Unit is located 14 miles southwest of New Haven in Milford. Take exit 34 off Interstate 95; go left off the exit onto Route 1 north. Take a right onto Lansdale Avenue then right onto Milford Point Road to the Connecticut Audubon Coastal Center at Milford Point, where parking is available. The unit may be accessed by walking a short distance on a boardwalk, then turning west along the shoreline to the observation deck. Please do not use the private road.



© Paul J. Fusco

*Semipalmated sandpipers*

### Great Meadows Unit

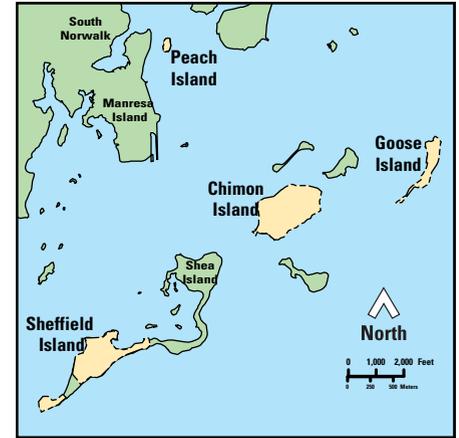
This 421-acre unit consists of tidal wetlands and upland habitats. A significant area for migratory birds, including waterfowl, shorebirds, and wading birds, Great Meadows contains the largest unditched tidal high marsh in Connecticut. It provides feeding and nesting habitat for over 270 species of birds, and is an important nesting and wintering area for the American black duck and northern harrier. Lewis Gut, which channels water into the marsh from Long Island Sound, formerly contained one of the most productive shellfish beds in the state. It serves as breeding and feeding grounds for several fish species.



© Richard Asarisi

*Great blue heron*

The Great Meadows Unit has an interpretive trail with audio signs, photography blind and two observation decks. This unit is located off of Lordship Boulevard (Route 113) in Stratford.



### Norwalk Islands Unit

Located approximately 40 miles east of New York City, four islands off the coast of Norwalk are in refuge ownership including: Chimon (68 acres), Goose (4 acres), Sheffield (51 acres as part of the refuge), and Peach (3 acres). The forest and shrublands of the Norwalk Islands are recognized as regionally significant habitat for colonial nesting wading birds, vital nesting and migratory habitat for neotropical birds, and high-quality wintering grounds for waterfowl. The Chimon Island Unit has supported as many as 1200 breeding pairs of herons, egrets and ibises.

The Sheffield Island trail and viewing platform offer visitors an excellent vantage point to observe or photograph nesting herons and other birds. Besides this trail, access to the Norwalk Islands is by special use permit and during tours to Sheffield Island hosted by the Norwalk Seaport Association.

*Juvenile  
Oystercatcher*  
©Paul J. Fusco



### **Calf Island Unit**

At 33 acres, Calf Island is the largest offshore island in Greenwich. It is located south of Byram Harbor, approximately 3,000 feet from the mainland, and is connected at low tide to Shell Island.

Calf Island boasts a diverse coastal habitat including tidal wetlands, intertidal flats, rocky intertidal shore, sandy beach, mixed forest, and coastal shrubland. The island provides excellent wading bird habitat and is located less than a mile from Great Captain's Island, which contains one of the largest heron and egret rookeries in Long Island Sound. Calf Island is recognized as an Important Bird Area and also has several significant geological features that offer a glimpse into the region's ancient past.

The Calf Island Unit is open to the public throughout the year from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset for wildlife-dependent recreation such as wildlife observation,

wildlife photography and environmental education. Portions of the island have been designated as a wildlife sanctuary for migratory birds. Overnight environmental education programs can be requested and allowed by special use permit.



*More than 90 percent of the breeding roseate terns at the Falkner Island Unit are color banded by the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center for long term cooperative research studies of their ecology and population dynamics. The McKinney Refuge offers unique opportunities for integrating the results of numerous individual studies. It has been the site of pioneering work in providing artificial sites such as half-buried tires and nest boxes to increase the productivity of these terns. These methods are now being tried at several other sites in the U.S. and in Europe.*

### **For Your Information**

The refuge headquarters is located at the Salt Meadow Unit in Westbrook, Connecticut. The office hours are Monday through Friday, 8:00am to 4:30pm.

The Milford Point, Salt Meadow (except Menunketesuck Island), and Calf Island units are open to the public, without charge, from one-half hour before sunrise to one-half hour after sunset. Visits to other units require special use permits from the refuge manager due to their small size, uniqueness, and seasonal use by migratory birds. Special events are periodically scheduled to provide the general public access to environmentally sensitive units.

Wildlife observation and photography, environmental education, and trail walking opportunities are encouraged.

To reduce disturbance to wildlife, and for public safety, the following are prohibited: entering closed areas; dogs, horses or other pets; removal of plants, animals, minerals, or artifacts; recreational camping; fires; kites; and motorized vehicles and bicycles outside parking areas.

Insect pests peak during the warmer months. Use repellents and other precautions against ticks and mosquitoes.



### **Partners for Wildlife**

Staff at the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge are responsible for the administration of the Partners for Wildlife program in Connecticut. This program is designed to protect and enhance fish and wildlife habitat on private lands. Through this voluntary program, the Service provides financial and technical assistance to landowners interested in restoring degraded or lost habitats on their property, including wetlands, riparian areas, and grasslands.