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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Cape May
## *National Wildlife Refuge*

**Red Knot**
© *Clay Myers*

*"The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System ... is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitat within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."*

***Cook's Beach Meadow***
**Virginia Rettig/USFWS**

## Overview

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge was established as part of the National Wildlife Refuge System in 1989. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has acquired about 11,500 acres and the refuge continues to grow. Ultimately, the refuge will protect 21,200 acres of precious wildlife habitat in New Jersey's Cape May Peninsula. Cape May National Wildlife Refuge's key location in the Atlantic Flyway makes it an important link in the vast nationwide network of National Wildlife Refuges administered by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. It ensures availability of critical habitat to hundreds of thousands of migratory birds each year, as these long-distance flyers travel along the New Jersey coast.

The refuge is located within the portion of the Delaware Bay watershed that is designated a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention. Due to the extent the area is used by migrating shorebirds – particularly the red knot, ruddy turnstone, semipalmated sandpiper and sanderling – the refuge is located in an area of the Delaware Bay considered to be hemispherically important to shorebirds.

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Diamondback terrapin*

## Three Divisions

Cape May refuge has been designated a "Flagship Project" of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan because of its importance to migratory waterfowl, particularly American black duck. The plan is a far-reaching international agreement to conserve and restore millions of acres of wetland habitats throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of three units. The Great Cedar Swamp Division is at the northern end of the refuge in Dennis and Upper Townships. Habitats such as salt marsh, hardwood swamp, bog, grasslands and large tracts of forested uplands are used by wildlife such as blue-winged warblers, ovenbirds, and short-eared owls. The refuge connects with a state forest and the Pineland National Reserve.

The Delaware Bay Division is located in Middle Township and extends along five miles of Delaware Bay. Bayshore, salt marsh, wet and dry forests, vernal pools, shrub/scrub habitat and grasslands are found in this division. Thousands of shorebirds, including red knot, ruddy turnstone and sanderling use the bayshore habitat during migration. Additionally, vernal pools are critical for the state endangered Eastern tiger salamander.

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Vernal pool*

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Piping plover chicks*

The Two Mile Beach Unit is a barrier island with beachfront, tidal ponds and maritime forest in Lower Township. The site is important for the federally listed piping plover (threatened), the state endangered least tern, and American black duck.

## Wildlife

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Southern leopard frog*

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge provides important habitat to a wide variety of migratory birds and other wildlife. It supports 317 bird species, 42 mammal species, 55 reptile and amphibian species, and numerous fish, shellfish and other invertebrates. Its value for the protection of migratory birds and their habitat continues to grow as wildlife habitat along the Jersey Shore is lost to development.

Cape May Peninsula's unique configuration and location concentrates songbirds, raptors and woodcock as they funnel south to Cape May Point during their fall migration. Faced with 12 miles of water to cross at the Delaware Bay, migrants linger in the area to rest and feed until favorable winds allow them to cross the Bay or head north along the Bay's eastern shore.

*Shorebirds*

The refuge's shore along Delaware Bay is a major resting and feeding area for migrating shorebirds and wading birds. The Delaware Bay shoreline gained international recognition as a major shorebird staging area in North America,

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge
Legend
Refuge Boundary
Trail Head Parking Area
Refuge Office
Observation Platform
Hiking Trail
North
0 0.5 1 2 3 4 Miles
For enlarged view of trails refer to back page of brochure
Great Cedar Swamp Division
Cedar Swamp Trail
Petersburg
Tyler Road
Cedar Swamp Creek
Seaville
Corsons Tavern Road
Dennisville
Dennis Creek
Sea Isle City
Atlantic Ocean
Delaware Bay
Songbird Trail
Ridwell Creek
Delaware Bay Division
Woodcock Trail
Cape May Court House
Hand Avenue
Deer Creek
Indian Trail Road
Swainton
Garden State Parkway
Avalon
Stone Harbor
Fishing Creek
Bayshore Road
Rio Grande
Town Bank
Cape May Canal
Ocean Drive
Wildwood
Two Mile Beach Unit
Dune Trail
Cape May
Cape May Inlet
PENNSYLVANIA
NEW JERSEY
DELAWARE
Philadelphia
Trenton
Camden
Wilmington
Vineland
Atlantic City
Dover
Cape May
Cape May NWR

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Shorebirds feeding at Kimbles Beach*

second only to the Copper River Delta in Alaska. Each spring thousands of shorebirds–nearly 80 percent of some populations–stop to rest and feed here during migration from Central and South America to their Arctic breeding grounds.

The arrival of more than twenty shorebird species coincides with the horseshoe crab spawning season, which occurs in May/early June. The crab eggs provide an abundant food supply that these long-distance flyers use to replenish their energy reserves before moving on. (In May virtually the entire North American red knot population gathers along Delaware Bay beaches!)

*Songbirds/ Neotropical Migrants*

Neotropical migrants—birds that breed in Canada and the U.S., and winter in Mexico, the Caribbean, Central America, and South America––use Cape May Peninsula's varied habitats during their long and difficult migrations. Due to loss of habitat throughout much of their range, many of these species are in decline. Almost 80 neotropical songbird species stop to rest and feed along the Cape May Peninsula, most often using forest habitats. Many songbird species also nest here–including ovenbirds, wood thrushes, and yellow-throated warblers.

Dave Menke/USFWS

*Common yellowthroat*

*Raptors*

Cape May Peninsula is renowned for its spectacular raptor migration each fall. Great numbers of 17 raptor species are commonly seen, including peregrine falcon, osprey, Northern harrier, American kestrel, Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawk. Because many raptors do not choose to cross large bodies of water like the Delaware Bay, many use the bayshore upland forest edge as a migration corridor.

USFWS

*American kestrel*

Red-tailed hawks frequent the refuge year-round. Owls use Cape May's woodland habitats in winter, and several species–such as the barred owl, barn owl, and Eastern screech-owl–also nest here.

*American Woodcock*

During migration, especially in the fall, woodcock concentrate in massive numbers in Cape May's moist woodlands and thickets. These unique upland shorebirds forage here, replenishing their fat reserves by eating more than their weight in earthworms daily. On the Atlantic Coast only Cape Charles, Virginia hosts comparable concentrations of woodcock. The refuge provides excellent resting and feeding habitat for this interesting species. In January and February, the males can be observed doing their entertaining courtship flights throughout the county.

*Endangered/ Threatened*

Bald eagles–on the Federal List of Endangered and Threatened Plants and Animals–use the refuge's protected habitats, and are commonly seen during migration. Bald eagles historically nested on areas within the refuge acquisition boundary. New Jersey State-listed species confirmed within the boundary include osprey, red knot, short-eared owl, barred owl, red-shouldered and Cooper's hawk, Northern harrier, great and little blue heron, red-headed woodpecker, yellow-crowned night-heron, bobolink, Southern gray treefrog, and Eastern tiger salamander.

Virginia Rettig/USFWS

*Eastern tiger salamander*

Swamp pink–a unique lily family member which is on the Federal

List of Endangered and Threatened Plants and Animals–also occurs on the refuge, as do 34 State-listed plant species.

*Fishery Resources*

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge's marshes and tidal creeks provide important nursery areas and nutrient resources for many popular species of finfish and shellfish, including summer flounder, weakfish, striped bass, blue crabs and lady crabs.

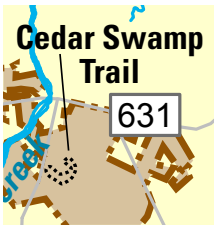
W.J. Berg/USFWS

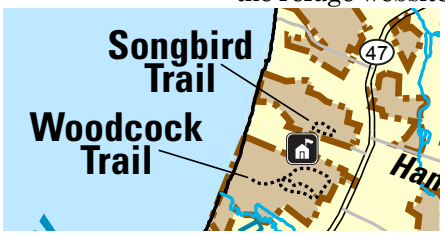
*White-tailed deer fawn*

These fisheries provide abundant resources for wildlife, as well as for people. Seventy percent of the species sought by recreational and commercial fishermen depend on shallow water habitats for at least part of their life cycle.

**Enjoying the Refuge**

Refuge visitors are welcome to enjoy a wide range of wildlife-dependent activities here. The refuge headquarters is located at 24 Kimbles Beach Road in Cape May Court House, and is open weekdays from 8 am – 4:30 pm.






There are four hiking trails throughout the refuge. These include Cedar Swamp Trail in the Great Cedar Swamp Division; Woodcock Trail and Songbird Trail in the Delaware Bay Division; and Dune Trail at the Two Mile Beach Unit (see maps). Best wildlife viewing opportunities occur in spring and fall.

Seasonal deer hunting and migratory game bird hunting are allowed in designated areas of the refuge, under State and Federal regulation. Please contact refuge headquarters or go to the refuge website (http://www.fws.gov/northeast/capemay) for additional information, regulations and maps.

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Surf fishing at Cold Spring Inlet*

**Important Information For Visitors**

The refuge is open daily from dawn to dusk.

Pets must be on a short, hand-held leash. No pets are permitted at the Two Mile Beach Unit.

*The following are prohibited on the refuge:*

Use of motorized and nonmotorized vehicles, horses

Disturbing, injuring, destroying, collecting plants, wildlife, or other natural objects

Picking fruits or flowers

Feeding wildlife

Entering closed areas

Camping, fires

Surfing, swimming, kite-flying

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Monarch butterfly*

**Cape May National Wildlife Refuge supports our precious wildlife resources for the ongoing benefit of people...want to help?**

Cape May National Wildlife Refuge welcomes volunteers. Individuals interested in volunteering are encouraged to contact refuge headquarters.

Heidi Hanlon/USFWS

*Birdwatchers at Songbird Trail*