



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

## **Preserving a Natural Heritage**

Established by Congress on June 9, 1980, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge encompasses some of Alabama's last remaining undisturbed coastal barrier habitat.

Located fifty miles due west of Pensacola, Florida, and fifty miles southeast of Mobile, Alabama, Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge consists of approximately 7,000 acres of coastal lands, ranging from constantly changing beach dunes to rolling pine-oak woodlands. Management at Bon Secour is aimed at protecting and preserving these unique habitats and associated wildlife for generations to come. The refuge protects the well-being of native plants and animals, serves as a living laboratory for students and scientists, and provides wildlife-oriented public recreation.

The name Bon Secour comes from the French meaning "safe harbor," very appropriate considering the sanctuary for native flora and fauna that the refuge provides. As the surrounding area becomes increasingly developed, Bon Secour is indeed a natural oasis of wildlands, where wildlife can exist without harm.





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### **Habitat**

By definition, habitat is an area where an animal or plant lives that provides food, water, shelter and space. Bon Secour owns or manages five miles of gulf beaches on the Fort Morgan Peninsula and more than a dozen miles of bay front on other refuge units along Mobile Bay and the Intracoastal Waterway. Impressively pristine, the beaches along the Fort Morgan peninsula are often referred to as America's Riviera. Coastal Alabama is indeed a paradise not only for humans but for several endangered or threatened species as well.

### **Endangered or Threatened Species of Bon Secour**

Listed as endangered June 6, 1985, the Alabama beach mouse is associated with the sand dunes closest to the Gulf of Mexico, which support stands of sea oats, a principal food source for this dune dweller. A small mouse with a buff colored patch on its back and snowy white underbelly, the Alabama beach mouse is nocturnal in nature, living and breeding in the foredunes, burrowing small tunnels in the sand to escape predators. Its existence has been threatened by man's steady development of the natural beaches where it makes its home.

### *The Alabama Beach Mouse*



Alabama Cooperative  
Fish and Wildlife  
Research Unit

### *The Loggerhead Sea Turtle*

USFWS



In more than 200 million years, these creatures have changed very little. The loss of nesting beaches due to coastal development and predation have been major factors in the decline of these huge marine reptiles. In summer, telltale tracks on refuge beaches attest to nocturnal visits of loggerheads, which come ashore to lay eggs and then return secretively to the sea. Nesting occurs from May-September, peaking in July. The refuge has a volunteer-based monitoring program, "Share the Beach." For more information, please see the map page.

### *The Piping Plover*

Due to direct habitat loss and beach alterations, populations of piping plovers were listed as threatened and endangered in 1986. Piping plovers are small, solitary shorebirds that nest on open sandy beaches along the mid to northern Atlantic coast, the Great Lakes region, and the Northern Great Plains. Plovers from these areas over winter at Bon Secour, feeding on invertebrates along the beaches and tidal flats. During the winter, piping plovers can be recognized by having pale gray feathers and white underparts with pale yellow legs, and a short, black bill.

### *The American Alligator*

Found throughout the refuge, the American Alligator can be confused with the long, pointed-nosed crocodile, which in the U.S. is found only in extreme south Florida. The alligator has a more rounded nose. Most of Bon Secour's gators measure

6-12 feet, although the record in the U.S. is 19 feet 2 inches. On land, the sleepy looking reptile is able to move at speeds of up to 20 miles per hour. When in the water, they often resemble a log, so look for just its nose, eyes, and back above the surface.

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## Hurricane Frederic

At nightfall on September 12, 1979, the devastating 150 mph winds of Hurricane Frederic struck the Alabama Gulf Coast doing untold damage to property, wildlife and the natural barrier island itself.

Miraculously, not a single human life was lost due to this storm. Born off the coast of Africa days earlier, Frederic raged on for twelve hours, twisting and snapping pine trees like toothpicks. Live oaks fared better in strong winds. Summer homes were ripped apart and scattered along the peninsula like leaves in the wind. Such debris is still evident in many places on the refuge today, mute testimony to the impermanence of man's creations in an area subject to the awesome fury of hurricanes.



USFWS

## Things You Can Do

Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge is open year-round **during daylight hours** for hiking, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, and nature study. Take your binoculars and camera, walk the trails and look closely. This will help you to see animals that blend in well with their surroundings. There are no restroom facilities at any of the trailheads. Restrooms are located at the refuge office. Hours are posted there and at the trailheads.



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The *Pine Beach Trail* is four miles round trip. It starts in a maritime forest, meanders between Little Lagoon and Gator Lake, before finally reaching a pristine beach. Next to Gator Lake is a kiosk where visitors are welcome to stop for a picnic lunch.



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The *Jeff Friend Trail* features a one-mile loop, providing a spectacular view of Little Lagoon and an access point for fishing and crabbing.

The *Gator Lake Trail* is two miles round trip; at one mile it intersects with the Pine Beach Trail, skirting the south side of Gator Lake.



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The *Centennial Trail* is the newest of our trails and is still currently under construction. Its proposed length is 2.2 miles and once completed, will connect the Pine Beach and Jeff Friend trails. This trail will highlight diverse habitats found on the refuge: Little Lagoon, freshwater wetlands, scrub hammocks, pine forests and sweet gum swamp. Interpretive signs along the trail tell the story of this unique coastal area.

During the hot, humid, summer months, be prepared for mosquitoes, sand gnats and other biting insects; bring along insect repellent and water, as none is available on the trails.

### *Fishing/ Freshwater*

Forty-acre Gator Lake is open for fishing year-round. Largemouth bass, catfish, and bluegill are the most commonly caught species. Canoes and small boats are allowed, as are electric trolling motors—gasoline motors are prohibited. Boats must be portaged 8/10 of a mile from the parking lot at the trailhead or one can fish from the bank. A valid Alabama freshwater fishing license is required.

### *Fishing/ Saltwater*

Anglers can take advantage of the beach access to try their hand at surf fishing or take a short stroll down the Jeff Friend Trail to fish Little Lagoon. A valid Alabama saltwater fishing license is required.

## **Regulations**

Refuge open during daylight hours only.

No weapons allowed.

Collection of artifacts, animals, sea oats, and other plants is prohibited.

No pets allowed.

Please put litter in its place.

Camping, open fires, and fireworks are prohibited on all refuge units.

Vehicles, including ATV's are prohibited.

Climbing on the dunes is prohibited.

Nude sunbathing is prohibited.



Jim Allen

## *Spring/Summer*

### **Wildlife Calendar**

Migratory songbirds herald spring's arrival, most arriving in mid-April. Birdwatchers from near and far come to view the marvelous array of species.



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Wading bird nesting takes two months to complete, usually starting in May but sometimes starting as late as early July. Nearby great blue heron and cattle egret rookeries (nature's nursery) are very active with newborn chicks.

Charlie Heidecker



By mid-April, the ospreys return to Bon Secour and immediately begin refurbishing their nests. Watch for aerial courtship displays of these beautiful birds. During the summer, osprey feed nestlings.

Sea turtle nesting occurs May-October; please see “Share the Beach” on the map page.

### *Fall/Winter*

Fall bird migration begins in August and peaks in mid-October. During this time, peregrines and other raptors can be seen soaring overhead.

Monarch butterfly migration occurs in mid-October and hundreds can be seen along the Pine Beach Trail drawing nutrients from milkweed and other plants.

In September and October, fall wildflowers light up the peninsula with a spectacular array of colors. Two of the most popular are the scarlet-colored red basil and the feathery seaside goldenrod, with its sweet anise-like aroma.

In addition to migratory birds, brown pelicans, ospreys and a wide variety of wading birds can be seen year-round. Other wildlife you may see include bobcat, squirrels, marsh and cottontail rabbits, marsh and wood rats, opossum, raccoons, alligators, skinks, and nine-banded armadillos.

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# Bon Secour

National Wildlife Refuge

