

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Back Bay

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



## **A Unique Area for Wildlife**

Welcome to Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. Located in the southeastern corner of Virginia, Back Bay Refuge was established in 1938 to provide habitat for migrating and wintering waterfowl, particularly greater snow geese. Today, the refuge continues to be an important link in the chain of national wildlife refuges located along the Atlantic Flyway.





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

Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge contains 7,732 acres, situated on and around a thin strip of coastline typical of barrier islands found along the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Habitat's include beach, dunes, woodland, farm fields and marsh. The majority of refuge marshland's are on islands contained within the waters of Back Bay. Since 1939, an additional 4,600 acres of Bay waters within the refuge boundary have been closed to migratory bird hunting by Presidential Proclamation. To assure long-term protection for waterfowl and other wetland-dependant species, the Fish and Wildlife Service is working to acquire additional wetland habitat in the Back Bay area.



USFWS

*Loggerhead Sea Turtle*

Approximately 10,000 snow geese and a large variety of ducks visit Back Bay Refuge during the annual peak, usually in December and January. The refuge also provides habitat for a wide assortment of other wildlife, including threatened and endangered species such as loggerhead sea turtles and piping plovers.

*Surf Fishing*  
*S. Bottorf*

## A Haven for Waterfowl and Other Wildlife

Nearly 300 species of birds have been observed at Back Bay Refuge. During the fall and winter months, large flocks of waterfowl use the Bay and freshwater impoundments. Snow and Canada geese, tundra swan, and many duck species are abundant. Each year, waterfowl numbers rise and fall in response to weather conditions, farming practices, and reproductive success. Migrating songbirds and shorebirds arrive at the refuge each spring. Brightly colored warblers dot shrub and woodland areas while shorebirds line the intertidal zone and search for food in shallow waters.



R. Harris

*Great Egret*

The varied habitats at Back Bay Refuge provide food and cover for mammals such as river otters, white tailed deer, mink, opossums, raccoons, and the red fox. Nutria, introduced to the United States from South America in the early 1900's are common on refuge marshlands. Other non-native species include feral pigs and horses. These animals compete with native species for food and cover, and are responsible for negative impacts to the managed environment. Nutria damage dikes through burrowing activity; pigs uproot valuable marsh vegetation; and horses trample plants and litter the area with their droppings.

*White Tailed Deer*



D. Dewherst

Many types of reptiles and amphibians occur at Back Bay Refuge. Snakes, including poisonous cottonmouths, are frequently seen. Other common snakes include brown and northern water snakes, black rat snakes and eastern hognose snakes. On warm, sunny days, turtles line up on logs and bask at the water's edge. Red-bellied, painted, eastern mud, and snapping turtles are most common.

## An Area of Diverse Habitats

Back Bay Refuge habitats support a wide variety of plant and animal life. Seventy-five percent of the refuge is marshlands. They are found within several large impoundments and on the Bay islands. These productive, protected marshlands contain valuable wildlife food plants such as three square, smartweed, and spike rushes.



The shifting sands of the barrier beach are constantly exposed to ocean waves, currents, and tides. No vegetation can withstand these powerful forces, but ghost crabs, gulls, and migrating shorebirds are common here. Sand dunes form a line of defense, protecting marsh and woodlands from high tides and storms. Like the beach, the dunes are exposed to the powerful forces of nature. However, dunes are able to support vegetation that helps to stabilize the sandy soil.



Wax myrtle, highbush blueberry, bayberry, wild black cherry, and persimmon dominate refuge shrublands.

Woodlands consist mostly of live oak and loblolly pines. Shrubland and woodland habitats are found in areas of higher elevation, where the soil is well drained and the harsh effects of the ocean are not as dramatic. Raptors, rabbits, squirrels, and deer are commonly found here.

USFWS

*Ghost Crab*

D. Dewherst

*Gulls*

*Osprey*

Edges between major habitats, such as between land and sea, are places where wildlife is most active. In fact, coastal barrier habitats are thought to harbor a greater variety of bird species than any other ecosystem in the continental United States. In many cases, this diversity occurs within an extremely narrow area. At the refuge, for instance, the distance to the ocean from Back Bay is no more than one mile.

## Visitor Activities

Approximately 100,000 people visit Back Bay Refuge each year. They come to enjoy the unique beauty of the area, to learn about wildlife, and to participate in environmental education and wildlife-dependant recreation. Because wildlife needs to have priority on a wildlife refuge, you may encounter seasonal closures and special regulations during your visit. Check the list below to see what activities and facilities are provided for visitors.

*Visitor Contact Station* - Displays, brochures, and films are available. A small auditorium may be used by prescheduled groups.

*Foot Trails* - Two boardwalks lead to the beach. The Bay Trail, Environmental Study Area, and portions of the interior dikes are also open to visitors on foot. See map for distances.

*Visitor Contact Station*

*Fishing* - Surf and freshwater fishing are permitted in specific areas. A Virginia fishing license is required to fish in Back Bay and D Pool. Phone the refuge office for details.

*Boating* - No launching facilities are available. Small boats and canoes that can be hand-carried to the Bay's edge are allowed. Trailers are not permitted.

*Bicycling* - Some interior dikes are open to bicyclists, although certain areas are closed seasonally to protect wildlife.

*Hunting/Trapping* - Available by permit during designated periods. Phone the refuge office for details.

*Volunteer Program* - Back Bay Refuge has many active volunteers. To join this dedicated group, please phone the refuge office.



C. Marshall

*Environmental Education*

*Educational Programs* - Organized school, civic, and professional groups may reserve dates for slide talks, films, and outdoor classroom activities. Public programs are regularly announced. Phone the refuge office for more information.

*Ashville Bridge Creek Environmental Education Center* - The center is available to prescheduled groups (school, civic, and professional) for slide talks, films, and outdoor classroom activities. Public programs are regularly announced. Phone the refuge office for more information.

## Refuge Hours

### Visitor Contact Station:

Open 8:00am to 4:00pm on weekdays,  
9:00am to 4:00 pm weekends.

Closed Saturdays, December through  
March. Closed holidays except  
Memorial Day, July 4, and Labor Day.

Outdoor facilities are open daily, dawn  
to dusk.

Walking/biking trails are seasonally  
closed or may be re-routed depending  
on wildlife use. Follow trail signs or  
contact the refuge for further details.

## Management Improves Habitat

Wildlife managers constantly work to  
improve the quality of wildlife habitat.  
Although refuge wetlands have a  
natural appearance, most areas are  
intensely managed for use by  
waterfowl and other native wildlife.  
Management actions create diverse  
habitats to encourage use by many  
wildlife species.



*Prescribed burn*

Habitat management at Back Bay  
Refuge includes water level  
manipulation, prescribed burning,  
plowing, discing, dike construction,  
chemical control, wildlife population  
control, and seasonal closures to  
protect various species. As you travel  
through the refuge you will see how  
habitats have been modified. Look  
for burned areas, water control  
structures, signed or cabled closed  
areas, and marsh areas that have  
been deliberately disturbed to  
prevent woody plant growth.  
Waterfowl, especially, thrive on  
marshes containing succulent plant  
growth with few upland species.





Area Closed Signs or National Wildlife Refuge Signs are used to inform the public that the designated area is closed to all entry. Please observe these signs while visiting the Refuge.

## Wildlife and Seasonal Happenings

*Winter* - Wintering waterfowl congregate on the refuge. Winter storms and cold fronts may bring increased numbers of birds to the area. Rafts and long lines of pelagic (oceanic) birds can be observed along the beach. Northern harriers are abundant as they search for food in the marsh. Deer shed their antlers and breed through February.

*Spring* - Local breeding ducks pair off and nest. Broods are visible by early May. Ospreys return in early March and begin using refuge nesting platforms. By May, white-tailed fawns appear and rare orchids and carnivorous plants bloom in the marsh and in ditches along refuge dikes. Songbird and shorebird migration peaks during this period.

*Summer* - Ospreys are hatching, along with songbirds. Sea turtles nest at night on the beach. Ticks, chiggers, and other biting insects are abundant. Wading birds concentrate in the marsh. Blackberries and blueberries provide food for songbirds and marsh hibiscus (rose mallow) blooms along marsh edges.

*Fall* - Migratory waterfowl begin moving through the area. Ospreys, swallows, and songbirds depart for their wintering grounds. Peregrine falcons hunt shorebirds along the beach and other raptors pass through as they migrate southward. Reptiles, amphibians, and insects become less active.

## Regulations Protect Visitors and Wildlife

Refuge regulations exist for your safety and for the welfare of wildlife. Visitors are expected to know and comply with all regulations. A complete listing of refuge regulations can be obtained by phoning the refuge office.

Listed below are a few regulations that you should know about before you visit:

An entrance fee may be required to enter the refuge at various times of the year.

The refuge is open during daylight hours only.

Only wildlife-dependant recreation is permitted. Swimming, sunbathing, and surfing are not allowed.

Visitors may not park cars overnight. Entry into closed areas, including the dunes is prohibited.

Groups of more than ten people must obtain a refuge permit before their visit.

Pets are allowed from October 1 to March 31 only, and must be kept on a leash not longer than 10 feet at all times. Pets are not allowed during the rest of the year to avoid conflicts with wildlife and for visitor safety.

Open fires, including charcoal-burning grills, are prohibited.

Vehicle access is permitted only as far as the Visitor Contact Station. Visitor access beyond this point must be by foot or bicycle. Congress has mandated that certain residents of North Carolina be allowed to drive vehicles on the beach. In addition, employees of False Cape State Park may drive to and from their park residences. Only those holding a valid refuge permit may drive on the beach.

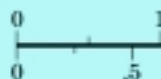
### One-way Mileage from V.C.S.

End of Bay Trail .....	4
To Beach via Seaside Trail .....	.25
To Beach via Dune Trail .....	5
B/C Cross Dike .....	2.0
A/B Cross Dike .....	2.5
To False Cape State Park V.C.S. ....	4.25
To North Carolina Line .....	9.0
From Little Island Park to V.C.S. ....	1.0



### LEGEND

- Refuge Boundary
- Visitor Contact Station (V.C.S.)
- Walking Trails/  
Biking Trails (Seasonal)
- Outdoor Classroom Site
- Parking Area
- Boat Ramp





To Sandbridge Road



North

**P** Little Island Park (Overnight Parking)

Fee Collection Point

Visitor Contact Station

Seaside Trail Boardwalk

Pool E

Dune Trail Boardwalk

Pool D

Long Island

Bay Trail

Break Island Cove

Pool C

Pool G

Pool F

Pool H

Pool I

Pool J

Pool A

Sand Bay

Proclamation Waters

Little Narrows

Back Bay

Barboers Hill Boat Deck

FALSE CAPE STATE PARK

1 Mile

*Back Bay is one of over 500 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat and represents the most comprehensive wildlife management program in the world. Units of the system stretch across the United States from northern Alaska to the Florida Keys and include small islands in the Caribbean and South Pacific. The character of the refuges is as diverse as the nation itself.*

*The Service also manages National Fish Hatcheries, and provides Federal leadership in habitat protection, fish and wildlife research, technical assistance and the conservation and protection of migratory birds, certain marine mammals and threatened and endangered species.*

*Loggerhead Sea Turtle Hatchling/USFWS*

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April 2000

