



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Discovering the Wonders of Nature

## *The National Wildlife Refuge System*

*The National Wildlife Refuge System is one of America's greatest conservation success stories. In its first hundred years, it helped save our national symbol, the American bald eagle, from extinction and has protected hundreds of other wild species—including fish, migratory birds, and many other plants and animals and the habitats that support them.*

**C**hildren and adults alike flock to the wildest classrooms around: America's wildlife refuges. Millions visit wildlife refuges each year, on their own or as part of school or tour groups, to learn more about the diversity of wildlife there. With a wildlife refuge within a hour's drive of most major cities, wildlife refuges offer all Americans an opportunity to learn about their natural surroundings.

Wildlife refuges offer two main approaches to learning—interpretation and environmental education—both of which are designated by law as priority activities.

*Environmental education* encompasses planned, often sequential, instructional programs and activities aimed at building skills, abilities, and knowledge about wildlife-related environmental topics.

*Interpretation* is not strictly instructional. Interpretive programs and activities seek to relate an area's natural resources to visitors' individual expectations and experience, to pique interest, allow them to develop their own conclusions, and, hopefully, inspire them to consider the effect of their actions on the world around them.

Wildlife refuges around the country offer unique hands-on opportunities to learn about wildlife and the natural world—and many feature dedicated education centers. Programs range from nature walks for local school children to full-scale teacher-training programs. Here are a few of the learning opportunities available on America's wildlife refuges.



CELEBRATING A  
**CENTURY**  
of CONSERVATION

*Don Edwards San Francisco Bay National Wildlife Refuge* hosts thousands of schoolchildren who come each year to learn about conserving wildlife habitat, especially the importance of saltmarsh to migratory birds and other wildlife. In addition to an outdoor classroom and other facilities onsite, this refuge operates an environmental education center in nearby San Jose, California.

*Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge* in Iowa boasts a Prairie Learning Center, where schoolchildren and others learn about this refuge's extensive efforts to restore the tallgrass prairie and reintroduce bison and elk. Programs and displays on prairie management and restoration include interactive exhibits, theatrical productions, and a simulated underground burrow that gives visitors the experience of living below the soil.

*Patuxent Research Refuge* in Maryland operates year-round outdoor education and wildlife management demonstration areas for school classes and the refuge hosts an extensive teacher-training program. The visitor center focuses on wildlife research and management practices as well as rare species and habitat conservation.

*Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge*, near Minneapolis, offers curriculum-based field trips for students from preschool through high school and a river stewardship program focusing on water quality. The visitor center's interactive exhibits describe the history of the Minnesota River and explain how wetlands are managed for waterfowl and other wildlife.

But you don't have to go far to learn about America's wild places. You can find many exciting education and interpretation programs at refuges near major metropolitan areas. Patuxent Research Refuge lies between Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum is just outside Philadelphia. There is the Tualatin River Refuge near Portland, Oregon, and Bayou Sauvage Refuge near New Orleans.

## America's Best Kept Secret



*When President Theodore Roosevelt made Florida's tiny Pelican Island a*

*refuge for birds in 1903, he wrote the first chapter of a great American conservation success story. And the story of safeguarding America's migratory birds, endangered species, and other wildlife keeps getting better and better. Entering its second century, the National Wildlife Refuge System comprises 95 million acres, protected within more than 535 refuges and thousands of small prairie wetlands that serve as waterfowl breeding and nesting areas. There are wildlife refuges in every state, and at least one within an hour's drive of every major American city, providing much-needed refuge for people as well as wildlife.*

*The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a Federal agency whose mission, working with others, is to conserve fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Under the management of fish and wildlife professionals, the National Wildlife Refuge System has become the world's premier network of wildlife habitats.*



Programs at these refuges and hundreds of others demonstrate that there's no better place to learn about nature than right in the wildest heart of it—America's wildlife refuges.

To find out about interpretation and environmental education programs at wildlife refuges near you, call 1-800-344-WILD or visit [refuges.fws.gov](http://refuges.fws.gov).

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