

## Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge

is one of over 560 refuges throughout the United States. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt established the Okefenokee Swamp as a refuge in 1937.

### The National Wildlife Refuge System

administers a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United

States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.



**Swamp Island Drive** is a little over 7-miles of driving, biking and/or walking loop. This guide corresponds to the numbered markers seen along the drive. Please keep the following in mind as you explore the drive and its trails:

*The best times for wildlife observation are around sunrise/sunset. Please be aware of refuge hours and be sure to be off the drive before closing.*

*The speed limit is 15 MPH. Watch for wildlife, pedestrians, and bicyclists. Passengers must remain inside vehicles while moving.*

*Prepare for biting flies, mosquitoes, and ticks. Keep an eye out for fire ant mounds.*

*Feeding wildlife is strictly prohibited. Do not throw items at or disturb wildlife. Never touch an alligator!*

*Littering is prohibited. Put all trash and garbage in the receptacles provided. Thank you!*

1. **Canal Diggers Trail—0.7 mile**—The deep ditch you crossed is the Suwannee Canal, which was built in 1891 in an attempt to drain the swamp into the St. Marys River to the Atlantic Ocean. The goal was to reach the cypress forests for logging and to create farmland. After 4 years and 12 miles of digging, the company abandoned the project due to lack of funds and unstable sand banks at this end. Today, the canal is the main access point for the water trails on this side of the swamp.



### 2. Longleaf Pine Restoration

Once covering 90 million acres in the southeast, fewer than 3 million acres of longleaf pine remain. Prior to the refuge, most of the longleaf had been harvested, and replaced with faster growing pine species. Okefenokee is restoring longleaf habitats on refuge uplands.



Forest management selectively thins areas encouraging natural regeneration, and longleaf seedlings are planted. Prescribed burning is a management tool used in these pine forests to maintain the open understory.

3. A slight elevation change creates this **hardwood hammock** where oaks and other deciduous trees are common. Black bears and turkeys feed on acorns and other fruit here.



4. **This pond** was dug to supply sand for the drive. This is a popular area to observe alligators. Courtship begins in April and mating

occurs in May. Eggs are laid in June or July and the young hatch two months later. The sex of the young is determined by the temperature/location of the egg in the nest; warmer temperatures produce male offspring!

5. Although the **bat box** to the right was built to attract these flying mammals, they have found adequate roosts in hollow trees and have never used it.

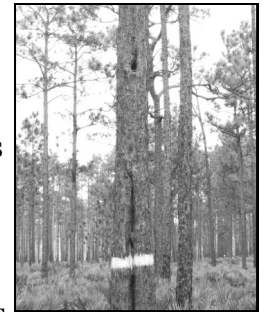


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### The Upland Discovery

**Trail—0.25 mile**—is a trail where you will see many trees with white bands on the trunks, these are cavity trees for red-cockaded woodpeckers. These birds depend on the longleaf pine forest, and require

mature trees that are at least 60 years old. Loss of the mature longleaf pine forest is a major reason the species is endangered. Since these woodpeckers use living trees, it takes them longer to complete a cavity than other woodpeckers that use dead trees. A breeding pair is helped by the male offspring from the previous year to raise the chicks.



6. Visitors may see wildlife such as white-tailed deer, bobwhite quail, and wild turkey in **wildlife openings**.



Many animals come to forage on the early growth vegetation. Predators such as black bear, bobcats, and barred owls may

frequent the areas near dusk and dawn.

7. The low growing, fan shaped, **Saw Palmetto** is common in the Southeast United States. Seen throughout the Swamp Island Drive, the plant provides foraging, nesting, and protective cover opportunities for over 100 different species of wildlife. Small mammals may take cover underneath the dense leaves, while the berries provide nutrition for raccoons, gopher tortoises, black bears, and various birds.

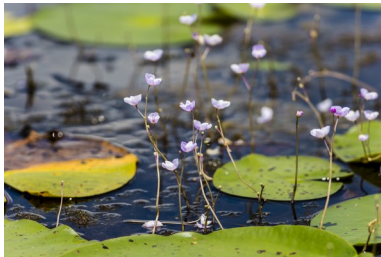


8. The federally threatened **eastern indigo snake**, although secretive, is an important part of the food web. At lengths up to 8.5 feet, it is North America's longest snake.

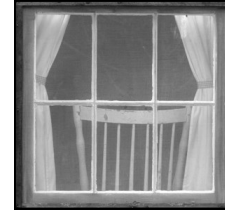
9. The long, narrow ponds along the left side of the road are called **borrow ditches** where material for the road was dug. You could say it was "borrowed" and never returned. They are rich in aquatic animal and plant life. Keep a lookout for alligators and turtles. You may also see hooded pitcher plants and two kinds of butterworts growing along the bank, as well as bladder-



worts in the water. All three are among Okefenokee's famous carnivorous plants. Snakes are also abundant so watch where you step.



10. Imagine returning home from a day in town in 1860. As you crossed the small stretch of swamp that you see on either side of the road, you would know you were almost home. A slight rise brings you onto **Chesser Island** where the W.T. Chesser family settled in 1858.



11. **Chesser Island Homestead** was built by Tom and Iva Chesser in 1927. Although sugar cane was this pioneer family's cash crop, they also hunted, kept livestock, tended beehives, and had a substantial garden. Turpentine, made from pine resin, also provided an income. Swamp settlers were a self-sufficient and industrious people. Walking among this homestead, you get a feel for what it was like as an early settler on the edge of the Okefenokee.

12. The **Chesser Island Boardwalk** is a 1.5 mile (round trip) hike that leads to a 360° view of Chesser Prairie and Seagrove Lake. While strolling along the elevated platform, visitors may encounter an assortment of wildlife and plants, and will see evidence of the 2011 Honey Prairie Fire. Wildfires are a natural occurrence in the Okefenokee, and actually benefit the swamp and the wildlife that live here. Visitors can take a rest at any of the 3 covered shelters before traversing up the 40-foot Owl's Roost Tower.



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

# Okefenokee

*National Wildlife Refuge*



David Holloway

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*Come again to see the many seasons of the Okefenokee.*