U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Wildlife Spectacles to See and Photograph

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.

CELEBRATING A CENTURY of CONSERVATION

The almost unimaginable scenic beauty of wildlife refuges is matched only by the breathtaking abundance of plants and animals that thrive there. From observation decks, canoes, and auto and nature trails, millions of visitors each year are awed by the wonder of these still-wild places, and many preserve their memories on film.

These are but a few examples of the exhilarating sights that astound and delight visitors to America's wildlife refuges. For a complete list of wildlife refuges that welcome wildlife watchers and photographers, visit *refuges.fws.gov* or call 1-800-344-WILD.

Wintering bald eagles. More than 1,000 bald eagles spend the winter at California's Klamath Basin National Wildlife Refuge—the largest concentration in the lower 48 states. The most enthralling spectacle is the "fly out" at dawn each day, when the eagles leave their night roost to fly into the marshes to feed. Golden eagles, northern harriers, and red-tailed and rough-legged hawks can also be spotted on this wildlife refuge.

American bison. Herds of bison still graze the Western grasslands as they did hundreds of years ago at the National Bison Range in Montana, the Fort Niobrara National Wildlife Refuge in Nebraska, and the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge in Oklahoma. These wildlife refuges also support myriad bird and plant species found nowhere else in the world. Visitors can observe and photograph bison from their cars most of the year. Bison calves, golden in color and irresistibly endearing, appear in the late spring.

Hawks soaring above exquisite fall colors. High above Tamarac National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota, hundreds of migrating redtail, broadwing, and sharp-shin hawks make their way south each fall. As the raptors descend into the refuge to rest, brilliant red, orange, and yellow maple leaves swirl like campfire sparks in the breeze across a glacial landscape of mixed forest, marsh, and lakes. While the memory lasts a lifetime, photographs allow you to share it.

Wildlife up close on Florida's Gulf Coast. Walking trails and canoeing coastal backwaters, visitors reach deep into the stunning scenery of the J. N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge, where a variety of wading birds—including the exquisite roseate spoonbill—share the canals with frolicking otters, lurking alligators, and an occasional bobcat. Estuarine seagrass beds and mangrove islands are home to manatees, loggerhead turtles, and the rare American crocodile.

Friendly manatees in crystal clear waters. In the winter, more than 300 of these sea cows—Florida's largest herd—congregate in the warm, spring-fed waters of Kings Bay in the Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge, where conservation efforts are helping to save this endangered mammal. Growing up to 12 feet long and 3,500 pounds, manatees are cooperative subjects for underwater photographers, who also marvel at the excellent visibility in the Bay's crystalline waters.

Canoeing and birdwatching amid primitive swampland. More than 120 miles of canoe trails wind through Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge's prehistoric panorama of moss-draped cypress trees and trembling grassy peat prairies. One of the nation's oldest, largest, and most primitive swamps, this wildlife refuge in Georgia is a major wintering area for sandhill cranes, ibis, songbirds, wood ducks, hooded mergansers, and teal, all of which can be observed and photographed from platforms scattered throughout the swamp.

Sea turtle capital of the western hemisphere. Just north of the nation's first wildlife refuge, Pelican Island, on Florida's Atlantic coast, is the Archie Carr National Wildlife Refuge, the most important nesting area for endangered loggerhead and green sea turtles in the Western Hemisphere. Hundreds of the enormous turtles swim long distances each June to haul themselves onto the same beaches where they themselves hatched, carefully dig their nests in the sand, and lay 100 or more eggs. Two or three months later, the eggs hatch and young turtles dig their way up through the sand, get their bearings from the luminescent surf, and rush for the sea.

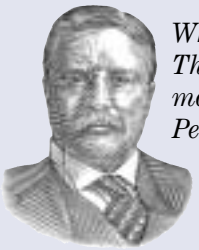
Two dozen species of migrating birds. The southern tip of New Jersey, known as Cape May, attracts an amazing variety of waterfowl to the Edwin Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge each year. Spring also brings prehistoric horseshoe crabs that emerge from the Atlantic's depths to lay their eggs on the beach. Migrating red knots, sandpipers, sanderlings, and dunlins—exhausted and ravenous—flock there to feast on the crabs' eggs before continuing their long journey north. An eight-mile road running along a dike that divides the fresh- and saltwater marshes offers visitors a rare opportunity to view both habitats from their vehicles.

Winter wonderland. Every fall, more than 7,500 elk trek from their high summer range in the mountains and forests down to their winter home in Wyoming's National Elk Refuge. From the famous sleigh rides, visitors also see more than 500 bison winter in the refuge, and rare trumpeter swans—the largest waterfowl in North America—nest there, alongside large numbers of mallards, mergansers, green-winged and cinnamon teal, and Canada geese. Antelope, coyotes, and free-roaming wolves can be spotted as well.

Kodiak bears feasting on spawning salmon. Each summer, schools of sockeye salmon crowd into a shallow creek on Alaska's Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge in a millennia-old spawning ritual. As many as 20 of Kodiak Island's famed giant brown bears congregate there, catching the salmon in their mouths and gorging themselves before starting their long winter naps.

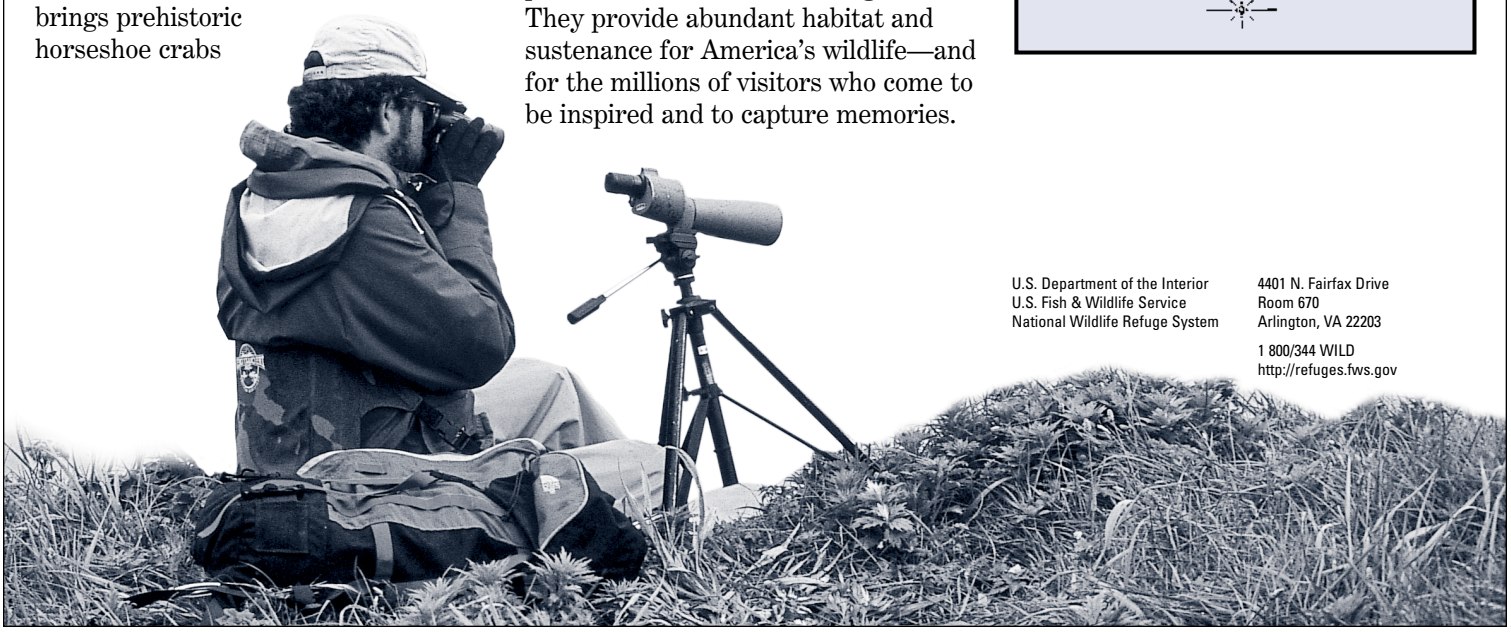
It's little wonder that these special places are called wildlife refuges. They provide abundant habitat and sustenance for America's wildlife—and for the millions of visitors who come to be inspired and to capture memories.

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.



U.S. Department of the Interior
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