U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Cape Romain

National Wildlife Refuge

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 550 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. This system, encompassing over 150 million acres, is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for wildlife. The Refuge System is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of Interior. Today, there is at least one wildlife refuge in each of the 50 states, each refuge working to restore, protect, and manage habitat for America's wildlife.

photo: Felicia Sanders, Black Skimmers

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

Preserving a Rich Natural and Cultural Heritage

In 1932, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge (Cape Romain NWR) was established to provide a safe haven for migratory birds. Stretching for 22 miles along the coast of South Carolina, the refuge is an area rich in natural resources. Its pristine lands and waters (66,287 acres) include barrier islands with long sandy beaches, dense maritime forest, fresh and brackish water impoundments, emergent salt marshes and intricate coastal waterways. In the shallow estuarine wetlands, the incoming tide carries juvenile fish, crustaceans and other invertebrates, combining the

life-giving nourishment of the ocean with the nutrient-laden fresh waters of several small rivers to make one of the most productive environments on earth. Numerous and diverse plants and animals from the land and waters are present at Cape Romain, all dependent upon the delicate balance of the estuary.

photos: Ricky Wrenn

Historic cultural resources found on refuge islands remind us of the significant connection between this coastal land and its earlier human inhabitants. "Middens", which are ancient shell

photo: Steve Hillebrand

heaps deposited by Native Americans over two thousand years ago, can be found on Bulls Island. In addition, the remaining foundation of the "Old Fort", a structure that served the coastal people through our nation's history of pillaging pirates and the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, can be viewed. Two 1800's lighthouses stand as maritime sentinels on Lighthouse Island. Although no longer operational, the lighthouses today serve as historic landmarks and navigational aids for the South Carolina coastline.

A Wildlife Haven

A myriad of wildlife is found within Cape Romain's fascinating and diverse habitats. Established as a migratory bird refuge, Cape Romain NWR is known for its abundant and varied bird life. The refuge provides abundant foraging, nesting and resting areas, for over 293 species of birds that include seabirds, shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl, raptors, and neotropical and resident songbirds. The refuge claims one of four large nesting rookeries for

photo: Felicia Sanders, Royal terns

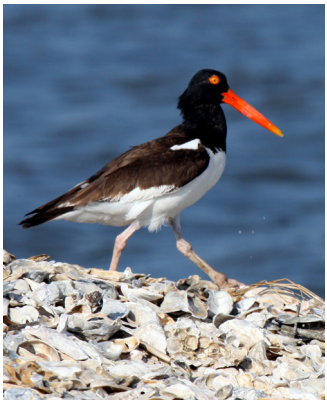


photo: Samatha Collins, Amercian oystercatcher

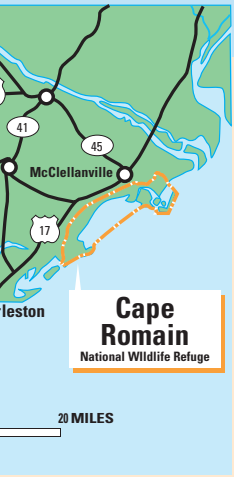
Brown pelicans, terns, and gulls on the South Carolina coast and harbors the largest wintering population of American oystercatchers along the Atlantic and Gulf coast. Noted as one of 500 Important Bird Areas by the American Bird Conservancy, the refuge provides critical habitat for federally listed species such as the threatened Piping plover, endangered Wood stork, and Wilson's plover and American oystercatcher, both listed as high priority species of concern. Cape Romain is designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network Site of International Importance and is one of only four sites on the Atlantic coast of the United States and Canada.

Over 24 types of reptiles, 12 varieties of amphibians and over 36 species of mammals have been recorded on the refuge. On Bulls Island, American alligators are plentiful and can be seen in the fresh and brackish water impoundments. In addition, the black Eastern fox squirrels and White-tailed deer find refuge in Bulls Island's maritime forest. Cape Romain's remote barrier islands are crucial to the protection of the northern sub-population of the threatened Loggerhead sea turtle, those turtles which nest from Virginia to Amelia Island, Florida. During the summer months, refuge beaches support the largest nesting population of these Loggerhead turtles north of Amelia Island. Cape and Lighthouse Islands, the northernmost islands of the Refuge, receives the majority of nests laid, averaging 1000 nests annually.

photo: Laura Smith, Loggerhead sea turtle hatchling

Francis Marion National Forest
Twin Ponds Rifle Range
Tibwin Trail
Palmetto Trail
Buck Hall Campground
Awendaw
Long Creek
Bull River
White Bank Islands
Sewee Shell Ring
17
432
Ion Swamp Trail
Salt Pond Creek
Bulls Bay
Marsh Island
Intracoastal Waterway
Sewee Visitor Center
Charleston 22 miles
Refuge Headquarters
Sewee Road
Venning Creek
Anderson Creek
Garris Landing
Sewee Bay
Bull Creek
Bulls Island
Jacks Creek
Lower Summerhouse Pond
Upper Summerhouse Pond
Price Creek
Scale 0
Lake Marion
6
Lake Moultrie
17 A
176
Moncks Corner
20
41
402
Huger
Summerville
17 A
17
Char
SCALE 0
10

45
Georgetown
21 miles
17
McClellanville
ntracoastal
Waterway
Casino
Creek
Cape
Romain
Bay
Cape
Island
Oyster
Bay
Muddy
Bay
Horse
Head
Creek
Little Papas
Creek
Papas
Creek
Santee Path
Creek
Key
Creek
Five
Fathom
Creek
Romain
River
Lighthouse
Island
Atlantic Ocean
Legend
Sewee Visitor Center
Refuge Boundary
Closed Areas -
February 15 - September 15
Forest
Marsh
Refuge Headquarters
Boat Landing
Hiking Interpretive Trail
Wildlife Viewing Tower
Picnic Area
Restrooms
Weather Shelter
1
2 Miles


41
45
McClellanville
17
leston
Cape
Romain
National Wildlife Refuge
20 MILES

photos: Steve Hillebrand

Managing for Wildlife

The refuge's original objectives were to conserve in public ownership habitat for waterfowl, seabirds, shorebirds, and resident species. Over the years, objectives have expanded to include: managing endangered and threatened species, protecting the 28,000 acre Class 1 Wilderness Area, and preserving the Bulls Island and Cape Island forests.

Since the establishment of Cape Romain NWR, wildlife managers and biologists have employed a number of management techniques to support wildlife's battle for survival. Examples of these techniques include:

Protection of threatened Loggerhead sea turtle nests: Management activities include locating nests and false crawls, nest relocation, caging, monitoring, and predator control. Predator proof hatcheries are constructed and nests are relocated to these enclosures to protect the eggs from predatory raccoons and eroding beaches. Wire cages are placed over those nests that are left in place, with inventories conducted after hatchlings emerge. The refuge participates in the Sea Turtle Stranding and Salvage Network program, coordinated by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources.

Protection of nesting seabirds and shorebirds: The Refuge has implemented a strategy of temporary closures at bird nesting areas. In addition to closing nesting islands on

an annual basis, mobile closures are also utilized. Mobile closures are used for species that don't always nest in the same area year after year, but seek out habitat that changes with the dynamic nature of this barrier island system. The closures consist of "area closed" signs placed around the colony's perimeter and include a large buffer zone. These areas are closed to public entry for the duration of the nesting season until all the chicks have fledged.

photo: Sarah Dawsey

Preservation of maritime forest habitat: An aggressive control plan has been implemented using a variety of herbicides and application methods to control the Chinese tallow tree on Bulls island. In addition, other invasive plants such as phragmites and bamboo are treated for eradication. By removing these invasive species, the natural flora found in the maritime forest can continue to recover from the devastating effects of Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

Management of impoundment water levels: The impoundments on Bulls Island are managed to maximize food production for waterfowl, wading birds and shorebirds, and maintain habitat for resident birds through the use of water control structures. The structures, called rice field trunks, operate with tidal surges to control the water flow between the impoundments and tidal creeks. First used on rice plantations in the 1700's, the rice trunk continues to be the most efficient means to manipulate impoundment water levels to make food available during fall and winter

photos: Steve Hillebrand

months and to allow the germination of new food plants during late winter and early spring. Salt water may be added during the summer months to control undesirable plants or to allow the influx of larval marine organisms and fish.

Adaptive strategies that address environmental challenges such as increased storm frequency and rising sea levels: of particular importance is the accelerated fragmentation and erosion of habitat resulting from sea level rise and changing climates. By participating in collaborative partnerships, monitoring plants and wildlife, managing water impoundment areas, and providing outreach and environmental education, refuge staff work to assure that ecosystems will be available to sustain our wildlife resources for generations to come.

Yours to Enjoy

Visit Cape Romain and experience pristine, sandy beaches, salt marsh vistas, and a sub-tropical maritime forest of Live oak, Cabbage palmetto and Loblolly pine. Enjoy recreational activities that provide opportunities to view the wildlife that inhabit these beautiful and fascinating natural areas.

photo: Ricky Wrenn

Wildlife Observation

With over 293 species of migratory and resident birds recorded on the refuge, birdwatching opportunities

photos: Steve Hillebrand

are available throughout the year. Whatever the season, look for herons and egrets, hawks, the Bald eagle, endangered Wood stork, and American oystercatcher. In the spring and summer months, neotropical migrants such as the Painted bunting, Hooded warbler and Summer tanager have returned to nest in the forest. Many shorebirds and seabirds, including the Willet, American oystercatcher, Black skimmer, Wilson's plover and various species of terns and gulls, use the refuge beaches for nesting. During the fall, Peregrine falcons and Merlins move through and ducks arrive in preparation for their winter stay. Birders can observe Gadwall, American Wigeon, Blue-winged teal, Bufflehead and other waterfowl species as numbers peak in the months from December – February. At this same time, most of Atlantic Coast's American oystercatcher population is on the refuge. The refuge provides two wildlife viewing platforms: the Dave Clough platform, located off of the Turkey Walk Trail, overlooks Upper Summerhouse Pond; Jacks Creek tower overlooks Jacks Pond and is located off of Sheepshead Ridge Road. Both platforms provide great opportunities for viewing shorebirds, wading birds and waterfowl foraging in the ponds. Be sure to pick up a Cape Romain Birding Checklist before you head out in the refuge.

photo: Nelle Rutecki, American alligator

Throughout the year on Bulls Island, you may also encounter some of the mammals and reptiles that inhabit the refuge. As you walk in the more forested areas, you might see the Eastern fox squirrel scampering across the road or catch a glimpse of a White-tailed deer disappearing in the thickets. Alligators are sure to be seen in all of the managed wetlands but are more prevalent in the ponds along "Alligator Alley" and along the banks of Jacks Creek. In the brackish creeks and bays of the refuge, keep an eye out for the small Diamondback terrapin, so named due to the diamond-like pattern on its shell. This aquatic turtle utilizes the refuge beaches for nesting during the summer.

photo: Huang Donghue

photo: Steve Hillebrand

Photography – With abundant wildlife and breathtaking landscapes, the opportunities for nature photography are excellent at Cape Romain. Perhaps the most photographed location on the refuge is Boneyard Beach at Bulls Island. Here, hundreds of oaks, cedars and pines are strewn along a three mile stretch of beach on the northeast corner of the island; all the result of an ever-changing beach in constant battle with the in-coming surf. Boneyard Beach gets its name from all the downed trees that, through the years, have been bleached by the sun and salt water.

photo: Ray Paterra

Hiking Trails -
There are two hiking trails located on Bulls Island. Through a canopy of pine and palmetto with striking views of the salt marsh bay, the forested one-mile Middens Trail takes one past the remains of ancient Native American shell mounds. The two-mile Turkey Walk Trail meanders along salt marsh, over dikes separating the Upper and Lower Summerhouse impoundments and through dense maritime forest to the beach. The scenic Turkey Walk Trail is designated a National Recreation Trail. There are also 16 miles of unpaved roads on Bulls that are open for hiking and biking. Bicycles are not allowed on the hiking trails or the beach.

Shelling -
Stroll along the beach and search for nature's treasures! Cape Romain's beaches offer excellent shelling for sand dollar, whelk, olive, angel wing and many other shells. You may collect one small bag of unoccupied shells.

photo: Steve Hillebrand

photo: Jannah Dupre

Fishing -
Fish the saltwater bays and creeks found within the refuge and surf-fish off of the beaches. Catch Spottail bass, Sea trout, Flounder, Sheepshead and Black drum year-round. Spottail bass runs peak in November. Catch shrimp and crabs, and harvest oysters and clams when in season, which is typically September through May. January and February are prime times to gather clams and oysters. You may also fish and crab on the Garris Landing pier. All fishing activities are allowed in accordance with State regulations.

photo: Tricia Lynch

Hunting –
Two annual 6 day archery hunts for White-tailed deer are offered at Bulls Island, with each scheduled hunt beginning the first Monday of November and December. The harvest of surplus deer is a means to manage a healthy population on the island. Rail hunting is also allowed on the refuge with the hunt schedule the same as the State season. Rules and regulations for rail hunting is provided in a separate State Migratory Bird Brochure. The Cape Romain Hunt Brochure provides information on the refuge hunts.

Visit the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center

The Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center, jointly operated by the Cape Romain NWR and the Francis Marion National Forest, U.S. Forest Service, showcases the valuable ecosystems of the Cape Romain NWR and Francis Marion NF. The Center, a 9,000 square foot facility, offers an exhibit hall featuring forest to sea ecosystems, 82-seat auditorium, classroom, laboratory and book sales outlet. Outside the Center

photo: Michelle Wrenn

photo: Tricia Lynch

you will find the pollinator garden, ablaze with color and attracting butterflies and bees for most of the year. In the early spring, the Bluebirds arrive to take up residence in their nesting boxes along the Bluebird trail that skirts the Center grounds. The Nebo Trail, a one-mile loop hiking trail that traverses through bottomland (swamp) and upland forested areas, takes you past the picnic pavilion, the Sewee Pond, and to the Nebo fishing ponds. Along the trail, interpretive signage highlights the intriguing wonders of the forest wetlands.

The Nebo Trail boardwalk leads to the live Red wolf exhibit where you can observe this rare and beautiful animal. The Red wolf, one of the most endangered animals in the world, was historically found in the southeastern United States. Cape Romain has played an integral role in the Red wolf recovery program. Bulls Island was chosen as the experimental release site in the late 1970's to determine the feasibility of releasing the wolves back into an area of their historic

photo: Stephen Drake

range. In 1987, the island became the first island breeding site and, until 2005, was a place where young pups would learn survival skills before their relocation into the wild at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern North Carolina. The Sewee Center is one of over 40 captive facilities for the Red wolf nationwide.

photo: Natasha Stokes-Frazier

Through a partnership involving the USFWS, USFS, and the South Eastern Wildlife Environment Education (SEWEE) Association, the Center provides informative literature on the Refuge and Forest and offers environmental education and interpretive programming and events for children and adults throughout the year.

The Center is located one-quarter mile north of the refuge office. Hours of operation are Tuesday – Sunday, from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. Phone 843/928-3368. Visit the Sewee Center website at www.fws.gov/seweecenter .

photo: Tricia Lynch

Volunteer Opportunities

Would you like to help our conservation efforts? Become a volunteer! Throughout the year, Cape Romain volunteers work with staff to meet refuge management goals and fulfill the mission of the Service to protect, conserve and restore our wildlife, plants and their habitats. Committed to conservation, the support volunteers provide is invaluable. Refuge and Sewee Center volunteers are engaged in a variety of tasks which include: Loggerhead sea turtle nest relocation, eradication

photo: Volunteer, Jim Hawkins

of invasive plant species, resource interpretation and conservation education, administrative tasks, facility and grounds maintenance, and visitor information services. Visit the Cape Romain website at www.fws.gov/caperomain and/or contact the refuge volunteer coordinator at 843/928 3368 to obtain more information about the volunteer program.

Refuge Regulations
General regulations are listed below. For a complete list, visit the Cape Romain NWR website (http://www.fws.gov/caperomain/).

Hours of Operation
The refuge is open daily during daylight hours only, from sunrise to sunset. Occasionally certain areas may be closed to the public. Entering any area with posted "closed" signs is prohibited.

Camping
Camping is prohibited. Camping facilities are located nearby on the Francis Marion National Forest. Call the Sewee Center at 843/928 3368 for information.

Fires
Fires are prohibited throughout the refuge due to potential fire hazards.

Hunting
Hunting is permitted on approximately 16,500 acres of the refuge during open hunting seasons and in open hunt areas. Hunters are required to familiarize themselves with Federal and State regulations regarding method of hunting, weapons allowed, bag limits, etc.

Firearms
Effective February 2010, persons possessing, transporting, or carrying firearms on National Wildlife Refuges must comply with all provisions of state and local law. Persons may only use (discharge) firearms in accordance with refuge regulations (50 CFR 27.42 and specific refuge regulations in 50 CFR Part 32).

Shells
Shell collectors are allowed to take one small bag of unoccupied shells. Collection of shells for commercial purposes is prohibited.

Pets
Pets are not allowed on refuge islands or on the pier at Garris Landing.

Bicycles
Bicycles are only allowed on the service roads on Bulls Island. Riding bicycles on the beach or on designated hiking trails is prohibited.

Refuge Office
The refuge office is located approximately 20 miles north of Charleston, SC on Highway 17. The office is open Monday through Friday (except holidays), from 8:00 am - 4:00 pm. Contact the office at 843/928 3264 or Email to caperomain@fws.gov for refuge information.

photo: Steve Hillebrand

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Website: http://www.fws.gov/caperomain
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August 2011

photo: Felicia Sanders, Brown Pelicans