

# Savannah

## *National Wildlife Refuge*

### *Map and Trail Guide*

#### Regulation Reminders Continued

- The use of drones is not allowed.
- Fishing from boats is permitted year-round in Kingfisher Pond (non-motorized or electric motor boats only) and all tidal creeks, unless otherwise posted.
- Fishing from boats (non-motorized or electric motor boats only) within all other impounded waters and canals is permitted March 1 - November 30.
- Bank fishing is permitted year-round, throughout the refuge, unless otherwise posted.
- Hunting opportunities are available. Refer to refuge hunt brochure for additional information.

#### Safety Reminders

- Overgrowth on trail shoulders and dikes may conceal snakes, poison ivy, or stinging insects.
- Alligators may be encountered on the wildlife drive or any of the trails; it is potentially dangerous (and a violation of state and federal law) to feed or harass this reptile in any way.
- Be cautious of potholes and puddles when bicycling/ hiking the trails and dikes.
- There are no shelters for visitor protection from the sun or inclement weather, except at the visitor center.
- Drinking water is only available at the visitor center.
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

#### Wildlife Viewing Tips

- Birdwatching opportunities are good all year, but are best from October through April. Electronic call devices should not be used.
- Waterfowl are most abundant from November - February.
- Alligators can even be seen in winter on warm, sunny days, but are most easily viewed when basking in the spring and fall.

#### You Can Help

- By obeying regulations
- By respecting the refuge, wildlife, and other visitors
- By volunteering your time
- By joining the Friends of the Savannah Coastal Wildlife Refuges, Inc. [www.coastalrefuges.org](http://www.coastalrefuges.org)

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Purple Gallinule, photo: Dan Irizarry



Anhinga by Kirk Rogers

### Yours to Enjoy...

Savannah National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) was established in 1927 as a preserve and breeding ground for native birds. Today its 31,551 acres are home to a variety of wildlife, including several threatened and endangered species such as the wood stork, shortnose sturgeon, and manatee. The refuge is an important link in the chain of wildlife refuges along the Atlantic Flyway, attracting thousands of migratory birds—over 30 species of warblers and 20 species of ducks have been recorded. The refuge also provides nesting habitat for wood ducks, purple gallinules, bald eagles, anhingas, and swallow-tailed kites, among others.

About half of Savannah NWR is bottomland hardwoods, composed primarily of cypress, gum, and maple species. Access to this area is by boat only. Motorists are welcome year-round on the Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive. This 4.5-mile wildlife observation route, off South Carolina Highway 170, meanders through a portion of the refuge's freshwater impoundment system.

The refuge, unless otherwise posted, is open to hiking, biking, wildlife observation, interpretation, environmental education, and photography.

Freshwater marsh by Kirk Rogers



Blue-winged teal by Kirk Rogers

It is also open certain times of the year to hunting, fishing, and boating; review refuge regulations for details. The visitor center offers a variety of interpretative and educational opportunities.

### Refuge Hours

Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive and all other refuge lands (except closed areas): Seven days a week, sunrise to sunset

Visitor Center:  
Monday – Friday  
10 am - 2 pm  
Closed federal holidays

### Land and Water Management

By 1850 as many as 13 rice plantations were located along the Savannah River on land now within the refuge boundaries. The current 6,000



Alligator by Genevieve Bailey-Rogers

acres of freshwater impoundments (dike-enclosed pools), now managed for migratory waterfowl and wading birds, were once rice fields dating back to the mid or late 1700s. Many of the dikes used today,

including the wildlife drive, were built upon some of the original plantation dikes constructed during the rice culture era.

Now the former rice fields are actively managed using a series of water control structures that includes rice field trunks. A regimen of flooding and draining the impoundments provides feeding, roosting, and nesting habitat for waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, and other wildlife. In place of rice, wild foods such as smartweed, redroot, and millet are encouraged to grow through careful manipulation of water levels.

### History

Rice field trunks were first used in the 1700s on all rice plantations along the tidal freshwater rivers from Georgetown, South Carolina to Brunswick, Georgia. Today the refuge still uses handmade, wooden rice field trunks to control the water levels within the impoundments.



Rice field trunk by Kirk Rogers

The Freshwater Diversion Canal, constructed in 1978, borders the wildlife drive to the east and plays a vital role in managing the refuge impoundment system. The canal was part of a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' project to mitigate for increased salinity levels in the lower Savannah River due to a past harbor deepening. It allows freshwater to be pulled from further upstream in the Savannah River, where saltwater intrusion has not

occurred, and distributed to refuge impoundments and neighboring private plantations.

### Regulation Reminders

- Entry into areas posted as closed is prohibited.
- Feeding, capturing, or harassing wildlife is strictly prohibited.
- Artifact hunting/collecting is not allowed.
- Do not pick or cut vegetation.
- Dogs, cats, and other pets are not permitted on the refuge.
- Camping is not permitted.

# Savannah National Wildlife Refuge



**Legend**

- Visitor Center
- Refuge Maintenance Center
- Laurel Hill Wildlife Drive
- Boat Launching Ramp
- Georgia/South Carolina Boundary
- Refuge Boundary
- Diversion Canal
- County/State Roads
- Dikes/Trails

