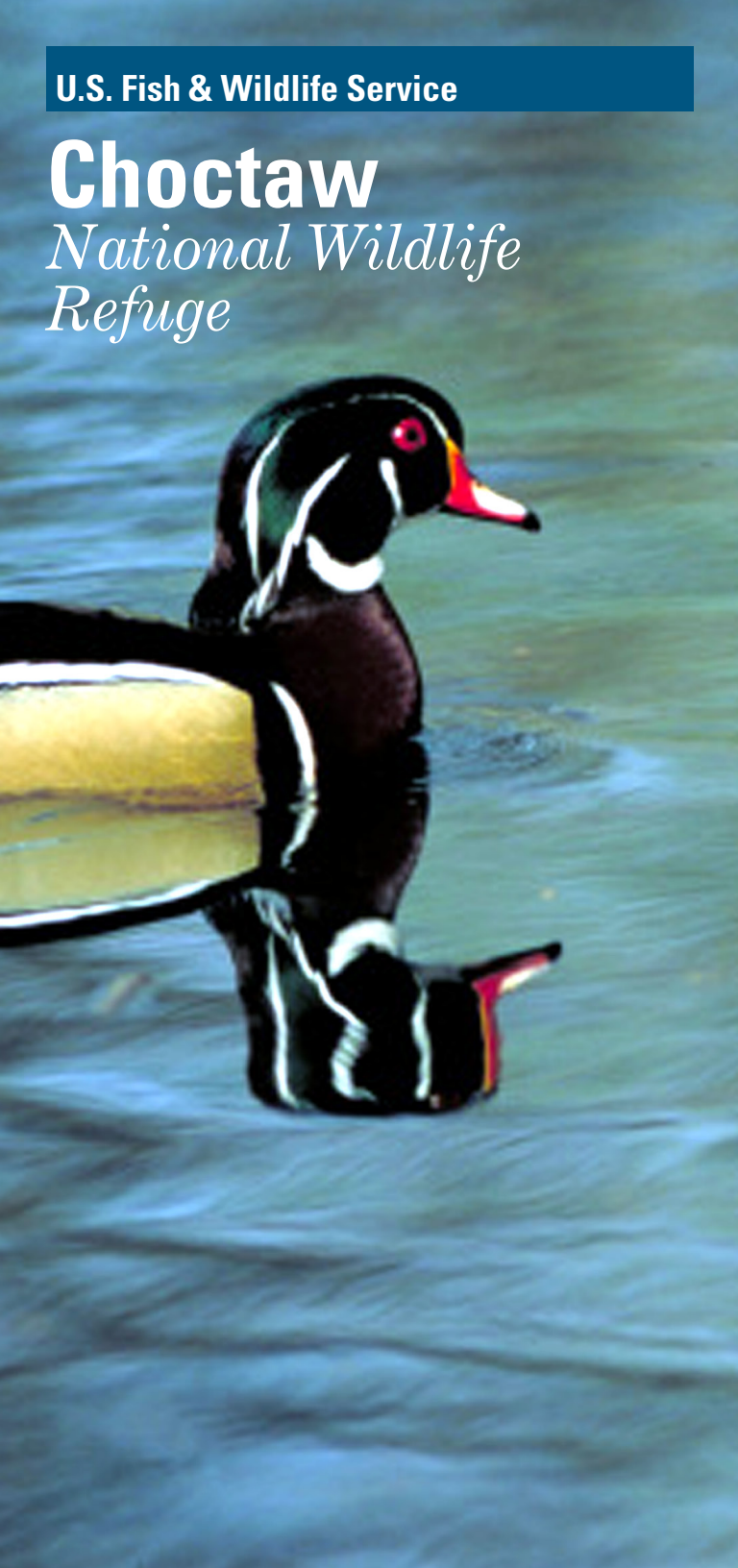
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Choctaw
National Wildlife Refuge



Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1964, lies along the Tombigbee River in southwestern Alabama. This rich river-bottom land with numerous lakes and sloughs is ideal waterfowl habitat.

wood storks

Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge

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

Although what is now Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge was once part of the territory belonging to the Choctaw Nation of Indians, there is little left today to remind us of this Indian history except for the names of local streams. Okatuppa Creek is derived from "Oka-katapa", a Choctaw word meaning water dammed up. This description is still accurate today with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Coffeeville Lock and Dam just down river from the refuge.

Choctaw Refuge is bordered on the east by the Tombigbee River and divided into three sections by two small creeks, Okatuppa and Turkey. This river-bottom land, which lies between 30 and 50 feet above sea level, is covered with stands of mixed hardwoods including sweet gum and oak. Tupelo gum and cypress growing in the wetter sloughs, rich farmland and moist soil impoundments add to the habitat diversity of this 4,218-acre refuge.

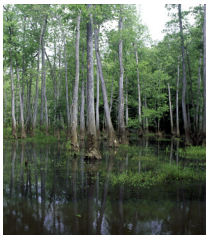
mallards

The refuge is an overlay on property acquired by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the Coffeeville Lock and Dam. With the completion of the lock and dam in the early 1960's, the level of the Tombigbee River rose from 19 feet above sea level to 32 feet above sea level, flooding over 2,000 acres of the refuge and creating excellent habitat for wintering waterfowl.

cover photo: Dr. Thomas G. Barnes

Management

Choctaw was established as a protected wintering area for waterfowl and for wood duck production. Although the primary objective is waterfowl management, many other wildlife species benefit from the diversity of habitats. Choctaw refuge has seven small moist soil impoundments which are drained in the spring or summer so that waterfowl food plants can grow. In the fall they are flooded so that the food is readily available for waterfowl. Planted crops such as millet and winter wheat add to the "dinner table."

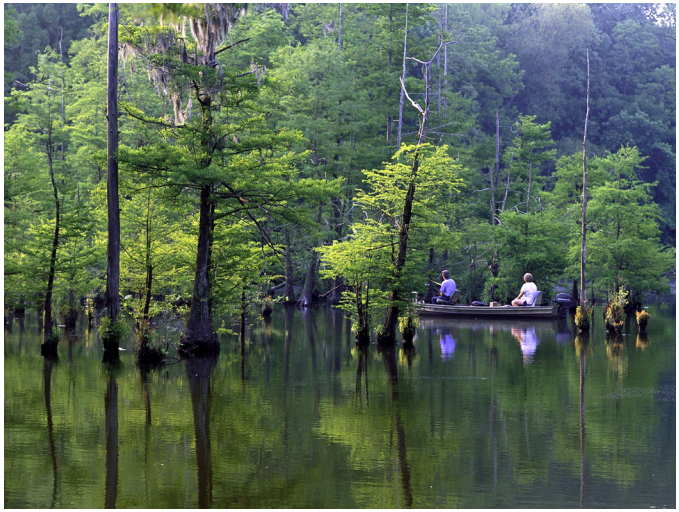


cypress tupelo

A major objective of the refuge is to provide for increased production of wood ducks. Over 400 artificial wood duck nesting boxes have been placed in the refuge's wetlands to supplement natural cavities. Approximately 2500 wood ducks are hatched in these boxes each year.

Management on the refuge's approximately 2,000 acres of forested bottomlands includes selective timber harvesting to open up the canopy and allow sunlight to reach the forest floor. This thinning stimulates new herbaceous growth and hardwood reproduction and improves wildlife habitat by increasing browse plants and mast yields.

bald eagle



Visitor Opportunities and Refuge Regulations

The refuge is open year-round, sunrise to sunset.

Information:
An information kiosk is located at the North end of the refuge.

Pets:
Pets must be on a leash at all times.

Hiking:
Walking through the woods or along refuge roads is permitted. Access is limited.

Photography:
Photographic opportunities are abundant throughout the year.

Fishing:
The refuge is open to sport fishing year-round except in designated waterfowl sanctuaries. Contact the Refuge Manager for special regulations concerning fishing.

Boating:
The refuge boat ramp is located just south of the office. CAUTION: Many areas are shallow and contain underwater stumps.

Firearms:
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).

Littering:
Please keep your refuge wild—take your litter home. Trash receptacles are not available on the refuge.

No Camping:
Although camping is not allowed on the refuge, campsites are available at nearby Corps of Engineers facilities and private campgrounds.

No Swimming:
For your safety, swimming is not allowed due to dangerous currents and alligators.

No Fires:
Wildfires are a serious threat to wildlife and people. Fires are not permitted.

Collecting:
The collecting of natural objects or objects of antiquity is prohibited.

Area Closed: Between December 1 and March 1 some areas are temporarily closed to public entry to provide sanctuary to the wintering waterfowl.

American alligator by Scott Lipsey.

Calendar of Wildlife Events

The variety of wildlife on the refuge is ever-changing. This calendar of wildlife events will tell you what kinds of wildlife you might see at different times of the year.

January:
Although mallards and wood ducks make up most of the wintering waterfowl population on the refuge, you may also see ringnecks, black ducks, pintail, widgeon, blue- and green-winged teal and coots. White-tailed deer rut is at its height and deer are plentiful and easily observed.

February:
As most ducks depart for their northern nesting areas, resident wood ducks began nesting in the nest boxes. Wading birds, including white ibis, great egrets, little blue herons, and cattle egrets are becoming more abundant.

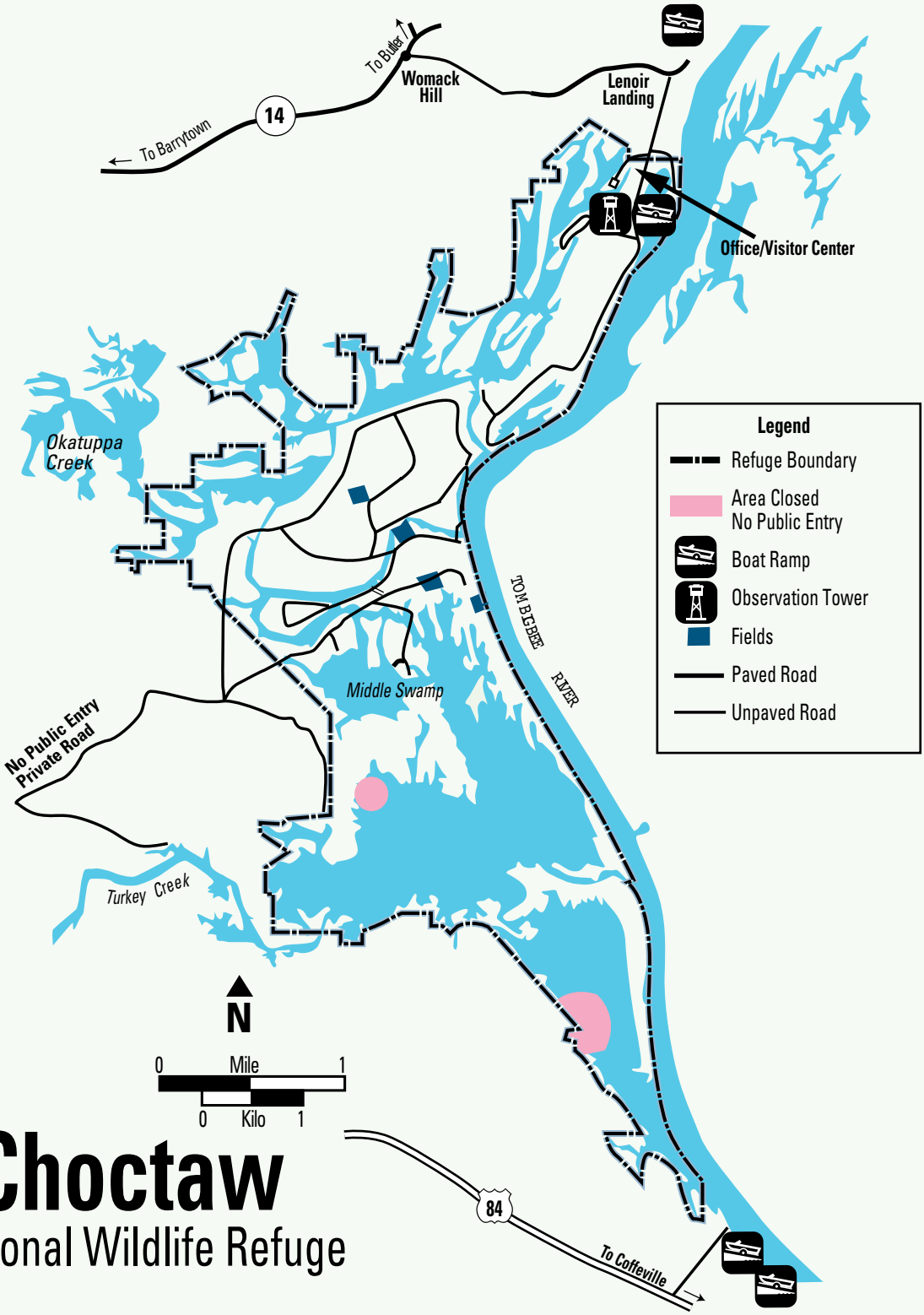
March:
Fishing is good as crappie move into shallow water. Turkey gobblers may be heard in the early mornings. Young rabbits begin to appear.

April:
The first wood duck broods can be seen in protected backwater areas. Large mouth bass begin spawning and crappie fishing peaks. Dogwoods bloom.

May:
Bluegill are on spawning beds. Bass, catfish and bream fishing is at its best. Wading bird rookeries are active in Hackberry Lake and Middle Swamp.

June:
Young turkeys may be seen in the open areas hunting for insects. Alligators begin to nest.

July:
Wood storks may occasionally be seen in groups of up to 20. Access to backwater areas is now limited because of the growth of aquatic vegetation.



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August:
Young grey squirrels and white-tail deer fawns are abundant in bottomland hardwood areas. An occasional swallow-tailed kite can be seen soaring over the open fields.

September:
Small flocks of blue-winged teal arrive as fall waterfowl migration begins. Owls may be heard in evenings.

October:
Archery season for deer and feral hogs opens on the refuge. Young-of-the-year alligators are abundant.

November:
Wintering mallards begin to arrive with increasing numbers. Refuge moist soil units are partially flooded for winter wildlife. Squirrel and rabbits are numerous and season opens for refuge small game hunting.

December:
Winter waterfowl near peak numbers. Alligators are less active. Many white ibis, egrets and herons. Bald eagles are nesting. A good month for wildlife photography.

For further information, please contact:
Refuge Manager
Choctaw National Wildlife Refuge
P.O. Box 150
Gilbertown, AL 36908
662/323 5548

Driving directions:
From Coffeeville, Alabama take Highway 84, across Tombigbee River going West. Turn north off U.S. Highway 84 at County Road # 21, which is about 8 miles west of Coffeeville and 4 miles east of Silas; then go north 4 miles to Barrytown and turn east; follow County Road # 14 to Womack Hill; turn right at Womack Hill. Watch for refuge directional signs from Highway 84 to the refuge.

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