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COLONIAL WATERBIRDS; INTERNATIONAL MIGRATORY BIRD DAY 2004

Visitors to refuges like Reelfoot National Wildlife Refuge in northwest Tennessee are wowed by the thousands of great blue herons living in rookeries in cypress and water tupelo trees. To celebrate spectacles like this, this year's theme for International Migratory Bird Day (IMBD) is "Colonial Waterbirds." IMBD is internationally recognized on May 8, but events will happen around the country throughout the year.

At hundreds of events such as bird walks, open houses, festivals, lectures and demonstrations, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is joining with partners to recognize the ways birds have stimulated people to become involved in conservation and to encourage individuals, corporations, and organizations to be a part of continuing efforts to protect birds.

"Perhaps more than anything, International Migratory Bird Day is a reminder that wildlife does not recognize political or geographic boundaries," said Service Director Steve Williams. "Migratory birds offer a compelling reminder that conservation transcends the borders of human society. International Migratory Bird Day is a great way to celebrate the birds, and the partnerships forged to conserve them."

More than 500 IMBD celebrations will take place at National Wildlife Refuges, fish hatcheries, field offices and at partnering organizations such as parks, zoos, and schools. The Service's IMBD website <http://birds.fws.gov> contains a listing of these events as well as links to additional information on migratory bird conservation, including the North American Bird Conservation Initiative. The IMBD 2004 art and materials portray ten bird species symbolizing conservation laws, programs, and organizations that have benefitted birds, the environment and humans alike.

Colonial birds nest together. One estimate is that 1 in 8 bird species worldwide nest colonially. Colony sites take many forms: mud nests plastered on vertical surfaces; burrows riddling a seaside cliff, a stretch of depressions in a sandy beach, or bulky stick nests forming a woodland rookery. Colonies also vary in size; from a few to sometimes millions of birds packed together.

International Migratory Bird Day was created in 1993 to focus public attention on the need to conserve birds and their habitats. This annual event celebrates one of the most important and spectacular events in the life of a migratory bird: its journey between summer and winter homes.

Today, International Migratory Bird Day is recognized in Canada, the United States, Mexico, the Caribbean Islands, and Central America.

For more information on IMBD, please see <http://www.birdday.org>

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 94-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System which encompasses more than 530 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces Federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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*For more information about the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,
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