

# Santee National Wildlife Refuge Cuddo Unit *Wildlife Drive Interpretive Guide*




Santee National Wildlife Refuge  
2125 Fort Watson Road  
Summerton, South Carolina 29148  
803/478 2217  
<http://fws.gov/refuge/santee>

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
1 800/344 WILD

February 2024





*Starting at the Cuddo Unit parking area, located off of Greenall Road, the 7.5 mile Wildlife Drive provides many stops along the way to view wildlife, hike or bicycle a trail, and learn about local South Carolina wildlife. Along the drive, look for numbered posts that correspond to numbers in the brochure for directional and interpretive information.*



### 1. Santee National Wildlife Refuge

The Santee National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1941 as a migratory bird sanctuary. The refuge boasts nearly 300 bird species recorded on the refuge. Mammal species found on the refuge include white-tailed deer, beaver, river otter, eastern fox squirrel, gray squirrel, and gray fox. Reptiles include the American alligator, snapping turtle, and over 30 species of snakes. You can find species lists at the Visitor Center or on the refuge website.

### 2. Forested Wetlands Wildlife Drive – straight ahead Woods Road—ONE WAY DO NOT ENTER

Forested wetlands provide habitat for numerous bird species. Seasonally flooded hardwoods along the Wildlife Drive may provide glimpses of wood ducks, Great Blue Herons, Egrets, and other wading birds and waterfowl. In addition, forested wetlands provide nesting habitat for the Prothonotary warbler, an abundant nester on the refuge during the summer months (featured on the cover of the refuge bird list).

### 3. Cuddo West Bike Trails/Habitat Management

Visitors may walk or bicycle the approximately 7.6 miles of dirt roads on the West Side of the Cuddo Unit from March 1 - Nov 1 where you may observe different habitat management techniques used by the refuge.

Farming provides habitat and a food source for resident and migratory animals. Prescribed burning is used to minimize fuel loads, maintain habitat types, and manage for specific species of plants and animals that may be fire dependant (long-leaf pine, red-cockaded woodpecker, etc).

### 4. Interior Canoe Trail

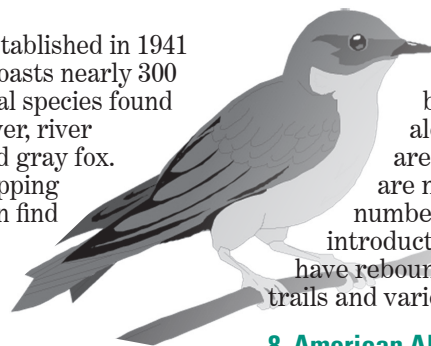
Please note the Interior Canoe Trail is no longer accessible; see marker 11 for information on the Plantation Islands Canoe Trail.

### 5. Otter Trail

Turn left on Otter trail to get to hiking trails OR continue straight ahead to Alligator Alley

### 6. Red Bank Field Parking Area

Park here and take a short walk down the trail in front of you to find a nice cove with wetland areas on each side. This is a great place to photograph wetland plants and wildlife. The field behind the parking area is known as Red Bank because of the red clay soils found there. The refuge is located on the edge of the coastal plain and midland region of SC and has a variety of soil types from sandy to clay soils.

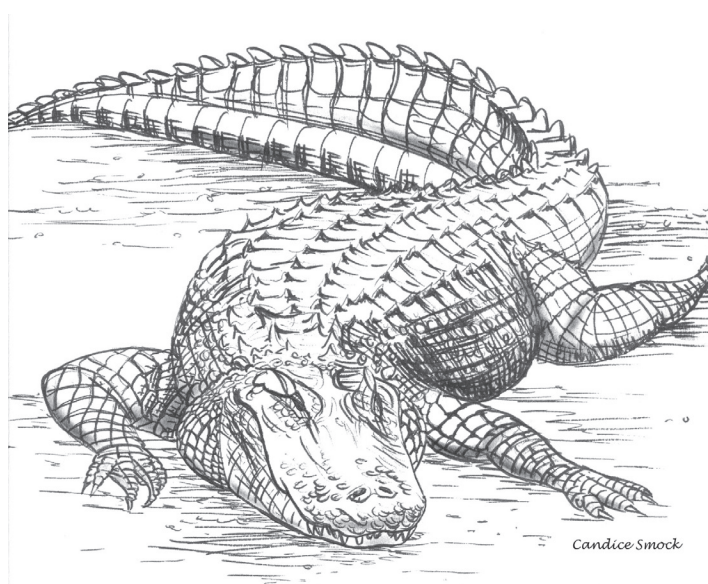


### 7. Bluebird Boxes

Wooden boxes mounted on posts along the edge of the road are nesting boxes for eastern bluebirds (*Sialia sialis*), which nest on the refuge along field and forest edge habitats. Bluebirds are secondary cavity nesters, using cavities that are made by other bird species. Eastern bluebird numbers dwindled in the early-mid 1900's, with the introduction of non-native species and habitat loss, but have rebounded with the establishment of bluebird box trails and various other bluebird box programs.

### 8. American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*)

Alligators are observed here basking in the sun or swimming in the water. The American Alligator is ectothermic (ecto = outside; thermic = temperature), meaning it gets its body temperature from the outside surroundings. Alligators, now common throughout their range, are found as far north as to North Carolina. Please remember to never feed wild animals, including alligators! Feeding alligators makes them dangerous to humans.



### 9. Greentree Reservoirs

A short hike down this trail brings visitors to a dike with small ponds on each side. Look for wood ducks, ring-necked ducks, mallards, and green-winged teal in winter; great blue herons, anhingas, prothonotary warblers and other migratory songbirds in spring, summer, and fall. Moist (hydric) soils are found in wetlands and managed areas known as greentree reservoirs (GTR). GTRs, first developed in the 1930s, are areas of impounded bottomland hardwoods that are flooded during the fall and winter months, providing nuts, acorns and vegetation for waterfowl. An example of a GTR can be viewed on the left side (inside) of the north loop hiking trail.

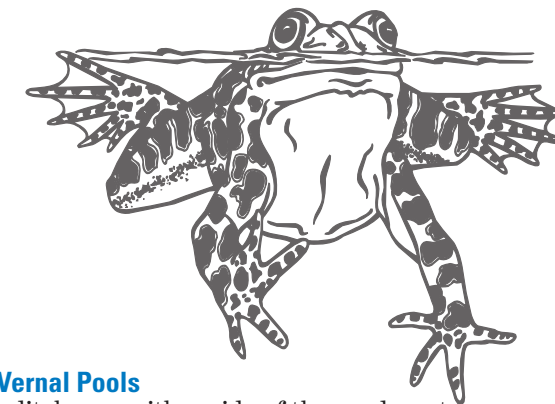
### 10. North Loop Trail

at Stop sign, take first right turn to access the North Loop trail or after Stop sign, take next right to continue on the Wildlife Drive.



### 11. Plantation Islands Canoe Launch

Parking & launch site for the Plantation Islands Canoe Trail. Potato Creek Hiking Trail begins on the right side of the road across from the parking area.



### 12. Vernal Pools

The ditches on either side of the road are temporary vernal pools that provide breeding habitat and sanctuary for a number of reptiles and amphibians. Since the pools go dry during the year, they are devoid of fish that might feed on amphibian and reptile hatchlings.

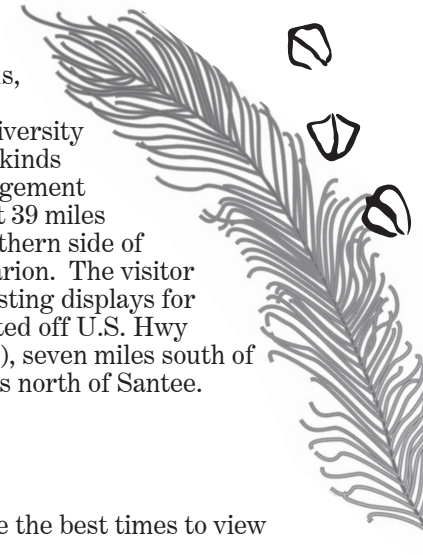
### 13. Invasive Species

Crested floating heart (*Nymphoides cristata*), water hyacinth (*Eichhornia crassipes*), alligatorweed (*Alternanthera philoxeroides*), water primrose (*Ludwigia uruguayensis*) and giant salvinia (*Salvinia molesta*) are aquatic invasive plants the refuge is currently managing, with the hopes of slowing down the spread of these species.

### National Wildlife Refuge System

The Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Santee National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1941, is located in Clarendon County, SC. The approximately 13,000 acre refuge lies within the Atlantic Coastal Plain and consists of mixed hardwoods, mixed pine, bottomland hardwoods,



flooded cypress, marsh, croplands, old fields, ponds, impoundments, and open water. This tremendous diversity of habitat supports many kinds of wildlife. The four management units of the refuge protect 39 miles of shoreline along the northern side of Santee Cooper's Lake Marion. The visitor center offers many interesting displays for public viewing and is located off U.S. Hwy 301/15 (exit 102 off of I-95), seven miles south of Summerton and four miles north of Santee.

### Wildlife Watching Tips

- Dawn and dusk are the best times to view wildlife.
- Vehicles make good observation blinds. Drive slowly, stopping often to scan places where wildlife might be hiding.
- Drive with your windows down. Often you will hear more than you see.
- Look for signs of animals. Tracks, scat, feathers, and nests often tell interesting stories.

### Hours of Operation

Access to the Cuddo Unit is limited to the following times:

October 1 – February 28: 7 am to 5 pm

March 1 – September 30: 6 am to 8 pm

Please note the Cuddo Unit is closed on Mondays.



**Santee National Wildlife Refuge  
Cuddo Unit**  
2903 Greenall Road  
Summerton, SC 29148  
Phone 803/478 2217  
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/santee>