

Pinckney Island

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: Water-Dog Outfitter



photo: Amy Ochoa



photo: Peter Wallack



photo: Layne Hamilton

Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge is part of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex headquartered in Savannah, Georgia. The complex includes seven national wildlife refuges, totaling 56,949 acres, along a 100-mile stretch of coastline in Georgia and South Carolina. The seven refuges are Pinckney Island and Tybee NWRs in South Carolina; Savannah (located in both states along the Savannah River); and Wassaw, Harris Neck, Blackbeard Island, and Wolf Island NWRs in Georgia.

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1975.
- Acres: 4,053 acres; approximately 2,700 acres of this is salt marsh and tidal creeks.
- Refuge includes four islands; Corn, Little Harry, Big Harry, and Pinckney Island. The latter, approximately 1,200 acres, is the largest island and the only one open to the public.
- Open to the public in 1985.
- Location: The refuge entrance is 1/2 mile west of Hilton Head Island, SC off of U.S. Highway 278. The island lies between Skull Creek (the Intracoastal Waterway) and Mackay Creek. The island's northern tip faces Port Royal Sound.

Refuge History

- From 1736-1936 the island was owned by the Charles Cotesworth Pinckney family and managed as a cotton plantation. Long staple Sea Island cotton was planted.
- Other crops included corn, lentils, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and grains.
- From 1937 to 1975 the island was managed as a game preserve.
- In 1975 the refuge was donated to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Natural History

- Large concentrations of white ibis, herons and egrets occur on the refuge.
- Wading bird rookeries and osprey nests can be found on the island.
- Two of the island's freshwater ponds were ranked in the top twenty wading bird colony sites of the South Carolina Coastal Plan during 1989 and 1996.
- Waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors and neo-tropical migrants are commonly seen on the refuge.
- An active bald eagle nest is located on the refuge.
- Management focuses primarily on wading birds.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- Over 300,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect and provide habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- Provide and maintain habitat for migratory and resident birds that utilize and or nest annually on the refuge.
- Provide, enhance and maintain habitat for native wildlife.
- Promote wildlife education, interpretation, and recreational opportunities to the visiting public.

Management Tools

- Water level management for wading bird rookeries.
- Prescribed burning.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious plants.
- Mowing/disking.
- Public hunting for deer management.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

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Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Wildlife photography.
- Hunting.
- Environmental education/interpretation.
- Kayaking.

Calendar of Events

May: Migratory Bird Day.

July: Butterfly survey.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week.

November: Annual deer hunt.

December: Christmas Bird Count.

Questions and Answers

What is the best time to visit Pinckney Island NWR?

Wildlife viewing is best during the spring and fall months. Throughout the spring, when wintering songbirds linger just prior to their migration, and breeding birds are arriving, birdwatching on the refuge is excellent. Wading bird rookeries located in several of the island's freshwater ponds are noisy with activity, as herons and egrets prepare for nesting season. Migrating flocks of shorebirds can also be seen in the spring and fall foraging on tidal mudflats or in the high grass of the salt marsh. Alligators are commonly seen basking on the banks of the ponds during spring, fall, and winter on mild, sunny days. Fox squirrels and white-tailed deer may be encountered at any time of the year by observant visitors. Bucks, with newly grown antlers in velvet, are sometimes seen in the summer months.

Are there any costs associated with a visit?

There are no fees charged to visit the refuge.

Are there any alligators on Pinckney Island?

Yes, there are alligators in most freshwater areas on the refuge. Also, it is not uncommon to see alligators swimming in the saltwaters of Mackay Creek, a navigable waterway that separates Pinckney Island from the South Carolina mainland.

Where might I see a painted bunting?

Painted buntings are one of the most easily spotted breeding songbirds. The blue head, lime green back and red throat and belly of male painted buntings are not easily mistaken for any other species. They are commonly observed in edge areas where the live oak and cabbage palm forests meet open grassy fields. Breeding males may sing from the cover of forested areas or from atop a snag out in the open. Both males and females have been seen in the meadow at Ibis Pond, foraging on the seeds of green grasses.

Is fishing allowed on the refuge?

No, fishing is prohibited from the land portions of the refuge. The island is used exclusively "as a nature and forest preserve." However, saltwater fishing from boats is allowed in the surrounding waters of Skull and Mackay Creek. Boats may access these areas from the public boat ramp located off U.S. Highway 278 across from the refuge entrance and are not allowed to come ashore or moor their boats at any other point on Pinckney Island. Shellfishing is also allowed in designated areas. Consult refuge brochures for regulations.

Is hunting permitted on the refuge?

Each year the refuge holds a one-day quota gun hunt to ensure that population numbers remain in balance with the surrounding habitat. For more information on refuge hunts and how to participate, please contact the Savannah Coastal Refuges office 912/652 4415 or visit our website: www.fws.gov/pinckneyisland