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Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge

Northwest of Pahrump lies a heavenly haven for wildlife and nature lovers.

BY CYNDI SOUZA

Located in the middle of nowhere, according to our visitors, is a place like no other in the world. Literally. In an area smaller than Disney World exist at least 26 species of plants and animals found nowhere else on earth—the greatest concentration of endemic life in the United States. The amazing colors of the desert spring pools are reason enough to visit.

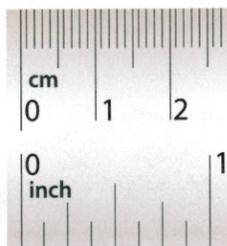
Just 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas, Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge is one of Nevada's best-kept secrets.

As you leave the glitz and glamour of the Strip, the landscape becomes a dry, vast, and sparsely populated desert. This is not where you expect to find unique flowers or four native fish species. The beauty and serenity found in this oasis—the largest in the Mojave Desert—is an unexpected surprise to all who visit.

Peterson Reservoir is located in the northern part of 23,000-acre Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, about 30 miles northwest of Pahrump and 90 miles northwest of Las Vegas. The refuge was established in 1984 primarily to protect federally listed endangered plant and animal species. PHOTO BY CYNDI SOUZA

FOR MORE INFORMATION

610 Spring Meadows Rd.,
Amargosa Valley, NV 89020
fws.gov/refuges
775-372-5435



Devils Hole Pupfish

The Devils Hole pupfish, found nowhere else on earth besides Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge, was listed as endangered in 1967. This species rarely exceeds .98 inches in length and has a life span of about one year. The pupfish are naturally restricted to Devils Hole, a limestone cave situated on the east-central border of the refuge. The spring pool of Devils Hole is located about 15 meters below the land surface, where a shallow rock shelf approximately 2x4 meters is located. Just beyond the shelf, the spring descends to an unknown depth (more than 80 meters) into myriad chasms, mostly unexplored.—ecos.fws.gov

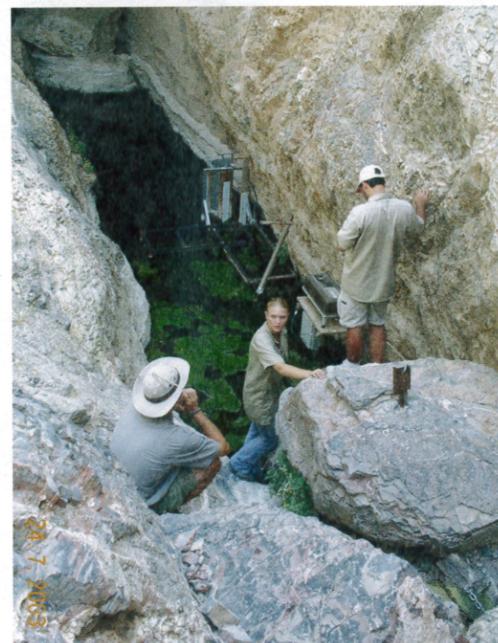


CYNDI SOUZA

Crystal Springs' (above) warmth creates a misty winter scene at Ash Meadows. In order to protect people and the endangered pupfish surviving therein, public access is not allowed at Devils Holes (below).

Sit a while and listen to the melodic calls of more than 275 species of birds, linger over crystal-clear waters filled with iridescent blue fish, or scan the rocky mountaintops for desert bighorn sheep. If you are more the scientific type, there is much to ponder here.

Devils Hole. The name itself incites curiosity. To



the casual observer, it looks like a simple water-filled chasm. The surface is small—only 66 feet long by 15 feet wide—yet it's home to the rarest fish in the world. Devils Hole pupfish, less than one inch in length, survive in this 93-degree water-filled cavern, which has been mapped to a depth of 500 feet; the bottom has yet to be found.

If history is your calling, the stone cabin of prospector and gunslinger Jack Longstreet awaits. Longstreet settled in Ash Meadows from 1894-99 and used spring water to cool his time-tested dwelling. The nearby spring pool is often called the boiling spring because of the fine white sand bellying up from its depths.

RESTORATION, RECOVERY, AND THOSE LOST FOREVER

Prior to 1984, the land was private. There was farming, ranching, peat mining, and a proposed housing development. These activities most likely led to the extinction of the Ash Meadows poolfish and possibly the Ash Meadows Montane Vole.

Since then, reestablishing a healthy ecosystem with native species has been challenging, but a proactive restoration program is achieving success. Today, not only have the desert fish of Ash Meadows benefited, but also many native plants and

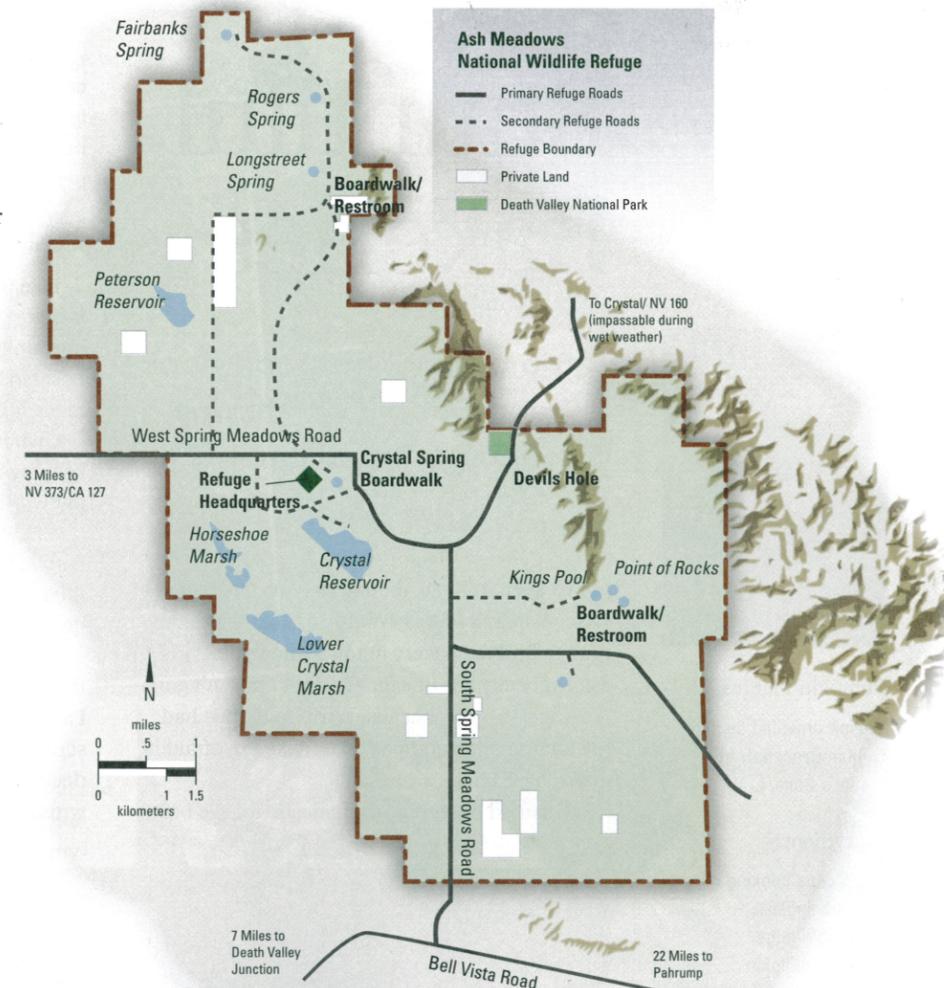
trees are beginning to flourish.

The area is frequented by a variety of migratory birds, so visitors might see pelicans, swans, or rare European migrants such as ruff. There are 40 species of mammals, more than 20 species of reptiles, four amphibian species, and more than 300 species of flowers and shrubs.

Along the Point of Rocks boardwalk are unique sculptures with information about the history, plants, and animals of the area. The boardwalk winds its way to an overlook complete with seating areas and wildlife-viewing scopes. Winter is prime time to spot desert bighorn sheep. The Ash Meadows Amargosa pupfish, also endemic, can be seen in Kings Pool, and the vegetation along the boardwalk makes it a good birding area.

In 2009, two new species of bees were discovered that might only exist in Ash Meadows. One can only surmise the fate of this species and many others if conservation efforts to protect endangered species had not been successful in this unique and rare place.

Cyndi Souza is a Visitor Services Specialist at Ash Meadows National Wildlife Refuge.



The amphitheater, located at the top of the Point of Rocks boardwalk, is the latest addition at the refuge. Viewing scopes allow visitors to get a closer look at refuge wildlife such as bighorn sheep.

ASH MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Established: June 18, 1984

Size: 23,000+ acres

No. of Endemic Species: At least 26

Best Seasons to View Wildlife: Spring and fall

Name: Refers to abundance of ash trees once found in area

Warning: Summer temps regularly exceed 100° F