



Helpful Hints

Stay early and stay late. You are more likely to see wildlife activity in the early morning or late afternoon.

Bring your field guides and binoculars. They are helpful in identifying plants and animals.

Bring water and insect repellent.

Beware of venomous snakes and poisonous plants!

Dig Into History

Tom Atkeson spent almost 50 years with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. He began his career in 1939 as a junior biologist at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge. At the start of World War II in 1941, he joined the Army. A year later, during a training assignment at Fort Hood, Texas, he was seriously wounded in an antitank mine explosion. The explosion ripped away the lower part of his face, severed both hands and parts of his arms. He was blinded, seared by flash burns, and riddled with shrapnel pieces. After 2 years of doctors and specialists, he was honorably discharged as a captain. During his recovery, Tom dreamed of going back to work on the refuge. He managed to regain a position at Wheeler despite his debilitating injuries and concentrated on memorizing the lay of the land with the help of a personal driver and guide. He learned many skills to help compensate for his lack of sight. In 1962, he was amazingly promoted to refuge manager. Tom worked hard – reinstating populations of wildlife that had been driven out or endangered and instituting the practice of cooperative farming on the refuge. Overcoming seemingly impossible odds, Tom Atkeson accomplished far more than he and others could have imagined.

Trail Rules:

- Stay on marked trails to help prevent erosion and damage to plants.
- Leave all plants and flowers for others to enjoy.
- Keep all pets on a leash.
- Do not litter. Pack it in, pack it out.

Thank you for visiting!
 Maps and more
 information are available
 at the Visitor Center, or
 call
 (256) 350-6639

Photos and design of this brochure were provided by talented volunteers. Funds for printing this brochure were provided by the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge Association. Please consider becoming a volunteer and member.



Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge Nature Trails



A visitor's guide to our nature trails



Five established nature trails are available for use on the Refuge. They wind along the water, crops, fields, and woodlands.

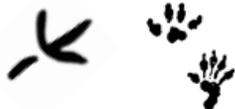
Atkeson Cypress Trail (.3 miles – 15 minutes)



The Atkeson Cypress Trail is located just behind the Visitor Center. It begins with a boardwalk that crosses over a cypress swamp then continues through a wooded area. A bench located adjacent to a section of land where crops such as wheat, corn, or soybeans are grown is a good place to sit and listen for birds such as quail, woodpeckers, or warblers. A variety of plants and wildlife may be viewed from this trail.

Wildlife Observation Building (200 yards – 5 minutes)

The trailhead, located behind the Visitor Center, leads to the Wildlife Observation Building which overlooks a waterfowl/wildlife display pool. During winter months, thousands of ducks, geese, and Sandhill cranes use the area for feeding and loafing. During spring, summer, and fall, butterflies and hummingbirds are attracted to the flowers in the Backyard Wildlife Area. Several feeders are filled year-round to attract various species of birds including chickadees, tufted titmice, finches, sparrows, northern cardinals, and blue jays. Make sure you check for eagles and kestrels!



Dancy Bottoms Trail (2.5 miles round trip – 1-2 hours)

Located in a bottomland hardwoods area near Flint Creek, this trail offers a wide variety of scenery. During winter months, waterfowl use the slough near the trail and can sometimes be seen if hikers are very quiet. Deer, squirrels, rabbits, woodpeckers, and many other species of wildlife are often encountered along this trail. From the Visitor Center, turn right on HWY 67 for 1.7 miles to the red-light at Indian Hills Road. Turn right here. In approximately 3.1 miles, turn right onto Red Bank Road. The short road to the parking area is located about 1.7 miles on the right just before a small bridge. This is site 33 on the North Alabama Birding Trail.

Flint Creek Trail (1.5 miles – 1 hour)



Located on the north side of HWY 67 approximately ¼ mile west of the Visitor Center entrance, this scenic trail offers an opportunity to see various species of plant and animal life associated with an oak-hickory forest. Two boardwalks cross the backwaters of Flint Creek, then the trail continues into the woods. For a short loop, take the first trail to the left after you cross the second bridge. For the longer loop, continue straight ahead and pass the covered pavilion. Common trees including hickory, oak, red maple, sweet gum, yellow poplar, and dogwood create shade for most of the trail during much of the year. Sassafras, witch hazel, grapevine, and greenbriers are common understory species. Chipmunks, squirrels, woodpeckers, wrens, and northern cardinals are commonly seen along the trail. Many different species of warblers can also be heard or seen here during their spring and fall migrations.



Beaverdam Swamp Boardwalk (1 mile – 30 minutes)

The boardwalk is accessed from Frontage Road located just off exit 7 on I-565 traveling towards Huntsville from I-65. Beaverdam Swamp hosts some of the largest black tupelo trees in the state. The boardwalk crosses the swamp where large tupelo trees create a very shady path. Various species of frogs, turtles, small fish, and other amphibians and reptiles are often visible. Songbirds are common in the canopy as well. This is site 25 on the North Alabama Birding Trail.

