Blackbeard Island
National Wildlife Refuge

The blue goose is the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Dogs disturb and kill shorebirds and other beach life. Please leave all pets at home.

For more information contact:
Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex
694 Beech Hill Lane
Hardeeville, SC 29927
Phone: 843/784 2468
Email: savannahcoastal@fws.gov
Web: http://www.fws.gov/refuge/blackbeard_island
Facebook: http://www.facebook.com/savannahcoastalrefugescomplex

May 2020

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Blackbeard Island
National Wildlife Refuge
Map and Trail Guide

American Oystercatcher, photo: Mary Ellen Urbanski

Welcome to Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge

Managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as part of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex, this barrier island refuge was established in 1924 as a sanctuary for migratory birds. In 1975, 3,000 acres of the refuge's total 5,618 were additionally designated as National Wilderness. The primary purpose of the refuge is to maintain and enhance habitat for migratory birds, nesting sea turtles, and other wildlife, and to preserve and protect this unique barrier island. Over half of the refuge is comprised of wetlands including saltwater marsh, freshwater marsh, and impoundments. The remaining 2,455 acres of uplands include maritime forest and miles of pristine, sand beaches. Visitors are welcome during daylight hours, year-round, but must provide their own boat transportation.

History

Blackbeard Island has been in continuous Federal ownership since 1800 when the 5,618-acre island was acquired by the Navy Department as a source of live oak timber for ship building. From 1880 and 1910, the island served as a yellow fever quarantine station, managed first by the National Board of Health, then by the U.S. Marine Hospital Service. The facility included a hospital and general offices placed on the southern end of the island because of the absence of standing water. Dockage and storage facilities were on the north end, some eight miles from the hospital. A steam-powered boat, the Gypsy, cruising at 10 mph, provided the communication link between the north and south-end stations. The only structure remaining from the quarantine facility is a crematorium located at the former north station site. Despite extensive research, historians have failed to determine if the crematorium was ever used.

Other colorful notes relating to the history of Blackbeard deal with the island's namesake, Edward Teach, alias Blackbeard the Pirate. Legends tell of his murderous and plunderous activities along the coast and his periodic retreats to the island for "banking" purposes. Rumors of Blackbeard's buried treasure still flourish, however not a single doubloon has ever been discovered as evidence of the pirate's presence.

The island's history as a refuge began in 1924 when Blackbeard was placed under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Biological Survey (forerunner to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) to be maintained as a preserve and breeding ground for native wildlife and migratory birds. In 1941, by Presidential Proclamation, Blackbeard Island was designated a National Wildlife Refuge.

Crematorium by Mary Ellen Urbanski

Who Lives Here?

Blackbeard Island NWR is home to a variety of resident and migratory wildlife species including shorebirds, wading birds, migratory songbirds, raptors, mammals such as white-tailed deer, and amphibians and reptiles, including the American alligator. The refuge is also home to several threatened and endangered species including peregrine falcons, piping plovers, wood storks, and loggerhead sea turtles.

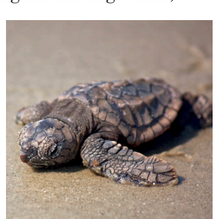
Refuge Hours

Blackbeard Island NWR is open to the public seven days a week, during daylight hours only; no overnight use or camping is allowed. Access to the refuge is by boat only, and visitors must provide their own transportation.

Recreational Opportunities

A number of wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities are available to refuge visitors year-round:

- Bird watching (best during spring and fall migrations)
- Wildlife observation and photography
- Hiking and biking trails
- Daytime beach use
- Saltwater kayaking
- Saltwater fishing
- Scheduled hunts (permit required)



Loggerhead sea turtle by Mary Ellen Urbanski

Kayaking by Southeast Adventure Outfitters

Regulations Reminders

- Camping and overnight use is not permitted.
- Dogs, cats, and other pets are not permitted anywhere on the refuge.
- Do not enter areas marked "Closed".
- Open fires are not allowed.
- The use of drones is not allowed.
- Freshwater fishing is prohibited.
- Bicycles and carts are not permitted within the Wilderness Area (see "Keep Wilderness Wild" section).
- Do not pick or cut vegetation.
- Feeding, capturing, or harassing wildlife is strictly prohibited.
- Artifact hunting/collecting is not allowed.
- Shell collectors are asked to take no live shells and to limit collecting to a handful.
- All forms of litter must be removed from the refuge.
- Refuge dock may be used for loading and unloading of people and gear or for visiting the information kiosk; extended mooring is prohibited.

Surf fishing by USFWS

Safety Reminders

- Drinking water and restrooms are not available on the island.
- There are no shelters for visitor protection from the sun or inclement weather.
- Overgrowth on trails may conceal snakes, poison ivy, or stinging insects.
- Alligators may be encountered on the refuge; it is potentially dangerous (and a violation of state and federal law) to feed or molest this reptile in any way.
- Beware of falling trees and limbs.
- Insect repellant and sunscreen are recommended.
- Tell a friend or relative where you are going and when to expect your return.

Keep Wilderness Wild

In 1964, our nation's leaders formally acknowledged the immediate and lasting benefits of wild places to the human spirit and fabric of our nation by enacting landmark legislation that permanently protected some of the most natural and undisturbed places in America. The Wilderness Act established the National Wilderness Preservation System to "*…secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness.*" The Act describes wilderness as:

"*…lands designated for preservation and protection in their natural condition…*"

"*…an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man…*"

"*…an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvement or human habitation…*"

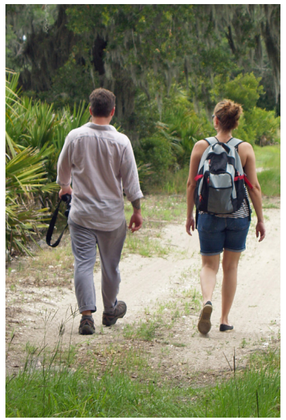
"*…generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable…*"

"*…has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation…*"

"*…shall be devoted to the public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historic use.*"

The United States Congress designated the 3,000-acre Blackbeard Island Wilderness in 1975. Visitors are welcome to hike, bird watch, and enjoy the beach; however, bicycles and carts are not permitted. Please be good wilderness stewards by practicing "Leave No Trace" wilderness ethics and keeping noise to a minimum. This will help ensure an outstanding wilderness experience for all visitors.

To learn more about America's Wilderness Areas visit: http://www.wilderness.net



Hiking by USFWS