

South Carolina  
Lowcountry Refuge Complex

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Volume 1

# Life in the Wild

*News from Cape Romain, Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin, Santee and Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuges*

## *From Sea Breeze to Cypress Knees*

*South Carolina Lowcountry Refuge Complex is home to four national wildlife refuges, each offering a unique recreational experience for Lowcountry visitors. From sea breeze to cypress knees, Lowcountry Refuges are yours to enjoy.*

**Cape Romain NWR** is 30 minutes north of Charleston on Highway 17. Accessible only by boat, the 66,267-acre refuge extends 22 miles along the coast, a dazzling array of barrier islands, rich salt marsh, sparkling tidal creeks, sandy beaches and dunes, and maritime forest. Approximately 29,000 acres of the refuge are designated as Class I Wilderness. Cape Romain NWR is known throughout North and South America for its vital habitat for 18-22 species of shorebirds. The refuge's sandy beaches also support the greatest density of threatened loggerhead sea turtles north of Florida.



*Waccamaw Education Center,  
photo: Ray Paterra*



*Osprey at sunset, photo: © Marc Epstein*

Headquartered near Adams Run, the **Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin NWR** was established in 1990 to protect and manage for migratory birds, native species, endangered and threatened species, and to provide educational and recreational opportunities on 11,815 acres. The Refuge supports a diversity of habitats including forested wetlands, forested uplands, salt marsh, brackish marsh, and managed impoundments.

The 15,159 acre **Santee NWR** was established in 1941 on the shores of Lake Marion to alleviate the loss of wildlife and their habitats by the creation of the Lake Marion and Lake Moultrie reservoirs. With an original focus on migratory ducks and geese, today it is indeed a place for wildlife, serving a larger, national role as a sanctuary for migratory songbirds, other wildlife, and for species of special concern. The refuge has a seven mile wildlife drive, canoe/ kayak trails, miles of hiking opportunities, and offers public hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, photography, interpretive-educational, and research programs.

**Waccamaw NWR**, established in 1997, is the newest refuge in the Refuge Complex. Refuge lands currently total in excess of 22,000 acres, including the diverse wetland habitats and species rich riverine ecosystems of the Waccamaw and Pee Dee Rivers. Outdoor sports enthusiasts can enjoy hunting, fishing, kayaking and hiking, and nature photography at the newly opened Cox Ferry Lake Recreation Area.

Waccamaw NWR will also be opening a new state-of-the-art environmental education center in the fall of 2009 on U.S. Highway 701 between Georgetown and Conway. Come out and visit Waccamaw NWR. You may catch a glimpse of a Swallow-tailed Kite, one of South Carolina's state-listed endangered birds.



## Birds, Butterflies, and Buntings at Santee NWR

For the second year, agencies and friends worked together to celebrate and experience some of South Carolina's treasured natural areas. The Santee Birding and Nature Festival was a huge success with over 190 people attending 27 different workshops and fieldtrips from kayaking on the Congaree National Park, to seeking the secretive painted bunting on the Santee NWR, and fossil hunting with South Carolina's famed naturalist, Rudy Mancke, in the giant Cement Quarry near Harleyville.

Offering unique opportunities to residents, it also attracted many folks from other states wanting to hear and take field trips with keynote speaker, Pete Dunne, Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, and the internationally known photographer, Len Rue.



The success of the festival is an achievement of true dedication by local volunteers and agencies working together. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, SC Audubon, National Park Service, SC State Parks and Recreation, SC DNR, Santee Cooper, Santee Cooper Country Tourism, Orangeburg County, Town of Santee, and many individual volunteers worked diligently to support the festival's goal to increase public awareness and appreciation of our national and state natural treasures and heritage in South Carolina.

The festival highlighted South Carolina's "midlands" natural beauty by having 23 different guides showcase birds, butterflies, wildlife, and natural history on refuges, parks, and other conservation lands in the Santee Lakes focus area over a three-day period in April. The festival's success and attendance is testimony to the importance and value of our wildlife heritage to people, even in today's slower economy.



photo: Sarah Dawsey

## Things to Do

- Visit all four refuges on-line at [caperomain.fws.gov](http://caperomain.fws.gov) to scope out a day's worth of fun in the sun.
- Ride the Coastal Expeditions Ferry to Bulls Island where you can hike six miles of undeveloped beach and enjoy the peaceful solitude of an undeveloped barrier island.
- Explore the Grove House, one of only three antebellum mansions in the ACE Basin area to survive the Civil War.
- Canoe the Waccamaw River. You might see a swallow-tailed kite.
- Visit the Sewee Center's endangered Red Wolf enclosure.

## Fast Facts

- An alligator's stomach contains gastroliths, small stones that are useful in grinding up food. This is important because gators swallow their food whole.



American alligator; © Ricky Wrenn

- ACE Basin NWR's Grove Plantation is one of only three antebellum mansions in the ACE Basin area to survive the Civil War.
- Santee NWR has the highest density of nesting Painted Buntings in SC. You can catch a glimpse of them at Santee NWR beginning in April.
- Loggerhead sea turtles return to the beach where they hatched to lay their own eggs.

## Volunteers Protect Seabird Nesting Habitat

A team of volunteers led by Refuge Biologist Sarah Dawsey recently spent a few days on Cape Romain Refuge's islands to protect seabird nesting habitat. George Leydic and Jim Hawkins, at left, stopped posting signs for a moment during the busy day to allow a photograph on Marsh Island. Cape Romain NWR holds the distinction of being one of only twenty Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Sites of International Importance in both North and South America. The refuge's undeveloped barrier islands are favored by Black Skimmers, Least Terns, and 18-22 species of shorebirds.



From left to right: Mark Purcell, Kevin Godsea, Raye Nilius, Marc Epstein, Craig Sasser on Boneyard Beach, photo: Garry Tucker.

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