

Life in the Wild

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

The Bulls Island Experience

Stroll along the beach, littered with sea shells of all shapes and sizes. Walk a trail, carpeted with pine needles and canopied by the tall pines and palmettos of the forest. Stand at the salt marsh, amid the blooming sea-oxeye and endless sea of spartina grass. This is Bulls Island, 5000 acres of salt marsh, fresh and brackish water ponds, dense maritime forest and sandy beach – an island with spectacular landscapes and abundant wildlife. The island is home to American alligators, fox squirrels, White-tailed deer, bobcat, Diamondback terrapins, Loggerhead sea turtles and many other animals. Over 293 species of birds have been recorded on the refuge and include the Bald eagle, Wood stork, hawks, shorebirds, seabirds, songbirds, wading birds, marsh birds and waterfowl.

There are 16 miles of unpaved sandy roads that crisscross the island from the salt marsh on Summerhouse Creek to the mighty Atlantic. The roads provide unlimited opportunities for wildlife watching, birding, photography, hiking and biking no matter the season. Sheepshead Road terminates at the Jacks Creek tower, an overlook for watching alligators, herons and egrets, and, in the winter months, waterfowl. Also, be sure to explore the two designated hiking trails.



Day breaks over Boneyard Beach, credit Ben Sumrell.

The one-mile Middens Trail will take you on a short jaunt through a forested area of Loblolly pine, cedar, Live oak, Yaupon holly, Red bay, Cabbage and Saw palmettos, with beautiful views of the bay. Of special interest on this trail are the historic remains of the Native American shell “middens,” heaps of oyster and clam shells dating back for over 2000 years. The two-mile Turkey Walk Trail, designated a National Recreation Trail, takes you from the salt marsh to the beach. Meander along the salt marsh, over the impoundment dike separating Upper and Lower Summerhouse Ponds and, into the dense sub-tropical forest to Beach Road. The Dave Clough platform overlooks Upper Summerhouse pond and is a great place to observe shorebirds, waterfowl and wading birds. Along the Turkey Walk is where you might cross paths with a Black fox squirrel scampering over the trail, a White-tailed deer crashing through the understory or, even catch a quick glimpse of a bobcat before it disappears into the forest. In the spring and summer months, look for the colorful migratory songbirds like the Painted bunting, Hooded warbler and Summer tanager.

The beach is the destination for most, if not all, visitors to the island. Bulls Island beach is a pristine part of the longest stretch of undeveloped coastline on the east coast. On the north end is Boneyard, aptly named for the downed cedars, palmettos and pines that, over the years, have been bleached by the sun and weathered by the salt air, rendering them skeletons on the shore. The beach is where you can search for nature’s treasures – the beautiful sand dollar, olive, whelk, angel wing and other shells that are tossed upon the beach by the Atlantic and, the twisted pieces of “driftwood” that stir the imagination. Watch for Bottlenose dolphins and for the pelicans, gulls and terns, sanderlings and other shorebirds and seabirds that fish and feed on the smaller creatures along the water’s edge. In the summer months, you might see the “crawl” or even a nest of the threatened Loggerhead sea turtle that comes onto the beach under the cover of darkness.

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Treasure in Paradise for Archers and Anglers

Bowhunting Across Generations

Ramsey Dawson registered for the November 2012 archery hunt with his hunter education card. John Dawson, Ramsey's grandfather, had brought the young bow hunter to the White-tailed deer hunt on Cape Romain's Bulls Island.

John was 26-years-old when he picked up the bow and attended his first hunt in 1956. Since '56, there have been only three years that Dawson has missed the annual hunts.

Dawson, Carroll, Cassels, Hobbs, Owens, Wilkerson and Bailey are familiar names of families who have been bow hunting on Bulls Island for decades. The first archery hunt was held in December of 1954 as a means to harvest surplus deer in order to maintain a healthy deer population and, aside from a two-year closure due to Hurricane Hugo in 1989, this popular hunt continues to be offered annually in November and December. American alligators are the only "would-be" predator for the island's deer; thus the hunt continues to be a valuable management tool and offers an enjoyable and challenging experience for hunters. Each year brings archers to experience their first hunt on Bulls.

In the early years, the hunters brought large canvas tents, Coleman stoves and heavy wooden boxes filled with supplies that would sustain them for the week-long hunt. They used long and recurved bows, built stands in trees and used climbing spurs to reach the stands. Hunters were transported to the island on the refuges' large landing craft. The campsite has evolved over the years, as hunters now use lightweight nylon tents and tarps, gas stoves, plastic "action packers" and portable showers. The archers carry compound bows and portable tree stands. Personal watercraft is used for transportation to the island.

Joel Hobbs recalled his first experience of Bulls Island in 1961 when a friend invited him to the hunt.

"My first trip captured my love for the island. I saw turkeys, ducks and other birds and, I saw a black squirrel for the first time. The island was a wildlife paradise."

Over the years, Hobbs would harvest several does and bucks. Hobbs met men like John Dawson with whom he would experience the same fascination for the island. For Dawson, there is "nothing like sitting in the marsh and watching the sunset over the grass; the marsh grass turns a brilliant gold and the beauty is a sight for the soul." The development of friendships, the beauty and mystique of this undeveloped island and, the challenge of the bow has kept Hobbs, Dawson and other archers coming back year after year.

Bowhunting is perceived as a more primitive sport, a unique bond with nature that requires honed skills. John Dawson has hunted exclusively with the bow and arrow for over 50 years. Why choose the bow over the gun? "It's the challenge. You've got to get it all together." According to The American Archery Council, over 9 million people participate in archery sports and, of those, more than 3 million are bowhunters.



Bulls Island Hunt Camp in 1960's, credit Cassels Collection.



Archers gather on a Sunday evening preceding the hunt, credit USFWS.

The Bulls Island hunt offers a recreational opportunity to connect youth and adults with a valuable, renewable natural resource. Sumpter Cassels notes,

"Because of development, we're losing places to hunt faster than we're gaining them. Thanks to the federal government for wanting to keep the hunt going."

Cape Romain NWR typically offers two six-day hunts, Monday through Saturday, beginning on the first Monday in November and the first Monday in December. Bulls Island is located three miles off the mainland and, due to travel requirements, archers may camp in a designated camping area. Individuals must have a refuge hunt permit, a state hunting license and be registered before setting up camp or starting to hunt.

Experiencing the Estuary of Cape Romain - Cast Away!



George Cross hooks a sea trout, credit Marlene Kooper.

For as long as humans have inhabited the Bulls Bay coastal area of South Carolina, people have been fishing the expansive estuary waters that comprise over 30,000 acres of intricate creeks and bays of the Cape Romain NWR. These nutrient-rich shallow estuarine wetlands harbor a myriad of saltwater finfish, shellfish and crustaceans. The estuary is a fisherman's delight.

Anglers cast their lines for popular fish species such as the spot-tail bass, sea trout, sheepshead, whiting, flounder and black drum. Oysters, clams, shrimp and blue crabs are abundant. June through January is considered to be the most favorable period for catching finfish, with September through November known as the peak time for catching the prized spot-tail bass.

Local anglers Jim Yergin and George Gallagher have been fishing the northern waters of Cape Romain for over 25 years. Gallagher primarily fishes in the shallow flats, one to two feet or less, using a fly rod to catch sea trout and spot-tailed bass. Yergin uses the spinning rod to fish in deeper waters for a variety of fish

species as well as bonnet head sharks and sting rays. Yergin and Gallagher note that the tidal fluctuations of the estuary are synonymous with the repetitive patterns of fish. With an in-coming tide, fish follow smaller minnows into the sparse grass. As the tide recedes, fish come onto oyster reefs to feed on fiddler crabs and shrimp before reaching the tidal flats. In the northern end of the estuary, shallow creeks and areas behind Cape, Lighthouse, and Mill Islands and the shorelines along Muddy Bay are well-known "hot" spots for catching fish.

Tidal fluctuations and shallow estuarine waters require those who wish to fish and collect shellfish to have knowledge of the channels, creeks and shoals in the area and be aware that, with storms and shifting sands, changes will occur in the waterways. As Yergin notes, "If you don't watch yourself, you can get trapped out there and be there 'til the next tide change, maybe 12 hours. I've set many an hour out there saying 'Durn, I didn't know it was that shallow.'" Gallagher advises anglers new to the area to go into the estuary on a low tide. If you should become stranded on a mudflat, the incoming tide will free the boat. Anglers should work with the tides and become familiar with the waterways. The lighthouses on Lighthouse Island and the tower in Muddy Bay are well-known reference points that fishermen use to orient themselves in the estuary.



George Gallagher displays a prized spot-tail bass, credit Gallagher Collection.

Why do people travel from other areas to fish the waters of Cape Romain? Many are drawn to the vastness, remoteness and beauty of the estuary. An angler may go out and not see another boater.

Gallagher notes that "the fishing is a part of it but the environment itself is a big treasure."

Gallagher guides fishing trips into the refuge. He recalled two visitors from Indiana who had caught two trout and, upon getting a close sighting of a mother dolphin and her calves, commented that they didn't care if they caught fish as, they had never had an experience like that in their lives. For those who live in more populated areas, the solitude afforded and the opportunities to see wildlife such as the bottlenose dolphin offer new, rare and memorable experiences in nature.

The Bulls Island Experience *continued*

Bulls Island, teeming with wildlife and awe-inspiring landscapes, provides excellent opportunities for nature photography. Coastal Expeditions, the refuge concession, offers rare pre-dawn photography tours to the beach. The refuge is closed from dusk to dawn and camping is not allowed on the island. The photography tour, suitable for amateurs and professionals, is a special opportunity to see daybreak over the Atlantic. The sun-bleached trees of the Boneyard intensify the dynamics of the sunrise. Captain Chris Crolley, steward of Coastal Expeditions, says it best.

"Bulls Island is less of a place and more of an experience."

Bulls Island is the southernmost barrier island within the Cape Romain NWR and is located three miles off of the mainland. Accessible only by boat, the refuge boat landing, Garris Landing, provides the closest access point to the island. Visitors who do not have personal watercraft can arrange ferry transport to the island through Coastal Expeditions at 843/881 4582 or www.coastalexpeditions.com. The concession runs regularly scheduled trips throughout the year. For information on other refuge islands, contact the Cape Romain NWR office at 843/928 3264.

Wildlife Watching at Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge

As of June 2013, Waccamaw NWR offers a variety of additional recreation opportunities that are sure to enrich your outdoor nature experience while visiting the refuge. *The Waccamaw Visitor and Environmental Education Center boasts a beautiful new garden, designed and created to attract those brilliantly colored “flowers in flight”- the butterflies.* The garden includes raised flower beds, basking areas and watering holes. There is also a picnic table where you can sit and have lunch while you enjoy the flowering plants and the butterflies and birds that are attracted to the garden. Plants chosen for the garden include varieties of Buddleja or butterfly bush, Lantana, Pentas, honeysuckle and many others which provide nectar for the insects. Several species of shrubs and trees such as the hollies, pines and oaks are also in the garden area and serve as host plants for female butterflies to lay their eggs. Tiger and Giant swallowtails, the Carolina Satyr and many other species of butterflies are enjoying the garden and several Ruby-throated hummingbirds have stopped in to enjoy a taste of the nectar.



Butterflies, birds and people are attracted to the newly constructed Butterfly Garden, credit USFWS.



The quiet waters of a Cypress Swamp offer opportunities to view migratory songbirds, alligators and other wildlife at Waccamaw, credit USFWS.

The Refuge announces exciting new amenities at the Cox Ferry Lake Recreation Area (CFLRA). *This summer, the replacement and expansion of the boat dock is underway and will include a fishing pier; kayak launching access onto Cox Ferry Lake and a floating dock that will allow visitors to arrive by boat or kayak.* The new dock system will connect the newly designated Waccamaw River National Water Trail to the refuge.

The Recreation Area provides picnic facilities, hiking and biking trails, a boardwalk that takes you through cypress swamp wetlands and interpretive panels that highlight the unique wetland habitats and wildlife.

A great addition to the CFLRA is an interpretive “smartphone” tour. Interpretive panels are placed at various locations in the Recreation Area and on the panel is a Quick Read (QR) Code. Visitors can use their smartphone’s camera and a free downloadable application to scan the code. The app will allow you to listen to a podcast with sounds of nature, view pictures of wildlife, or watch a short educational video. Some topics included feature the cypress swamps, long-leaf pine forest, and volunteer opportunities on the

refuge. The smartphone tour is educational, fun and makes use of the technology at your fingertips.

The recent addition of guided birding trips on the Refuge is a popular activity for both novice and experienced birdwatchers. As of June 1st, the Waccamaw Audubon Society is slated to lead guided birding trips on the first Saturday of each month. The trips will visit a different area on the Refuge each month and will include birding walks, birding boat tours, birding photography sessions, and guest speakers. Visitors will have opportunities to see Prothonotary warblers, Swallow-tailed kites, Mississippi kites, osprey,

egrets, herons, woodpeckers, and many more bird species.

After several years of consideration, planning, and coordination, the Refuge will offer boat tours from the Waccamaw Visitor and Environmental Education Center in the near future. Coastal Expeditions, the concessionaire for the Cape Romain NWR, will conduct the tours on their boat the “Island Cat.” Tours will travel around Bull Island and Sandy Island via Bull Creek and the Great Pee Dee River, a designated South Carolina Wild & Scenic River, while in search of Swallow-tailed Kites, Mississippi kites, Red-cockaded woodpeckers, osprey, egrets, herons, alligators, and other fascinating wildlife associated with the lowcountry of South Carolina. The boat tours will give visitors an up-close and personal experience with some of the Refuge’s best-kept secrets. Coastal Expeditions will also offer guided kayak tours into some of the hidden backwater areas of the Refuge.

For more information about any of the recreational programs offered at Waccamaw NWR, please contact the Refuge Visitor Center at 843/527 8069 or visit www.fws.gov/waccamaw.

Lowcountry Refuges Remember George Garris

We remember George Garris, Refuge Manager, whose tenure of service with the National Wildlife Refuge System spanned 44 years, from 1959 until 2003. Upon his retirement, George was honored as the longest serving Refuge Manager in the history of the System. On September 13, 2003, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford issued a proclamation honoring George for his service to the State and Country by declaring the day George R. Garris Day. The U.S. Senate also honored George with a proclamation that renamed Cape Romain's Moore's Landing as Garris Landing.

George began his distinguished career in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at St. Marks National Wildlife Refuge, Florida in 1959. In 1961, George left St. Marks NWR to serve as the Assistant Refuge Manager at Cape Romain. George accepted an assignment at Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge, Georgia in 1962, where he served three years before moving to Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge as the Refuge Manager in 1966. In 1974, George left Carolina Sandhills and returned to manage Cape Romain until his retirement in September, 2003.

Throughout his celebrated career, George was a strong and passionate voice for the natural resources. He faced difficult challenges and witnessed many accomplishments. George guided Carolina Sandhills through recovery from the worst ice storm of the century in 1969. While at Carolina Sandhills, his foresight for the enhancement of the Longleaf pine ecosystem and his efforts to save the endangered Red-cockaded woodpecker continue to serve as a hallmark for management programs today.



George, assisted by Bio-technician Chris Lucash and Dr. Roland Smith, places a radio transmitter collar on a Red wolf in 1988, credit USFWS.

George was Refuge Manager at Cape Romain NWR when Hurricane Hugo devastated the area in 1989, battering the refuge with 150+ mph winds and a 20' tidal surge. George was at the helm of recovery efforts. With the loss of the refuge office/visitor center at Moore's Landing, his visionary efforts for Cape Romain forged the creation of

a unique partnership with the Francis Marion National Forest, U.S. Forest Service, to build the Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center, known throughout the region today for exemplary environmental programs for youth.

George was instrumental in the implementation of the endangered Red wolf recovery program at Cape Romain.

In 1976 Bulls Island was chosen as the breeding site that would allow wolves to produce wild-born young. This was a first-time attempt to reintroduce a species declared extinct in the wild. Under George's watch, 26 pups were born on Bulls in a period that spanned 18 years.

During his time of service at Cape Romain, George directed the Loggerhead sea turtle nest recovery program, a program that continues to be acclaimed as one of the most successful sea turtle nest recovery programs in the country.

Lastly and perhaps more importantly, George served as a steadfast and encouraging mentor to dozens of men and women as they began their careers as refuge managers, foresters, park rangers, maintenance leaders and administrators. Kay McCutcheon, retired Park Ranger, attributes her memorable 36-year career to George, who hired her at the age of eighteen for a part-time clerk position at Carolina Sandhills. Kay notes that his commitment to the resources served as a benchmark for her own career. "Anyone who worked with George long saw him dig his heels to support issues and projects." George had a profound influence on the careers of many during his service with the Refuge System. The Service men and women George mentored are his true legacy and they have formed the backbone of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today.

Birds and Bucks in the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge

Get outside and experience the wildlife and beauty of the Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge. At approximately 12,000 acres, the refuge is part of the 350,000 acre ACE Basin, one of the largest undeveloped estuaries on the East Coast. The forested uplands and wetlands, tidal marshes, freshwater creeks and impoundments, and grass habitats support a wealth of diverse wildlife. The refuge is not only significant for wildlife - it also offers outstanding recreational opportunities for people, especially those who enjoy hunting and bird watching.

The history of hunting in the ACE Basin can be traced back to the late 1800's. After the decline of the rice culture, wealthy sportsmen purchased plantations as hunting retreats and managed the areas for a diversity of wildlife, especially for large game and waterfowl. In the near future, the story of the early 1900's sporting era will soon be interpreted at the refuge's Kitchen House Visitor Contact Station, an outbuilding adjacent to the Grove Plantation house. The Kitchen House was, at one time, the plantation manager's office and designs are underway for the small building to be representative of the period.

As in the past, deer hunting is extremely popular on the EFH ACE Basin NWR. Hunts were offered with the establishment of the refuge in 1990. Not only are the hunts a benefit to people but they benefit a healthy habitat and herd as well, maintaining a well-balanced and healthy deer population. If you enjoy hunting, plan a trip to the refuge. Several white-tailed deer hunts are scheduled and include the bow and muzzle loading



Hunt Manager's Office, credit USFWS.

(black powder) rifle hunts. Hunters are also encouraged to harvest feral hogs as controlling the population of this animal is crucial to the habitat and native species.

One mobility impaired hunt is offered each year and hunters are permitted to use the center-fire rifle. For this hunt, permanent blinds are positioned at designated sites and are accessible by 4WD vehicles. The mobility impaired hunt is a two-day hunt and open to people who are permanently confined to a wheelchair or who require the use of mobility aids to walk.

With the founding of the South Carolina Disabled Sportsmen in 1993, the first mobility impaired hunt was held at the EFH ACE Basin NWR. Indeed, this hunt was the first of its type in the state.

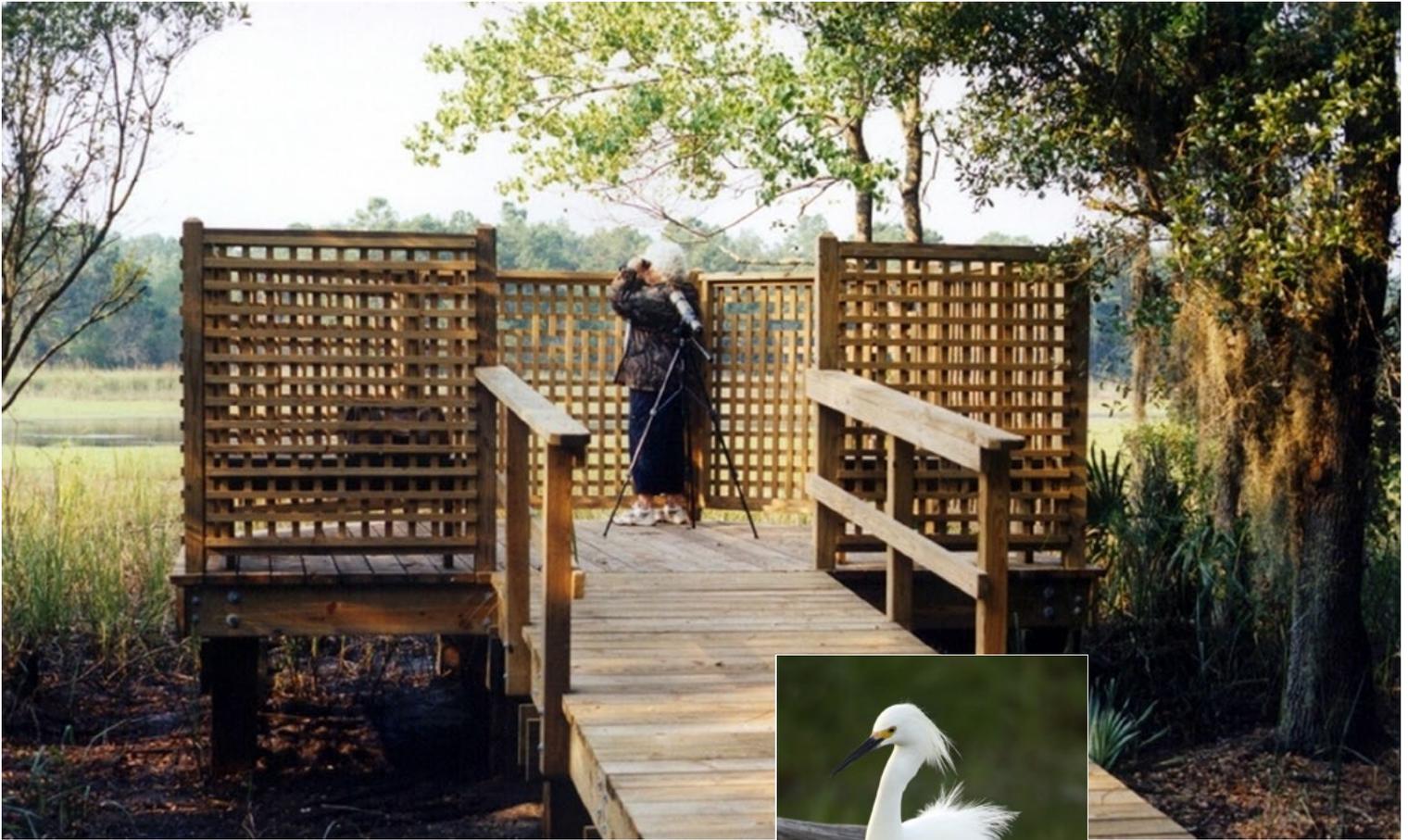
Bobby Harrell, retired wildlife and forestry consultant, was on the first hunt. Harrell had always hunted and fished and, following his accident, realized the significance of those activities in his life. He has participated in the hunts over the



Chad Hett harvests a six-point buck, credit USFWS.

years and enjoys watching others "get back into doing stuff that they used to do but didn't think they could." For Harrell, the refuge has wonderful resources and this hunt is "a good way to use it."

Birds and Bucks in the ACE Basin National Wildlife Refuge *continued*



Perimeter Pond is a prime spot for waterfowl, credit USFWS.

If you are interested in participating in the 2013 Mobility Impaired Hunt, contact the Refuge office at 843/889 3084. Space is limited to 12 hunters per day and hunters will be selected from a random drawing.

The EFH ACE Basin NWR lies along the Atlantic Flyway - the “highway in the sky” – and is a known destination for bird watchers. Literally thousands of waterfowl, shorebirds, neo-tropical songbirds, and birds of prey migrate from their nesting grounds to wintering areas, passing through the ACE Basin.

Beginning in late fall and through early spring, the refuge is a haven for wood ducks, pintails, shovelers, mallards and widgeon, to name a few of the waterfowl species that winter here. During the spring, summer, and early fall, neo-tropical songbirds call the refuge their home.

Prothonotary warblers, painted buntings, and ruby throated hummingbirds are just a few that use the refuge to replenish their energy reserves.

The bald eagle can be seen using the refuge as a feeding ground throughout the year. Wading birds such as egrets, herons, and ibis live in large active rookeries and forage the impoundments for food. Refuge wetlands provide nesting and feeding sites for sandpipers, plovers, yellowlegs, and black necked stilts. The EFH ACE Basin NWR is a birdwatcher’s paradise!



Great egret, credit Ryan Hagerty.

Pack your binoculars and lunch and head out to the refuge, whatever the season. There are numerous points for bird watching along refuge service roads, impoundments, and rice field dikes. The roads, impoundments and dikes are only accessible by foot or bicycle.

You also have access to 25 miles of unpaved refuge service roads and the Grove Plantation site. The refuge includes two units, the Edisto and the Combahee unit. Be sure to walk the two hiking trails at the Edisto unit as there are two elevated platforms – Goose Pond and Perimeter Pond. You can pick up a trail map and bird list from the refuge headquarters office, located at the Grove Plantation. The refuge is located approximately 25 miles south of Charleston.

Visit the refuge website at www.fws.gov/acebasin for more information. Enjoy your refuge!

Highs Across the Lowcountry

Santee NWR sponsored the 1st Annual Santee Refuge Nature Photography Contest this spring.

The Contest, open to amateur photographers both young and old, solicited over 60 entries from all over South Carolina and beyond. Photographers submitted beautiful and captivating images in the categories of landscapes, wildlife, flowers and plants, and Santee NWR. First-place winners were Colin Knight-Wildlife, Carl Miller-Landscapes and Flowers and Plants, and Zelma Covington-Santee NWR. The photographs are on tour as a Photographic Exhibition and will be displayed at the Santee-Cooper Visitor Center, Santee State Park, South Carolina Welcome Center on I-95 and the Sewee Visitor Center. View the photographs and obtain information for the 2014 Photography Contest and the Santee Birding and Nature Festival, scheduled for April 25-27, 2014 at www.santeebirdingfestival.com.

Cape Romain NWR and partners celebrated the **1st annual Bulls Bay Nature Festival – From the Forest to the Sea on March 23rd**. Fifteen federal, state and local agencies, local townships, organizations, businesses, churches and schools came together to get community residents outside to enjoy our natural places and wildlife. Festival activities and programs occurred in Cape Romain NWR and Francis Marion National Forest, at Camp Sewee, the Sewee Visitor Center and Hampton Plantation State Park. Community school children in grades 3-8 participated in the Wildlife Art Contest and Exposition. The student's wildlife art creations will be showcased in a 2014 wildlife calendar that will be on sale, with proceeds benefitting the student art programs. Dr. Patrick McMillan, host of ETV's Expeditions with Patrick McMillan, closed the festival with his intriguing presentation on nature, man and our evolving landscapes.

The outstanding support from 31 sponsors and a Connecting People with Nature grant awarded by the USFWS enabled Cape Romain and its partners to offer the festival. Bulls Bay partners have scheduled the second Bulls Bay



This Barred owl takes 1st place in Wildlife, credit Colin Knight.

Nature Festival on May 17, 2014. Visit www.fws.gov/caperomain.gov.

The Sewee Visitor and Environmental Education Center is the new home for four endangered Red Wolves.

Two five-year old sisters arrived from the Salisbury Zoological Park on November 1, 2012. On May 21, 2013 an eight-year old male and six-year old female arrived from the captive facility at Alligator River NWR. The male sired three pups in 2012 and we have high hopes that pups will be born at the

Center in 2014. Red wolf interpretive programs and feedings are scheduled Tuesday and Thursday (3 - 4 pm) and Saturdays (11 am - 12 pm) at the Center. With a population of approximately 300, the Red wolf is one of the most endangered animals in the world. The Sewee Center is one of 43 captive facilities across the country.

Construction began on the new Cox Ferry Lake Recreation Area dock at Waccamaw NWR on July 15th.

The new dock will include access for boaters and kayakers and an observation/fishing pier. This will be a great addition and will link the Waccamaw River, a National Water Trail, to the recreation area which has 3.5 miles of hiking and biking trails. The construction is expected to take three to four weeks to complete.

Loggerhead nesting sea turtles made a slow arrival to Cape Romain beaches but, as the summer has progressed, **the turtles are nesting in record numbers with an average of 26 nests each day**. On June 13th, 46 nests were laid, breaking the daily record for the refuge since the 1980's! The refuge is on pace to match if not exceed the 1,675 nests laid in 2012. The Cape Island Turtle Crew has been

working diligently to survey all of the islands, protect all of the nests and collect genetic samples from each.

Santee NWR is partnering with the Conservation Fund to restore approximately 450 acres of Longleaf Pine habitat on the Cuddo and Pine Island Units. The project was kicked off with contractors doing site inspections and bids in July.

Coastal Expeditions led its first boat trip from the Waccamaw NWR Visitor Center to Sandy Island on July 6th. The wildlife observed on the trip was plentiful and exciting and included Swallow-tailed Kites, Red-cockaded woodpeckers, alligators, and much more. Reggie Daves of the Waccamaw Audubon Society was the birding guide and seats sold out in two days. Another trip is scheduled for August 3rd.

Ernest F. Hollings ACE Basin NWR has completed renovations on the Kitchen House. Built in 1929, the house was assumed to be a hunt manager's office. In the mid 60's, a complete



Sewee sisters, credit Nicole Rankin.

restoration was done and, this year another restoration was completed to interpret the sporting period of the early 1900's. Plans are to use the building as a visitor contact station, decorated to appear as a hunt manager's office with a brochure stand and information panels on the "duck stamp" Act, the Dingle-Johnson Act and the sporting period. Panels will also be installed to interpret the chronology of plantation life after the turn of the century and, in agreement with the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), panels will interpret former out-buildings which were located adjacent to the office.

Nature Discovery at Santee National Wildlife Refuge



Santee is a well-known birding “hot spot” in the South East, credit USFWS.

Santee National Wildlife Refuge is yours to enjoy! Located along the banks of Lake Marion, the refuge comprises four separate land areas, the Cuddo, Pine Island, Dingle Pond and Bluff Units that together encompass 13,000 acres of upland pine forest, freshwater impoundments and marsh, and bottomland hardwoods that include a unique Carolina Bay. Best known for the migratory neo-tropical and waterfowl bird species which draw thousands of visitors each year, the birds and many other intriguing aspects of the refuge attract nature lovers, young and old.

The Visitor Center, located near the Bluff unit, is a popular starting point for becoming acquainted with the refuge.

Whether it be viewing the Bald eagle display and climbing the overlook to view an osprey nest, or learning about Fort Watson which was erected by the British during the Revolutionary War, there are opportunities to learn about the fascinating cultural and natural history of the refuge.

Be sure to check the “wildlife observations” notebook that visitors maintain or, perhaps the children would enjoy spending time in the Kid’s Corner where they can learn about the refuge system and play fun, educational wildlife and habitat games.

Outside on the Bluff area is where you will find the Santee Indian Mound which dates back more than 1000 years and, the site of Fort Watson that was constructed on top of the Mound.

The Cuddo unit is the largest of the four units, and it contains what might be considered the “fan favorite” - the 7.5-mile Wildlife Drive.

The Wildlife Drive affords visitors the opportunity to view wildlife in their natural habitats, all from the comfort of their automobile. You are all but guaranteed to see Great Blue heron, egrets and alligators. Other species, including Painted bunting, wild turkey

and various turtles and frogs are quite common. There are also Bald eagle nests located nearby, so our proud national symbol is often spotted soaring high above the waters of Lake Marion.

For those who want to get out of the car and explore the refuge areas, there are over 42 miles of hiking and kayaking trails located on the refuge.

Visit the newly constructed boardwalk loop at Dingle Pond or climb the observation deck to see a unique Carolina Bay ecosystem, as well as migratory waterfowl, alligators and other wildlife species. On the Cuddo unit you have a choice of two kayak trails, one that will take you through the interior canals and the other around the lake shore. A primitive boat launch is located at the Pine Island parking area, providing access to the lake for canoes, kayaks and small boats.

Santee NWR provides hunting and fishing opportunities for recreational sportsmen throughout the year.

Deer hunts and hunting small game such as raccoon and opossums are offered during designated state seasons. The refuge’s annual Family, Friends and Kids deer hunt is a highlight for many local residents and grows more popular each year. This special event is a lottery hunt with applications received from September 1st - 30th.

Fishing is also quite popular on the refuge and permitted on the four units and within the refuge boundary waters of Lake Marion. The lake is known for its trophy Blue catfish and Largemouth bass and, a variety of bream species can be caught in the inland ponds. Be sure to have your state licenses and free fishing permits in hand before hunting and fishing.

Many visitors enjoy nothing more than sitting back and watching the world unfold in front of them. Santee NWR has long been a destination for South Carolina photographers.

All of the flora and fauna that makes the refuge so attractive to naturalists also makes it irresistible to those wishing to capture the color and movement of Mother Nature. There is

Nature Discovery at Santee National Wildlife Refuge *continued*

always something to catch the eye and the camera lens at Santee. And with photography, we highlight our most popular yearly event- the Santee Birding and Nature Festival. Into its seventh year, the festival attracts hundreds of participants from all over the country to experience some of the best birding in the east. And the festival's newest activity - our photo contest - has once again proved the deep connection people feel to the natural world. Armed with cameras, big and small, we challenged our visitors to capture Santee National Wildlife Refuge - and indeed, South Carolina as a whole. The 2014 Festival is slated for April 25th - 27th and, the Nature Photography Contest will be coming soon so start shooting for 2014 now!

These are the things proudly displayed as representing the best of Santee NWR. The refuge is many things to many people, but we are sure of this — there is no end to the discovery and no limits to the inspiration Santee NWR will strike in all of us.



Kayaking around the Plantation Islands is a popular activity at Santee, credit USFWS.

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Family and friends connect with nature and each other at the Bluff Unit, credit USFWS.