

Santee National Wildlife Refuge

Santee National Wildlife Refuge, established in 1941, is located in Clarendon County, South Carolina. The approximately 13,000 acre refuge lies within the Atlantic Coastal Plain and consists of mixed hardwoods, mixed pine, bottomland hardwoods, flooded cypress, marsh, croplands, old fields, ponds, impoundments and open water. This tremendous diversity of habitat supports many kinds of wildlife. The four management units of the refuge protect 39 miles of shoreline along the northern side of Santee Cooper's Lake Marion. The office/visitor center offers many interesting displays for public viewing and is located off U. S. Highway 301/15(exit 102 off of I-95), seven miles south of Summerton and four miles north of Santee.



We Need This Refuge

To provide food, water, and shelter for migrating ducks and geese during the winter months.

To provide food, water, and shelter for many other migratory and resident birds.

To provide opportunities for environmental education, interpretation, and wildlife-oriented recreation for refuge visitors.

Facts about Santee NWR

- Provides habitat for threatened and endangered species such as the wood stork.
- Is the southernmost extension of the migratory Canada goose population.
- Has been touted as one of the best inland birding areas in the southeast.
- Painted buntings are a summer resident and frequently nest on the refuge.

Wildlife

A myriad of wildlife species inhabit the varied landscape of Santee NWR. During winter months, the bald eagle, sandhill crane, and over a dozen species of waterfowl can be observed feeding and loafing in refuge ponds and fields. From November through February, wood ducks, pintails, teal, shovelers, and ring-necked ducks are a major attraction for refuge visitors. Throughout the year, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks can be seen, as can a variety of songbirds and wild turkey.

Birds are not the only residents of Santee. Forested areas provide a home for white-tailed deer and other woodland creatures such as raccoons, squirrels, and bobcats. The ponds and marshes provide a home for alligators, rare spotted turtles, and many other reptiles and amphibians.

Habitat Management

To support a large variety of wildlife species, intensive habitat management is a must. The habitat management programs at Santee range from the very basic to complex.

One of the basic programs is the nest box program, where nesting boxes are placed in areas that are lacking available tree cavities. Over 250 nest boxes for wood ducks, bluebirds, and prothonotary warblers are monitored by staff and volunteers to determine success, brood size, and nesting periods.

The managed freshwater marsh program is more complex. Water levels are adjusted to provide maximum benefits for wildlife. In the impoundments and marshes, different water levels are used to help encourage desirable vegetation to grow while controlling unwanted “pest plants”. The impoundment management and water delivery systems were recently upgraded to provide optimum water level management to the wetlands/marsh areas most heavily used by migratory waterfowl.

Seasonally flooded woodlands containing mast producing hardwoods are food-rich and very beneficial to waterfowl. These flooded woodlands are called Greentree Reservoirs and are indicated as GTRs on the refuge tearsheet.

Management of croplands is also critical. Corn, wheat, and millet are planted to supplement available natural foods and benefit many species of wildlife.

Enjoy Your Visit

The Santee Visitor Center is currently open Tuesday through Friday, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm and contains a number of displays describing refuge wildlife and habitats. The Center provides an excellent opportunity for visitors to become acquainted with the refuge before venturing out and is highly recommended, especially for the first time visitor.

The refuge is open daily from dawn until dusk with vehicular access on the Cuddo Unit limited to the following times:

Oct 1 – Feb 28 7:00 am – 5:00 pm

Mar 1 – Sept 30 6:00 am – 8:00 pm

An automatic gate on the Cuddo Unit controls hours of vehicular access to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

Visitor Opportunities

Santee National Wildlife Refuge includes four units, each offering a variety of outdoor recreation activities for the refuge visitor.

The Bluff Unit, located near the Visitor Center is home to the Santee Indian Mound that dates back more than 1000 years. This Indian mound, often thought of as a burial mound, is more likely substructure for a temple that once stood. The temple would have been a simple structure formed with sticks and mud. The area was surrounded by numerous smaller mounds, none of which remain today. The British erected Ft. Watson atop the mound during the Revolutionary War only to have it taken by General Francis Marion's troops in 1781.

A walk along the one-mile Wrights Bluff Nature Trail affords visitors the chance to observe songbirds, wood ducks, and small mammals. An observation platform on the east side of this trail is a great place to see wading birds, Canada geese, and other waterfowl species in Cantey Bay.



The Dingle Pond Unit includes a large Carolina Bay, a naturally occurring depression wetland, and provides habitat for wetland species including alligators, wood ducks, mallards, great blue herons, and other wildlife.

The bay harbors a great diversity of songbirds as well as numerous reptile and amphibian species. Visitors may utilize a one-mile trail to get a closer look at wildlife on this unit. An observation tower is located on the edge of Dingle Pond and gives visitors a wonderful vantage point of this unique area.

The Pine Island and Cuddo Units provide the greatest diversity of habitats among the four units. Pine Island provides protection and habitat for American alligators, numerous species of wading birds, nesting bald eagles, and several grassland bird species. Visitor access on Pine Island is limited to foot and

bicycle traffic only on a four-mile loop trail. A primitive boat launch is located at the Pine Island parking area, allowing for canoes, kayaks, and small boats to have access to the waters of Lake Marion.

An auto tour route on the Cuddo Unit provides numerous wildlife observation opportunities. Bird life on the Cuddo Unit is abundant as are alligators and many other native species. Numerous hiking and bicycling trails begin off of the Wildlife Drive and provide visitors opportunities to explore the varied habitat types found on the refuge. There are also two canoe/kayak trails: one on the Cuddo Unit around the lake shore, which leads to the Proposed Plantation Island Wilderness Area, and the other on the Pine Island Unit (from the boat ramp to the Proposed Wilderness Area).

Boating

Lake Marion is open year-round to boating, except Cantey Bay, Savannah Branch, and Black Bottom which are closed from November 1 to March 1.

Fishing

Public fishing is permitted on all four refuge units and includes the open waters of Lake Marion, inland ditches, ponds, and impoundments. Cantey Bay (Bluff Unit), Black Bottom (Cuddo Unit), Savannah Branch (Pine Island), and refuge ponds and impoundments are closed to all access including fishing from November 1 – March 1 for migratory bird sanctuary. These areas produce largemouth bass, catfish, and bream. All Federal and State regulations are in effect. A free refuge fishing permit is required and must be in your possession while fishing on the refuge. The fishing permit can be found on the front of the fishing brochure. Some areas are only able to be accessed by foot or bicycle, please see map for those designations.



Hunting

Permitted during refuge designated seasons. Deer, small game, and dove seasons are scheduled annually. A free refuge hunting permit is required for hunting and can be found on the front of the hunt brochure. Consult the hunt brochure for additional details.

We Recommend

Visitors are encouraged to stop by the Visitor Center for current information on access and seasonally closed areas. Visitor access on all refuge units may be seasonally limited to provide total sanctuary for wintering ducks and geese.

Layered clothing during cool months and the use of insect repellent during warm months are recommended.

Binoculars, spotting scopes, and field guides are also highly recommended.

Prohibited Activities

The collection or taking of any items including dead and/or live plants. Federal law prohibits the searching for or removal of objects of antiquity or other value. The use of metal detecting devices is not allowed.

Camping – is not allowed but commercial camping facilities are nearby and the Santee State Park has campsites and cabins for rent.

Open Fires - Prohibited due to potential fire hazards.

Pets are not allowed on any hiking trails. Pets on leashes are allowed in designated areas around the Visitor Center.

Entry into closed areas is prohibited.

ATV's, dirt bikes and other off road vehicles are prohibited.

Swimming or wading is not permitted in any refuge waters including the Scott's Lake fishing area.

Entering or remaining on the refuge when under the influence of alcohol, or the use or possession of illegal drugs is prohibited.

Wildlife Calendar

This calendar is meant to provide visitors with a general guide to seasonal wildlife events. Weather may cause slight variations. The best time to observe wildlife is dawn and dusk. Wildlife photography is encouraged throughout the year.

January

Waterfowl concentrations peak with Canada geese abundant on wheat fields and ducks and coots in the impoundments and bays. Wintering grassland bird species



(sparrows, juncos, and flycatchers) are abundant. Striped bass are schooling.

February

Waterfowl can be observed foraging to build energy reserves before beginning their long migrations north. Crappie begin to move into the creeks. Wood ducks, purple martins, and bluebirds are beginning to look for nesting cavities.

March

Raptors are plentiful. Alligators may be seen sunning on canal and pond edges. Largemouth bass begin to move into the shallows.

April

Butterflies and dragonflies are everywhere. Both painted and indigo buntings as well as orioles, tanagers, vireos, and blue grosbeaks have returned and warblers are migrating. Fishing is productive for most species.

May

Spring migration continues. Nesting activities are evident. **Fishing is excellent for all species.**

June

Fish begin to seek out cooler waters. Many breeding birds are rearing young.

July

Shorebirds begin to return from their nesting grounds and can be seen on pond and lake edges. Young of the year are out practicing their skills and learning to survive. Bass, crappie, and catfish have moved to deep water.

August

Redbugs, biting flies, and mosquitoes are voracious. Fishing is more challenging during the heat of the summer, but panfish can still be caught in refuge waters.

September

Summer warblers begin to migrate south. White-tailed deer rutting-activity commences as bucks begin to rub the velvet off their antlers.

October

Raptors, cormorants, white-throated and song sparrows, and waterfowl are arriving in numbers. Ruby-crowned kinglets and yellow-rumped warblers are prevalent. Catfishing is excellent.

November

Bald eagles are frequently sighted around concentrations of waterfowl. Striped bass are schooling.

December

Large concentrations of waterfowl. Sandhill cranes may be observed on the Bluff Unit.

Excellent fishing for largemouth bass, striped bass and catfish.

The National Wildlife Refuge System

Santee National Wildlife Refuge is one of 550 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System. The mission of the system is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and plant resources of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations. The Refuge System encompasses over 150 million acres administered by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, an agency of the Department of the Interior.

In addition to the Refuge System, the Fish and Wildlife Service is responsible for the endangered species program, National Fish Hatcheries, certain marine mammals, and migratory birds as well as other wildlife programs.

For more information contact:

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www.fws.gov/santee