

This "blue goose", designed by J. N. "Ding" Darling, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.



Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1938 as a wintering area for ducks, geese and other migratory birds. Today the refuge is one of over 540 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



USFWS

Waterfowl Banding

Ducks are banded each year in an effort to maintain current information on nesting success, harvest numbers, migration routes, and the general conditions of waterfowl populations.

Use by the Public

The public is encouraged to visit the refuge and participate in the many activities designed and offered for outdoor enjoyment. Wildlife observation, fishing, hiking, nature study, and hunting of small game and deer are just a few of the opportunities available. The Visitor Center located on Highway 67 2.5 miles west of I-65 should be the first stop for all visitors planning a trip to the refuge. At the Visitor Center, visitors can obtain information about the refuge, enjoy the exhibits, watch the orientation video, use the observation building and trails, and find out about other interesting activities that might be available.

Migrating Waterfowl

This 35,000 acre refuge attracts thousands of wintering waterfowl each year. The refuge hosts 115 species of fish, 74 species of reptiles and amphibians, 47 species of mammals, and 285 different species of birds. The refuge also manages and protects habitat for 10 federally listed endangered or threatened species that reside on the refuge.

Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge is comprised of a great diversity of habitat types such as bottomland hardwoods, wetlands, pine uplands, shoreline or riparian woodlands, agricultural fields, and back water embayments. These habitats provide excellent feeding, loafing and roosting sites for wintering waterfowl, as well as nesting sites for seasonally migrating songbirds.

Management techniques on the refuge include:

Waterfowl Food Production

Approximately 3500 acres of cropland are cultivated by local farmers on a share agreement. During harvest, a portion of the crop is left in the field as a food source for ducks, geese, and other wildlife. Each fall the refuge provides green browse for wintering geese by planting wheat.

Water Control

Water control structures are used in wetland areas to change water levels in a controlled manner. This type of management provides food for waterfowl by encouraging the growth of native plants in moist areas.

Providing Habitat Diversity

Wheeler NWR's wide variety of habitat types are managed to produce as much quality food and cover as feasibly possible for wildlife.

Dave Menke

Mallards are among the most common waterfowl found on the refuge. In the spring, they can often be seen swimming in pairs.

Calendar of Wildlife Events

This calendar is meant to serve as a guide to general wildlife events for visitors. Weather and fluctuating water levels may cause variations in these events.

January	Waterfowl numbers are at their peak during the first half of the month. Canada and snow geese are abundant along with many species of ducks; mallards are the most abundant. Waterfowl begin moving north by the end of the month.
February	Waterfowl numbers begin to decline rapidly. Wood duck nesting begins. Depending on the weather, fishing can be good by the end of the month.
March	Waterfowl numbers are low, but a variety of species can still be seen. Blue-winged teal and shorebirds begin migrating. Turtles are present on sunny days. Crappie fishing is at its best.
April	Teal migration is at its peak. Warblers, vireos, and other small passerine birds are migrating. Migrant songbird nesting is in full progress. Wildflowers are at their peak.
May	Broods of wood ducks, mallards, and black ducks appear. Young songbirds and rabbits begin to appear. The last of the migrant songbirds and shorebirds are moving through the refuge.
June	With migration at an end, only resident birds and mammals are seen. Fishing for bluegill and bass is fairly good.
July	Waterfowl activity is at its lowest ebb for the year. Songbird young are common in the woods and fields.
August	The fall migration of songbirds begins with purple martins bunching for their southward move. Large numbers of swallows move through and some early shorebird migration begins. A few blue-winged teal begin arriving. Fishing for catfish is good.
September	Blue-winged teal migration is at its peak. Shorebirds and large numbers of swallows begin moving through. The first incoming geese arrive during the latter part of the month.
October	Sport fishing is good. Waterfowl continue to arrive with good concentrations present by the end of the month. The mass of southward bound fall songbird migration is at its peak.
November	Although songbird migration is at an end, waterfowl numbers continue to increase. Large numbers of great blue herons can be seen congregating. Red-tailed and northern harriers along with other raptors are common.
December	Waterfowl numbers reach their peak during the latter part of the month. Bald and golden eagles, although not common, may be present.

Recreation Symbols



Visitor Center



Wildlife Observation: Permitted year round. An observation building and platform are provided for your enjoyment.



Fishing and Hunting: Open to fishing. Managed hunts are held for squirrel, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, quail and white-tailed deer. State regulations apply.



Boating: Permitted. Six improved boat-launching ramps available. Water-skiing and jet skiing restrictions apply. Overnight mooring prohibited.



Bicycles: Permitted on graveled roads only.



Horse and Mule Riding: Permitted on open graveled roads only. Not permitted for refuge hunts.



Vehicles: Only licensed vehicles permitted. ATV's prohibited. Access is limited to graveled roads and a portion of these are closed at certain times.



Walking Trails: Five walking trails are available.



Firearms: Prohibited except on managed hunts.



Camping: Not permitted.



Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge provides approximately 35,000 acres of land for public enjoyment of a wide range of outdoor activities. A number of federal and state laws apply to public uses of national wildlife refuges. This information is a summary of the outdoor recreation opportunities available at Wheeler National Wildlife Refuge.

For further information, contact the Visitor Center
2700 Refuge Headquarters Road
Decatur, Alabama 35603
256/350 6639
<http://wheeler.fws.gov>

