

Muscatatuck Auto Tour Starts just south of Visitor Center– follow brown signs



1

Water is the basic ingredient that brings wildlife to Muscatatuck. Water from Richart Lake (on your left) flows by gravity under the road and is used to seasonally flood wetland units down-stream. Diving ducks, osprey, and cormorants may be seen on Richart during migration times. During the summer months, the shallow backwaters of the lake are favorite areas for wood duck broods.



2

The area on your right, known as Grader Marsh, is a seasonal wetland that dries up in summer. Many species of reptiles and amphibians, including the copperbelly watersnake, a State of Indiana threatened species, make their homes in the wetlands of Muscatatuck.



3

Storm Creek bridge. Storm and Mutton Creeks, the major drainages of the area, were dug out and straightened in the early 1900s in an effort to reduce the flooding of nearby farmlands. The poorly drained lowlands still flood today creating fine wildlife habitat. Wood ducks may often be seen along Storm Creek in the summer months.



4

On both sides of the road here is McDonald Marsh, named after the former owner of this land. These two marshes were constructed by building dikes in the flood-prone fields. Runoff from surrounding lands fills the marshes. Water can also be added from the creek when needed for management purposes. Refuge staff raise and lower water levels in many marshes and moist soil units to provide habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl food plants.



5

Historically dense hardwood forests covered most of Indiana's uplands and bottomlands. Following the arrival of settlers much of the land was cleared for the timber industry and agricultural purposes. The field on your right was a part of the refuge farming program for many years. It was removed from farming and planted with hardwood seedlings to reduce forest fragmentation and provide better habitat for forest-dwelling birds.



6

In several places along here you may notice the big trees and deserted lanes that mark old house sites. An unmarked pioneer cemetery was located along the road in this area and two one-room schools were located nearby. Throughout the refuge, land that was once used for livestock grazing, farming, and homesteads is now used as homes for wildlife



7

This area is becoming a grassland managed for birds. Many grassland bird species, including eastern meadowlarks and sedge wrens, are declining because of habitat loss.

The marshes ahead of you (North and South Endicott) were named for James Endicott, a leading advocate of establishing the refuge. Prairie grass planted round the marshes provides tall grass wildlife habitat. An overlook on North Endicott Marsh is a short walk from the intersection.



8

In this part of the refuge old pastures and farmlands are reverting to forest. Brushy areas make ideal feeding and nesting areas for birds like wild turkey and woodcock. Along the roadsides here you can see an alien invader, an invasive plant called autumn olive, which has taken over much of the refuge and displaced native plants.



9

Directly ahead of you, across the road, is part of the Moss Lake floodplain. Moss Lake is a seasonal swamp created by springs and the flooding of Mutton and Storm creeks and the Muscatatuck River. The wetland, which varies in size between 100-500 acres, has attracted wildlife for hundreds of years. On the west edge of the refuge Sandy Branch drains into Moss Lake and creates ideal sandhill crane habitat.



10

On your left is moist soil unit #4. This is one of several moist soil impoundments where water levels are managed to produce moist soil plants such as sedges, millets, and smartweeds. These plants provide a critical food source for migrating waterfowl. These units will usually be dry in the summer to allow for plant growth, then flooded during the late fall, winter, and spring months. Ducks, tundra swans, and geese are often seen here during peak migration periods.

On your right is Otter Marsh, the first site for river otter reintroduction in Indiana. In 1995 twenty-five otters captured in Louisiana were released here.



11

The beech woods on your right contains trees which are over 100 years old. Beech trees are ideal cavity trees for wood duck nesting and the nuts are a valuable food source for deer, turkeys, and many kinds of wildlife.



12

Muscatatuck has a healthy herd of white tailed deer and they can often be seen in this area. **Just ahead of you is Richart Lake and the Visitor Center . We hope you have enjoyed the drive and will visit again soon!**