

[From Spring 2002]

## A Celebration of Special Places

Where's your special place? Is it an island paradise, a mountain retreat, or just a quiet place in your own backyard? Each of us has a place in our hearts and minds that we treasure and go to as often as possible. The theme of International Migratory Bird Day this year is "A Celebration of Special Places," an opportunity for us to enjoy the places we love and maybe even discover new ones.

The Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge is one of our region's special places, and one you may not have explored yet. Here on the southernmost point of the Delmarva Peninsula at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, wildlife abounds and new discoveries are made everyday. We invite you to come visit and uncover its hidden qualities for yourself.

What makes this place so unique? It might be its geographic location, or importance to migrating animals. Maybe it's the rich human history or abundant wildlife found here. Many qualities come together on the refuge to create a special environment for wildlife and people.



Look at a map of the eastern shore of Virginia and what do you see? A long spit of land, wide at the top, and narrowing as it descends, pushing its way between the waters of the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. The refuge encompasses over one thousand acres at the very point - where land meets water. This area is an integral part of the Atlantic coastal flyway, a highway for migrating birds and butterflies, and the refuge is a critical rest stop along that highway. Weary travelers find food and resting places here among the refuge's fields, forests, ponds, and salt marshes.

Although now a haven for wildlife, refuge lands have a rich human history. Native Americans hunted in the forests and fished the surrounding waters. Later landowners turned to agriculture, farming the fertile soil. During World War II, because of its strategic location at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay, the military acquired the land for an army base, Fort John Custis. Its mission was to protect commerce in and across the Chesapeake Bay. After the war, the air force took over the area for use as a radar site and renamed it Cape Charles Air Force Station. Thousands of military families called this area home and the base became the center of social activity for Northampton County. The base closed in 1980 and four years later became the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Visitors can still see the reminders of the past as they walk the refuge trails, winding through Winslow Battery, a large gun emplacement from World War II and past an old cemetery to the salt marsh overlook. Fields stand where the runway once ran though, and forests and ponds have replaced houses and barracks. Wildlife makes its home here now.

Wildlife abounds at all times of the year on the refuge. In the fall, songbirds congregate in the shrubs and raptors soar overhead. Monarch butterflies float along the fields and tree swallows gather by the thousand, swirling like a tornado over the pond.

In winter, woodcock shelter in the forest, sawwhet owls roost in the pines, and deer and fox find food in the fields. In spring, wildflowers bloom everywhere as bright-colored warblers flit through the trees. Butterflies float over the refuge through the summer, and dragonflies zip around the ponds hunting mosquitoes. If you take the time to look, there's something to see in every season.

On May 11th, we invite you to participate in the annual International Migratory Bird Day Celebration at Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge. Tour Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge or walk to Wise Point, an area of the refuge normally closed to the public. Visit local birding

hotspots like Eyre Hall and Maplewood Gardens. Canoe or kayak in the salt marsh creeks, enjoy a variety of children and family activities at the Visitor Center, or explore the trails on your own.

There's something for everyone! Come discover the Eastern Shore of Virginia National Wildlife Refuge for yourselves - it's a special place to celebrate!

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