

[From Spring 1993]

Refuge Manager's Note

With last year being named the "Year of Storms," it has led to many changes in the physical look of the beach and low piping plover production. 1993 will be called the "Year of Celebrations" with several important anniversaries in the life of the National Wildlife Refuge System being observed. This year marks the 90th anniversary of the establishment of the first National Wildlife Refuge and the 50th anniversary of the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

Back in 1903 when few people were seriously thinking of the environment and America was the land of unlimited opportunities and natural resources, a need to protect certain migratory birds was recognized. Egrets, herons, and other birds were being killed in large numbers, as their feathers were needed to fulfill the fashion desires of the time. In order to protect these birds, President Theodore Roosevelt established the first national wildlife refuge on a small island in Florida. Although Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge was very small, the birth of this refuge signaled the beginning of a system of refuges which is unequalled in the entire world. President Roosevelt probably never realized what his one small step would become, as 90 years later the National Wildlife Refuge System is composed of over 480 refuges covering over 90 million acres.

A very important part of the history of the National Wildlife Refuge System occurred in the spring of 1943 when the Chincoteague Refuge was established. As in the establishment of most refuges, a need was recognized in the late 1930's and early 1940's. That need was a drastically declining population of Greater Snow Geese, a species which use the Atlantic Flyway and frequent the salt marshes for feeding. Development was rapid along the Atlantic Coast, and habitat for migratory birds and other wildlife was being lost. The Chincoteague Refuge was created in order to protect habitat for migratory birds, with a special emphasis on Greater Snow Geese. It is now a success story, thanks to refuges like Chincoteague and other protective measures, as the fate of this magnificent bird is no longer considered in jeopardy. Over the last 50 years, Chincoteague Refuge has evolved into one of the most important in the entire system.

In order to celebrate this important year, the Chincoteague Refuge staff will be planning a number of special activities during the year. Although specifics are yet to be finalized, the refuge plans to kick off the special events in the spring, followed by summer programs related to the celebration, and a grand finale during Waterfowl Week in November. The general public as well as members of the CNHA are encouraged to participate in these special activities.

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Chincoteague Refuge Manager