

[From Spring 1996]

Spring Migrants

As the days begin to lengthen and temperatures start to rise, many of the waterfowl so abundant this winter will return to their breeding grounds in the north. A few species will remain on the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge to nest. These include the Canada goose, mallard, black duck, gadwall, wood duck and mute swan.

With the decrease in waterfowl comes the increase in many other bird species. Migrating shorebirds will abound on impoundments, beaches and mud flats, with peak spring migration taking place in mid-May. Shorebird species nesting on the Refuge include willet, American oystercatcher, killdeer, piping plover and Wilson's plover. Gull and tern numbers increase also, with least tern nesting among the threatened piping plover.

Many of the marsh and wading birds such as snowy egret, cattle egret, tricolored heron, little blue heron, green-backed heron, and glossy ibis begin returning in April. Most of these birds nest nearby on small islands in and around Chincoteague Bay. Winter residents of the Refuge including the great blue heron, great egret, and black-crowned night-heron also nest on these islands.

Numerous species of migrant passerine (known as neotropical migrants) can be seen in the spring with careful observation. The spring migration is a good opportunity to see some of the more rare species found here. Consult the Refuge Bird Checklist for these species.

No matter what you're looking for, you are certain to find something of interest. So get out and enjoy the warm spring days and take advantage of all the Refuge has to offer.

*Cheryl Snow,
Biological Technician*