

[From Summer 2003]

## **Some Beaches Are for the Birds**

Refuge Biologist, Pamela Denmon, is very proud of her new sign on Fisherman Island National Wildlife Refuge; it tells boaters, kayakers, and swimmers to keep off Fisherman Island. Why is she proud of a sign that says no trespassing when Pam is actually such a friendly person? Because the island is an important place for nesting pelicans, oystercatchers, skimmers, terns, and gulls. As the station biologist, it's her job to try to provide the best conditions possible for the birds to nest and reproduce and one of the biggest requirements is peace and quiet during the spring breeding season.

Located at the southernmost tip of the Delmarva Peninsula, Fisherman Island is a national wildlife refuge. Refuges are areas specifically set aside for their value to wildlife and in a way are wildlife's answer to parks. Just as a park provides quiet places for people to rest, room to move about and socialize with their own kind, and a place to eat a meal, so do refuges provide resting areas for wildlife, a place for them to go through courtship and social behaviors and get something to eat. Though the migrating bird may not have a picnic basket, it is just as hungry - after its long flight north and fighting winds to cross the bay - as any beachgoer who had to pay the toll to cross the Chesapeake Bay-Bridge Tunnel.

The birds that use these refuges have traveled hundreds to thousands of miles to find a resting place where they can hatch and raise their young. After traveling so far, they must contend with high tides, predators, and competition from other birds for space and resources. They can't take the additional pressure of people walking the beaches, chasing them away from their nests when they need to protect their eggs or young from the hot sun or the ever-hungry raccoon. They can't take the curious dog dropped by the boater to do his business on the beach but instead chases the desperate parent bird or grabs a baby.

Television, newspapers, the travel agencies are all telling you that summer's coming, it's time to hit the beach, but first check which beach you are hitting. It may be a protected beach reserved for nesting birds. It may be closed to people. Think about the refuges and the wildlife that live there. Be sure you are a welcome guest by checking the rules of where and when you can visit. Go and have fun and let the birds have fun too with their own beach areas.

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