

[From Summer 2005]

S is for Spring and Schools

School's out for summer! Hooray! Visitor Services staff at Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge (CNWR) can breathe a sigh of relief at the completion of yet another successful spring educational season. During the months of March, April, and May over 10,000 students utilized Chincoteague Refuge and its resources to learn about wildlife and ecology. From the unbridled enthusiasm of a pre-kindergarten class to the mature wit of an Elderhostel group, Chincoteague Refuge offered programs for all ages and learning styles. In addition, staff from the Assateague Island National Seashore (AINS) Virginia District, the Marine Science Consortium, and the Oyster and Maritime Museum regularly conducted educational programs on the refuge.

Each day brought a new wave of students from Virginia, Maryland, Delaware, and/or New Jersey. Every program, like every educational group, was unique. Some schools conducted their own educational programs while others relied on the knowledge and expertise of CNWR and AINS staff. There were groups that were day-trippers while others enjoyed an extended stay camping or lodging in town. For many schools, a trip to CNWR is an annual tradition.

Why are so many schools attracted to CNWR? School groups will travel hours to spend a day on the refuge. Aren't there other outdoor facilities closer to where they live and go to school? Why Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge? The answer is different for every group. On one beautiful island, you can visit and study four distinct habitats (beach, forest, freshwater and saltwater marsh). There are two federal agencies willing and able to conduct top-notch hands-on programs. A maritime history of lighthouses, ponies, and pirates captivate and inspire the imagination. The refuge is an on-going laboratory of wildlife management in which students can observe and learn first-hand. Why go anywhere else?