

[From Summer 1996]

## **Refuge Manager's Report: Support!! Can't Live Without It**

Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge is one of over 500 refuges located nationwide. The National Wildlife Refuge System is operated through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of the Interior. This system of refuges, being a federal operation, is funded by your tax dollars, and that could be the end of the story. But the story does not end here since many refuges, including Chincoteague, rely on the support generously given by individuals and organizations.

With constantly shrinking budgets and personnel, our volunteers play an ever increasing role in helping the refuge operate effective programs. Nearly 9,000 hours are being donated annually. Our volunteers have been instrumental in assisting with the biological, public use, maintenance, law enforcement, and administrative programs. Volunteers have been involved in collecting water/salinity data, participating in disturbance and grazing studies, and conducting wildlife surveys. The data collected has enabled the refuge biological staff to better determine what management actions need to be taken.

Volunteers have also staffed the Visitor Center, conducted bird walks and interpretive programs, assisted with environmental education activities, and served as roving interpreters. This assistance has provided valuable information to refuge visitors and has enabled the refuge to achieve over 50,000 hours of environmental education activity annually. Hundreds of volunteers assist with beach cleanup, tree planting, and sand fencing activities.

Generous visitors and other donors have enabled the refuge to proceed with biological projects that would have to be put on hold if dependent upon federal funds. The refuge's Adopt-a-Tree program, which is just over one year old, has collected over \$12,000, which has been used to help with reforestation following the Southern pine beetle devastation. This program has enabled the planting of over 2,000 trees to date, and will continue until the reforestation project is complete. Monies placed in the refuge donation box have allowed for the purchase of equipment for obtaining more accurate information for our geographic information system. This system will improve the effectiveness of managing wildlife and habitats, not to mention improving information transfer to visitors.

The support of various environmental and conservation groups, as well as the local community, has been and will continue to be important to the success of the refuge. Both were valuable contributors during the preparation and completion of the Master Plan - a plan that continues to guide the management of the refuge. Cosponsoring special events, such as the beach cleanup, the International Migratory Bird Celebration, and others, is a great show of refuge support.

Cooperating associations are blessings to those refuges lucky enough to have one. Chincoteague and Eastern Shore of Virginia Refuges are even more blessed to have such a supportive association. Since establishment of the Chincoteague Natural History

Association (CNHA) in 1987, Chincoteague Refuge has received an annual average of over \$10,000 in support of our interpretive and educational programs. The support shown by your Board and Association members is even more important than the financial support.

However, CNHA funding has provided for the hiring of environmental education interns, produced exhibits and leaflets, sponsored children's and volunteer programs, purchased audio-visual equipment, and much more. These activities would be either nonexistent or done at reduced levels without the assistance provided by the CNHA.

A refuge operating alone, without support, cannot be effective. The Chincoteague Refuge staff is very appreciative of the support generously given by the Chincoteague Natural History Association and others.

*John D. Schroer,  
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