

[From Winter 1996-97]

Winter Birding at CNWR

Winter is prime time for birding on the refuge. While many of the passerines, shorebirds, gulls, and terns depart for warmer climates during the winter, waterfowl numbers increase in such numbers as to dwarf the summer bird populations.

Most of the duck species wintering on the refuge begin to arrive early in the fall. The earliest migrant is the blue-winged teal, with peak numbers occurring around September. Most of the duck species peak in November and December, along with the snow geese. Some of the late arrivals, such as tundra swans and mergansers, are most abundant in January and February.

Many marsh and wading birds decrease or disappear from the refuge during the winter months. Great blue herons, great egrets, and black-crowned night-herons remain on the refuge throughout the winter. Additionally, for the past few years, large numbers of American coots have spent the winter here.

With the large flocks of ducks, geese, and coots to prey upon, bald eagles also become more noticeable during the winter months. When an eagle is flying overhead, the ducks and snow geese are often sent into a panicky flight. American coots, instead of taking flight, will form a tight raft to try and confuse the predator.

Winter is the perfect time for birding on the refuge. While the waterfowl are abundant and the mosquitos are not, get out and enjoy the sights and sounds of the refuge.

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