

Blackbeard Island

National Wildlife Refuge



photo: David E. Goeke



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photo: Heather Cason



photo: Peter Wallack

Kimberly Hayes, Refuge Manager
Jane Griess, Project Leader
Blackbeard Island NWR
c/o Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex
694 Beech Hill Lane
Hardeeville, SC 29927
Phone: 843/784 2468
Fax: 843/784 2465
E-mail: savannahcoastal@fws.gov
www.fws.gov/blackbeardisland

Blackbeard Island National Wildlife Refuge is a barrier island off the Georgia Coast. The island is part of the Savannah Coastal Refuges Complex headquartered in Savannah, Georgia. The complex includes seven national wildlife refuges, totaling 56,949 acres, along a 100-mile stretch of coastline in Georgia and South Carolina. The seven refuges are Pinckney Island and Tybee NWRs in South Carolina; Savannah (located in both states along the Savannah River), Wassaw, Harris Neck, Blackbeard Island, and Wolf Island NWRs in Georgia.

Refuge Facts

- Established: 1924 as a bird refuge and as an experiment station for the acclimatization of certain foreign game birds.
- Acres: 5,618 (1,163 freshwater impoundments/marsh; 2,000 saltwater marsh; 2,115 pine and oak forests; and 340 sand beach).
- Location: McIntosh County, Georgia, five miles north of Eulonia, GA, then six miles east on Harris Neck Road, then 18 miles southeast by boat.

Refuge History

- Federal ownership since 1800 Department of Navy and FWS.
- 1880-1910 served as South Atlantic Quarantine Station.
- Established as a wildlife preserve in 1924 and formally a NWR in 1940.
- Wilderness area consisting of 3,000 acres designated in 1975.
- Notable concentrations of waterfowl, wading birds, shorebirds, songbirds, raptors, deer, and alligators.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- 11,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Provide wintering habitat and protection for migratory birds.
- Provide protection and habitat to promote resident and migratory wildlife diversity.
- Provide protection and management for endangered and threatened plant and animal species (loggerhead sea turtle, American bald eagle, American alligator, wood stork, piping plover).
- Provide wildlife education, interpretation and recreational opportunities to the visiting public.

Management Tools

- Water level management for waterfowl, shorebirds, wood storks, and wading birds.
- Mowing/disking.
- Prescribed fire.
- Mechanical/chemical control of noxious plants.
- Public hunting for deer management.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships.

Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking/biking/trails
- Wildlife observation
- Wildlife photography
- Hunting
- Fishing/shrimping/crabbing
- Environmental education / interpretation
- Sea kayaking

Calendar of Events

October: Archery deer hunting; National Wildlife Refuge Week; Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival

December: Archery deer hunting

Questions and Answers

How do I get to the refuge?

The only access to the refuge is by boat. Information on commercial boat charters that provide day trips to the island can be obtained by calling the Harris Neck NWR office at 912/832 4608 or visiting our web site: www.fws.gov/blackbeardisland

Are all the refuge roads/trails open to hiking and bicycling?

All roads and trails are open to hiking unless posted as closed; bicycling is permitted on all roads and trails except within the Wilderness Area.

What types of wildlife am I likely to see on the refuge?

A diversity of wildlife species are present on the island. Songbirds, wading birds and shorebirds are the most visible. The endangered wood stork and threatened American bald eagle are also present and likely to be observed during a visit to the refuge. Deer, raccoon and alligators are also readily observed.

Are there any costs associated with a visit?

There are no fees charged to visit the refuge.

What can a family do on the refuge?

The refuge is managed for wildlife and to maintain the island in its natural state. The public is welcome to enjoy the beach and interior trails for hiking, bicycling, and wildlife observation. Although swimming and picnicking is permitted on the beach, open fires and pets are not allowed.

Does the refuge offer public tours of the island refuge?

Public tours are included in National Wildlife Refuge Week events and during Georgia's Colonial Coast Birding & Nature Festival. Several tour companies have permits to conduct interpretive and educational programs on the refuge. They also provide transportation to the refuge.

For a list of tour companies currently serving the refuge, please call our headquarters office or visit us on the web.

Does the refuge allow recreational camping on the island?

Recreational camping is not permitted on the island. Camping is only permitted during the two 3-day archery deer hunts held each year. The camping is confined to a designated area and is permitted only to those possessing a valid state hunting license.

Is hunting permitted on the refuge?

Yes, two 3-day archery hunts for deer are conducted each year during the months of October and December. For more information on these hunts and how to participate, please contact the Savannah Coastal Refuges office 912/652 4415 or visit our website: www.fws.gov/blackbeardisland