

# Pinckney Island

## *National Wildlife Refuge*



photo: G. B. Parndue



photo: David E. Goeke



photo: USFWS

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### Refuge Facts

- Established: 1975.
- Acres: 4,073 acres, approximately 2,700 acres of this is saltmarsh and tidal creeks.
- Four islands; Corn, Little Harry, Big Harry and Pinckney Island. The latter, approximately 1,200 acres, is the largest of the islands and the only one open to the public.
- Pinckney Island NWR is one of seven different refuges comprising the Savannah Coastal Refuges complex.
- Open to the public in 1985.
- The refuge entrance is 1/2 mile west of Hilton Head Island, SC off of U.S Highway 278. The island lies between Skull Creek (the Intracoastal Waterway) and Mackay Creek. The island's northern tip faces Port Royal Sound.

### Refuge History

- From 1736-1936 the island was owned by the Charles Cotesworth Pinckney family and managed as a cotton plantation. Long staple sea island cotton was planted.
- Other crops included corn, lentils, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes and grains.
- From 1937 to 1975 the island was managed as a game preserve.
- In 1975 the refuge was donated to the Fish and Wildlife Service.

### Natural History

- Large concentrations of white ibis, herons and egrets occur on the refuge.
- Wading bird rookeries and osprey nests can be found on the island.
- Two of the island's freshwater ponds were ranked in the top twenty wading bird colony sites of the South Carolina coastal plain during 1989 and 1996.

- Waterfowl, shorebirds, wading birds, raptors and neo-tropical migrants are commonly seen on the refuge.
- An active bald eagle nest is located on the refuge. Consequently, bald eagles are not an uncommon sight.
- Management focuses primarily on wading birds.

### Financial Impact of Refuge

- Pinckney Island is part of a seven-refuge complex that has an annual budget of \$2,400,000 (FY 2004) and a combined staff of 30, one of which is assigned to this refuge.
- Approximately 330,000 visitors in 2000.

### Refuge Objectives

- To protect and provide habitat for endangered and threatened species.
- To provide and maintain habitat for migratory and resident birds that utilize and or nest annually on the refuge.
- To provide, enhance and maintain habitat for native wildlife.
- To promote wildlife interpretative and recreational opportunities.

### Management Tools

- One annual deer quota hunt.
- Prescribed burning.
- Water management for wading bird rookeries.
- Mechanical/chemical control.
- Partnerships.

### Public Use Opportunities

- Hiking and biking trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- A one-day deer hunt.

# Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge

## Calendar of Events

**May:** Migratory Bird Day.

**July:** Butterfly survey.

**October:** National Wildlife Refuge Week programs.

**November:** Annual deer hunt.

**December:** Christmas Bird Count.

## Questions and Answers

*What is the best time to come to Pinckney?*

Wildlife viewing is best during the spring and fall months. Throughout the spring, when wintering songbirds linger just prior to their migration, and breeding birds are arriving, birdwatching on the refuge is excellent. Wading bird rookeries located in several of the island's freshwater ponds are noisy with activity, as herons and egrets prepare for the nesting season. Migrating flocks of shorebirds can also be seen in the spring and fall foraging on tidal mudflats or in the high grass of the saltmarsh. Alligators are most commonly seen basking on the banks of the ponds during spring, fall, and winter on mild, sunny days. Fox squirrels and white-tailed deer may be encountered at any time of the year by observant visitors. Bucks, with newly grown antlers in velvet, are sometimes seen in the summer months.

*Are there alligators on Pinckney Island?*

Yes, there are alligators in most every freshwater area on the refuge, and they may even be found crossing roads during springtime. Also, it is not uncommon to see alligators swimming in the saltwaters of Mackay Creek, a navigable waterway that separates Pinckney Island from the South Carolina mainland.

*Where might I see a Painted Bunting?*

Painted Buntings are one of the most easily spotted of Pinckney's breeding songbirds. The blue head, lime green back and red throat and belly of male Painted Buntings is not easily mistaken for any other species. They are commonly observed in edge areas where the live oak and cabbage palm forests meet open grassy fields. Breeding males may sing from the

cover of forested areas or from atop a snag out in the open. Both males and females have been seen in the meadow at Ibis Pond, foraging on the seeds of green grasses.

*Is fishing allowed on Pinckney Island?*

No, fishing is prohibited from the land portions of the refuge. The island is used exclusively "as a nature and forest preserve." However, saltwater fishing from boats only is allowed in the surrounding waters of Skull and Mackay Creek. Boats may access these areas from the public boat ramp located off U.S. Highway 278 across from the refuge entrance and are not allowed to come ashore or moor their boats at any other point on Pinckney Island. Shellfishing is also allowed in designated areas. Consult refuge brochures for regulations.

*Are there many deer on Pinckney Island and do you allow hunting?*

Each year the refuge holds a one-day quota hunt to ensure that population numbers remain in balance with the surrounding habitat. Indices of herd health, such as tail and kidney fat, are examined at the hunt check station by refuge biologists and indicate the need for any further management. The 2000 hunt resulted in a one-day harvest of 28 deer by 59 hunters.