

Pinckney Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

By

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Pinckney Island NWR is one of the seven refuges in the Savannah Coastal Refuge Complex. The refuge is 4,053 acres, and contains four primary habitats - 1) salt water marsh, 2) fresh water ponds, 3) maritime forest and 4) salt water estuary. Numerous species of animals (deer, bobcat, rabbit, raccoon, opossum, otter, fox, squirrels and alligators) live on the refuge. More than 75 species of resident and migratory birds use the refuge. It truly serves as an environmental classroom for everyone to enjoy. In 2007, more than 201,000 people visited the refuge.

Pinckney Island has a long and varied history dating back to 1708 when part of the island was purchased by an Indian Trader named Alexander MacKay. In 1736 MacKay sold the island to Charles Pinckney, who turned it into a plantation producing sea island cotton. The plantation flourished until the Civil War when it was occupied by the Union Troops. After the war the plantation did not prosper, and by the 1930's it was virtually abandoned. In 1937 it was sold to James Bruce who turned it into a private hunting preserve and provided homes to several tenant farmers. Edward Starr and James Barker purchased the island in 1954 and continued to manage it as a game preserve. In 1975 Pinckney Island was donated to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to be managed exclusively as a National Wildlife Refuge. It was opened for public use in October 1985. Since Pinckney Island became a refuge, the Hilt-011-Mead Island Society has had a close relationship with the FWS staff concerning what happens on the refuge. The Society has served as the Audubon Refuge Keeper and today: two members of the Society serve as refuge liaisons.

The refuge is 3.5 miles long and approximately one mile wide. A gravel road (closed to public vehicles) runs from the parking lot to the far end of the refuge. There are also 13 miles of mowed trails on the refuge for visitors to explore all the different habitats. The best way to see the refuge is by hiking or by bicycle, and the best time to see the wildlife is early in the morning or in the early evening. The refuge is generally open from sunrise to sunset. Visitors should carry drinking water with them as there is none available and know that there are no public restrooms on the refuge.

Besides the bird project; many exciting things are happening on the refuge. In 1990 the largest white ibis colony (300 nests) in South Carolina was located on the refuge. These birds continue to nest and feed there. During a recent 2008 bird count 180 ibis nests were counted on just Ibis Pond with more than 200 young birds fledged there. Starting last winter many of the fields were strip mowed to provide winter habitats for the Le Conte's and Henslow's sparrows and the Sedge wrens. All three were seen in these fields, so the fields will be striped again this fall. The South Carolina Native Plant Society has done two plant searches on Pinckney NWR finding more than 70 plant species, including the Least Snoutbean (*rhynchosia minima*) which had never been found in South Carolina before.

In 2007, a butterfly garden was added near Ibis Pond. This garden provides an excellent habitat for more than 20 species of butterflies and serves as an excellent place to educate the public about butterflies. For example, all four life cycles of the Gulf Fritillary butterfly can be observed

on the Passion Vines growing in the garden. The Hilton Head Island Audubon Society provided funds to purchase plants and other L.C. S. & Y. materials to start the garden, and volunteers established it. Members of the M'fste; Gardeners of the Low Country Association under the direction of Betty Manne, the Project Coordinator, have provided their expertise, plants and hard work to maintain the garden.

Pinckney Island NWR is an un-staffed refuge. That means there are no fulltime Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) personnel assigned to maintain it. So under the direction of a refuge manager, eight volunteers (Dale and Connie Terrell, Twila Gray, Bill Hamel, "Buck" Hackett, Clem Dietze, Mike and Karen McGinty) do the maintenance work on the refuge. Besides talking to and helping refuge visitors, these volunteers monitor the bluebird boxes, do bird counts, mow the grass, keep the parking lot clean, maintain the trails, keep the kiosk information current, weed eat, spray, pick up trash and other projects the FWS requests. Last year these volunteers donated more than 100 hours of volunteer time to do this.

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