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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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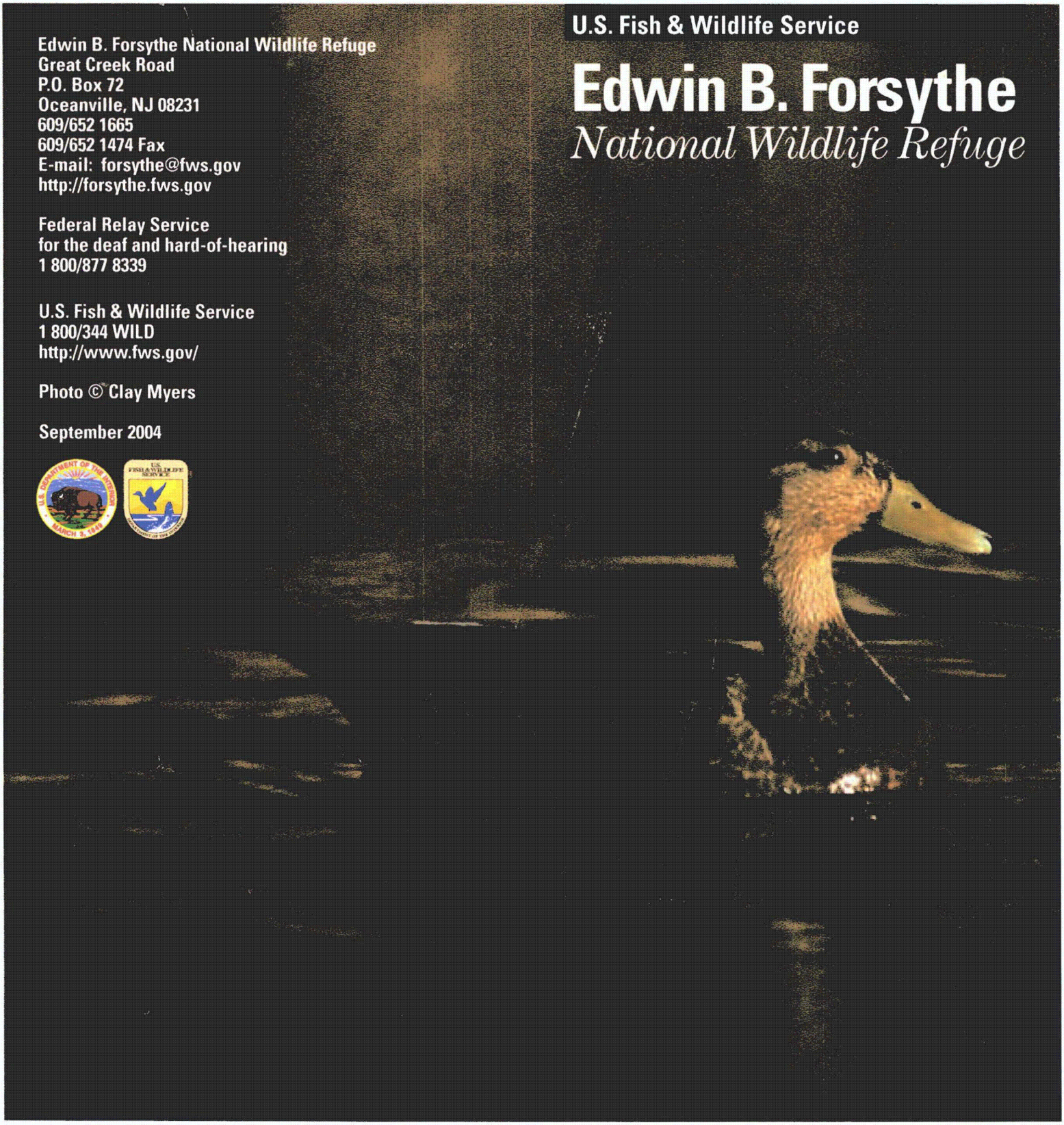
http://www.fws.gov/

Photo © Clay Myers

September 2004

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Edwin B. Forsythe
National Wildlife Refuge



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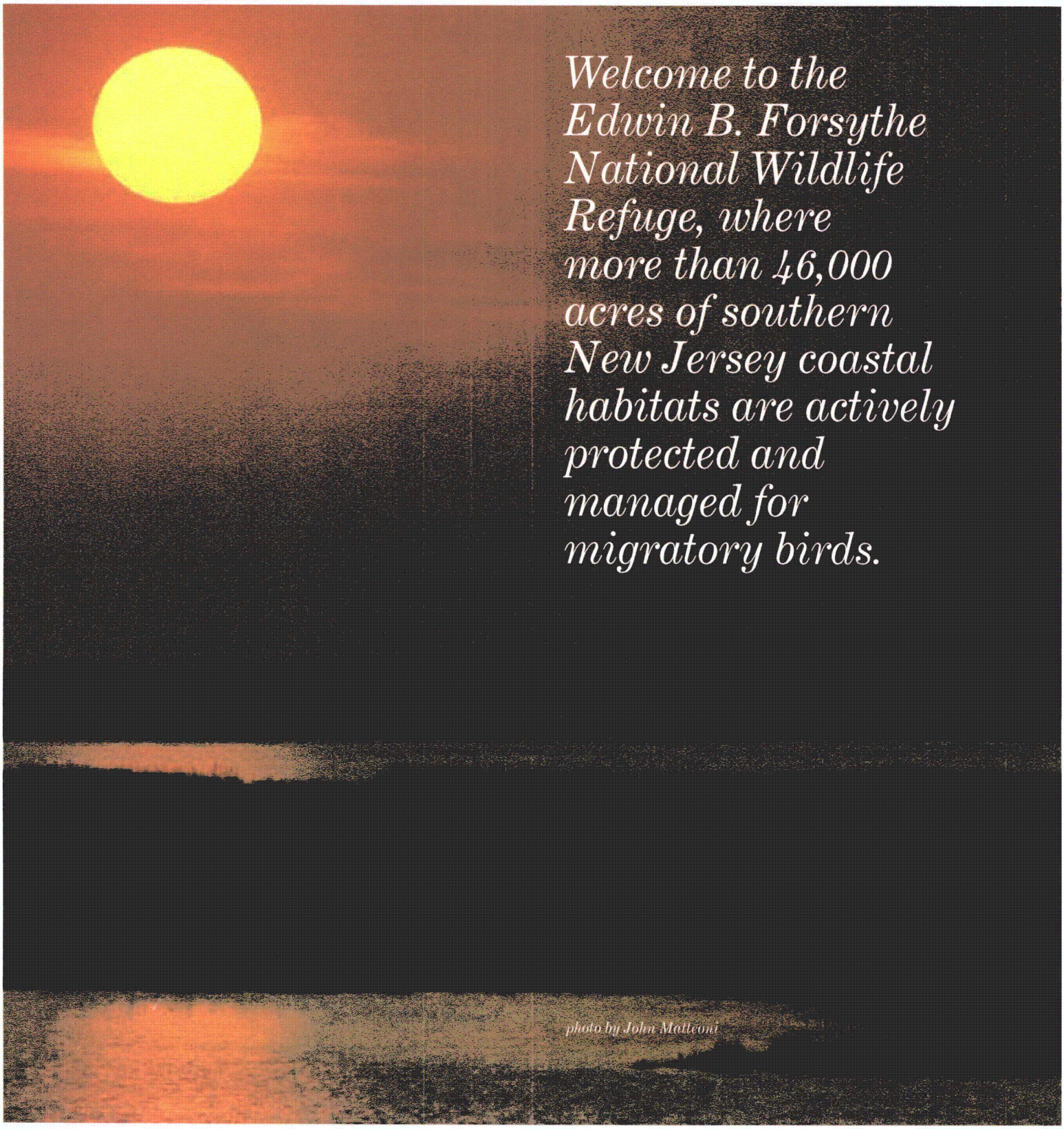


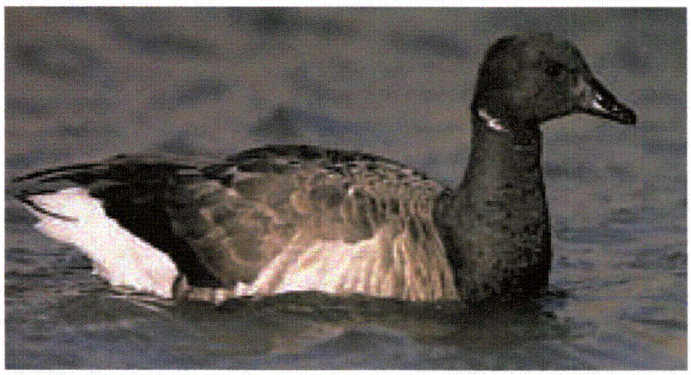
Welcome to the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, where more than 46,000 acres of southern New Jersey coastal habitats are actively protected and managed for migratory birds.

photo by John Matteoni

Overview

Forsythe Refuge's Brigantine and Barnegat Divisions were originally two distinct refuges, established in 1939 and 1967 respectively, to protect tidal wetland and shallow bay habitat for migratory water birds. In 1984 they were combined under the Edwin B. Forsythe name, in honor of the late conservationist Congressman from New Jersey.

The refuge's location in one of the Atlantic Flyway's most active flight paths makes it an important link in the vast network of national wildlife refuges administered nationwide by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its value for the protection of water birds and their habitat continues to increase as people develop the New Jersey shore for our own use.



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Atlantic brant

Wildlife and Habitats... Diversity is Critical

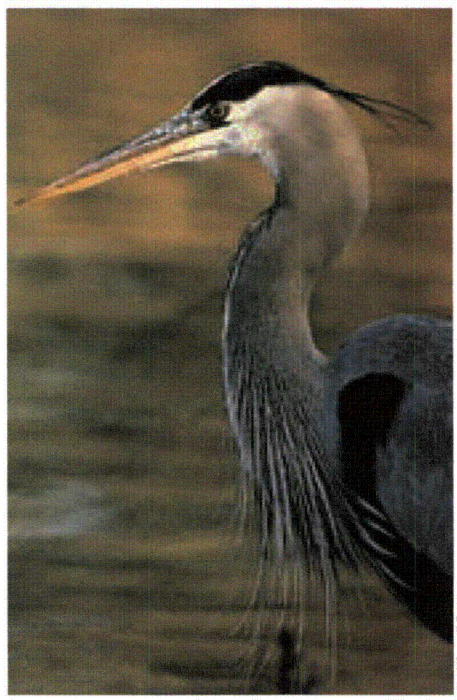
New Jersey coastal wetlands have long been the preferred habitat of large numbers of Atlantic brant and the American black duck—a species which has suffered major population declines over the years. Refuge salt marshes provide important nesting habitat for rails.

While the refuge's primary concern is to meet the habitat needs of these species, we manage refuge habitats to support a wide variety of water birds and other wildlife. Special emphasis is also placed on protection and habitat management for the endangered and threatened bird species which nest here.

Marshes and Water Birds

More than 82 percent of Forsythe refuge is wetlands, of which 78 percent is salt marsh, interspersed with shallow coves and bays. These are important resting and feeding habitats, as abundant marsh plants provide food and cover for water birds and other wildlife. The quiet tidal waters serve as nurseries, spawning and feeding grounds for fish and shellfish which are important in the diets of many wildlife species—and of people!

At the Brigantine Division, refuge staff have used the management technique of "diking" to create 1,415 acres of impounded fresh- and brackish-water marsh habitat in the heart of naturally occurring tidal salt marsh. We created these wetlands to support a wider variety of wildlife than could native salt marsh alone. Water levels in the impoundments are managed to enhance the resources on which wildlife depend. In spring, refuge staff draw the water down to maximize growth



© Clay Myers

Great blue heron

of plants beneficial to waterfowl. The drawdown also provides mud flat feeding habitat for shorebirds and wading birds. We reflood the impoundments just in time for the arrival of fall migrants.

Each spring and fall tens of thousands of migrating ducks and geese, wading birds and shorebirds concentrate here. They linger to rest and feed on the rich resources provided by our managed impoundments, thus providing Wildlife Drive visitors with spectacular viewing and photo opportunities. Several migratory species, including the clapper rail, willet, and black duck, remain at the refuge through summer to nest and raise their young. Atlantic brant and black ducks also overwinter here.

Peregrine falcons and ospreys frequent refuge wetlands and take advantage of the nesting platforms erected for their use.

Bald eagles use refuge habitats along the Mullica River, and occasionally forage over refuge impoundments.

© Clay Myers

Osprey

Barrier Beaches and Endangered Beachnesters

More than 6,000 acres of the refuge are designated as a National Wilderness Area. This includes Holgate and Little Beach, two of the few remaining undeveloped barrier beaches in New Jersey. They provide essential nesting and feeding habitat for the rare piping plover, black skimmer and least tern. These birds, along with other beach-nesting species, have suffered drastic population declines as human beach developments and recreational uses have eliminated the habitat they need. Forsythe Refuge is one of their last strongholds.

The dunes, prime nesting habitat, constantly shift and change as the forces of wind and wave action mold them. Beach grasses, which trap blowing sand and stabilize the dunes, provide important cover for wildlife, especially developing young birds. Use by humans and their pets can result in severe erosion, loss of habitat, and harm to beach-nesting birds.

The refuge manages its fragile beach areas for the rare birds which depend on them. In order to minimize disturbance to the birds and their habitat, this management includes limiting or prohibiting public access. Holgate is closed to all public use during nesting season; Little Beach is closed all year except by special use permit for research or education.

Forests, Swamps and Fields

Almost 5,000 acres of the refuge are woodlands dominated by such tree species as pitch pine, oaks, and white cedar. Fields are maintained in the midst of these wooded communities to provide habitat for grassland-nesting birds, and to increase habitat diversity.

A wide variety of upland wildlife species, including songbirds, woodcock, white-tailed deer and box turtles, frequent these upland areas. Waterfowl such as black ducks often nest here.

© Clay Myers

Woodcock

Enjoying the Refuge

Visitors enjoy a wide range of wildlife-dependent activities at Forsythe Refuge.

Wildlife Observation, Photography and Nature Study

At the Brigantine Division

Most of the refuge's public use facilities are located at the Brigantine Division headquarters area in Oceanville, open daily sunrise to sunset. This site provides exceptional wildlife viewing, photography, and environmental education opportunities. Accessible rest rooms are available.

Wildlife Drive:
The most popular place to view wildlife on the refuge is the Wildlife Drive. This eight-mile, one-way, unpaved road leads you through wetlands and woodlands. Look for spectacular concentrations of migratory water birds in spring and fall, as they stop and linger in refuge habitats managed to meet their needs. There are no restrooms or drinking facilities on the drive.

Nature Trails

Leeds Eco-Trail: A scenic half-mile loop foot path through salt marsh and woodlands offers visitors a chance to view "life on the edge" of these two interesting habitats. Marsh segments of the trail are boardwalked, and the first 700 ft. is wheelchair accessible.

Akers Woodland Trail: A quarter-mile easy walking path through native woodlands provides many seasonal opportunities to see migrating warblers.

Jen's Trail: A three quarter-mile loop with a thirty-five foot elevation gain provides great views of the refuge and is a good place to see forest birds.

Songbird Trail: This one and a half-mile trail through a variety of upland habitats is an outstanding hike to view migratory songbirds. By returning along the wildlife drive, you can choose different loop options such as a two and a half-mile loop from Jen's trail or a four-mile loop from refuge headquarters.

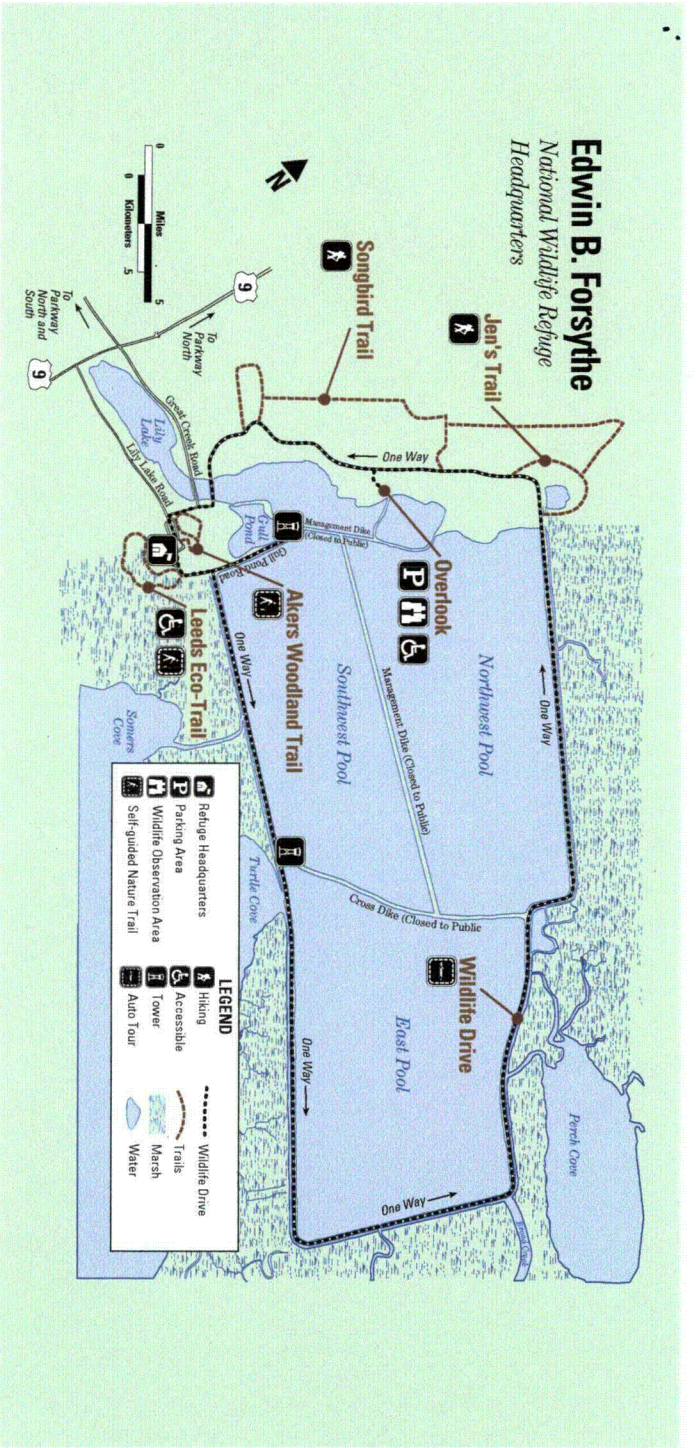
Headquarters and Auditorium: The refuge headquarters building contains information and staff offices. An auditorium offers an interesting array of seasonally changing wildlife displays.

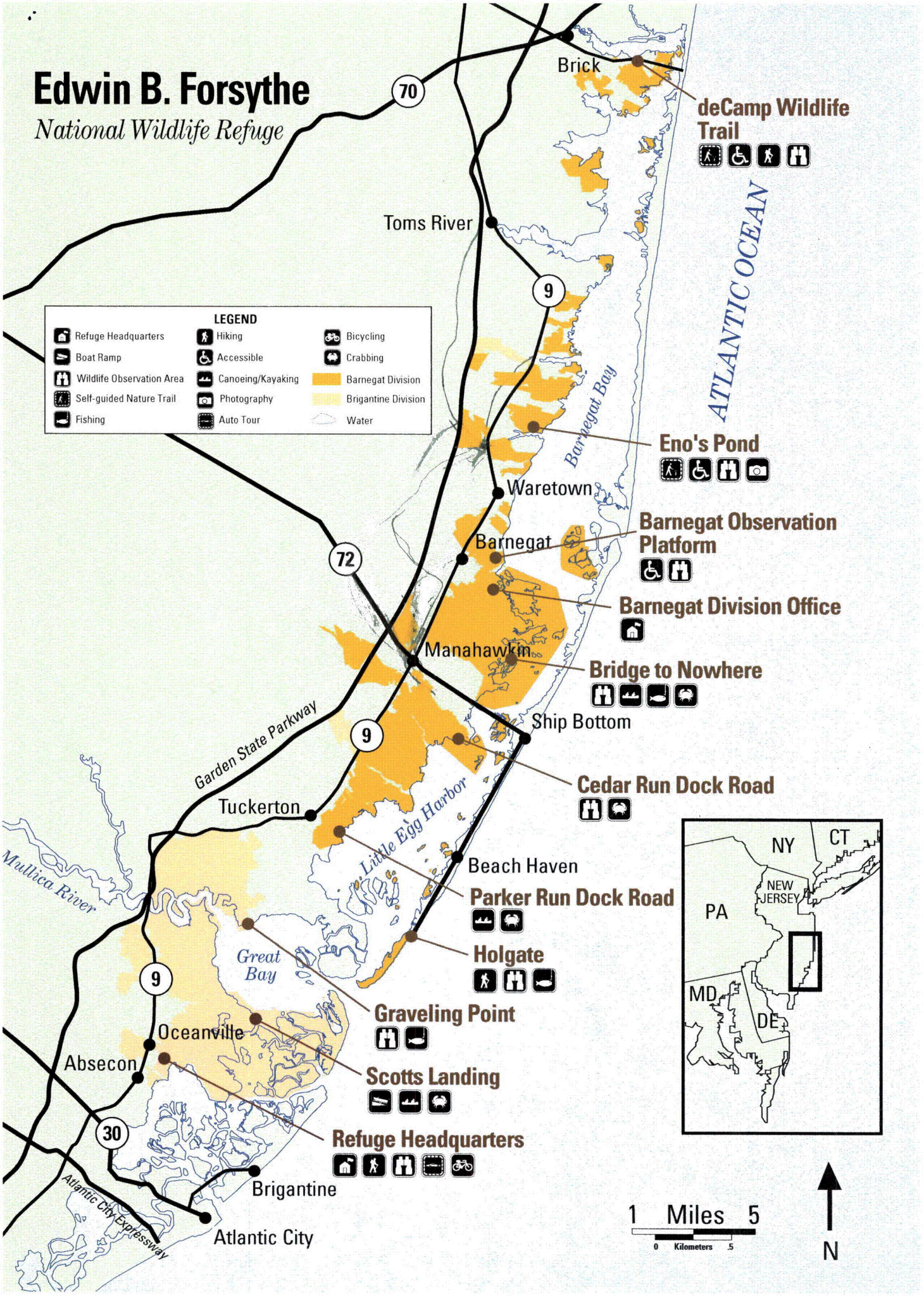
Self-Service Visitor Information Area: Provides brochures, as well as wildlife sightings and other important information.

Environmental Education: Please contact the refuge to find out about our offerings for schools and groups seeking environmental education activities.

© Clay Myers

Yellow-rumped warbler




Edwin B. Forsythe
National Wildlife Refuge
LEGEND
Refuge Headquarters
Boat Ramp
Wildlife Observation Area
Self-guided Nature Trail
Fishing
Hiking
Accessible
Canoeing/Kayaking
Photography
Auto Tour
Bicycling
Crabbing
Barnegat Division
Brigantine Division
Water
Brick
deCamp Wildlife Trail
Toms River
ATLANTIC OCEAN
Barnegat Bay
Eno's Pond
Waretown
Barnegat Observation Platform
Barnegat
Barnegat Division Office
Manahawkin
Bridge to Nowhere
Ship Bottom
Garden State Parkway
Cedar Run Dock Road
Tuckerton
Little Egg Harbor
Beach Haven
Mullica River
Parker Run Dock Road
Holgate
Great Bay
Graveling Point
Oceanville
Absecon
Scotts Landing
Refuge Headquarters
Brigantine
Atlantic City Expressway
Atlantic City
70
9
72
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NY
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NEW JERSEY
PA
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At the Barnegat Division

Wildlife viewing opportunities are seasonal in some areas of the Barnegat Division, and year-round in others.

The Holgate Unit: a pristine barrier beach located at the southern tip of Long Beach Island, offers visitors seasonal opportunities to observe its remarkable living plant and animal communities.

During non-nesting season—approximately September 1 through March 31—visitors are welcome to walk Holgate's beach front, to take advantage of its plentiful wildlife viewing opportunities. (Sorry, pets are prohibited—they can be harmful to both wildlife and this fragile habitat.)

During the nesting season—April 1 through August 31—Holgate is closed to all public access, to ensure undisturbed nesting conditions for threatened piping plovers and other beachnesters. (Holgate is one of the last nesting sites still available for these birds along the Jersey Shore.)

Barnegat Observation Platform: From this accessible boardwalk and overlook, visitors can see resting and feeding migratory birds in freshwater wetlands. Platform is located on Bay Shore Drive between Ridgeway and Edison Avenues east of Route 9.

Richard Kuzminski

Piping plover chick

Eno's Pond: A one-mile self-guided nature trail loops its way through pine barrens to observation decks and a wildlife blind. The trail is a partnership between Ocean County Parks and Recreation and Edwin B. Forsythe NWR. A half-mile of the loop, on the county side, is an accessible trail.

The deCamp Wildlife Trail: This one-mile foot trail, located at Mantoloking and Adamston Roads in Brick Township, offers visitors year-round opportunities to experience the tranquil beauty of refuge woodlands and wildlife. Its first 1300 feet are wide and flat, with benches—and becoming moderately more difficult thereafter.

Hunting, Fishing, and Crabbing

Seasonal waterfowl and deer hunting, fishing, and crabbing are permitted in designated areas of both the Brigantine and Barnegat Divisions, under Federal and State regulation. Boats may be launched at the Brigantine Division's Scotts Landing boat ramp, located at the end of Scotts Landing Road, off Moss Mill Road, at Leeds Point.

Please contact refuge headquarters for additional information, regulations and maps.

Note: Best wildlife viewing occurs in spring and fall.

Bird checklists, Wildlife Drive brochures, and a leaflet describing Holgate's seasonal regulations are available.

Biting insects abound from mid-May through mid-October. Ticks occur all year, and are most active during warmer months. Some ticks may carry Lyme disease, known to be harmful to humans. Insect repellent and other safety precautions are recommended.

Important Information for Visitors

The refuge receives more than 200,000 visits each year. Cumulative impacts of this many visits on wildlife and habitat can be great. To ensure that we may continue to fulfill our primary mission of protecting and managing this refuge to support wildlife for the benefit of present and future generations of people, visitors must comply with these simple guidelines and regulations.

The refuge's public use areas are open only during daylight hours (sunrise to sunset).

Visitors are urged to remain on designated roads and trails, leaving adjacent habitat undisturbed for use by wildlife.

Headquarters entrance road and Wildlife Drive speed limit is 15 mph or less, as posted.

Pets must be on a short, handheld leash at all times where permitted.

The following are prohibited on the refuge:

Pets are prohibited at Holgate.

Disturbing, injuring destroying, collecting of plants, wildlife or other natural objects.

Feeding wildlife.

Picking fruits or flowers.

Entering closed areas.

Use of bicycles or motorized vehicles on trails.

Camping, swimming, kite-flying, fires.

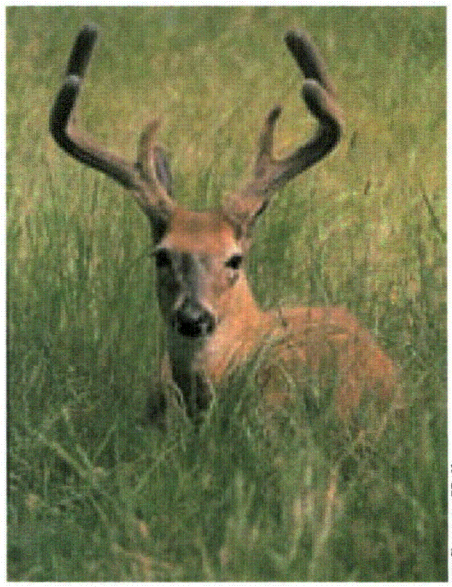
Horses, off-road vehicles, unregistered motorized vehicles.

A Guide to Seasonal Wildlife Activity

Although migratory and other seasonal wildlife events are described below by month for easy reference, actual timing can vary from year to year due to weather conditions and other factors.

Year-round

White-tailed deer and other resident species may be visible in refuge habitats in virtually any season.



© George Hall

White-tailed deer in velvet

January and February

Limited wildlife visibility. Best during thaws. Possible sightings of black ducks, snow geese, Atlantic brant, diving ducks, raptors (perhaps a bald eagle). Cold weather may freeze refuge waterways, forcing waterfowl southward to find open water. The season's first killdeers and red-winged blackbirds may arrive in February.

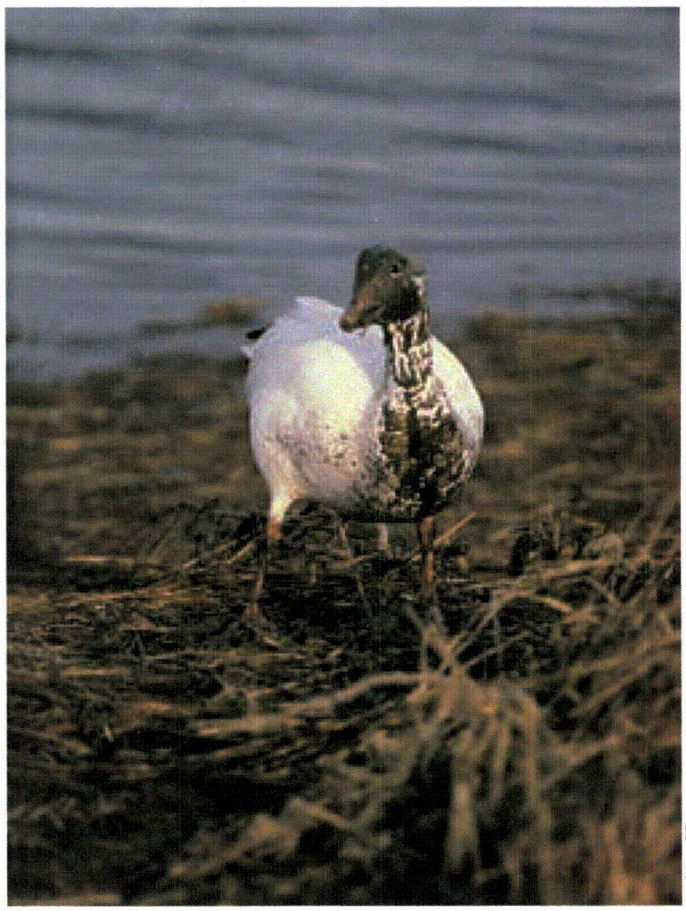
© George Hall

Red-winged blackbird

© Clay Myers

Cedar waxwings

March 20 to April 15	Northbound waterfowl migration. Spring peepers and other frog species begin their courtship calls in freshwater wetlands. Beach-nesting birds, including piping plovers, arrive on refuge beaches. (Holgate closes to all public entry April 1.)
April 20 to May 30	Wading birds and shorebirds begin to arrive; glossy ibis numbers peak in late April.
Early May	Greatest diversity and peak numbers of warblers in refuge uplands, coinciding with the seasonally increasing insect populations which are a major part of their diet.
May and June	Horseshoe crabs spawn on refuge bay shores and beaches. Migrating ruddy turnstones arrive to forage on the crab eggs. Turtles may be seen laying eggs in the soft dirt along refuge roadways, or sunbathing on roads and wetland edges. Drive carefully.
Mid-June to Mid-July	Peak of duckling hatch. These young birds will migrate with adults this fall.
August	Best opportunities to see shorebirds and warblers heading south. Wading birds gather for migration.
September	Ducks gather in large flocks. Blue-winged teal will be the first to migrate this month.
October	Snow geese begin to arrive in refuge wetlands.
Early November	Spectacular concentrations of ducks and geese in refuge impoundments; numbers can exceed 100,000!
Mid-November through December	Peak snow goose and Atlantic brant numbers. Ducks and geese moving south. Bald eagle sightings most likely in December.



© Clay Myers

Snow goose

Refuge Volunteers Volunteers assist biologists, staff the headquarters information desk, guide tours, conduct environmental education activities, and maintain trails and facilities. For more information or an application, call 609/748 1535.

Nick Kontonicolas

Black skimmer

Friends of Forsythe NWR Gift Shop: Open weekends in the spring and fall, the gift shop offers birding supplies, gifts, and binocular rentals. Entrance passes are also available.

Friends Group The Friends of Forsythe NWR is a non-profit group established in 1998 to provide support and services to the refuge. For more information or to join the Friends, write
Friends of Forsythe NWR,
P.O. Box 355, Oceanville NJ 08231
or phone 609/641 4671
or visit the Web site at
http://www.friendsofforsythe.org/

Refuge Entrance Fees—Enacted to Help Wildlife In response to the staggering loss of wetlands in the United States, in 1986 Congress authorized the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to charge entrance fees at some national wildlife refuges. The monies are used to support refuge operations—especially wildlife-dependent public uses—and to purchase wetlands for inclusion into the refuge system.

An entrance fee is required to access the wildlife drive and its associated foot trails. Those visitors carrying a Forsythe Annual Pass, Federal Duck Stamp, Golden Age, Golden Eagle, Golden Access, or a National parks Pass with upgrade stamp are not required to pay the entrance fee. Refuge officers routinely conduct compliance checks, and individuals entering the refuge without a valid entrance pass will be cited.

Remember, your entrance fees help to protect wetlands, support refuge management programs for wildlife, and wildlife-dependent recreational opportunities for you!

© John Matteoni

Great egret