



NEWS RELEASE

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SEE MORE THAN 300 SPECIES OF BIRDS BY BICYCLE IN THE EAST COAST BIRDER'S PARADISE KNOWN AS CHINCOTEAGUE

CARMEL, Ind.—Mar. 25, 2005 — Moments after the sun rises over the Atlantic Ocean off Virginia's beautiful coastline, a pair of birdwatchers snaps photos of shorebirds. They mount their bicycles, ride several hundred yards, and stop at a marsh where a glossy ibis and a black-crowned night heron feed on small fish. A family of four riding the other way stops and trades notes about what they saw farther up the trail. It's a typical morning at the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge.

The National Audubon Society designated Chincoteague as one of its top ten birding hotspots, and it's easy to understand why. More than 320 species of birds can be seen in the refuge over the course of the year. That diversity has earned the refuge recognition as an International Shorebird Reserve, a World Biosphere Reserve, and a National Natural Landmark.

In fact, Chincoteague, which spans 14,000 acres of beach, dunes, marsh and maritime forest in Virginia and Maryland, was set aside in 1943 to protect snow geese and other migratory birds along the Atlantic Flyway. The refuge includes a series of barrier islands that stretch along the Atlantic coast south of Ocean City.

One of the best ways to view everything Chincoteague has to offer is by biking the Beach Road Trail bike path – and it's becoming even better! A \$100,000 grant from the Wild Birds Unlimited Pathways To Nature Conservation Fund is helping the Refuge extend the bike path. In addition, the grant is funding interpretive kiosks and exhibits along the path, familiarizing visitors with the refuge and its inhabitants.

Two threatened species frequent the refuge. The piping plover nests on sandy and rocky beaches, as well as on overwashes. A pair of peregrine falcons that have produced 2 to 4 young early every year since 1982 can be found near their tower nest, and bald eagles also nest here. Wildlife lovers will delight to the antics of the endangered Delmarva Peninsula Fox Squirrel as it scampers through the loblolly pine forests.

In addition to wintering snow geese, the refuge supports black ducks, mallards, green-winged teal, eastern brown pelicans and others. Particularly popular among visitors is the non-native population of large mute swans that now live safely in the refuge's impoundments. Raptors such as red-tailed hawks and kestrels pass through, while eastern screech owls, great horned owls, and common barn owls are year-round residents. Many songbirds migrate through Chincoteague, among them the Carolina wren, common yellow-throat, fish crow, and gray catbird. To learn more about all of the species that can be seen there, visit <http://chinco.fws.gov/>.

The original and largest franchise system of backyard birdfeeding and nature specialty stores with over 300 locations throughout the North America, Wild Birds Unlimited established the Pathways To Nature Conservation Fund in 1999 as part of its mission to bring people and nature together. Funded by a contribution from every Wild Birds Unlimited store, Pathways To Nature has provided nearly \$740,000 in grants to 25 environmental education and wildlife viewing projects. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation partners with the company in this effort, using federal funds and a challenge grant program to match the grants, thereby increasing their impact. More details on the Pathways to Nature program are available at www.pathwaystonature.com.

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