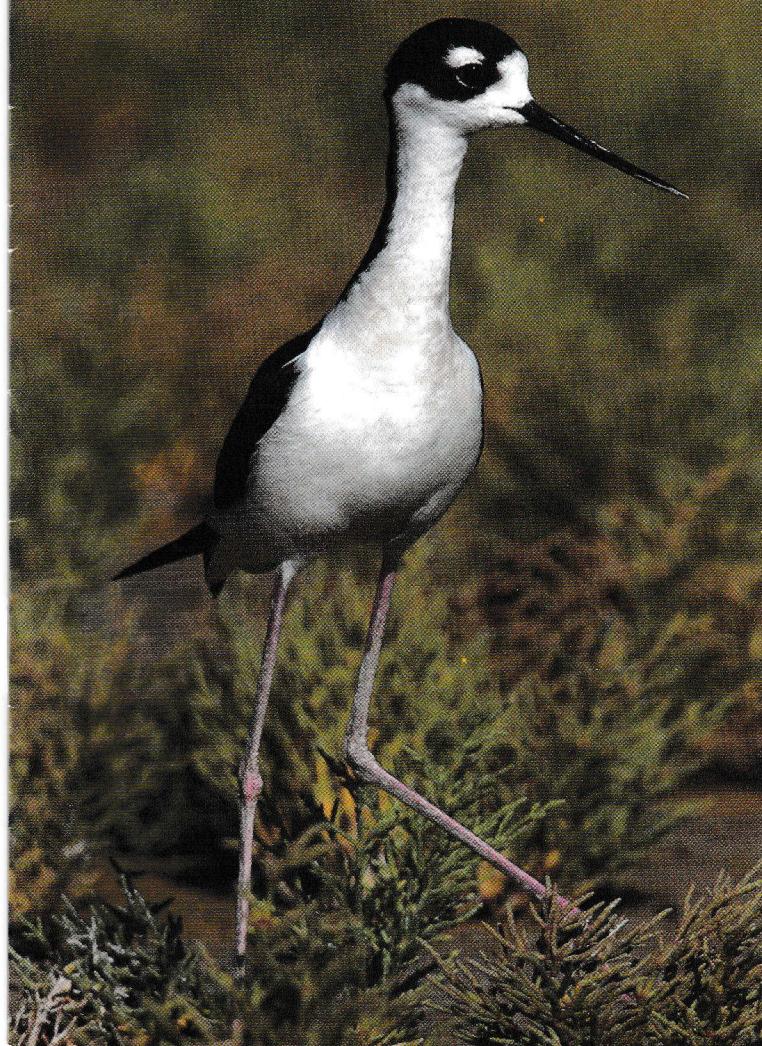


U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bear River

Migratory Bird Refuge



*Hope is the thing with
feathers
That perches in the soul.
And sings the tune
without the words
And never stops at all.*

- Emily Dickinson



Common yellowthroat
© Roland Jordahl

Welcome



*This blue goose,
designed by J.N.
“Ding” Darling,
has become the
symbol of the
National Wildlife
Refuge System.*

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (MBR) lies in northern Utah, where the Bear River flows into the northeast arm of the Great Salt Lake. The Refuge protects the marshes found at the mouth of the Bear River, which are the largest freshwater components of the Great Salt Lake ecosystem. Since these marshes are surrounded by arid desert lands, it is little wonder that they provide a welcome oasis for waterbirds.

The Refuge and other wetlands associated with the Great Salt Lake provide critical habitat for migrating birds from both the Pacific and Central Flyways of North America. Birds come to this area annually by the millions to rest and to feed on abundant food found in the wetlands. As part of the Bear River Bay, the Refuge is designated as a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site, a globally important shorebird area.

*“The waterfowl made
a noise like thunder...
as the whole scene
animated with
waterfowl.”*

*Explorer
John C. Fremont
1843*

Bear River MBR is one of over 545 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System – a network of lands set aside and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service specifically for wildlife. The Refuge System is a living heritage, conserving wildlife and habitat for people today and for generations to come.

Refuge Establishment

As European American settlers moved into the area in the late 1800s, ambitious projects were undertaken to divert great quantities of the Bear River's water to upstream settlements and farms. Gradually, the marshes below these water diversions began to dry. By the 1920s, only 2,000-3,000 of the original 45,000 acres of the Bear River delta wetlands remained.

The loss of the marshes became a serious problem that affected the survival of breeding and migrating birds. However, the wetland depletion occurred so slowly, it attracted little attention or concern from the public.

The public was, however, aware of the huge bird die-offs from botulism that occurred periodically. These die-offs created gruesome scenes of hundreds of thousands of dead and dying waterfowl and shorebirds. For example, records show that 2 million birds died in a 1910 outbreak of the disease. While these disease cycles were natural, they had not been seen to this extent before. The public's reaction to these deadly epidemics brought about action.

In response to urging from many individuals and organizations, a Presidential Proclamation established the Refuge in 1928 as, "a suitable refuge, feeding and breeding grounds for migratory wild fowl." Later, the Refuge mission was expanded to include all migratory birds.

Did you know?

The Great Salt Lake boasts the largest fall staging concentration of Wilson's phalaropes at approximately 500,000 birds. Red-necked phalaropes number nearly 100,000.

Changes in the Great Salt Lake Affect the Refuge

The Great Salt Lake is a dynamic system. Because it is fed by snowmelt from the mountains in the spring and then depleted by evaporation in the arid climate the rest of the year, the lake level changes constantly. Since the late 1800s, the Great Salt Lake has reached flood levels twice and fallen to severely low levels twice.

In 1983, rising waters in the Great Salt Lake topped the Refuge dikes and contaminated wildlife habitats with salt water, destroying marsh vegetation. The dikes and other water control structures were ruined, as were Refuge buildings. The Refuge was rendered inoperable.

By 1989, the lake receded enough that the Refuge dikes could again be seen. Refuge staff, aided by scores of invaluable volunteers, began working to restore the Refuge. Today, marsh vegetation is growing once again, insect populations have returned with vigor, and birds come in phenomenal numbers.

Flood waters inundated Refuge buildings in 1983.



USFWS

Managing Habitat for Wildlife



© Roland Jordahl

Yellow warbler

Today, Bear River MBR contains just over 74,000 acres of marsh, open water, uplands, and alkali mudflats. The marshes and open water are managed using a complex system of dikes and water control structures to provide a variety of water depths suitable for the needs of different waterbird species.

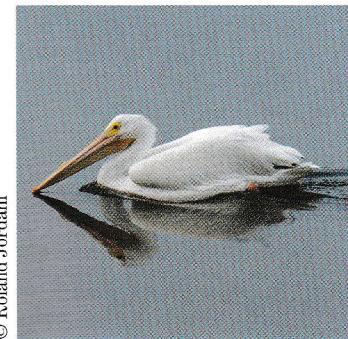
Wildlife Throughout the Year

Spring

Spring is a particularly enjoyable time to visit the Refuge. There is a continuous flow of a wide variety of birds in and out of the area. The birds display their bright and colorful breeding plumage, and the observant visitor can witness eons-old courtship rituals. Waterfowl begin to arrive in early March, and shorebirds peak during the third and fourth weeks of April.

Summer

Canada goose goslings, duck broods, and American avocet chicks make their debut as early as mid-May. Other young birds are most evident in June and July. In July and early August, visitors may be treated to the sight of young western and Clark's grebes riding atop their parents' backs, an especially memorable event to witness!



© Roland Jordahl

American white pelican

American white pelicans are common at the Refuge in the spring, summer, and fall. In the summer, adult pelicans make frequent flights between the Refuge and a nesting island in the Great Salt Lake. The fish in the Refuge marshes and in the Bear River provide an excellent source of food

that is absent from the Great Salt Lake because of its high salt levels.

By late summer, millions of shorebirds begin to make their way south, stopping to refuel at the Refuge marshes and mudflats which are full of aquatic insects and worms. The birds' aerial maneuvers, taking place over the marshes, are a spectacular sight.

Fall

Up to 500,000 ducks and geese concentrate on the Refuge marshes in the fall. Tundra swans begin to arrive in mid-October. In November, the swan flock may increase to as many as 40,000 birds.

Winter

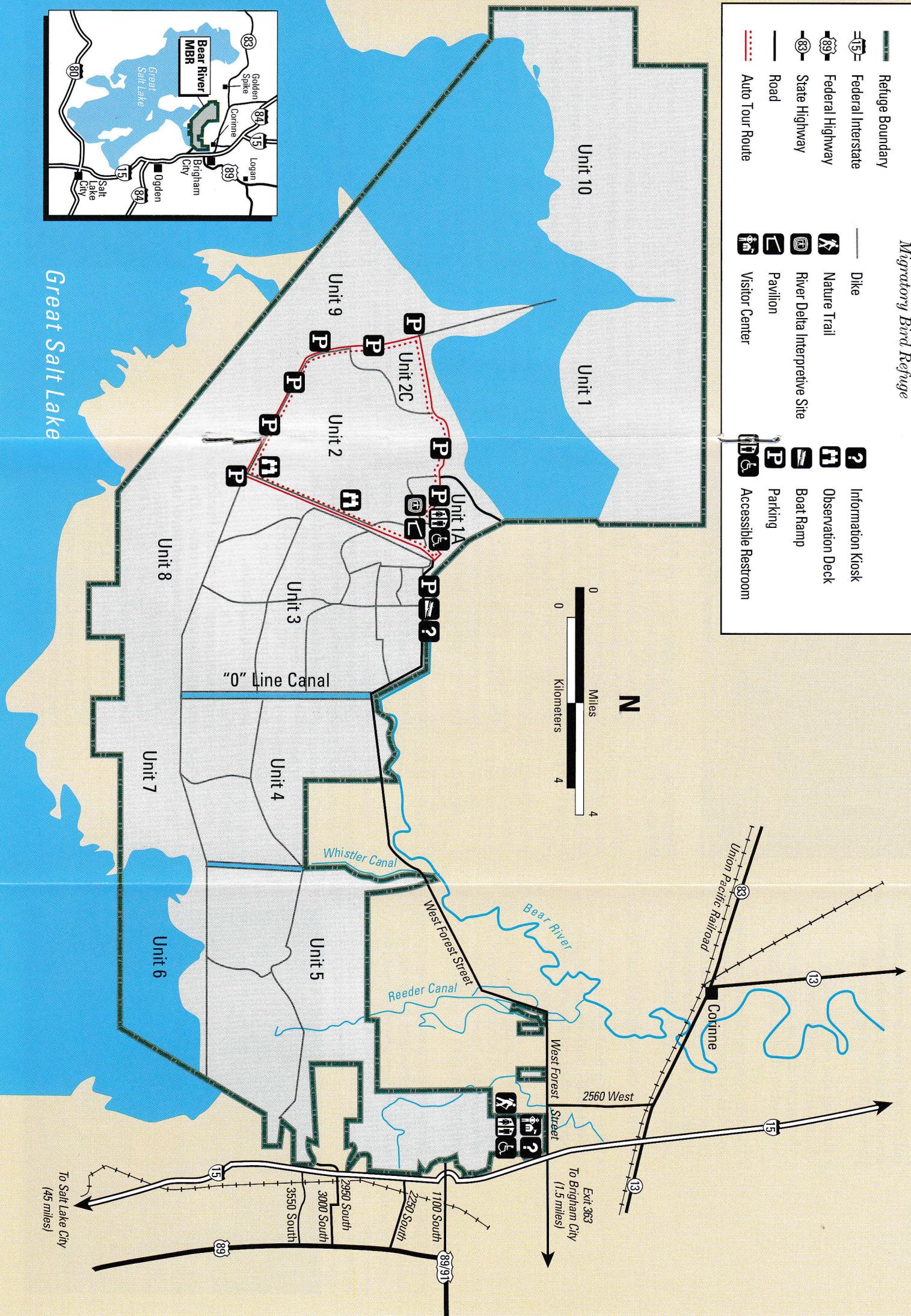
Although many birds leave the Refuge for warmer climates, some consider the Refuge a winter home. From November through March, northern harriers, rough-legged hawks, prairie falcons, and bald eagles can be found on the Refuge hunting the frozen land for their next meal.



Cinnamon teal

© Gary Crandall

Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge





Enjoying the Refuge

Above:
Adult white-faced ibis
feeding its chick.

During your visit to the Refuge, you can observe wildlife along the auto tour route, go fishing in the Bear River, visit the James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center, and more. The Wildlife Education Center hours are 8:00 am to 5:00 pm weekdays; 10:00 am to 4:00 pm Saturdays; and closed Sundays and Federal holidays.

The Refuge is open during daylight hours year-round, weather and road conditions permitting.

To reach the Refuge, take the Forest Street exit (Exit 363) from Interstate 15 at Brigham City, and turn west. The Wildlife Education Center is located one block west of the Interstate. To reach the main portion of the Refuge, including the River Delta Interpretive Site and auto tour route, continue driving west on Forest Street for approximately 12 miles.

Note that except for during hunting seasons, the auto tour route is the only area in the main portion of the Refuge that is open to the public. Also, there is a security gate at the River Delta Interpretive Site that closes in the evenings. If you are leaving in the evening and the gate is already closed, please approach the gate slowly and it will open, allowing you to exit.

Did you know?

Refuge breeding colonies of white-faced ibis contain as many as 18,000 birds.

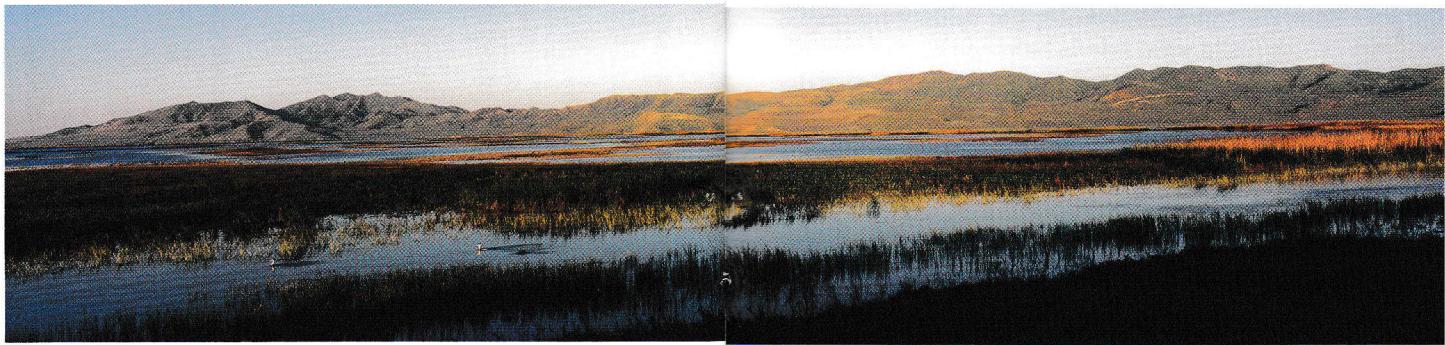
Protecting Wildlife

Bear River MBR is a special place for wildlife and people. By following Refuge regulations, you can help ensure a safe and enjoyable visit for yourself and other visitors. Be respectful of the wildlife which reside here. Carry out all trash.

Please take the time to review the following list of activities you can take part in while at the Refuge. Any activity not addressed below is not permitted. Read the information below and the hunting and fishing leaflet for more detailed information on permitted activities.

James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center

The James V. Hansen Wildlife Education Center offers interactive exhibits, a wetland diorama, and other displays featuring information on birds and wetlands of the Great Salt Lake ecosystem. The Center's observation deck has a unique parabolic hood that enhances the sounds of wildlife in the adjacent marsh. Just outside the Center, a $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile accessible walking trail meanders through the wetland habitat.



A view of the Refuge marshes from the auto tour route.

River Delta Interpretive Site

At the River Delta Interpretive Site, you will find a teaching pavilion and accessible restrooms. Just east of this site is an information kiosk where you can obtain maps and other information about the Refuge.

Wildlife Observation and Photography

The best way to observe the Refuge and its wildlife is to drive, hike, or bike the 12-mile auto tour route. Phenomenal numbers of birds can be observed and photographed from both West Forest Street and the auto tour route most of the year.

The auto tour route begins and ends at the River Delta Interpretive Site. Please stay on the main road, and do not venture onto side roads or dikes. If you wish to stop, park in designated parking areas, or pull over to the side of the road so that others may pass.

Environmental Education and Interpretation

A variety of programs and events are offered throughout the year. Groups are welcome, but please call the Refuge to make a reservation before your visit. Inquire at the information desk, ask Refuge staff, or check the Refuge web site to learn more about available programs.

Fishing

Fishing is allowed in accordance with Utah State regulations. Fishing is permitted at three general locations on the Refuge. Consult the Refuge hunting and fishing leaflet for more detailed information.

Hunting

Ducks, geese, coots, tundra swans, and pheasants may be hunted during designated State seasons only. Hunting of all other species is prohibited. Park only in designated areas. Please consult the Refuge hunting and fishing leaflet for more detailed information, as well as the Utah State Proclamations.

Boating and Canoeing

The Bear River channel is open to public boating upstream from the information kiosk only.

Bicycles

Hunters may use boats or canoes during designated State seasons only. Please refer to the Refuge hunting map and regulations for more specific information.

Pets

Bicycles are permitted on West Forest Street and the auto tour route only. Please stay off all other dikes and roads.

Pets must be on a leash at all times, except dogs used for hunting. Dogs used for hunting must be kept under control at all times.

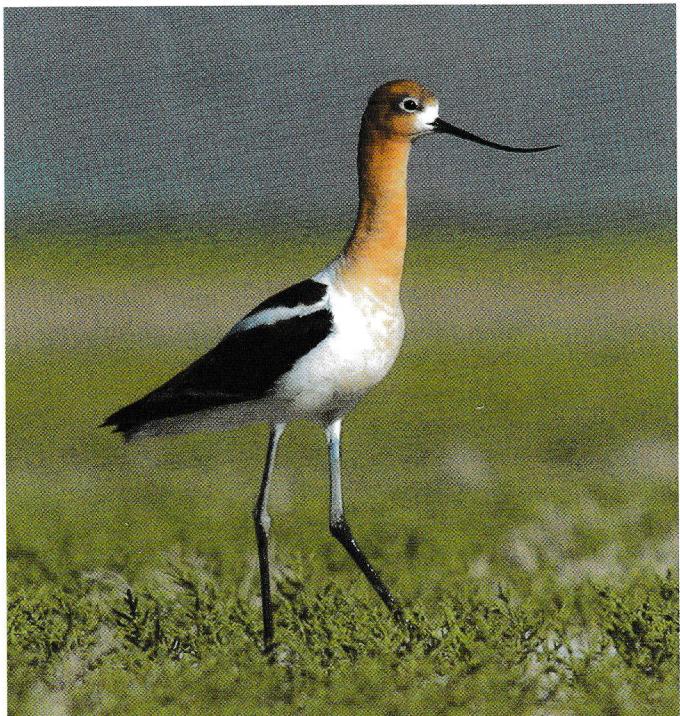
Our Volunteer Program

A talented corps of volunteers play a vital role in helping the Refuge fulfill its mission. They assist with a variety of projects, including staffing the information desk and bookstore, providing environmental education experiences, or taking visitors on guided Refuge tours. If you are interested in our volunteer program, please inquire at the information desk, or contact the Refuge staff by telephone or email.

Friends of the Bear River Refuge

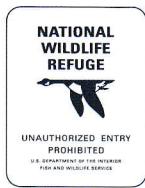
Our non-profit Friends group assists the Refuge with education, construction, and management projects. They also operate the Avocet Corner Bookstore, which offers visitors a wide selection of books, gifts, and souvenirs highlighting local flora, fauna, and culture.

American avocet



© Judd Patterson

Signs that Protect Visitors and Resources



Refuge signs grant or restrict certain activities for visitors while protecting wildlife and their habitats. Please respect the following signs.

This sign is posted at the Refuge boundary. On the Refuge, visitors may participate only in the activities specified in this brochure and permitted by Refuge regulations.

This sign is posted where hunting is permitted according to Refuge and State regulations. Consult the Refuge hunting and fishing leaflet for more information.

The area behind this sign is closed to all public entry.

No vehicles are permitted beyond this sign.

Accessibility Information

Equal opportunity to participate in and benefit from programs and activities of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is available to all individuals regardless of physical or mental ability. Dial 7-1-1 for a free connection to the State transfer relay service for TTY and voice calls to and from the speech and hearing impaired. For more information or to address accessibility needs, please contact the Refuge staff at 435 / 723 5887 or the U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Equal Opportunity, 1849 C Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20240.

Did you know?

Up to 10,000 American avocets breed at the Refuge annually.