

The Site Guide

Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, South Carolina

Location Charleston County in southeastern South Carolina

Description A crescent about twenty miles long and four to six miles wide. On the ocean side, within the arms of the crescent, the refuge is bounded by barrier islands, beaches, and the shallow mouth of Bulls Bay. Behind these are the spartina (salt marsh) marshes, winding saltwater creeks, shallow bays with numerous mudflats and sand bars exposed at low tide, and a few small islets high enough to support trees and other land plants. The inland border of the refuge runs along the Intercoastal Waterway. Of the three larger islands, Cape Island and Racoon Key support trees, mostly pines and willows. They are mostly old sand dunes with varying amounts of vegetation. Cape Island has a fairly large fresh water pond created artificially by diking. Bulls Island, on the other hand has in addition to the habitats described for the other islands, a luxuriant subtropical forest of pines, oaks, magnolias, palmettos and other tree species in lesser numbers. The wax myrtle (bayberry) is plentiful and is an important winter food source for many passerine birds. The several ponds on Bulls Island support a large number of waterfowl in winter and are important to summer birds.

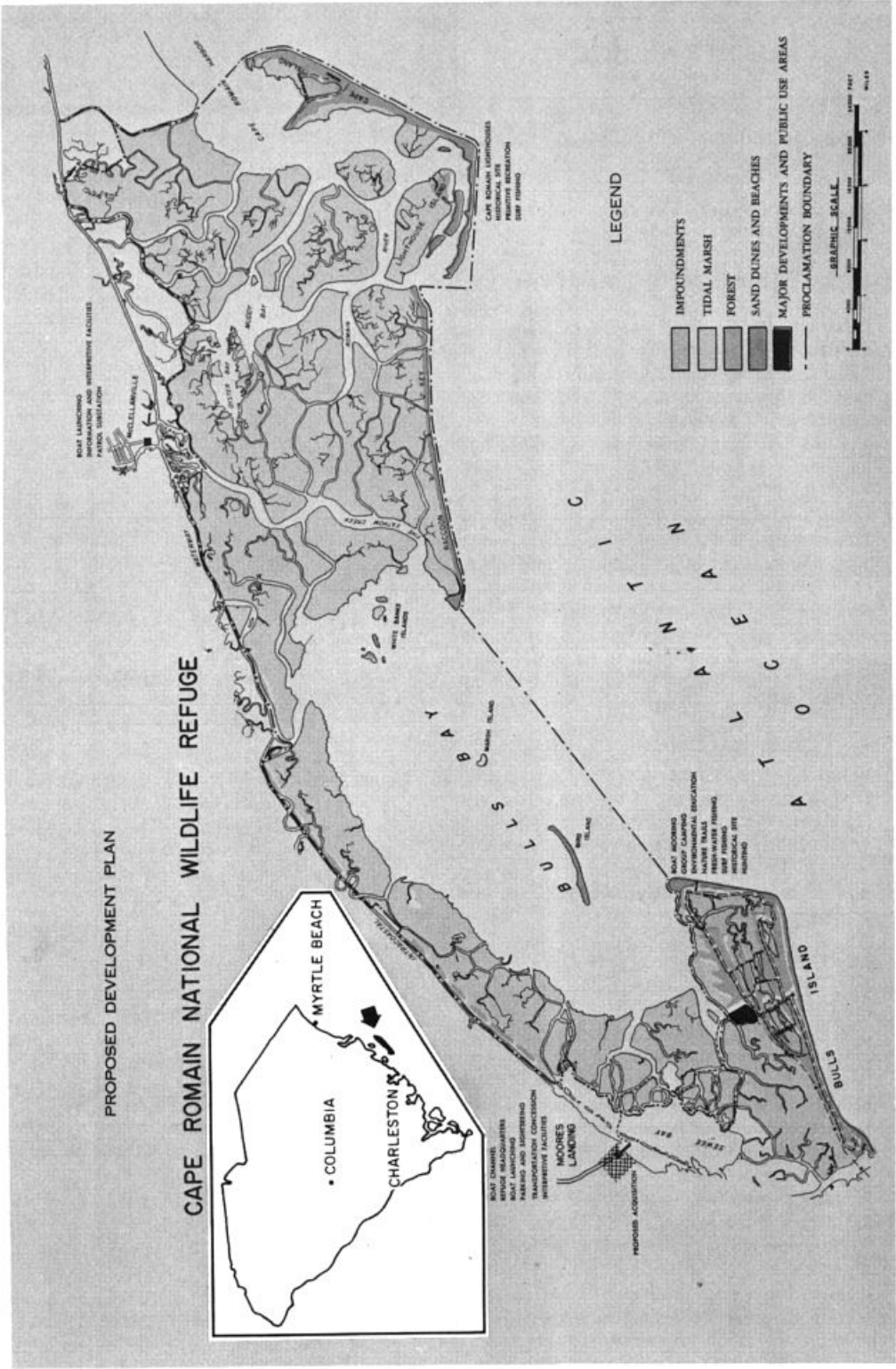
Access The nearest major airport is at Charleston. By car 25 miles from Charleston north on US 17. 35 miles south of Georgetown on US 17. Most of the refuge may be visited by using private boats which may be launched at McClellanville, Buck Hall Recreation Area (Forest Service maintained facilities about thirty miles north of Charleston on US 17), and at Refuge Headquarters. From Refuge Headquarters at Moore's Landing, about twenty miles NE of Charleston and 5 miles E on paved road (See Wee Road), one may take a boat to Bulls Island on a first come first served basis. The boat leaves Moore's Landing everyday (free until a concessionaire is found to take over) at 8:30 a.m. and departs from Bulls Island at

4:30 p.m. No transportation available on Bulls Island; the dirt roads in the woodlands and the beach must be covered by foot. Drinking water, restroom and picnic tables are available on the island, but no camping is permitted.

Birdwatching Obviously, because of the difficulty of finding transportation in this huge wetland refuge, the best birding area is Bulls Island, six miles long, a mile or two wide, with many habitats. While waiting for the boat at Moore's Landing, a good start on the day's birding can be made. Watch particularly for Painted Buntings. Swallow-tailed Kite may be seen here. From the dock one can see Brown Pelicans, various egrets,



herons, shorebirds, and terns. A number of rare birds have been recorded here, including the Gray Kingbird and (in the late 50s) a Bachman's Warbler. The boat trip itself gives an excellent chance to observe waterbirds; in winter scan the mudflats for the uncommon Long-billed Curlew and the Marbled Godwit. Horned Grebes, Buffleheads, Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers may be seen swimming in and flying over the salt creeks. One or two Peregrine Falcons are seen over the marshes in winter, as are Bald and Golden Eagles. In summer, American Oystercatchers, Willets, and Black Skimmers nest here. In salt marsh around the Bulls Island dock look for Long-billed Marsh Wren in summer, Seaside and Sharp-tailed Sparrows in winter. In the forest the breeding birds include Chuck-will's-widow, Pileated, Red-bellied and Red-cockaded Woodpeckers, Carolina Wren, Brown-headed Nuthatch, Parula and Yellow-throated Warblers, among many other species. On the freshwater ponds winter Whistling Swans, geese, and many other species of waterfowl. In winter, scan



the ocean for loons, grebes, Gannets, sea ducks and gulls, the dunes for Ipswich Sparrow. One should stay alert of rarities on Bulls Island. It is the last stop for birds wandering in from north and west, often frequented by birds normally wintering farther south. The huge nesting colonies in Bulls Bay and on Cape Island are not normally accessible to birdwatchers, but here breed thousands of pelicans, herons, egrets, Laughing Gulls and terns of several species.

Accommodations The usual accommodations may be found at Charleston and Mt. Pleasant. In the nearby Francis Marion National Forest are a number of campgrounds, perhaps the most convenient is the one at Buck Hall Recreation Area. Write for free bird check-

list (279 species) and map to Refuge Manager, Cape Romain National Wildlife Refuge, Rt. 1, Box 191, Awendaw, S.C. 29429

Rating Each season at Cape Romain is unique and would rate four stars in most birders' opinions. However, weather and insects make some seasons more enjoyable than others. January-February ★★, March-April ★★★★★, May-June ★★, July-August ★, September-October ★★, November-December ★★★★★.

—Jay Shuler, Box 228, McClellanville, S.C. 29458 and Burkett S. Neely, Jr., Cape Romain Nat'l Wildlife Refuge, Route 1, Box 191, Awendaw, SC 29429.



Photographs/ Burkett S. Neely, Jr.