

Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge



VISUAL TRAVEL TOURS

Maps Show You Where... We Show You Why!

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Tour Summary

Merritt Island Wildlife Refuge is one of the largest refuges in Florida. It's ironic that one of the most secure, futuristic government facilities is surrounded by the most pristine landscape in central Florida. Water - fresh, salt, and brackish estuary - and climate that ranges from temperate to subtropical create an unbelievable species diversity. There are over 500 kinds of animal life and 1,000 plant varieties, 15 of which are on the threatened or endangered list. This tour will guide you to the best birding spots and the most likely places to view wildlife in central Florida.

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Introduction





Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge (MINWR) is one of the largest refuges in Florida. It's ironic that one of the most secure, futuristic government facilities, NASA's Kennedy Space Center, is

surrounded by the most pristine landscape
in central Florida.



The mix of fresh, salt, and brackish waters with a climate that ranges from temperate to subtropical creates an unbelievable species diversity. There are over 500 kinds of animal life and 1,000 plant varieties, 15 of which are on the threatened or endangered list.



Being on the Atlantic flyway doesn't hurt the birding a bit. The beach area is the Canaveral National Seashore. We're going to tour both the beach and inland parts of the refuge.



Florida scrub jay, West Indian manatee...



...and gopher tortoise are just a few of the endangered or threatened species you will most likely see when we visit the trails and waterways.



Even one of the elusive bobcats could cross your path.



Don't forget to stop and enjoy the wildflowers.

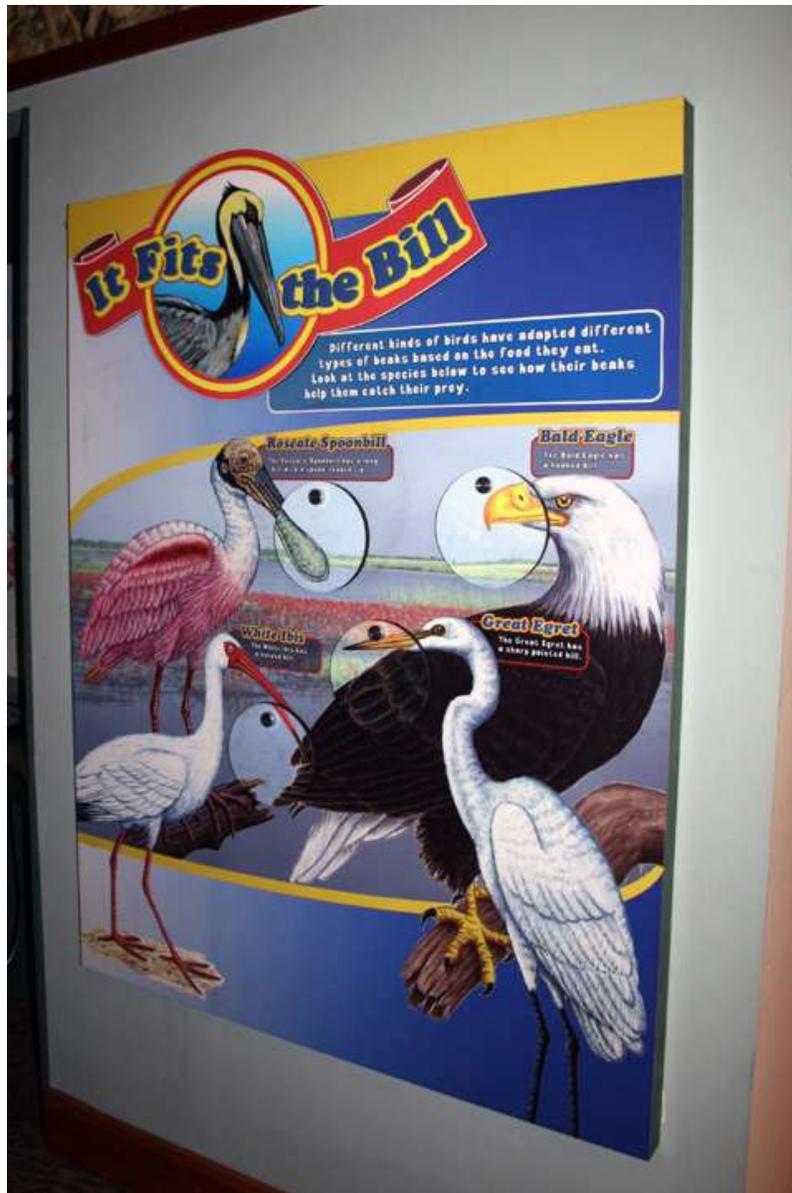


When it opened in 1963, MINWR faced challenges. It needed to protect the delicate natural balance while creating a place for outdoor recreation. It also had to consider the security of the Kennedy Space Center (KSC), so the refuge is closed for three days before a launch.



The relationship between the wildlife refuge and KSC is sometimes strange. For example, there is a 24-hour birdwatcher at the space center. It's not for nature study. Their job is to keep birds off the launch pad.

In 1995, a woodpecker delayed Discovery's launch by pecking holes in an external tank's foam insulation. Today, NASA takes no chances.



It is also important to protect the history of Merritt Island.

Educating recreational users about the environment is crucial.



Trails for hiking and wildlife watching are a big part of the refuge.



Recreational watercraft range from canoes and kayaks to larger boats.



Fishing is a big activity here; just be sure to get a permit online or at the kiosk at the entrance to the refuge.

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