



Eagle-Watching in Pennsylvania

Erie National Wildlife Refuge, Crawford County



Steve Hillebrand/USFW Photo

An Erie National Wildlife Refuge Snapshot

Facilities: Visitor Contact Station, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

Driving Directions: From the south, take Interstate 79 north to Exit 141. Follow 285 East to Rt. 173 North, toward Cochranton. Continue north on Rt. 173 for eight miles. Turn right onto State Rt. 27 East/Guys Mills Rd. Follow this road one mile and turn left onto State Rt. 198 west. In 2.7 miles, turn left to stay on 198 West. Follow one mile and make a left at Wood Duck Lane.

From the north, take Interstate 79 south to Exit 154. Follow 198 East three miles to Saegertown. Turn right on Main Street, staying on 198 East. In 0.7-mile, turn left to stay on 198 East. Continue on 198 East for about 13 miles to Guys Mills. Make a left at Guys Mills, staying on 198 East and proceed 0.75-mile to Wood Duck Lane on the right.

American Woodcock



Jake Dingel/PGC Photo

Viewing Directions: Eagle nests at the Erie National Wildlife Refuge are not viewable, but eagles are spotted regularly on the refuge. The best opportunities are from the fishing pier on Pool K and the Deer Run Trail Observation Deck. Both sites are within the Sugar Lake Division.

Property Hours: Outdoor facilities are open daily from one half hour before sunrise until sunset.

Best Eagle Viewing Season: Late winter through summer.



USFWS Photo

Activities at the site: Hiking, birding, hunting, fishing, cross-country skiing

Other Wildlife: Waterfowl, songbirds, birds of prey, semi-aquatic mammals, a wide variety of plant and animal species of concern.



Wood Duck

Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

Where to go, what to look for

Three pairs of bald eagles nest at Erie National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge includes two separate land tracts about 10 miles apart. One nest is on the Seneca Division, a 3,594-acre tract of mostly forested valley with streams, creeks, wetlands and upland forest. Two other active nests are on the Sugar Lake Division, which consists of 5,206 acres in the Woodcock Creek Drainage. The nests are not watchable at either site, but with six adult eagles inhabiting the refuge, the chance of spotting an eagle is probable.

Bald eagles are consistently spotted on both divisions of the refuge. However, the Sugar Lake Division near Guys

Mills is a bit more favorable for eagles. The Sugar Lake Division has many impoundments including the 130-acre lake called Pool 9, located on Allen Road. Use the Deer Run Trail Observation Deck — a fully-accessible, roofed shelter with benches for watching wildlife — at Pool 9. Bald eagles frequent Pool K as well. The fishing pier on Pool K provides a good opportunity to observe eagles fishing overhead or roosting on a tree at the edge of the water. Eagle viewing at the refuge is best from January through August. By midsummer, young eagles have fledged the nest, but remain in the vicinity as they learn to forage on their own. The large, immature birds can be seen soaring or perching over the impoundments and marshes. After fledg-



Green Heron

Joe Kosack/PGC Photo

ing, the adults and young frequently call to one another. This harsh, gull-like cackle is distinct and often reveals a roosting or perching site.

About 2,500 acres of the refuge consists of a mix of wet habitats such as marshes, beaver floodings, swamps, soggy meadows, riparian corridors and man-made ponds. The refuge also holds mixed hardwood forest, grassland, shrubby areas, cropland, and mature stands of eastern hemlock. The mix of habitat

harbors a wide assortment of plant and animal species. Because of its diverse wetlands, the refuge is designated an [Important Bird Area](#) by the Audubon Society.



Throughout the seasons, 237 bird species may utilize Erie National Wildlife Refuge and of those, 112 species breed and nest here. Other wildlife includes 47 species of mammals, 37 reptiles and amphibians, 22 varieties of freshwater mussels and a mosaic of wildflowers from the early spring ephemerals to the late summer wildflowers that wither away in October. More than 100 wildflower species bloom on the refuge. Many wildflowers bloom along Tsuga Trail, Deer Run Trail and Beaver Run Trail on the Sugar Lake Division. Trolley Line Trail and Muddy Creek Trail on the Seneca Division are especially productive from April through July.

The Tsuga Nature Trail, a 1.6-mile flat loop, passes through a beaver pond by way of a boardwalk. The backed waters of the beaver pond created a marsh with standing dead trees. These snags are beneficial to a variety of birds. Eagles, hawks, osprey, green herons, great blue herons and belted kingfisher use the snags for hunting and perching.



Flickers, woodpeckers and chickadees excavate cavities in the dead wood to use for nests, while tree swallows, screech owls and wood ducks utilize existing holes created by woodpeckers and natural hollows formed by weather and decay. Wood ducks use these natural cavities and nest boxes installed throughout the refuge.

The wood duck is the most common waterfowl species to nest on the refuge. The refuge has one of the highest densities of wood ducks in the state. Other nesters include mallards, blue-winged teal, hooded mergansers and Canada geese. American coots and pied-billed grebes also nest here in the emergent vegetation at the edges of the marshes.

Reitz Pond, also on the Sugar Lake Division, has



an observation blind for watching and photographing wildlife. The blind is a good spot to see many ducks. Waterfowl migrations on the refuge peak in March to early April in spring and September to November in the fall. These seasonal gatherings may bring 4,500 Canada geese and 2,500 ducks, including northern pintails, green-winged teals, American wigeon, greater and lesser scaup, common goldeneye, ring-necked ducks and black ducks.

Many birds are seen or heard in the marshy areas and their shrubby edges. Some include American and least bitterns, sora, common snipe, marsh wren, sedge wren, mourning warbler and blue-winged warbler. The occasional sandhill crane and great egret stop to forage the marsh edges during migration.

For additional information, contact:

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Erie National Wildlife Refuge, 11296 Wood Duck Lane, Guys Mills, PA 16327. Telephone: 814-789-3585

By Kathy Korber and Doug Gross

Pennsylvania Game Commission

Connecting you with wildlife!

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