

# Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge



*Located near Syracuse in Central New York — Size: 9,153 acres  
A premier watchable wildlife site*



Bill Banaszewski

## Where to Watch Wildlife in New York State

*Editor's Note:* With its amazing natural beauty and rich diversity, New York has many places to watch wildlife. To celebrate this, DEC will soon be publishing an updated and expanded guide to New York's "Watchable Wildlife" sites. The following is the first in a series of excerpts from the guide, highlighting the intriguing creatures and fascinating places waiting to be seen and explored.

This birder's paradise of mudflats, marshes, open-water wetlands, flooded and upland forests, shrubland and grassland is one of the busiest stops for migrating birds (particularly waterfowl) on the Atlantic Flyway. An estimated 1 million birds representing more than 240 species pass through Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge each year.

In addition to birds, 43 species of mammals, and more than 20 species of

reptiles and amphibians call this place home. Visitors can explore Montezuma by car or on foot. Water is the refuge's dominant feature, and wetlands make up about 85 percent of its acreage. Two large diked marshes and several small ones are included within its borders. It is also rimmed by the New York State Barge Canal, the Cayuga-Seneca Barge Canal and Cayuga Lake.



Wayne Jones

## Wildlife to Watch

Many visitors are fortunate to see bald eagles. Bald eagle restoration in New York State began at Montezuma in 1976, resulting in one of the state's most successful wildlife restoration efforts. Today, as many as five bald eagle nests and up to 60 eagles have been observed, many overwintering.

Ospreys (a species of special concern), red-tailed hawks, American kestrels,



northern harriers (a threatened species), eastern screech-owls and great horned owls breed on the refuge, while peregrine falcons and short-eared owls (both endangered species), rough-legged hawks, turkey vultures, and Cooper's and sharp-shinned hawks are seasonal visitors.

Waterfowl flocks in spring and fall reach epic proportions. In early spring, the number of Canada geese routinely exceeds 100,000. During peak migration, one can stand and see geese aloft in any direction; their collective honking is a veritable cacophony. In late fall, mallard numbers have approached 100,000 birds. More than 150,000 snow geese visit the area during spring migration.

Shallow pools attract an abundance of great blue herons, green herons, great egrets, black-crowned night herons, Virginia rails, soras, American and least bitterns, common moorhens, pied-billed grebes, American coots, and American bitterns.

Killdeer, spotted sandpiper, American woodcock, and common snipe are shorebird species that typically breed on the refuge, although virtually every species of shorebird that migrates through central New York has been seen here. And black terns (an endangered species) have recently returned to nest in Montezuma's wetlands.

White-tailed deer, cottontail rabbits, several kinds of bats, Virginia opossum, eastern chipmunk, woodchuck, eastern gray squirrel, red squirrel, beaver, muskrat, red and gray fox, and coyote are among the many kinds of mammals you may see. Snapping turtles are commonly seen in the warm months, as are several species of frogs. In spring, big carp often congregate along the shallow edges of the canals.

With so much to see, why not visit one of New York's premier watchable wildlife sites like Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge? You won't be disappointed. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55687.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55687.html).



## Site Features

Visitors can find parking, a visitors center, restrooms, hiking, bird-watching, photographic opportunities, special waterfowl and white-tailed deer hunting seasons. Fishing is prohibited in the refuge's pools, but the refuge maintains an accessible fishing pier at May's Point, off NY-89N, as well as a boat landing/seasonal dock along the NYS Barge Canal, just north of the US Route 20 bridge, east of the refuge entrance road.

**Trails:** A self-guided wildlife drive takes you about 3.5 miles from the visitors center into the refuge. Five walking trails run for 5.5 miles through all of Montezuma's many wildlife habitats. Observation towers and decks offer great views and wildlife photography opportunities.

**Accessibility:** Accessible features include the visitors center, fishing pier, observation decks and trails.

**Site Notes:** Owned by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, the refuge is open during daylight hours seven days a week. Please call ahead (315-568-5987) to check visitor center hours or if you intend to take the wildlife driving tour.

**Directions:** Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge is located off US Route 20 near Seneca Falls. Visitors can access the refuge via Exit 40 of the NYS Thruway/I-90 coming from the east, and from exit 41 of the NYS Thruway/I-90 coming from the west.

**Contact Information:** Call: 315-568-5987; or write to: Montezuma NWR, 3395 US Route 20 East, Seneca Falls, NY 13148; or visit: [www.fws.gov/refuge/Montezuma](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Montezuma)

**Nearby:** Montezuma Audubon Center and DEC's Northern Montezuma Wildlife Management Area. See: <http://ny.audubon.org> and [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov).

