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# A Field Guide to the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve

and other Coastal Reserve sites  
managed by the North Carolina Division  
of Coastal Management as the Coastal Reserve

Edited by the NCNERR Staff, 2000

Illustrations by Debbie Pagliughi

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Copies of this publication are available from the Reserve Manager or the Education office of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### Introduction

#### 1. North Carolina Coast

|         |    |
|---------|----|
| Ecology | 12 |
| Geology | 16 |
| Climate | 19 |

#### 2. Sites of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve and other NC Coastal Reserve sites

##### Currituck Banks:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 24 |
|--|----|

##### Kitty Hawk Woods:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 31 |
|--|----|

##### Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Coastal Reserve:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the site | 36 |
|--|----|

##### Buxton Woods:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 41 |
|--|----|

##### Rachel Carson:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 46 |
|--|----|

##### Masonboro Island:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 53 |
|--|----|

##### Zeke's Island:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 60 |
|--|----|

##### Bald Head Woods:

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site | 67 |
|--|----|

## Permuda Island

Map, Setting, History, Ecology, Getting to the Site, Visiting the Site 72

**3. Habitats**

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Ocean Beaches         | 78  |
| Subtidal Zone         | 78  |
| Intertidal Zone       | 79  |
| Supratidal Zone       | 79  |
| Sand Dunes            | 81  |
| Grasslands            | 83  |
| Shrub Thicket         | 84  |
| Maritime Forest       | 86  |
| Coastal Marshes       | 89  |
| Low Salt Marsh.       | 89  |
| High Salt Marsh       | 93  |
| Brackish Marsh        | 94  |
| Tidal Flats           | 97  |
| Subtidal Soft Bottoms | 100 |
| Dredge Spoil Areas    | 104 |
| Hard Surfaces.        | 106 |

#### 4. Flora and fauna

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Birds                   | 112 |
| Fish                    | 122 |
| Vertebrates             | 128 |
| Invertebrates           | 133 |
| Vegetation              | 143 |
| Aquatic Vegetation      | 151 |
| Glossary                | 154 |
| Guidelines for Visitors | 157 |

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## INTRODUCTION

*And as I hunkered down in the grass, listening to the whine of insects and the far-away detonations of the surf, I was beginning to understand what a special place the salt marsh was, stretched as it was between land and sea, not quite either one and yet partaking of both.*

Lawrence S. Earley  
“Miracle in the Marsh”

Discovering that “special place” where the land and sea meet is what this field guide is all about. Where the waters of the ocean and inland rivers meet and mix, forming estuaries, there is a community of life unlike any other. It may not be immediately apparent, though. Unlike enjoying a day at the beach, getting to know the worlds within salt marshes, shallow waters, tidal flats, maritime forests and grasslands takes time.

However, patient observation is rewarded: Egrets and herons wander gracefully among the tall marsh grasses, translucent shrimp scull through the shallow water and thousands of fiddler crabs troop across sandy flats.

This guide, then, is a tool to use in exploring these less well known areas of the coast which are found within the North Carolina Estuarine Research Reserve and other North Carolina Coastal Reserve sites. The guide describes the habitats – the different “homes” of the natural environment – and the typical plants and animals that live in those habitats. How human and natural histories have intertwined at each of the sites is also described, for there are few places in North Carolina where the natural characteristics of the land have influenced how people have lived as distinctly as in the coastal area.

*Continued*

The first chapter describes the overall characteristics of North Carolina's coastal area and estuaries in general. The primary habitats within the reserve sites, and illustrations of the plants and animals commonly found on those habitats, are described in Chapter Two. Chapter Three explains the history and ecology of the site, how to get there and which areas to use. As part of the description of each site's ecology, a list of the habitats found there is included, which can then be cross-referenced with the detailed habitat descriptions in the previous chapter. Included are descriptions of plants and animals found in the Maritime forest sites managed by the Division of Coastal Management.

Finally, there are guidelines for using the sites and references for additional information. Many plants and animals have more than one common name, so to avoid confusion about which organism is being described, both common and scientific names are used.