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VIRGINIA BIRDING FESTIVAL OFFERS SOMETHING TO CROW ABOUT

Have fun with the entire family at the annual Birding Festival on May 7-9

CHESAPEAKE, Va., May 4, 2009 – The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Chesapeake, Va., is hosting its third annual Birding Festival on May 7 - 9, 2009. The celebration takes place over International Migratory Bird Day (May 9) and is strategically held during the height of spring Neotropical songbird migration so spectators can enjoy greatest diversity of species on the fly.

Why are so many birds and birders flocking to the region? The Refuge is comprised of 111,000 acres of continuous forest land, creating an ideal habitat for birds and beautiful surroundings for viewing. "Serious birders want to see species in their natural habitat," says Delores Freeman, visitor services professional with the Refuge, and a local birding expert. "They seek areas with vast stretches of unbroken woods." More than 200 species of birds have been identified on the refuge since its establishment in 1973, many of which have been reported as nesting on or near the refuge.

Bird lovers will delight in catching a glimpse of the Swainson's warbler and the Wayne's warbler (a race of the Black-throated Green warbler), two of the most secretive and least observed of all North American birds. Lucky visitors will likely catch a bird's eye view of the white-throated Sparrow, the graceful Great Egret and even the regal Bald Eagle. Other unique birds of interest are the wood duck, barred owl, pileated woodpecker and prothonotary warbler.

The Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is open every day, year round and is perfect for hiking, biking, canoeing and kayaking. The Refuge is home to the largest natural lake in Virginia, Lake Drummond. Walk or bike along the 8.5 mile Dismal Swamp Canal Trail after a day of bird watching, and see an array of other wildlife, including turtles, lizards, mink and wild turkeys.

The annual Great Dismal Swamp Birding Festival is free and open to the public and offers exciting activities for the entire family, such as guided bird walks, owl prowls, bus tours and photography workshops. Bird walks and bus tours require reservations. On Saturday, May 9, exhibitors and family activities including nature crafts, bluebird house building and face painting, will be held under a tent at Washington Ditch. Remember, the early bird catches the worm! Reservations can be made by calling the Refuge Headquarters at (757) 986-3705. For more information about the festival, visit www.fws.gov/northeast/greatdismalswamp.

About Chesapeake, Va., Conventions & Tourism

Based in southeast Virginia, the city of Chesapeake boasts more than 4,000 available hotel rooms and some of the strongest attractions, accommodations and meeting spaces in the area. Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism (CCT) strives to promote, market and sell the city as a destination for meetings, conventions and individual travelers, fostering economic development and benefiting and supporting members and the overall business community.

Because of its location and highway network, Chesapeake provides easy access to several other cities in the Tidewater region including Virginia Beach, Norfolk and Williamsburg, all of which are less than an hour away. The City of Chesapeake is home to several stops along the Civil War Trail and its Great Dismal Swamp is nationally recognized as a stop on the historical Underground Railroad. In addition to rich history, Chesapeake is home to the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and hosts a thriving outdoor community with thousands of unspoiled acres for kayaking, birding and fishing.

Chesapeake is a part of the statewide Virginia Green program which aims to reduce the environmental impact of the tourism industry. Chesapeake is also rated by the FBI as one of the top five safest cities of its size in the U.S., and *Money* magazine proclaimed it as one of the six best places in America to live. For more information on Chesapeake Conventions & Tourism, visit www.visitchesapeake.com

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