

National Key Deer *Refuge*



photo: USFWS



photo: Jerry Victor and Lauren Gilbert



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Refuge Facts

- Established: 1957.
- Acres: 84,351 owned, 2,278 of which are designated Wilderness.
- Located in: Monroe County, FL.
- Location: The refuge is located 100 miles southwest of Miami and 30 miles northeast of Key West, FL along U.S.#1. Headquarters is on Big Pine Key in the Big Pine Key Plaza off Key Deer Boulevard.
- Other management: 700 acres through the State CARL program, 200 acres owned by the Monroe County Land Authority.
- About a third of the uplands portion of NKDR is on Big Pine and No Name Keys.
- Satellite refuges administered as part of the complex include: Crocodile Lake NWR, Great White Heron NWR and Key West NWR.

Natural History

- Refuge covers the truncated historical range of the endangered Key deer, including habitat critical to its survival.
- Refuge is home to the imperiled tropical hardwood hammock habitat and 22 federally listed endangered and threatened species of plants and animals, five of which are found nowhere else in the world.
- Upland forests 2,400 acres; shrub wetland 5,100 acres; wetland marsh 1,050 acres.
- Key deer population may have reached a low of 27 in 1957 and have rebounded to approximately 800 today.

Financial Impact of Refuge

- 13-person staff.
- More than 90,000 visitors annually.

Refuge Objectives

- Protect and preserve Key deer and other wildlife resources in the Florida Keys.
- Conserve endangered and threatened fish, wildlife and plants.
- Provide habitat and protection for migratory birds.
- Provide opportunities for environmental education and public viewing of refuge wildlife and habitats.

Management Tools

- Deer management as an endangered species, including medical and rehabilitation, habitat restoration and enhancement, routine herd health monitoring and population checks, and research on population density, behavior and migration patterns.
- Prescribed fire.
- Routine wildlife monitoring.
- Habitat restoration.
- Mechanical and chemical control of invasive exotic plants.
- Education/interpretation.
- Law enforcement.
- Partnerships, both locally and nationally.
- Volunteer assistance with projects and programs.
- Friends group-Friends and Volunteers of Refuges (FAVOR).

Public Use Opportunities

- Trails.
- Wildlife observation.
- Photography.
- Environmental education.

Calendar of Events

April: Volunteer Recognition Ceremony, National Wildlife Week, Earth Day.

April-May: Key deer fawning season.

May: Migratory Bird Day.

August: refuge birthday.

October: National Wildlife Refuge Week, Florida Keys Birding and Wildlife Festival.

Questions and Answers

Where can I see the deer?

The Key deer are a wild species, and are not confined to Refuge lands. They are visible throughout Big Pine and No Name Keys, and are scattered on surrounding islands. They are most active at dusk and dawn and remain in the confines of the cool pine rocklands during the heat of the day. Unfortunately, due to illegal feeding, Key deer can be found foraging on the sides of most roads and eagerly approach slow moving vehicles for hand-outs. Roadside feeding kills Key deer as it draws them to hazardous roadways, and concentrates populations facilitating the spread of parasites and disease.

How many deer are there?

The last scientific study of the Key deer, part of a 3-year study, was completed in 2000 at which time the entire population of the Key deer is estimated to be between 700 and 800. The population on Big Pine Key and No Name Key is estimated to be 600 with another 100 to 200 on other Lower Keys and Backcountry islands.

How big are the Key deer?

The Key deer are the smallest of the 28 subspecies of Virginia white-tailed deer. Bucks range from 28-32" at the shoulder and weigh an average of 80 lbs. Does stand 24-28" at the shoulder and weigh an average of 65 lbs.

Why are the Key deer endangered?

Low population numbers, development pressures, habitat loss, and threats from hurricanes have all

been important in the listing of this species as endangered. Currently, illegal roadside feeding contributes to road kills which account for 70 percent of the annual mortality.

What is the range of the Key deer?

In 1922, Barber and Allen reported the range of the deer to be Duck Key to Key West (60 linear miles). They are now isolated to a 6-mile area with most of the population on Big Pine Key.

Where are the Blue Hole and the Nature Trails?

Central on Big Pine Key is an old quarry, filled with freshwater, and home to a diverse array of wildlife—the Blue Hole. The Blue Hole has visitor facilities including an interpretive kiosk, staffed by volunteers, and an observation platform. It is a popular look-out spot for visitors to Big Pine Key. Just north of the Blue Hole are two interpretive nature trails: one penetrating the tropical hardwood hammock, the other a wheelchair accessible journey through pine rocklands to a freshwater wetland slough.