Every time I fly over the state of Maryland, I am fascinated by all the waterways snaking across the landscape. Maryland’s Eastern Shore is deeply scalloped with bays and inlets, rivers and coves. No highway follows the water’s edge down the coast. To explore a fishing village on the tip of a small peninsula, you must drive all the way out to that point. My maps of the Chesapeake Bay show many small coastal islands, each at the end of a long, narrow road. My plan for this newsletter was to drive every one of these roads to discover and explore what lay at the end. I would photograph everything interesting I saw. Looking closer, my map of the Eastern Shore revealed a wealth of wildlife refuges, some of my favorite places for photography.
I traveled the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay, so I started my explorations from the northern end. I left Interstate 95 at Exit 100, just south of the Pennsylvania border, and drove south ten miles to Elk Neck State Park. This 2,100-acre park is located on the tip of a peninsula formed by the Chesapeake Bay and the Elk River.

Elk Neck State Park
After entering the state park, the road passes through a small residential community then ends at a gravel parking area. I parked at the end of the road and headed south along the easy two-mile trail out to the tip of Turkey Point. The trail follows the edge of vertical, hundred-foot cliffs above Chesapeake Bay.

The wide trail winds through woods and across open meadows where I spotted and photographed several wild turkeys. Rabbits darted across the trail much faster than I could follow with a camera. I turned left at the fork a half-mile south of the parking area. After passing through a wooded area, I reached the Turkey Point Light House at the end of the peninsula. The 35-foot light tower was built here in 1833 atop hundred-foot cliffs at the junction of the Elk River and the Chesapeake Bay.

I recommend, if you make this hike, arrive as early in the morning as possible. This would be a wonderful spot to watch the sun rising over the Chesapeake Bay.

Turkey Point is an excellent place to photograph soaring hawks, golden eagles, falcons and egrets. You’ll see ospreys migrating south in mid-September, members of the hawk family migrating in late October, and golden and bald eagles heading south in early November.

Leaving the lighthouse, I walked around the tower, headed west along the cliffs, then followed the trail back into the woods and to the fork where I headed left and returned to the parking area.

I was ready for lunch, so I headed back up the peninsula to a place called North East, a small town that has a lot of character. After a great lunch, I returned to Elk Neck and hiked the one-mile Green Trail from the visitor center to the Bohemia Campground. The trail winds through a deep hardwood forest and passes a freshwater pond. The dogwoods were just beginning to bloom. It was getting dark so I headed back on the road.

Leaving Elk Neck State Park, I drove fourteen miles north to the town of Elkton where I stayed the night. There are no bridges or ferries across the Elk River. In the morning, I headed south on Route 213, crossed the Bohemia and the Sassafras Rivers and jogged to the right at the town of Galena. I stayed on Route 213 all the way to the old city of Chesterton, well known for its shipbuilding industry.

From High Street, the main street of Chesterton, I drove one block south to Cannon Street and headed east to the river. The narrow streets of Chesterton are lined with beautifully-restored homes dating back to colonial times. The old shipyards are now a modern marina, with several historic vessels on display at the docks. A beautiful reproduction of the schooner, Sultana, dating back to 1767, was tied to the end of the pier.

From Chesterton, I drove ten miles west on Route 20, stopping in the small town of Rock Hall for lunch.

From Rock Hall, it’s five miles south to a bridge over the Eastern Neck Narrows between Eastern Neck Island and the Eastern Neck Peninsula.

Eastern Neck National Wildlife Refuge
Located at the mouth of the Chester River in Kent County, Maryland, Eastern Neck
The main paved road, Route 445 on Eastern Neck Island, ends just beyond the site of one of the first homes in the New World. Major Joseph Wykes built Wickliffe here in 1650. To the south, I could see Kent Island and the Chesapeake Bay Bridge, only a few miles away. It took me over an hour to drive there, the long way around, going back through Chesterton, then south through Centreville before reaching Grasonville, where I spent the night.

Kent Island
Horsehead Wetlands Center
South of the Eastern Neck Refuge, three miles across the mouth of the Chester River, lies Kent Island. This is one of the narrowest spots in the Chesapeake Bay and this is where the four-mile-long Chesapeake Bay Bridge was built. Kent Island is the largest island in Chesapeake Bay. Much of Kent Island is dotted with marinas and is covered with farmlands and residential communities. The best reason to visit Kent Island is the five-hundred acre wildlife sanctuary known as the Horsehead Wetlands Center. Operated by the Wildfowl Trust of North America, a private, non-profit conservation organization, this sanctuary educates visitors on the value of wetlands as well as the birds.

The sanctuary is on the east side of Prospect Bay, on the east side of Kent Island. To reach the sanctuary, leave Highway 50 at Exit 43B just west of Grasonville, drive east on Route 18 a few blocks, and turn right on Perry’s Corner Road. Go a half-mile south to the Horsehead Wetlands Center entrance on the right.

Drive out through the woods and follow the road across the marshy grasslands to the parking area. Check in at the visitor center to pick up a trail map and pay the entry fee. In the visitor center, a large window faces a pond that is usually filled with a variety of waterfowl. Check out all the educational displays in the center or just pay the fee, pick up a map, go outside, and start shooting.
I returned to the far end of the parking lot and found the marked trail leading to several observation towers. The first tower overlooks Marshy Creek. From the top, I photographed herons and egrets wading through the reeds along the shore. The trail continues northward, circling a large pond. There are two enclosed blinds, one on each end of this pond—labeled “Lake Knapp” on their map. The blinds have stools installed below small openings facing the pond. From the blind on the west side of the pond—named the White Blind for its donor, a Mrs. J.C. White—I photographed ducks landing on the pond and frightening the herons each time they splashed down. I photographed a bald eagle and several ospreys circling the pond. The late afternoon sun was behind me and illuminating the scene with fairly flat light. On the trail map, the other blind across the pond was called the “East Blind.” A good choice for morning photography on Lake Knapp.

At the visitor center is a series of small ponds, filled with Chesapeake Bay birds and resting migratory birds on their way to the Arctic. Visitors can walk around the low fences and photograph a great variety of birds. There are large cages where injured and rehabilitating raptors are kept. I photographed a bald eagle, a Cooper’s hawk, and several owls through the wire screen. Visitors can walk through a very large, enclosed aviary, covered with a huge net. This is the home of a great variety of colorful ducks.

This is a great place to find wildflowers in the spring and migrating monarch butterflies heading south to Mexico in the autumn. Several wild turkeys wander the trails, accustomed to the visitors.

Terrapin Beach State Park
The caretaker at Horsehead Wetlands Center told me about another, much smaller wildlife area on Kent Island, called Terrapin Beach State Park. On the edge of Chesapeake Bay, I found a one-mile trail, a small pond, and two observation towers for bird watchers and photographers. A boardwalk leads out to the edge of the bay. Heading east or west on US Highway 50, take Exit 37 at the east end of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge and head north on Route 18. Take the first left into the Chesapeake Bay Business Park, drive straight through the first intersection, head left at the second, and drive to the entrance sign. When you start down the trail, bear left onto the narrower trail toward the pond.

Wye Island
There are some worthwhile trails to explore on Wye Island, just east of Kent Island. Most of this eight-mile-long island is managed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Forest and Park Service. On the island, a thirty-acre forest, called School House Woods, is dense with ancient hardwoods that were here when our nation was formed. These mature oaks, hickories, and black gums are a rare sight on the Eastern Shore. The rest of the island is mostly planted with corn and soybean fields, making great cover for wildlife.

Four miles east of Grasonville on Highway 50, turn south onto Carmichael Road and drive south five miles where you’ll cross the low bridge over the Wye River. When you reach the end of the paved road, keep going. All the trailheads are located farther south, along the gravel road. There are six miles of trails open to the public on Wye Island. Drive to the far end of the island, park at a trailhead, and hike to the old Ferry Point Landing on the river.
Park anywhere along the long, straight roads on the island and look back up the tunnel of tall hardwoods lining both sides of the country lanes. This island is well known for its busy hunting season. Photographers should avoid Wye Island in the late fall and winter and also beware of the ticks in the tall grass along the trails and use a good tick repellent.

**Heading South**

Highway 50 is the main route from the Chesapeake Bay Bridge south to Salisbury, Maryland. It then turns east to Ocean City on the Atlantic side of Maryland. At Easton, twelve miles south of Wye Mills, I left Highway 50 and headed west on Route 33 to St. Michaels, a harbor town on the Miles River.

**St. Michaels**

Route 33 goes down the main street of St. Michaels. You can’t get lost although the street signs are very small. Watch carefully for the sign at the corner of Mill Street for the right turn into the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Drive to the end of the street, park in the lot and walk across the street to the entrance on the bay. This is a great place to soak up the history of the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

There are more than eighty-five antique and restored sailing vessels on display. Many are floating, tied to the docks surrounding the museum’s grounds. There are examples of classic power boats and twin-masted schooners.

When the old Hooper Strait Lighthouse was deactivated, it was saved from demolition, removed from its old position in Chesapeake Bay a few miles south, and installed here on the museum grounds. Visitors can climb the ladders to explore the authentically-furnished lighthouse-keepers quarters and then climb the circular stairwell to the top of the tower for close-up photographs of the fresnel lens. The outside deck around the top of the light tower offers a great panoramic view of the bay, the boats below, and the town of St. Michaels.

I arrived at the Maritime Museum just after the gates opened at 9 AM and stayed most of the day. Guided tours are available or you can wander freely.

**Tilghman Island**

After leaving the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, I drove west on Route 33 toward Tilghman Island. I missed the opening of the drawbridge, so I crossed the Knapps Narrows and drove to the far end of the narrow island. There were a couple of working boats in Dogwood Harbor, but this island is mostly a retirement community with lots of yachts.
A check of the map showed that the next place I had to visit was another peninsula a short distance down the coast, but a long way around by road. I followed Route 579 out to the small village of Neavitt on the coast. There was a small fleet of working boats in the harbor at the end of Long Point Road. I found some great harbor scenes and lots of details from dockside.

I drove back through St. Michaels and headed west on Route 33, watching for the right turn onto Route 329 and the Ferry Neck Road. This route to the small community of Bellevue saved many miles of driving. I was able to cross the Tred Avon River on a small nine-car ferry that runs between the small communities of Bellevue and Oxford, Maryland. (from March to December 15). It is the nation’s oldest continuously-operating ferry. It was started in 1683, was out of service during the American Revolution until 1836, and has been making its ten-minute run across the Tred Avon River ever since. After driving off the ferry in Oxford, I parked near the harbor and found a spot on the shore, beneath the trees, to photograph the ferry leaving the dock.

After leaving Oxford, I headed southeast to the city of Salisbury, the largest city in southern Maryland. Salisbury is located half-way between the Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge and the Assateaque National Seashore and is a convenient, central location for explorations of all of southern Maryland. I found a large selection of lodgings and plenty of good restaurants.

Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area

After a few days of rain, the parking lot at the Nanticoke refuge was a quagmire. The trail wasn’t much better. It led out across a marshy peninsula to the edge of Quantico Creek which flows into the Nanticoke River. I photographed herons, egrets, osprey, and several bald eagles from a blind I fashioned by sitting on the ground in the middle of a large bunch of tall reeds. My dark green parka blended into the landscape. I stayed very still for twenty minutes before I saw any action. When a great blue heron waded close enough to fill my viewfinder, I knew I was doing something right. A 400mm telephoto was all I needed in the Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area.
Heading south of Cambridge on Route 16, watch for the sign at the south end of the village called Church Creek, pointing out the left turn onto Route 335. Drive four miles south. Make a left at the next sign at the left turn onto Key Wallace Road, encircling the northern side of the refuge. First, you'll see the visitor center and then the right turn onto Wildlife Drive, a six-and-a-half mile road that leads out to the trailhead at the Marsh Edge Trail, to an observation site on the edge of the river, and a loop trail through the woods. When I arrived at the refuge, I first took this drive to acquaint myself with the layout of the area. Then I got busy shooting.

I returned to Blackwater early in the morning of the second day in the area to photograph great numbers of shorebirds along the edge of the marshes. Large pools of impounded water at Blackwater are partially drained in the spring to control the salinity, and flush out excess silt. Lower water levels expose vegetation important to waterfowl and attract great numbers of plovers, dunlins, killdeer, and sandpipers.

After leaving the Blackwater Refuge, I drove around the eastern side of the marshes along Maple Dam Road. The views equaled those from the Visitors Drive inside the refuge. The refuge boundaries enclose a huge area including the Maple Dam Road between the villages of Seward and Andrews.

Everywhere I saw a side road that headed toward the bay, I turned and followed it to its end. I was looking for scenes unique to this land. I stopped to photograph several small villages, including the official U.S. Post Office in the small village of Crapo,

Blackwater National Wildlife Refuge
Visit Blackwater National Wildlife any time you are cruising the Eastern Shore of Maryland. This place, located fifteen miles west of Nanticoke and eight miles south of Cambridge, Maryland, is beautiful. You will hear the birds as you approach the refuge on Key Wallace Drive. Geese, ducks, and swans are honking and quacking and the song birds are singing. The very wide but shallow Blackwater River is covered with migratory waterfowl in the autumn and again in the spring. The marshes are spotted with wading birds. The dead trees and branches are filled with bald eagles, hawks, and vultures. There are over thirty osprey nests atop poles placed around the Blackwater Refuge and every one I saw was still occupied in mid-April.

Nanticoke is ten miles west of the city of Salisbury, Maryland. The drive seems a lot farther and more round-about. Six miles northwest of Salisbury on Highway 50, watch for the left turn onto Route 347 through the village of Hebron. Follow this road five miles southwest until it veers to the left at Quantico. In that village, turn right at the first street, marked Cherry Walk, and continue west for another two miles. The sign at the left turn onto Nutters Neck Road points the way to the Nanticoke Wildlife Management Area.
Maryland. I followed Route 366 all the way out to the end of the peninsula to a rustic fishing harbor at a small community called Crocheron.

**Hooper Island**

On my way out to the tip of Hooper Island, I drove over several bridges connecting Upper, Middle and Lower Hooper Islands. One of my favorite fishing villages was at Hoopersville on the farthest tip of the Lower Island. When I finished shooting the old boats and rotting piers and shacks, I walked over to the other side of the narrow spit of land and photographed the sun setting across Chesapeake Bay.

Not many services are available around the Blackwater Refuge. Drive back into Cambridge for lunch or drive half-way back and make a left turn onto Route 16. Follow this west, four miles, across the Slaughter Creek Bridge to Taylor’s Island.

**Deal Island skipjacks**

The remaining few examples of the once large fleets of working skipjacks can be seen in the harbors of the remote, waterfront villages of Chance and Wenona on Deal Island in Somerset County. Every Labor Day, skipjack races are held in Tangier Sound off Deal Island.

From the small town of Princess Anne, Maryland, drive west on Route 363 ten miles to the bridge over the inlet from Tangier South and onto Deal Island. There are usually skipjacks in the harbor below the bridge and in the harbor at the southern end of Deal Island, a few miles south.

I had traveled as far down the Eastern Shore of southern Maryland as is possible without crossing the border into Virginia. I decided to explore the back roads across this narrow part of Maryland, all the way to the Atlantic, before heading north again. I headed east to Pocomoke City and found Route 364 following the north side of the Pocomoke River. At the well-marked intersection with Nassawango Road, I made a right turn and drove to the entrance of Pocomoke River State Park.

**Pocomoke River State Park**

Seven miles south of Snow Hill, Maryland, on Nassawango Road, turn into the park at the sign and drive until you see a sign pointing toward the boat launching ramp. Turn right, drive through the woods, and park at the trailhead on the uphill side of the large parking lot above the pier and boat ramp on the Pocomoke River.

The bald cypress is a member of the redwood family that drops its needles in the winter and grows in southern swamps. The northernmost grove of bald cypress is in this low-lying swamp along the edge of the Pocomoke River in southern Maryland, not far from the Mason-Dixon line. The Bald Cypress Trail is easy to walk and well-marked. A trail guide can be found in the box on the sign. It points out local trees along the trail, including the black tupelo and the American hornbeam.
In a half-mile, the trail reaches the edge of the swamp and circles around a dense grove of bald cypress standing knee-deep in water. The cypress trees are covered with thick green moss. The forest is open and airy in the spring and dark and mysterious in the summer when foliage covers the trees.

Pack your shortest wide-angle lens or bring a panoramic camera for this landscape. The short hike is easy enough for your heaviest view camera and the scenes you'll find are worth the effort. Late in the afternoon, this scene will be backlit, as the trail circles the eastern side of the swamp. When you reach the far end of the loop, a wooden boardwalk along a spur trail takes you out to a platform over the Cottingham Mill Branch, a freshwater stream flowing from the swamp and draining into the Pocomoke River.

Watch for Indian pipe and pinesap, two saprophytic plants that grow in the dead leaves along the trail. These strange, white plants have no chlorophyll and get nourishment from decaying plant material.

After leaving the Pocomoke River State Park, I headed north through the town of Snow Hill, then continued north on Route 113 to Berlin, Maryland, where I made a right on Route 376, out to Assateague Island.

Just beyond the Barrier Island Visitor Center is the bridge over a narrow bay between the mainland and Assateague Island. Signs direct visitors to the State Park, straight ahead, or to the right turn into the entrance of the Assateague Island National Seashore.

Assateague Island
Assateague Island is thirty-seven miles long and as narrow as a quarter-mile wide in some places. The northern twenty-three miles of the island are in Maryland and the southern fourteen miles are in the state of Virginia. Like all barrier islands along the Atlantic coast, this fragile environment is a long sandbar that has been washed up from the sloping sea floor by persistent waves washing against the shore. Strong winds, winter storms, and the occasional hurricane are continuously sculpting the Atlantic’s barrier islands. These islands protect the mainland from the full fury of Atlantic storms and are frequently altered by the elements. In 1965, Assateague Island was saved as a national seashore and all future development was stopped.
Assateague Island has two herds of wild horses (called “ponies” here), separated by a fence at the boundary between Maryland and Virginia. These wild horses are the descendants of domesticated stock that was grazed on the island in the 17th century by mainland planters who wanted to avoid paying taxes and building fences. Visitors to Assateague will see these small, stocky ponies grazing along the roads into the park and everywhere else on the island. They are easy to photograph—just don’t feed them or get too close. They are wild and can kick and bite.

With a permit available at the Ranger Station, drive your 4x4 along the beach, as far south as the Virginia border. There are three short nature trails (a half-mile each) in the Assateague Island National Seashore: the “Life of the Marsh,” the “Life of the Dunes,” and the “Life of the Forest,” the three major elements that make up this fragile environment. The most interesting is a boardwalk trail that loops around the edge of the marsh and ends at a raised observation platform overlooking the bay side of the island.

While I was photographing herons, egrets, and osprey from the observation platform, a small herd of sika deer made their way through the woods, along the shoreline, and into the campground. These tiny creatures can be photographed grazing along most of the island trails. The largest are about three-feet tall.

Little Creek Wildlife Area
Just east of the Dover Air Force Base is the Little Creek Wildlife Area. While driving north on Route 9, I made a right turn to Little Creek on Route 349, called Pickering Beach Road. I turned left at the sign and entered the refuge. I found an empty observation tower and a photographer’s blind on a pond filled with ducks and geese.

There was one more spot I wanted to visit before the end of the day, so I headed north to Port Mahon. Two miles north of the Little Creek Refuge, following Route 9, is the village called Little Creek. Watch for the right turn onto Port Mahon Road and drive one mile east to the gravel parking lot. There is a blind for photographers on the edge of a pond located one mile farther east along the same road.

Port Mahon
When I reached the edge of the pond at Port Mahon, I saw larger flocks of birds than I had found at all the previous refuges I had visited along the Eastern Shore of Chesapeake Bay. The rough, sandy road continues past the observation platforms, along the eroded edge of the bay. Storms have almost washed the road away but it eventually reaches a boat launching ramp on a protected cove about a half-mile up the Mahon River. At the end of the road, with my longest telephoto, I caught large flights of plovers, with black chests and white tails, heading up the river and across Kelly Island.

Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge
I stayed overnight in Dover, Delaware, to get an early morning start for a trip out to the Bombay Hook National Wildlife Refuge, the largest of the ten wildlife refuges along the shores of Delaware Bay.
In the early morning, I headed north on Route 13, the main highway through Dover, and turned east on Route 42 to the village of Leipsic, Delaware. Then I turned left onto Route 9 and drove two miles to Whitehall Neck Road, turning right at the small sign pointing out the entrance to the refuge.

This is a large refuge covering sixteen-thousand acres and is one of the most important links in the chain of national refuges that extend from the Gulf of Mexico to Canada. Established in 1937, Bombay Hook is a refuge for migrating and wintering ducks and geese. Many other species of birds and mammals can be seen and photographed from the trails, blinds, and the three observation towers.

I spent a productive morning photographing flocks of arriving ducks and several great white egrets from the tower at the end of the Bear Swamp Trail. Most of the shorebirds at Bombay Hook head south during October and November. Thousands of ducks and geese cover the ponds here during the autumn months.

November and May are the best times for bird photographers visiting Bombay Hook with the highest concentrations of shorebirds arriving during May. Migratory birds heading north stop here to rest and feed at this mid-way point on their flights from South America to their Arctic breeding grounds. Their arrival coincides with the spawning of countless horseshoe crabs. Every March, warming waters off this coast stir up the crabs from the depths of Delaware Bay. The high tides of May bring female horseshoe crabs ashore to lay their eggs. After they are fertilized, both males and females return to the bay.

Migrating shorebirds, after flying 5,000 miles non-stop from South America, arrive here in May to gorge on these eggs. Over thirty species of shorebirds arrive in huge waves to dig up the shallow nests and eat the horseshoe crab eggs.

After a long day at Bombay Hook, I returned to town for a crab dinner before the drive back to Washington’s Dulles International Airport and my flight back to California.

My life-long career in photography began at San Jose State University in 1957. After college, I enlisted in the U.S. Army Signal Corps, serving as a photographer and darkroom technician. In Germany, my skills and experience with equipment and lab work were developed and polished. I took the opportunity to photograph the beauty of nature in the Black Forest. Returning to California in 1965, I produced industrial and military training films for Raytheon Electronics and began showing my color nature prints. From 1969 through 1981, my photography was exhibited and sold in West Coast galleries. During the early 1980’s, I taught color darkroom workshops, then expanded to include field trips. Former customers, who had purchased my framed photographs, wanted to learn photography. My Pacific Image Photography Workshops offered adventures to the Pacific Coast, the Southwest deserts, national parks, Hawaii, New England, Canada, England, and the South Pacific. The workshops evolved into writing and sharing my adventures with others. Photograph America Newsletter provides information on where, when, and how to discover the best nature photography in North America.

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