

Meet Masonboro

Whether this is your first trip to Masonboro Island or you have been surfing here for years, this North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR) site is a beautiful place to explore. The following Masonboro Top 10 guide will make you want to visit again and again!

1. Designated in 1991, Masonboro Island is the largest of the four sites comprising the federally designated NC National Estuarine Research Reserve. The barrier island encompasses 5,653 acres, and is 8.4 miles from end to end. That is one long, romantic walk on the beach!



Masonboro Island aerial photograph. Photo credit: NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

2. Despite being just five miles from Wilmington, one of the most populous areas of the N.C. coast, Masonboro Island is a nearly pristine barrier island and estuarine ecosystem complex. Habitats found on the island include subtidal soft bottoms, tidal flats, hard surfaces, salt marshes, shrub thicket, maritime forest, dredge spoil areas, grasslands, ocean beach, and sand dunes.



Masonboro Island is home to a variety of plant species.

3. Masonboro Island is home to an incredible diversity of coastal flora and fauna. The loggerhead and green turtles that nest on Masonboro Island’s beaches may be the island’s most famous visitors, but several species of birds listed as “Threatened” or “Species of Concern” also nest here, including least terns, Wilson’s plovers, and American oystercatchers.



Juvenile sea turtle on Masonboro.



Wilson’s Plover.

4. Because of the diversity of habitats and species found on the island and in the surrounding waters, Masonboro Island is protected as a living laboratory for long-term research. NCNERR research biologists Heather Wells and Byron Toothman conduct research projects focusing on invasive species, nutrient transport through the estuary system, emergent marsh ecology, and how upland activity affects estuarine ecosystems.



Research biologist Byron Toothman inspects Masonboro Island's weather station. For real time data from this station is <http://nerrsdata.org/get/realTime.cfm?stationCode=NOCRCMET>

5. Summer is Masonboro Island's busiest season, but not only because the weather is warm! From May to August, loggerhead and green sea turtles crawl up Masonboro Island's beaches to lay their eggs. Nesting activity is monitored each day in the summer months by dedicated interns and volunteers, who often walk the length of the beach looking for turtle tracks and nests.



NC Coastal Reserve staff and interns record the GPS location of turtle tracks found on Masonboro Island.

6. Considered one of the best surf spots on the Carolina coast, Masonboro Island has been attracting wave enthusiasts for decades. Surf information hotline Surfline [<http://www.surflineline.com/travel/surfmaps/surfspot.cfm?id=351>] reports that "perfect

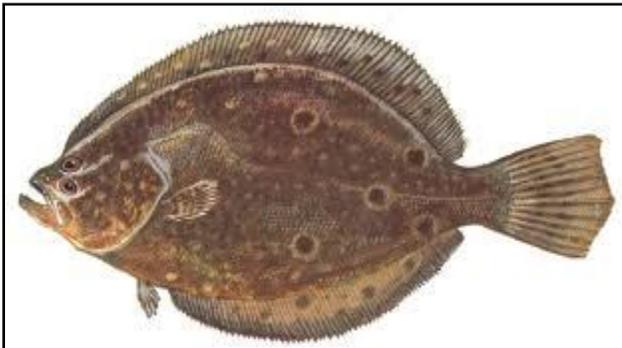
bowls, crystal-clear water, and miles of untouched beach await the surfer seeking something a bit more primal than a photograph.” Hang ten!



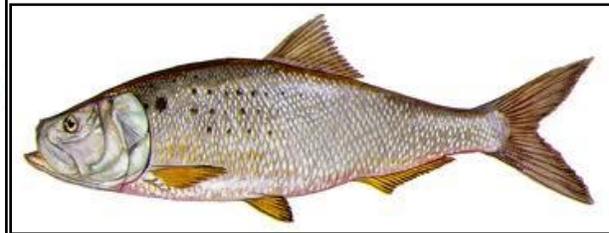
Photo credit: Wrightsville Beach Surf Camp.



7. Since Masonboro Island is only accessible by boat or paddle, visitors may want to explore the various fish species supported by Masonboro Sound’s nutrient rich waters. The island’s estuaries act as an important nursery area for spot, mullet, summer flounder, pompano, menhaden, and bluefish. This handy “Checklist of Fishes” [<http://www.nccoastalreserve.net/uploads/File/general/Checklist%20of%20Fishes.pdf>] found around Masonboro Island provides technical information about fish populations in the area.



Summer flounder and Atlantic Menhaden, two species commonly found in the waters surrounding Masonboro Island.



8. Camping at Masonboro Island is “in-tents!” Primitive camping has been allowed on the Reserve since its designation in 1991. Campers should follow these responsible use guidelines [<http://www.nccoastalreserve.net/Resources/Camping-at-Masonboro-Island/205.aspx>] when planning a camping trip to the island.



9. Leave Masonboro better than you found it! Masonboro Island is a pristine natural environment preserved for research and education. When visiting Masonboro to surf, camp, explore, and enjoy, please keep in mind that the island has no formal facilities or services such as bathrooms, trash cans, or concessions. Everything you bring to the island must come back with you at the end of your trip. Please do your part to keep Masonboro Island clean and fun for all!



Keep Masonboro Island pristine!

10. Ready to learn more about Masonboro Island? Join Education & Outreach Specialist Marie Davis [marie.davis@ncdenr.gov] for FREE public educational events that are perfect for the whole family. Events are held throughout the summer at Masonboro Island [<http://www.nccoastalreserve.net/uploads/GettoknowMasonboro.pdf>] and nearby Wrightsville Beach [<http://www.nccoastalreserve.net/uploads/WB%20SE%20EEOutreach.pdf>].



Summer education sessions
are fun for all ages!