

# GEOGRAPHY CONNECTIONS

This year-long series is presented in collaboration with the Connecticut Geographic Alliance.



## ASSATEAGUE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE



### CITY/COUNTRY VIEW

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Assateague Island National Seashore is a wondrous tourist destination famous for the “wild horses” that roam freely on the island. It is a lush waterfront landscape and nature lover’s paradise that is home to a multitude of wildlife including many different species of birds. Assateague Island is an American gem! It is a pristine location where nature and animals coexist and visitors are able to enjoy them.

Assateague Island is a barrier island located in the Delmarva Peninsula on the East Coast of the United States. The Delmarva region is made up of Delaware and portions of Maryland and Virginia. It is located in the Atlantic Coastal Plain, a sandy and flat region with little to no hills. The Native Americans of the Assateague Tribe originally inhabited the island. With over thirty-seven miles of beaches and 48,000 acres of land to its name, the island is one of the largest nature preserves on the East Coast. It became a national park in 1965.



The famous “wild horses” of Assateague draw in throngs of visitors each year. How did these wild horses come to exist here? Local legend says the wild ponies first arrived on the island during the days of Exploration. The stories say that in the mid-1500’s a Spanish cargo ship crashed off shore during a terrible storm. The ship was carrying horses, and when the ship eventually sank, the horses swam to shore. Other local tales say that the horses were brought to the island by early colonial settlers. A Spanish shipwreck was located off the coast of Assateague Island in 1997 leading many to believe the local legends. The horses assimilated to life on the seashore, and now, over 300 of these magnificent wild horses live on the island today roaming along the beaches, salt marshes and inland areas. Each summer, there are more than 70 precious newborn ponies on the island.

Assateague Island is also home to a large variety of birds. There are more than 300 different species of birds on the island. Some of the birds are migratory and some are resident of the island. Assateague is home to the Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge which is a very famous bird watching site in the United States. Thousands of birds and waterfowl inhabit the island making it a draw for bird lovers everywhere! Such birds include egrets, osprey, gulls and peregrine falcons. Because of its seashore location, a multitude of marine-life can also be found on the island.

In order for visitors to enjoy the marvelous wild horses, birds and marine life, Assateague Island hosts wildlife tours. The island and its wildlife can be enjoyed by boat, kayak and cars. Four-wheel recreational vehicles are a fun way to travel on the beach! A spectacular view of the island can be seen from the Assateague Lighthouse. Visitors can also delight in the wonders of the island by fishing, swimming, clamming, surfing and seashell collecting.



Take 5

**LOCATION:** Assateague Island National Seashore is located in the Delmarva Peninsula. Delmarva is a large peninsula on the East Coast of the United States, occupied by Delaware, Maryland and Virginia.

**PLACE:** Assateague Island is within the Atlantic Coastal Plain, which is a very flat and sandy area with little to no hills. The peninsula’s highest point is 102 feet above sea level.

**HUMAN-ENVIRONMENT INTERACTION:** The Delmarva Peninsula area, where Assateague Island is located, is also known for many poultry farms, including the famous Perdue Farms, which boosts the local economy. This area boasts its own breed of chicken, the Delaware. Tourism is also a large staple of the area’s economy including local beach vacation towns such as Ocean City, MD, and Bethany Beach, DE.

**MOVEMENT:** Assateague Island has evolved into a famous location for tourism and wildlife preservation in the United States.

**REGION:** Assateague Island National Seashore has been designated as a national park and wildlife preserve for over 50 years despite many attempts over the years by people seeking to commercialize the area. It remains a treasure of this unique area of the East Coast of the United States.

## MAPPING ACTIVITY

Assateague Island National Seashore in the Delmarva Peninsula is home to the famous “wild horses” that roam the beaches, marshes and inland areas of the island. Locate other nature preserves using a map of the United States National Parks. Locate the places are known for special species of fascinating and rare wildlife?



## DID YOU KNOW?

Assateague Island and the surrounding areas have over **300 campgrounds** for its many yearly visitors?

The name Delmarva is a **Toponym**, which is a place name that is derived from a topographical feature. Delmarva refers to **Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia**, which are the three states the island spans.

Assateague Island is home to the **Peregrine Falcon**. These falcons were once on the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Endangered Species List. The island is an important recovery area for these birds, and they were taken off the endangered species list in 1999. Every summer, since 1925, there has been a **Chincoteague Pony Swim** where the horses and their new foals cross the Assateague Channel. It is a wonderful spectacle that draws over 40,000 a year!

## Community Connections/ Using the News

Assateague Island National Seashore is focused on preserving nature and special wildlife for our country. Use [www.courant.com](http://www.courant.com) to learn more about why is it important for people to preserve nature and wildlife in our country. How does this help our environment? What places in your community work to protect your local wildlife and nature areas? What can you do to help preserve the animals and nature where you live? Name three ways you can do this in your community.

### Online Resources:

<http://mdcoastdispatch.com/2015/02/11/assateague-island-marking-50-years-as-national-park-island-almost-developed-several-times-in-past/>

<http://mdcoastdispatch.com/2015/02/11/assateague-island-marking-50-years-as-national-park-island-almost-developed-several-times-in-past/>

<http://www.delmarvanow.com/story/life/outdoors/2014/05/31/dynamic-barrier-island/9825609/>

<http://www.nps.gov/asis/learn/kidsyouth/index.htm>

### Related Children’s Literature

*Misty of Chincoteague* by: Marguerite Henry  
*Stormy, Misty’s Foal* by: Marguerite Henry  
*Georgie of Assateague* by: Jean Hill Chase

### Common Core Curricular Connections

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4;  
 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7



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