

Harbor Island, Naturally

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A PERSONAL PROJECT OF JOHN ALBERT

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TOMKINS ISLAND

TIME FOR A LITTLE CHANGE

This year from time to time I will share some of the places and things I have visited as well as specific species.

In July I was invited to join Mark Spinks, Department of Natural Resources shorebird specialist and Amy Tressler, Curator for Education at the Coastal Discovery Museum on Hilton Head, on a trip to observe Tomkins Island in the Savannah River.

We set off from All Joy Landing in Bluffton at 8 a.m. Mark took us south past Dafuskie Island. Soon the island was in sight and shortly the

smell of several thousand birds wafted over the waves.

Tomkins Island is a five-acre island constructed by the Army Corps of Engineers one mile off Turtle Island in the SC side of the Savannah River jetties. It was constructed as a mitigation for activities associated dredging of the Savannah River. Construction was completed before the 2005 nesting season. The island is off limits to the public and given the smell and crowd of birds not a good picnic site.

Pelicans and Terns are the main inhabitants. They nest here undisturbed. In 2007 there were 7,132 nesting pairs observed by SCDNR.

Not wanting to disturb the birds we did not land on the island. After making observations and taking photos we took the Cooper River back to Bluffton.



BROWN AND WHITE PELICANS

Sources: www.uga.edu/water/GWRC/Papers/Bailey

www.coastalrefuges.org/Tomkins.htm

iba.audubon.org/iba/viewSiteProfile.do?siteId=3230&navSite=state



ROYAL TERN

**THE ISLAND IS AN
IMPORTANT RESTING
AREA FOR MANY
SPECIES**

The island is heavily used as a resting place by resident seabirds and shorebirds. The following species have been observed using the site as a resting area:

**Brown Pelican (*Pelecanus occidentalis*), White Pelican (*Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*)
Double-crested Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax auritus*), Wilson's Plover (*Charadrius wilsonia*), Semi-palmated Plover (*Charadrius semipalmatus*), American Oystercatcher (*Haematopus palliatus*), Sanderling (*Calidris alba*), Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*), Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*), Laughing Gull (*Larus atricilla*), Ring-billed Gull (*Larus delawarensis*), Herring Gull (*Larus argentatus*), Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*), Royal Tern (*Sterna maxima*), Forster's Tern (*Sterna forsteri*), Sandwich Tern (*Sterna sandvicensis*), Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*), Black Skimmer (*Rynchops niger*), and Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*).**

PHOTOS BY JOHN ALBERT

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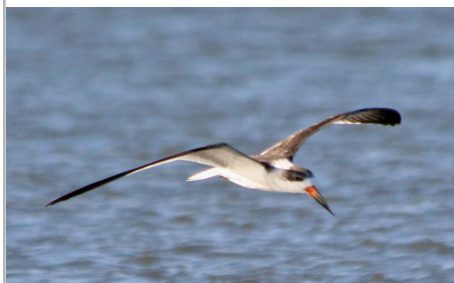
Real Estate Here Is So Tight That Some Nest On The Rocks



*Like a hidden picture painting by Bev Doolittle
Brown Pelicans blend into the scenery*

HERITAGE TRUST PRESERVE

In 2004 the SC DNR Heritage Trust Board agreed to include the island in their Heritage Trust Program. The Board designated the site a Heritage Trust Preserve. Status as a preserve recognizes the site as a valuable habitat and allows SC DNR to protect the site in the future for non-game species.



BLACK SKIMMER



SANDWICH TERN

The island was named Tomkins Island, in honor of Mr. Ivan R. Tomkins, a naturalist and ornithologist from the Savannah area in 1920's through the 1960s Mr. Tomkins recognized and documented the region's richness in bird habitat.

The island was recognized as an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society (SC Audubon, 2004)