

## Editorial: 'Important Bird Area' important for county

**Global designation by National Audubon Society touches the foundation of Beaufort County economy**

By Island Packet June 12, 2015

**B**eaufort County tends to measure its success by building permits, property transfers, retail sales and heads in beds.

Overlooked in the mad dash for more, more, more are the underpinnings of the whole economy: the county's natural resources.

That's why the news of a downturn in the county's own variety of cobia fish is so disheartening. The number of wild Port Royal Sound cobia have dwindled fast in recent years, and it's important that men and women who catch them also release them until a solution can be found.

And that's why news of six Beaufort County barrier islands being designated a Global Important Bird Area by the National Audubon Society should be celebrated as much as a banner tourism season.

The northern Beaufort County islands -- Harbor Island, Hunting Island, Fripp Island, Pritchards Island, Old Island and Capers Island -- cover 10,000 acres across 16 miles from St. Helena Sound to Port Royal Sound.

The Audubon Society said this area received the designation because "a number of endangered and rare birds, as well as a high concentration of a wide variety of birds, numbering over 182 species, make their homes on these islands that are surrounded by pristine salt marshes, tidal creeks, and rivers. This chain of islands is also a safe stopover for all birds migrating along the Atlantic Flyway."

This recognition enhances the county's position in the world of bird-watchers, which can directly result in tourism and real estate dollars.

The designation encourages science-based priorities for habitat conservation. It will encourage "the preparation of inventories of birds that will aid the national research efforts and similar

programs to focus on the continued stewardship of this unique natural resource," the Audubon says.

And it reflects a healthy priority for the community.

The Fripp Island Audubon Club gathered the data and prepared the application, just as it did five years ago to gain state recognition as an Important Bird Area.

Citizens often hold the key to wildlife success stories, just as developers and governments do.

People of Beaufort County can protect bird habitat in their own yards, neighborhoods and towns. That means less cutting of trees, bushes, undergrowth and vines. It means providing food, water and bird houses. It means keeping dogs from chasing shorebirds, and keeping cats inside. It means joining or financially supporting clubs like the Audubon and Ducks Unlimited that work on bird habitat. It means getting outside to learn the fascinating stories of the birds, and thereby work to protect them. It means supporting the local economy.

Read more here: <http://www.islandpacket.com/2015/06/11/3790672/editorial-important-bird-area.html#storylink=cpy>