

Birdlife on Beaufort County barrier islands gets international attention

By CAROLYN RENNIX

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A new designation for barrier islands in northern Beaufort County means the world will now know what many locals already see.

These pristine areas are a birdwatcher's paradise.

Last month, the Fripp Audubon Club found out its application for the barrier islands to become a Global Important Bird Area was approved by the National Audubon Society.

The designation was based on the large number of shorebirds, seabirds and wading birds that winter and migrate to Caribbean and Central and South American wintering grounds, including a number of threatened and endangered species.

The IBA program helps to identify, monitor and protect a global network of sites for the conservation of the world's birds.

The six barrier islands -- Harbor Island, Hunting Island, Fripp Island, Pritchard's Island, Old Island and Capers Island -- extend approximately 16 miles and cover 10,000 acres of beaches, salt marshes, tidal creeks and rivers.

It is the only IBA in Beaufort County and one of 17 in the state. The island and hummocks of the area border St. Helena and Port Royal sounds. Their maritime forest provide safe habitat for migratory birds making a pit stop along their arduous journeys.

More than 182 species pass through or call the islands home. Birds that can be spotted on the island include the wood stork, bald eagle, Wilson's



BARRIER ISLANDS DESIGNATED IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

Six barrier islands -- Harbor Island, Hunting Island, Fripp Island, Pritchard's Island, Old Island and Capers Island -- make up the Beaufort Barrier Islands Global Important Bird Area awarded by the National Audubon Society.



plover, least tern, piping plover, little blue heron, glossy ibis, gull-billed tern and the painted bunting.

"There just aren't that many pristine barrier islands in South Carolina anymore, and we are lucky enough to have them," said Fripp Audubon Club vice president Ken Scott.



The new IBA on the barrier islands is also an economic plus, likely attracting birdwatchers to visit the area, Scott said.

But more important, he said, having a large part of northern Beaufort County's coast designated an IBA will help protect the birds. Audubon club members and other volunteers will document bird activity on the islands to aid national research.

"I think everyone knows how beautiful the birds are, but I don't think people are aware of how important they are," Scott said. "This type of global recognition will hopefully help spread awareness."