

Masonboro Island

Location: New Hanover County

Total Size: 2,056.0 ha (5,078.3 acres)



Site Description: Masonboro Island is a 8.3-mile long, low-lying, undeveloped barrier island located between Wrightsville Beach and Carolina Beach. This is one of the few remaining undeveloped and relatively undisturbed barrier islands along North Carolina's coast. The barrier island and associated tidal marshes, creeks, and bays provide a diverse array of habitats for many species of birds throughout the year. A jetty built to maintain a navigable channel in Masonboro Inlet is one of the few places in North Carolina with wintering purple sandpipers and often a Great Cormorant or two. At the same time, the jetty causes accelerated erosion on the beachfront, which must receive dredged sand periodically to replace sand lost as a result of the jetties. Lastly, Masonboro Island is a popular destination for recreational pursuits throughout the year.

Habitats: barrier beach/dune, saltmarsh/estuary, sandflat/mudflat, maritime shrub thicket, dredged sand disposal areas. Of the 5,097 acres that comprise the island, approximately 87% are marsh/estuary while the remaining 13% is uplands.

Land Use: other conservation, recreation, wildlife conservation, dredged-material deposition, hunting, fishing,

Primary Threats: disturbance to birds, recreational overuse

Protection Status: The site is protected and managed but the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve program.

Conservation Issues: Disturbance to nesting birds is a critical concern. The island has heavy recreational use during the warmer months, especially on the northern and southern ends. This use has displaced nesting birds. In recent years, recreation use and unleashed pets appear to be increasing in the more remote areas of the island. This presents a significant problem for beach-nesting birds that have already abandoned the more heavily used areas of the island.

Birds: Masonboro Island is one of the few undeveloped and relatively undisturbed barrier islands remaining in North Carolina and supports the suite of bird species typically associated with barrier island habitats (Criteria NC4). American Oystercatchers and Willets are abundant and nest throughout the site, but no formal surveys have been conducted.

Key Bird Species

Criteria		Season	Number	Year	% '01	'97-'01	% NC '97-'01
2b	Seaside Sparrow	FM,W	--	2002		--	--
2a	Nelson's sharp-tailed Sparrow	FM	--	2002		--	--
2a	Saltmarsh sharp-tailed Sparrow	FM,W	--	2002		--	--
2a	Black Skimmer	B	41 prs.	2001	6.9 %	18 prs	2.8 %
2a	Black Skimmer	FM	2,500	2002		--	--
2a	Least Tern	B	100 prs.	2001	6.2 %	81 prs.	6.3 %
1	Piping Plover	FM,W,SM	3	2002		--	--
2b	American Oystercatcher	B	9 prs.	2002		--	--
3a	Hooded Merganser	W	200	2002		--	--
3a	Willet	all	150	2002		--	--
3d	Shorebirds	FM,W,SM	3000	2002		--	--

B=Breeding FM=Fall Migration SM=Spring Migration W=Winter