

Lea-Hutaff Islands

Location: Pender County

Total Size: 2,288 ha (5,651.4 acres)



Site Description: Lea and Hutaff Islands are undeveloped barrier islands, and associated saltmarsh, located between Figure 8 Island and Topsail Island. The islands are now joined following the closure of Old Topsail Inlet. This barrier island is characterized by large, open expanses of bare sand caused by overwash during the hurricanes of 1996, 1998 and 1999. Remnants of primary dunes exist in a few locations along the island. The saltmarsh is a typical tidally-flooded saltmarsh and creek system. This barrier island is one of North Carolina's few undisturbed and relatively pristine barrier islands.

Habitats: beach, saltmarsh, sandflat/mudflat, sandflat, dune

Land Use: Recreation/tourism, wildlife conservation, fishing

Primary Threats: disturbance to nesting birds, residential development

Protection Status: Both Lea and Hutaff islands are privately owned. National Audubon Society and the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust are currently negotiating with landowners to acquire Lea Island. National Audubon posts and patrols tern-skimmer colonies on both islands and monitors birds throughout the year.

Conservation Issues: Lea Island has been subdivided, platted for development and sold to 42 individual property owners. Hutaff Island is owned by one family. One house exists on each island. Both islands get heavy recreation use during the warmer months, especially during the breeding season. Management of nesting sites to prevent human disturbances is essential.

Birds: The site is an undeveloped and undisturbed barrier island with associated saltmarsh, beach and adjacent sand flats. The site is an excellent example of a barrier island system and hosts a complete assemblage of species associated with the habitat types found on North Carolina's barrier islands (Criteria NC4). Additionally, the site supports thousands of shorebirds during migration and winter, hundreds of beach-nesting seabirds and shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl and marsh birds. Clapper Rails breed and are abundant in marshes; Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow, Seaside Sparrows are abundant during fall and winter.

Key Bird Species

Criteria		Season	Number	Year	'97-'01	% NC
2a	Least Tern	B	342 prs.	2003	160 prs.	12.3 %
2a	Black Skimmer	B, FM	105 prs., 750	2003	46 prs.	7.2 %
2a	Common Tern	B	38 prs.	2003	52 prs.	5.3 %
1	Piping Plover	all	4 prs.(B), 15 (FM)	2003	3 prs.	18.2 %
3d	Shorebirds (21 spp)	FM, SM, W	3,000	2003		
2a	Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow	FM	--			
2a	Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow	FM, W	--			
2b	Wilson's Plover	B	12 prs.	2003	10 prs.	
2b	Seaside Sparrow	FM, W	--			
2b	American Oystercatcher	SM, B, FM	9 pr., 25	2003	--	
3a	Great Egret	FM, W, SM	300			
2a	American Bittern	FM, W	15	2003		
3a	Hooded Merganser	W	150	2003		

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