



The Cape Fear River estuary, with its salt marshes, is our most important habitat and richest in nutrients

Brunswick Wildlife What's wrong with this picture?

Nothing as far as birds and birders are concerned. Fort Caswell in the foreground is enjoyed by both during fall migration...especially shorebirds that litter those lawns after a strong cold front. Just a short hop away is one of the best fall migration stopovers on the east coast, the Fort Fisher, Zeke's Island, and Smith Island complex.

Unfortunately, at the altitude this photo was taken, I could not include those islands and their salt marshes. Ditto the wonderful town of Southport where we birds and birders show up at the Smithville Burying Grounds, Riverwalk, and the Shepard Road area. A walk down to Brenda Nichol's dock at the end of Shepard Road may produce a variety of overwintering waterfowl.

In the middle ground is Battery Island, the anchor of Audubon's Cape Fear River Islands Important Birding Area (IBA) that stretches north past the ferry and also includes Striking, South Pelican, Ferry Slip, and North Pelican Islands.

Battery Island supports the largest breeding colony of wading birds in the state, including approximately ten percent of North America's White Ibises. In addition, the five islands support vibrant breeding grounds for beach nesting birds such as gulls, terns, oystercatchers, and pelicans.

Why is Battery Island for the birds? Habitat! Wading birds nest in red cedars, yaupon and other shrubs on the higher, southern end of the island. The island is protected from mammalian predators such as raccoons and foxes by the strong currents of the Cape Fear River. Also, Audubon enforces a year-round ban on human activity.

Of course, things could be improved with better water quality and restoration of shellfish beds, but given the status quo, the birds will take it. They do worry, however, about some scary things planned for upriver. The chatter I'm hearing from the birds, fiddler crabs and other species that make the estuary home is a plea to simply maintain what we have for them... and for us.

John Ennis