

IBA Dedication of Ossabaw Island State Heritage Preserve

by Alison Huff, Oconee Rivers Audubon Society

Tropical storm Barry may have drenched the state when it blasted through, but it could not dampen the excitement of those who were on Ossabaw Island for a milestone dedication. About 50 brave souls crossed Ossabaw Sound to attend the Important Bird Area (IBA) ceremony, Georgia's thirteenth site to be included in this national registry of exceptional wildlife habitats. The ceremony on June 2, 2007 highlighted Georgia's IBA program and Ossabaw Island's distinction as being the state's first Heritage Preserve. Guest speakers included DNR Commissioner Noel Holcomb, National Audubon Society's IBA Director, John Cecil and Georgia General Assembly Representative from District 130, Debbie Buckner. Georgia's new IBA coordinator, Mary Elfner, coordinated the entire event.

Georgia's Ossabaw Island is a pristine barrier island about 20 miles south of Savannah. The legendary Eleanor Torrey West, whose family sold the property to the state of Georgia in 1978 still lives on the island, accompanied by a sturdy band of semi-wild Sicilian donkeys which roam free. Over 16,000 acres of tidal marshes make ideal habitat for feeding egrets, herons, stilts, rails, ibis and other waterfowl. An additional 9,000 acres of dry ground supports tall pines, palms and hardwoods in maritime, second-growth forests. These forests are rich habitats for over a hundred species of nesting birds and migrants. Many ponds, salt-water creeks, a shallow river and beaches round out the complex geography.

Fifteen people lingered overnight in Ossabaw Island's two-story lodge after the IBA dedication ceremony, having weathered several hours of horizontal rain from Barry's bluster. The skies cleared, the winds calmed to gentle breezes, and Painted Buntings returned to the porch feeders. A small wild pig made a dash through the yard. A Great Egret lifted off from the nearby marsh. Resurrection ferns that had hung brown and limp on the sturdy branches of the live oaks were brilliant green again. The visitors, grateful for the short but invigorating sojourn on this island paradise, gathered their belongings for the boat trip back to the mainland.

If you would like more information on the Georgia Important Bird Areas Program, or if you want to volunteer in any way to help this conservation effort, please contact Mary Elfner, Georgia IBA Coordinator, at gaiba@comcast.net.

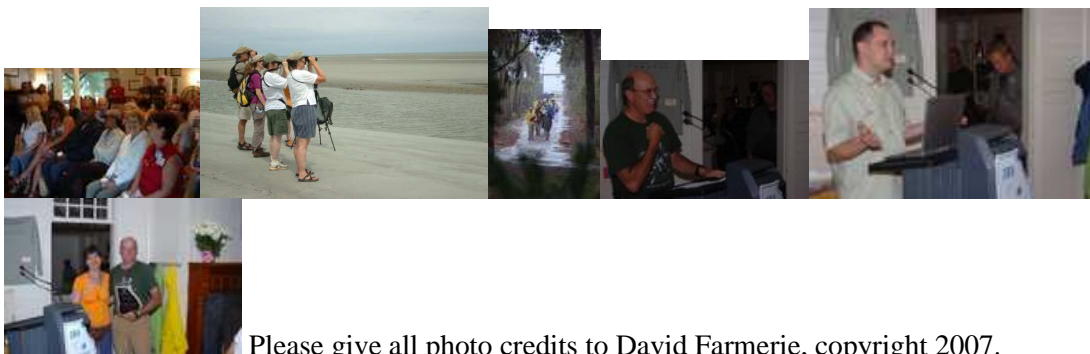
Recommended Web sites for additional information:

National Audubon IBA — www.audubon.org/bird/iba/index.html

Georgia IBA Program — www.atlantaudubon.org/aaswww/iba/iba.htm

The Ossabaw Island Foundation — www.ossabawisland.org

DNR for Ossabaw Island — georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us/content/displaycontent.asp?txtDocument=225



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Sketch of Black-necked Stilt by Alison Huff.

