

2016 WETLAND TREASURES OF THE CAROLINAS



FRANCIS BEIDLER FOREST WETLAND TYPES:

Cypress-tupelo swamp, bottomland hardwood forest

Photo by Mac Stone

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

The Audubon Center and Sanctuary at Francis Beidler Forest comprises nearly 18,000 acres of Four Holes Swamp in the coastal plain of South Carolina. The site's principal claim to fame lies within the 1,800-acre old-growth portion of the Sanctuary. It is the largest remaining stand of virgin bald cypress and tupelo gum swamp forest left anywhere, and is one of only two stands of significant old-growth forest left in the entire state. The tract abounds with trees in the 1000-year-old age range and is home to the second oldest confirmed bald cypress tree in the world—1,500 years old! Though much of the swamp has been logged to some degree over the years, permanent impacts are limited and its hydrology remains intact. Based on benthic sampling and water chemistry taken by Audubon staff over the last 40 years, the swamp is healthy and maintains very high quality water.

FLORA & FAUNA

Plant communities vary with minor elevational changes in this swamp; a couple of inches can determine whether a particular area contains predominantly bald cypress and tupelo gum, or a mix of hardwoods (laurel and overcup oaks, red maple, pumpkin ash, water ash), or a mix of pine and hardwoods (loblolly

and spruce pines, water and swamp chestnut oaks, mockernut hickory, ironwood). A diverse understory includes buttonbush, Virginia willow, high bush blueberry, fetterbush, dwarf palmetto and more. The rarest plant on the site is the dwarf trillium. This diverse swamp is home to 140 species of birds, 44 mammals, 40 amphibians, 50 reptiles, 39 fish and untold insect and invertebrate species. It is famous for its abundant prothonotary warblers and has some of the densest breeding bird/acre nesting for forested ecosystems nationwide.

THREATS

Development pressures from the Charleston metro area are expanding up the I-26 corridor towards the Francis Beidler Forest. Audubon Society has been working to purchase more of the swamp and upland buffer, growing the Sanctuary from its original 3,400 acres to its present size. Audubon has also brokered nearly 17,000 acres of conservation easements with private landowners in and around the swamp.

ACCESS

The Forest is open to the public and is accessible by a boardwalk trail and seasonal canoe/kayak trips. For details, see beidlerforest.audubon.org.

SOURCES

National Audubon Society



Barred owl pair—photo by Don Wuori



FRANCIS BEIDLER FOREST

Property Owner: National Audubon Society, private
Recognitions & Designations: Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Convention),
National Natural Landmark (National Park Service), Natural Area (Society of American
Foresters), Important Bird Area (National Audubon Society)

