



Establishing Joulter Cays IBA as a National Park in the Bahamas

Title

The **National Audubon Society** (BirdLife in the USA) and **Bahamas National Trust** (BirdLife in the Bahamas) are working together to establish a new national park on the Joulter Cays IBA, a group of small uninhabited islands and intertidal sand flats to the north of Andros Island in the Bahamas.

The **Joulter Cays** were designated as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) for the Piping Plover *Charadrius melodus* and Short-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus griseus* in 2012. The IBA supports more than four percent of the global population of the Near Threatened Piping Plover and contains recently discovered wintering locations for Red Knots *Calidris canutus*, whose population has declined to alarming levels in recent years.

"We have always known that the Joulter Cays were important for fly fishing but the discovery of significant numbers of wintering Piping Plovers and other shorebirds like the Red Knot has been phenomenal and has significantly elevated the area's importance to the Bahamas and the international community", said Eric Carey, executive director for the Bahamas National Trust.

Findings from Audubon and Bahamas National Trust research are helping to better understand the importance of the Bahamas and places like the Joulter Cays to Piping Plovers, Red Knots and other shorebirds. This is an essential step in protecting shorebirds and recovering their populations. It is an important step in the process of formally protecting the region, an action that will benefit all wildlife utilizing the Cays and help preserve the natural heritage of the Bahamas.

"The Joulter Cays are rich in birds, fisheries and other wildlife. This is true paradise, a treasure for the Bahamas and it deserves protection for all that it has to offer", said Matt Jeffery, Deputy Director of Audubon's International Alliances Program.

A Rapid Ecological Assessment of the Joulter Cays including the terrestrial and marine components and a park designation proposal will be submitted by Bahamas National Trust in consultation with stakeholders who use the area. A recent visit to the IBA with Audubon staff, Honorable Kenred Dorsett, Minister of Environment and Housing for the Bahamas, other senior government officials for the Island of Andros, the board of the Bahamas National Trust

and local sports fishing guides highlighted the site's significance for migrating and wintering birds, marine wildlife and local economies.

“It is clear to me that the Joulter Cays and Andros West Side National Park represent tremendous opportunity for our people,” said the Honorable Kenred Dorsett. “The Piping Plover is a species of bird whose numbers are dwindling in the United States, but there are significant numbers that fly here during the winter season between July and March. I dare say that it is a Bahamian bird.”