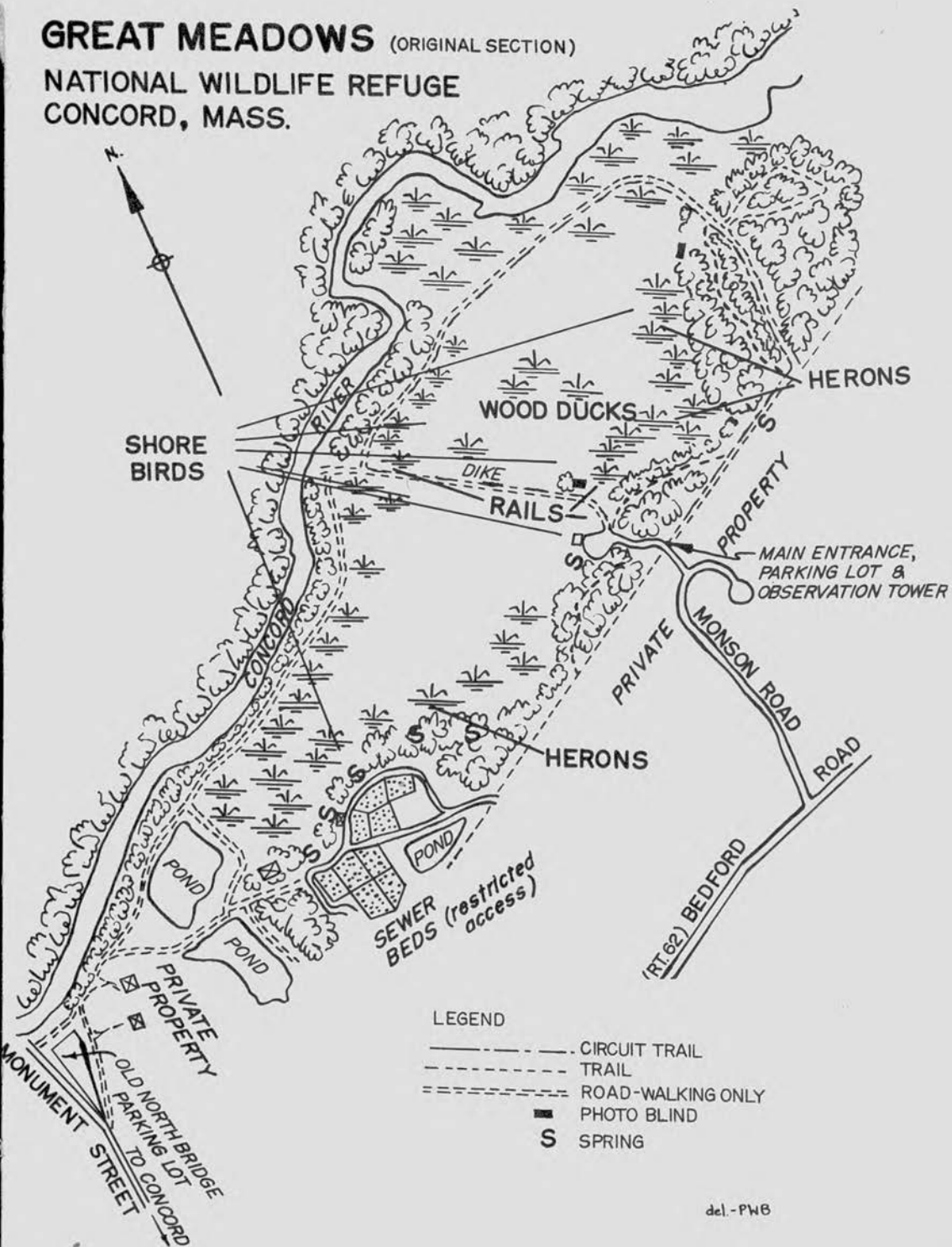


GREAT MEADOWS (ORIGINAL SECTION)

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
CONCORD, MASS.



LEGEND

- CIRCUIT TRAIL
- ... TRAIL
- - - ROAD-WALKING ONLY
- PHOTO BLIND
- S SPRING

del. - PWB

GREAT MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

There are four National Wildlife Refuges in Massachusetts: Great Meadows in Concord, Monomoy in Chatham, Parker River in Newburyport, and Thacher Island in Rockport. The latter three are coastal, while Great Meadows is inland, along the Sudbury and Concord rivers.

Great Meadows is unusual in that it is about 10 miles long and varies greatly in width, according to the width of the river floodplain, which generally defines the refuge boundaries. In some areas along the river the refuge is only about 20 feet across. It extends into seven towns: Sudbury, Wayland, Lincoln, Concord, Bedford, Carlisle, and Billerica. Eventually, it will include most of the floodplain marshes along the Sudbury and Concord rivers, when acquisition is complete.

At present, ownership is scattered and includes about 2,700 acres of the ultimate 4,000 acres approved for acquisition. Most of the refuge was purchased with funds derived from the sale of migratory waterfowl hunting stamps (over \$614,000), and it was set aside as a resting, nesting, and feeding area for waterfowl. Great Meadows Refuge originated as the result of a donation by Samuel Hoar of Concord, when in 1944 he deeded more than 250 acres of land to the U. S. Government.

These meadows were the livelihood of the early settlers of Concord, for they reaped a rich harvest of hay every year to enable their livestock to survive the harsh winters. In 1775, after the battle at the Old North Bridge, the Minutemen took a short cut across the meadows to intercept the retreating British troops at Merriam's Corner and to harass them back to Charlestown.

In the early 1960's, expansion of the refuge began on the approved 4,000 acres. Due to funding restrictions, land acquisition has progressed slowly, but ultimately the refuge will serve to preserve and protect the riverside marshes, which are so fragile and vulnerable to the ravages of man. Anyone can destroy a marsh but no one can make one.

After the hurricane of 1938, few dead trees remained standing in eastern Massachusetts to serve as nesting sites for Wood Ducks. A few years later, Wood Duck numbers dropped dangerously low. It was then that Great Meadows became the center of cooperative efforts to save the Wood Duck in eastern Massachusetts. Wooden nest boxes were erected on the meadows to simulate natural tree cavities, and the Wood Ducks accepted them for nesting, resulting in a population rally that brought them back to the large numbers found here at present.

The refuge has always been one of the better, if not the best, inland birding area in Massachusetts. William Brewster lived just across the river, a stone's throw from the meadows, and Ludlow Griscom frequently visited the refuge, assimilating the knowledge that elevated him in the ranks of naturalists. One of Griscom's favorite places was in an area now within the refuge between Route 20 and Pelham Island Road, Wayland. This site, along with Broad Meadows in Sudbury and Wayland, is given extensive coverage in his excellent book The Birds of Concord.

Access to most of the refuge is only by boat along the two rivers, because most of the land surrounding the refuge is privately owned. The distance between the north and south ends of the refuge is about 14 miles, but in Concord about four miles separate the two largest tracts.

There are few areas along the river where a boat may be launched. The best place is the Bedford boat launch off Route 225 by the bridge. A canoe can be put in the water at the Monument Street bridge in Concord, and a boat at the Route 20 bridge in Wayland. The South Bridge Boathouse on Route 62 in Concord rents boats and canoes.

There is only one area on the refuge developed for public use: the original meadows off Monsen Road which is off Route 62 about 1.5 miles out of Concord Center towards Bedford. Where Monsen Road begins to curve to the right, turn left down a dirt road between two houses to get to the parking area inside the refuge.

At the parking lot there is an observation tower, a leaflet dispenser and about 1.5 miles of interpretive trails to enjoy. If you cross the dike, turn right at the far

side and continue around to the log cabin where nearby there are primitive restroom facilities and a short Loop Trail. Continue down the road through the woods until you reach the old abandoned railroad bed where you turn right. Proceed along the railroad bed until you reach the entrance road once more. A new modern comfort station by the entrance road should be completed this spring. The Spring Trail begins and ends at the parking area and takes about ten minutes to walk.

Birding at the meadows is best in the late summer and fall. During the late summer, water levels are lowered to encourage shorebirds to stop by on their migration. Many excellent inland sightings of shorebirds have been made at the meadows in the past few years, such as Wilson's and Northern Phalarope, Hudsonian Godwit, Ruddy Turnstone, Golden and Black-bellied Plover, Stilt, White-rumped, Baird's and Western Sandpiper, and many others. Since 1970, two Bald Eagles, a Peregrine Falcon, a Sandhill Crane, a Le Conte's Sparrow and a European Wigeon have also been observed. During the fall, waterfowl by the thousands may be seen, particularly Canada Goose, American Widgeon, and Green-winged Teal. After sundown, hundreds of waterfowl may be seen coming in to roost.

Regulations governing public use of the refuge are posted. Disturbance of wildlife or habitat is prohibited, and pets must be kept on a leash. Alcoholic beverages are likewise forbidden, and visitors must remain on existing roads and trails. The refuge is open to the public during daylight hours.

Additional specific information may be obtained by writing, telephoning, or visiting the office.

Berlin Heck
Acting Refuge Manager

LESSER BLACK-BACKED GULL
(Larus fuscus graellsii)*

A sub-adult was first found at Nauset (Eastham) on August 17, 1973, by the undersigned, who later showed it to Carl Goodrich, Bradford Blodget, and Blair Nikula. Wallace Bailey, Jeff Harris, and Vernon Laux were able to see the bird on the evening of the 17th.

This Lesser Black-backed Gull appeared to be entering into its third winter plumage. It had a slightly broken tail band (actually smudges on the ends of some of the rectrices), while the middle wing coverts and some of the under-wing linings were brownish, in sharp contrast to the slaty gray color of the back and parts of the mantle. The head had considerable freckling, especially on the crown. An eye ring was not visible. The bill appeared slightly shorter than that of surrounding Herring Gulls, being orange-yellow with a pale orange spot, immediately behind which was a black smudge. The dull pinkish legs were lighter than those of adjacent Black-backs, shading to pale straw-yellow on the backs near the joints.

Overall, the size was that of the Herring Gulls, being much less than that of the Great Black-backs. The mantle color was much darker than the Herrings but not nearly as deep as the Great Black-backs.

This bird was studied for over an hour from a distance of 300 feet through a 20-power telescope. The weather was cloudy and cool with a 15 m.p.h. northeast breeze. It rained all day on the 15th.

I believe this is only the second published record for Massachusetts, despite the recent increase in sightings throughout the Northeast. The other Massachusetts record was for September 14, 1971, when an adult (also of the race L. f. graellsii) was seen at Monomoy Point by Robert Clem and Wallace Bailey.

Wayne R. Petersen
Abington, Mass.

* Larus fuscus graellsii is the British and western European race of Lesser Black-backed Gull, recognized in adult plumage by a pale gray mantle and wings relative to the Scandinavian race L. f. fuscus, which is often as dark as the Great Black-backed Gull. -- ED.