

**Scraggy Neck
to
Little Island**

Maps by J. L. Heywood

WINTER BIRDING ALONG BUZZARDS BAY-
SCRAGGY NECK, BOURNE, TO FALMOUTH CENTER

by Robert H. Stymeist, Brookline

The Buzzards Bay area of Cape Cod offers a great day of winter birding for anyone looking for a good selection of waterfowl and an ideal location for regular winter birds as well as a good area for semi-hardy winterers and tardy migrants. The area that this article deals with comprises primarily the coastal necks from Scraggy Neck in Bourne to Quissett Harbor just north of Woods Hole and the Falmouth Center area including several freshwater ponds. This is precisely the section that the author has canvassed for the Buzzards Bay Christmas Bird Count since 1974. Some of the sections that this article deals with include the villages of Cataumet, Megansett, North Falmouth, West Falmouth, Sippewisset, and Quissett.

This region, approximately 55 miles south of Boston, enjoys much the same mild winter climate as outer Cape Cod with generally much less snow than areas to the north and west of Boston. There are numerous saltwater bays and freshwater ponds that remain open for much of the winter. The area abounds in thickets, low swampy woods, and many berry-bearing delicacies for birds (bittersweet, privet, and multiflora roses).

Since 1974, a total of 117 species and one additional race (Oregon Junco) have been recorded in this area on the Buzzards Bay Christmas Count generally held in mid-December. Some of the more noteworthy highlights of this survey over the years include Snowy Egret, Clapper Rail, Least Sandpiper, Short-billed Dowitcher, Western Kingbird, House Wren, Solitary Vireo, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Chipping and Vesper sparrows.

Our winter trip begins at the rotary on Route 28 at the Howard Johnson's on the cape side of the Canal. Drive south on Route 28 four miles to Route 28A (shore route). Drive past Picture Lake - no need to stop for usually there are just Mallards here - and at County Road you should take a left. Shortly after you pass the Barnstable County Hospital, there is a very active feeding station on the left (875 County Road, Pocasset) and an equally fantastic hedgerow next to an open field on the right. The very friendly owner, Robert Whittemore, makes his own feeders, and these can be easily studied from the road. He has had hundreds of Evening Grosbeaks at times, and there is usually a handful of Purple Finches among the score of House Finches. The multiflora rose hedgerow is a great attraction to many robins and scolding mockingbirds. In late November 1981, a Nashville Warbler was present. Spishing here could bring out a Hermit Thrush or a Brown Thrasher. The fields have been good for lingering

meadowlarks. Continue down County Road, and just beyond where Long Hill Road meets County Road, a cranberry bog on the left often has Great Blue Herons. Farther along on the right you may drive through an old cemetery that backs up to Herring Pond, famous for the Tufted Duck in years past. There are usually Mute Swan, Ring-necked Duck, Bufflehead, and Hooded Merganser on the pond. The pines along the hillside of the cemetery are frequented by Golden-crowned Kinglet and Brown Creeper. Now, before continuing, it should be noted that there are many roads that will require criss-crossing and backtracking because of the necks, and that there can be many productive stops along this route. Thickets are everywhere; some of the streets I have yet to explore, and who knows what might be found. You are now in a very productive area and you should follow your hunches.

For those of you who still need guidance, take a left on Red Brook Harbor Road to Scraggy Neck Road, take a left to Grasslands Road on the right, a dead end at Squeteague Harbor. There is usually a kingfisher here and many Red-breasted Mergansers and Common Goldeneye. Grasslands Road has a fine privet hedgerow and catbrier thickets that have harbored Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Carolina Wren, and Rufous-sided Towhee. Continue a short distance to Windsor Road to an ample pull-off for parking and explore the thickets. Along the dirt road you may flush a Ruffed Grouse; I have done so twice, but you are more likely to see a covey of Northern Bobwhite, Yellow-rumped Warblers, Carolina Wrens, or a towhee, as well as many titmice, chickadees and Cardinals. On the road again, just short of a mile you will come to the Scraggy Neck causeway. Here, next to the sign "for residents only" there is a place to park and scan both sides of the road for bay ducks. All three scoters, goldeneyes, Buffleheads, and Red-breasted Mergansers are usually well represented. Surprisingly Common Eider is rare; in nine years we have recorded only four individuals! On the right, look closely at Basset's Island and you should see Great Blue Heron; we had seven in 1975 and seven again in 1981. Scraggy Neck, mostly oak and "scraggy" pines, is on the whole disappointing for land birds, but a recent visit this past November found three well-stocked feeding stations. Bear right at the end of the causeway to Seal Lane (0.9 mile). This is a good look-out into Megansett Harbor for more bay ducks. Spish here and be overwhelmed by Yellow-rumped Warblers, Red-breasted Nuthatches (at the right time), House Finches, and Blue Jays. There is a good feeder at the last house. Another 0.7 mile is a feeder and another lookout towards Wing's Neck, a very good spot to see Oldsquaw, and Black and Surf scoters. Retrace your steps from Scraggy Neck back to County Road. At this intersection an old over-grown field has yielded a Dickcissel, White-crowned Sparrow, and Carolina Wrens. No wonder several feeding stations are in this neighborhood; streets are named for sandpipers, sanderling, partridge, pheasant, bobwhite, shearwater, dove, puffin, tattler, pintail, willet and whim-

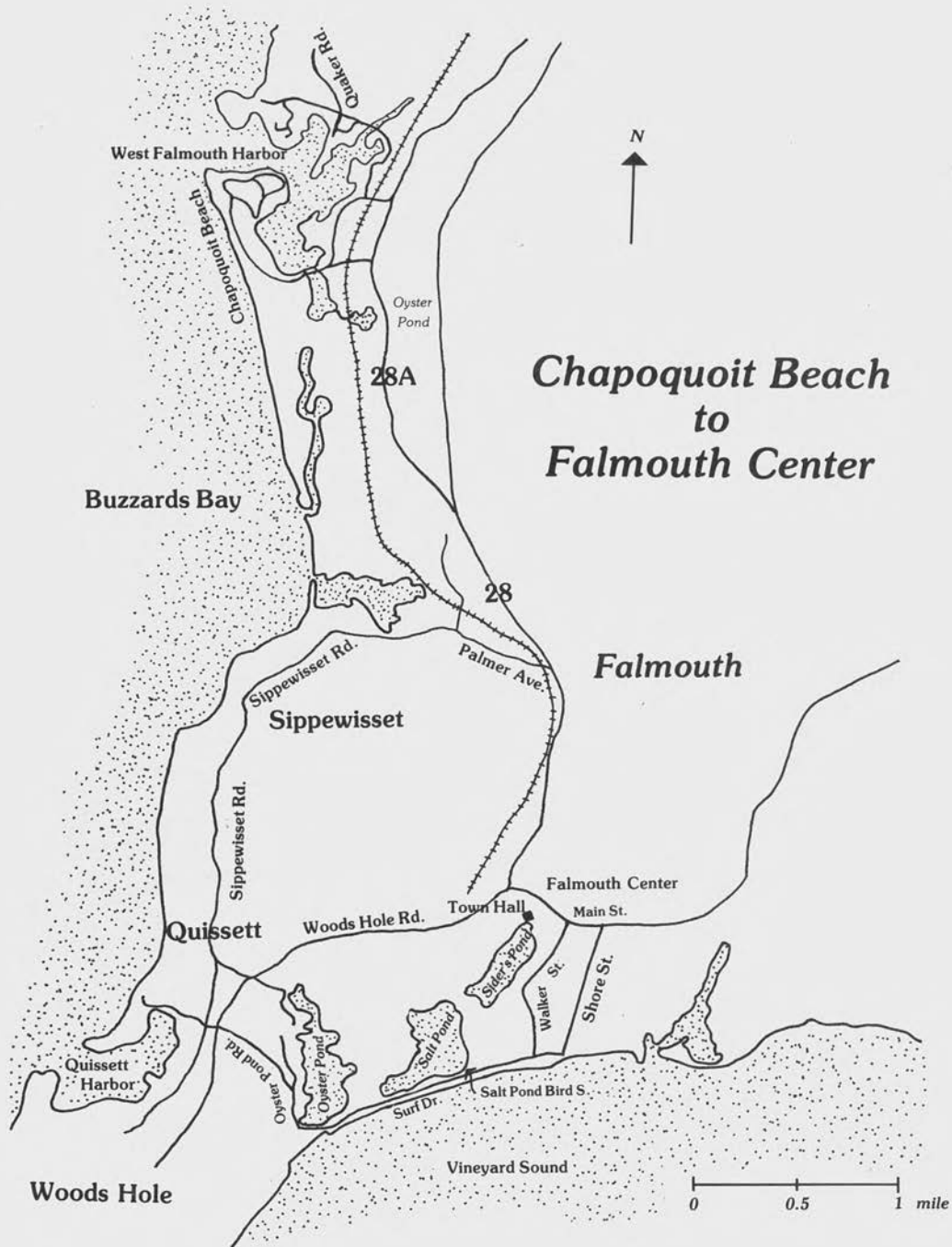


Carolina Wren

Illustration by Denise Braunhardt

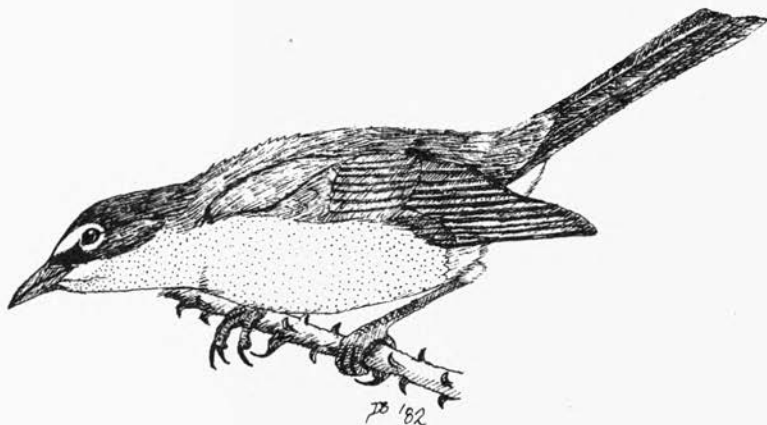
brel. I doubt you will find many whimbrels on the drive or willets in the circle, but you have a good chance of finding a dove on the lane.

Take a left on County Road to a left on Depot Road and find another fine thicket worth spishing at. Continue down Depot Road to Scraggy Neck Road - I told you we would backtrack! Take a right and then a left on Grove Avenue to Megansett Road. Along this road is a posted bird sanctuary with many winding trails through catbrier thickets in a swampy woods, an area that has in the past held many Hermit Thrushes, Ruby-crowned Kinglets and a Yellow-breasted Chat! On the right is Amarita Island. A kingfisher is usually found here. Megansett Road becomes Garnet Road in the town of Falmouth. Stop at the bridge just where the harbor comes to the road. Some winters at low tide Greater Yellowlegs are present, but the thickets and swampy inlet on the left are the main attractions. Here you can usually find Carolina Wren, Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Hermit Thrush, towhee, Swamp Sparrow, and occasionally a Yellow-breasted Chat. At the end of Garnet Road is Cedar Lake where as many as 300+ scaup can be found as well as many Ring-necked Ducks and sometimes Redheads. The thickets around the pond have Carolina Wrens, and on the 1978



Christmas Count a Solitary Vireo was found here. Follow Chester Street past Trout Pond where Wood Ducks have been seen on a few occasions to a right turn on Wild Harbor Road. Take a right on Ryder Road to Fiddler's Cove. A marsh on the right has yielded Green-winged Teal, Wood Duck, American Bittern and blackbirds. Retracing the road leads to the end of Nye's Neck, more thickets and more overlooks onto Buzzards Bay.

The next major area is Crow Point, reached by taking a right onto Bay Shore Drive from Quaker Road. Here, along the inlet of Wild Harbor River, we have found Great and Snowy egrets, Great Blue Heron, Clapper Rail, Short-billed Dowitcher, Common Snipe and dabbling ducks such as Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail among the predominating Black Ducks. There is always a kingfisher here and Hooded Mergansers have been found quite routinely. On a recent November trip a Little Blue Heron was found. Overhead we once recorded a Northern Goshawk and a Red-shouldered Hawk. Northern Harriers have been seen many times over the marsh. Back on Quaker Road you will pass Old Silver Beach; a parking lot there will enable you to scan over Buzzards Bay for loons and Horned Grebes. Across the street, Herring Brook runs from a substantial salt marsh where Great Blue Herons and Northern Harriers are frequently seen. The next neck will be Little Island, reached by driving out Little Island Road. At the end of the road there is space for one or two cars to park. Walk down the sand road to Little Island, a bird sanctuary of the town. Here you will find trails past mostly cedar trees and bayberry. There are usually many Yellow-rumped Warblers, an occasional yellowthroat or a Palm Warbler.



Yellow-breasted Chat

Illustration by Denise Braunhardt

Cedar Waxwings and American Robins like to feed here. This is also another fine lookout over Buzzards Bay and West Falmouth Harbor. Continue back along Quaker Road past West Falmouth Harbor and Oyster Pond on the left. Hooded Mergansers are usually found here, and the thickets have yielded Carolina Wren every time. Follow the coast to Chapoquoit Point and Beach along the south side of West Falmouth Harbor. Here you can find Barrow's Goldeneye, present for the last few years. From the parking lot at the beach, scan over Buzzards Bay where Red-necked Grebes have been recorded a few times. This point is the last stop of the author's official section of the Buzzards Bay Christmas Count. Depending on your ambition and numbers of stops, this can easily consume a winter's day of birding.

If you have missed some of the specialties such as Canvasback, Lesser Scaup and Redhead, you should continue up the Cape to Falmouth Center. A suggestion is to continue along Buzzards Bay through the village of Sippewisset where FOUR Yellow-breasted Chats on the December 1981 Buzzards Bay Christmas Count set a record - the highest national total of individual chats on the 1981 Christmas Count! There are excellent thickets here for chats, yellowthroats, towhees, kinglets and Carolina Wrens. Keep your eyes peeled for promising thickets. Stop and spish! It's also a good idea to drive slowly with car windows open a bit, for Carolina Wrens sing frequently during the winter months. Continue along Sippewisset Road to the village of Quissett. Quissett Harbor is another good vantage point from which to scope for bay ducks. Take a left on Oyster Pond Road, passing Oyster Pond where Mute Swans can be found, to Surf Drive. Along Surf Drive there is a good vantage point for Salt Pond Bird Sanctuary. This pond is one of the best areas in Massachusetts on which to find Redheads and Canvasbacks. There usually are a number of Ring-necked Ducks, and both species of scaup can be found here. Follow Surf Drive to Walker Street on the left. Take Walker Street to Main Street where you should take a left through Falmouth Center to the Falmouth Town Hall on the left. Park behind the Town Hall to view Sider's Pond - another fine spot for Redhead, Canvasbacks and Lesser Scaup. Even during the coldest spells there is usually open water in which the birds concentrate. You can find Pied-billed Grebe, coot and Wood Duck here. The thickets around the Town Hall contain Carolina Wrens, kinglets, Hermit Thrush and Gray Catbirds. Occasionally you might flush an American Woodcock or a Common Snipe. A Eurasian Wigeon has been recorded here, and for several years a Tufted Duck was seen among the scaup and Ring-necked Ducks.

The Butterworth Company (23 Trader's Lane, West Yarmouth, MA 02673) has produced an excellent folded street map showing all points of interest, and ponds with depths recorded in the towns of Bourne, Falmouth, Mashpee and Sandwich. It can be bought for \$1.95 in most drugstores in the area or

directly from the company. I highly recommend it.

While this article is not a complete survey of the winter birdlife, it offers an idea of the potential of the Buzzards Bay region. I hope it will stimulate your interest so that more birdwatchers can discover for themselves this little known birding hot spot.

ROBERT H. STYMEIST, an accountant by profession, has established a second career in birding as a founding member and current president of Bird Observer, on the directorial board of Brookline Bird Club (his spring walks at Mt. Auburn Cemetery are famous throughout New England), and, at present, as treasurer of the Nuttall Ornithological Club. An accomplished North American birder (over 600), he has birded in Europe and the British Isles, in Central and South America, and most recently expanded his birdwatching to Tanzania in Africa.

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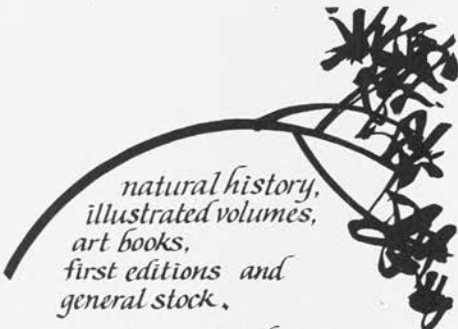


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