

BIRDING CAPE ANN

by Christopher Leahy, Gloucester

We are all in spiritual bondage to the passions of our youth. Having grown up with the smell of salt water in my nostrils and an obsession with birds, I will never be convinced that there is a better way to spend the early hours of a late fall day than sitting on a point of rocky coastal ledge, staring out to sea across great green, long-rolling combers, constantly wiping a mixture of rain and spray from face and lenses, and watching the procession of southbound arctic and subarctic-breeding seabirds in all its variety of species and rhythm. Translated into geographical and meteorological terms, this sentimental description becomes - the eastern periphery of Cape Ann during a good northeaster in late October or early November.

During the height of the Griscom era of birdwatching in the Commonwealth - now drawing to a close - the peculiar activity described above had a considerable following. In addition to himself, dozens of other Boston-based or south shore-oriented field ornithologists made frequent autumn and winter pilgrimages to this most "pelagic" corner of Essex County to count scoters and gannets, always hoping for one of those exceptional mornings when a Leach's Storm-Petrel is picked up flapping equably amidst the gale or when Dovekies are being blown overland and whiz by on all sides.

Has Cape Ann ceased to be the birding Mecca it once was? A few years ago, a birding acquaintance, having been told that I was now living in Gloucester, replied incredulously, "Gloucester!" Then, "Remember when people used to go to Cape Ann?" What he meant principally was that spectacular movements and exotic species of seabirds are now far more closely associated in the birder brain with Cape Cod and particularly First Encounter Beach in Eastham than with any place on the North Shore. There is no point in denying that if you want to see large numbers of shearwaters and jaegers and to have a better than average chance of seeing a Sabine's Gull or a puffin, you should head for what people south and west of Boston call "the Cape." As for loons and grebes, gannets and sea ducks, you can pick them up at nearly any shore point between late fall and early spring, so that unless there is a Blue Grosbeak at a feeder in Lanesville, a serious birder does not "need" to make the long eastward detour from Interstate 95 at all. Why then describe the alleged highlights of this unfashionable backwater of field ornithology? First, before anyone has time to take that last sentence seriously, my purpose is to remind the birding community that Cape Ann remains one of the top half dozen birding regions of the state at any time of year except in the early summer avian doldrums. There are few enough places

after all where you can watch 2600 Common Eiders glitter across a dark, swollen sea as I did in an hour's visit to Andrew's Point on a squally day last October. Where else can you hold out to a birding visitor from the South or inland a reasonable hope of finding Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, King Eider, Purple Sandpiper, Glaucous and Iceland gulls, Black Guillemot and usually some rarity du jour in return for a few hours in the cold?

Furthermore, those tempted to dismiss Cape Ann as coastal habitat may be interested to hear that the bird list for the Halibut Point Reservation numbers some 235 species and includes Northern Goshawk, Peregrine Falcon, Lesser Golden-Plover, Snowy Owl, Red-headed Woodpecker, Northern and Loggerhead shrike, White-winged Crossbill, Grasshopper Sparrow, and the great majority of regular spring and fall migrant songbirds in addition to pelagic rarities such as Northern Fulmar, Great Skua, and Ivory Gull. And while Cape Ann is often characterized as a thinly vegetated outcropping of Pre-Cambrian shield, there is also a surprising amount of Pileated Woodpecker habitat if you know where to look (see under Summer Residents, below).

An equally important reason to include Cape Ann frequently in your annual birding schedule is that it is uniquely beautiful. Its landscapes, cultures, waters, and especially its light have inspired many of the best American artists from disciplines as diverse as the luminists of the nineteenth century and the "ash can" school of the 20s and 30s. It is, to be succinct, the most beautiful place in Massachusetts. Lest you think this is just the idle claim of a chauvinistic resident, let me point out that a true native son (I am a Johnny-come-very-lately from Marblehead) is insulted by any description of his turf that does not set it by a good margin above all other places on earth. I've seen a good deal of the earth in the last dozen years, and I'm inclined to be sympathetic to this view.

I have organized the bird-finding material below by phenomenon - seabird migration, winter residents, etc. - under which more detailed information is further divided by locality. Inasmuch as this is a commission for a birdwatching periodical, I have perhaps taken a small liberty by including in the locality notes a few facts that are not directly related to efficient birding. I have tried to limit these digressions to a few "hidden treasures" and to the kinds of things that everyone wonders about as they go about their chosen business but that few have the time to look up.

[Editor's note: the Winter Residents section includes detailed directions for a full day's tour around the Cape Ann coastline. The reader should consult this part and the accompanying maps to find areas mentioned elsewhere.]

SEABIRD MIGRATION

The most spectacular avian event on Cape Ann is the fall passage of seabirds along the coast, beginning with flocks of Double-crested Cormorants as early as late August and tapering off in mid-to-late December with the arrival of the last of the wintering sea ducks and alcids. For me, this spectacle has two high points: the great strings and wedges of scoters (all three species) and Common Eiders (sharp eyes will pick out a King occasionally) which peak between mid-October and early November and the drama of a good, strong two or three day northeast blow between late October and early December. The scoter/eider migration occurs regardless of the weather and is a moving pageant whether the sky is clear or lowering. When the day is fine, the sun vivifies the reds, yellows, and green of the ducks' soft-part colors and makes the drake eiders seem to twinkle as they flap. When the wind is blowing inshore and a big green sea is running, it is equally fine to watch the flocks undulate over the wave crests and disappear into the troughs. It is as if you can feel the primordial instinct to flee before the arctic winter.

The thrills of a November northeaster are of a somewhat different nature. The weather itself is exciting - noisy and physical - and the birding takes on the piquance that derives from the anticipation of rarities. Apart from their intrinsic glamour, the advantage of northeasters is that they push pelagic species toward the coast. When such a storm coincides with some offshore event such as an influx of kittiwakes or a concentrated movement of Dovekies, birders on the snore may be treated to interesting species in unusual abundance. November combines a high average incidence of northeasters and the greatest variety of seabirds on the move in numbers. Common and Red-throated loons (sometimes hundreds), Red-necked and Horned grebes, Northern Gannets (often hundreds), both cormorants, any of the wintering sea ducks, kittiwakes (sometimes thousands), Razorbills, Thick-billed Murres, and Black Guillemots should be represented in an average November flight, and the "edge" is provided by the hope that a Leach's Storm-Petrel, fulmar, Cory's Shearwater, Common Puffin, or a flock of Red Phalaropes will wing into view. Not long ago Dovekies would routinely have been included among the regulars above, but they have been so scarce during the last decade that they can no longer be blithely expected.

A roaring onshore gale is not crucial to good fall seabirding on Cape Ann. A still, overcast day in mid-November with a flat, calm sea may compensate with improved visibility for its failure to produce great concentrations. Indeed, only strong northwest winds are consistently unproductive along this coast in the fall except for cormorants, loons, and sea ducks.

From August through October, the patient observer-cum-telescope can view from land's end in Rockport a full range of "summer pelagics": tubenoses, phalaropes, jaegers, etc., as well as whales, dolphins, basking sharks, and ocean sunfish. But most visitors to Cape Ann in search of these species will probably want to invest in a boat trip offshore (see Pelagic Trips below).

The return of seabirds northward in the spring is a more attenuated, dispersed affair and is not as predictable an event as the fall flight. Nevertheless, southeasterly gales are not at all unusual in April and May and occasionally drive migrating flocks of Red Phalaropes inshore. Shearwaters, storm-petrels and jaegers also begin to arrive in numbers on the offshore banks in April and may be pushed shoreward by spring storms though these species do not become common on the inshore banks until midsummer at the earliest. Sooty Shearwaters tend to migrate closer to the coast than their fellow tubenoses, and a patient observer can often see them from shore in late May and early June, even in fine weather.

Under any weather conditions, experience has shown that sea-watching is best in the early hours following dawn. Birds moving at sea during the night seem to get pushed inshore when the wind is easterly and then gradually reorient during the day. When there is no storm, the seas tend to be calmer at dawn, enhancing visibility. This is not to say that impressive movements do not occur at other times of day; they most emphatically do.

Two locations surpass all others as seabird watch points on Cape Ann. (See Winter Residents section for detailed travel directions.)

Andrew's Point is reached by public roads that end right at the edge of the sea. The obvious advantage here is that when the weather is nasty, you can watch the migration from your car, suffering only the inconvenience of having occasionally to wipe rain and spray from your optical equipment. There are a number of ways to park at Andrew's to command a broad stretch of horizon, but on weekends in late fall the best slots go to the early birds. Most of the human residents of Andrew's Point have departed for the season by the time the birds are flying, and relations between property owners and birders have in general been good here. In order to maintain this civilized coexistence, individuals and especially bird clubs are advised to take a proprietary interest in the welfare of the area's lawns, shrubbery, etc.

Halibut Point, originally perhaps "haul about" point, is one of the most magnificent pieces of real estate in the Commonwealth. Its sculptured pink granite margins meet the

Atlantic with a grace that suggests artistic invention. When the wind is up, the play of water and rock is as good as the last act of King Lear. On a clear day your eyes will be drawn along the smooth pale curve of Plum Island and Crane's Beach to the left and you can pick out Mt. Agamenticus to the northeast, looking more like a little blue island than a tall monadnock back of the Maine coast. If it is October, the gentle slope up to the quarry pond will be scarlet with turned huckleberry leaves, and if it is August, the mixture of salt air and sweet fern will make you want to sit down and wait out the season right there.

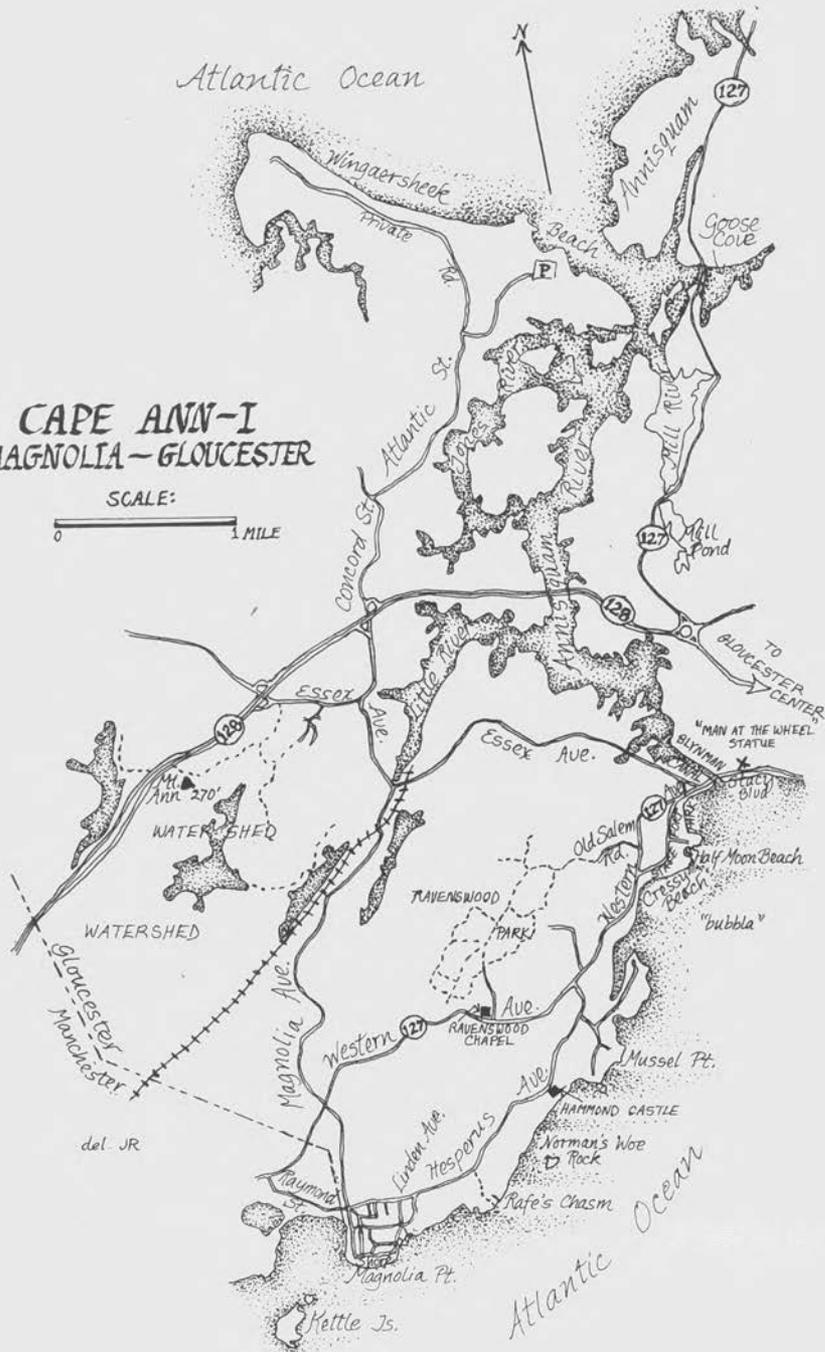
From about 1798 to 1920, cutting slabs of the native ledge like the ones that make up Halibut's most prominent topographical feature was a prosperous industry in Rockport. Most of the hard work was eventually done by meaty-armed Finns and Irishmen who risked their lives and worked twelve hour days for a slice of New World opportunity. Except for a single operative quarry in Pigeon Cove, commercial stone-cutting is only history here now. But the quarry holes still have their uses: one is a favored repository for the region's stolen cars; another is reserved for skinny dipping; most, like the one at Halibut, are just pretty to look at.

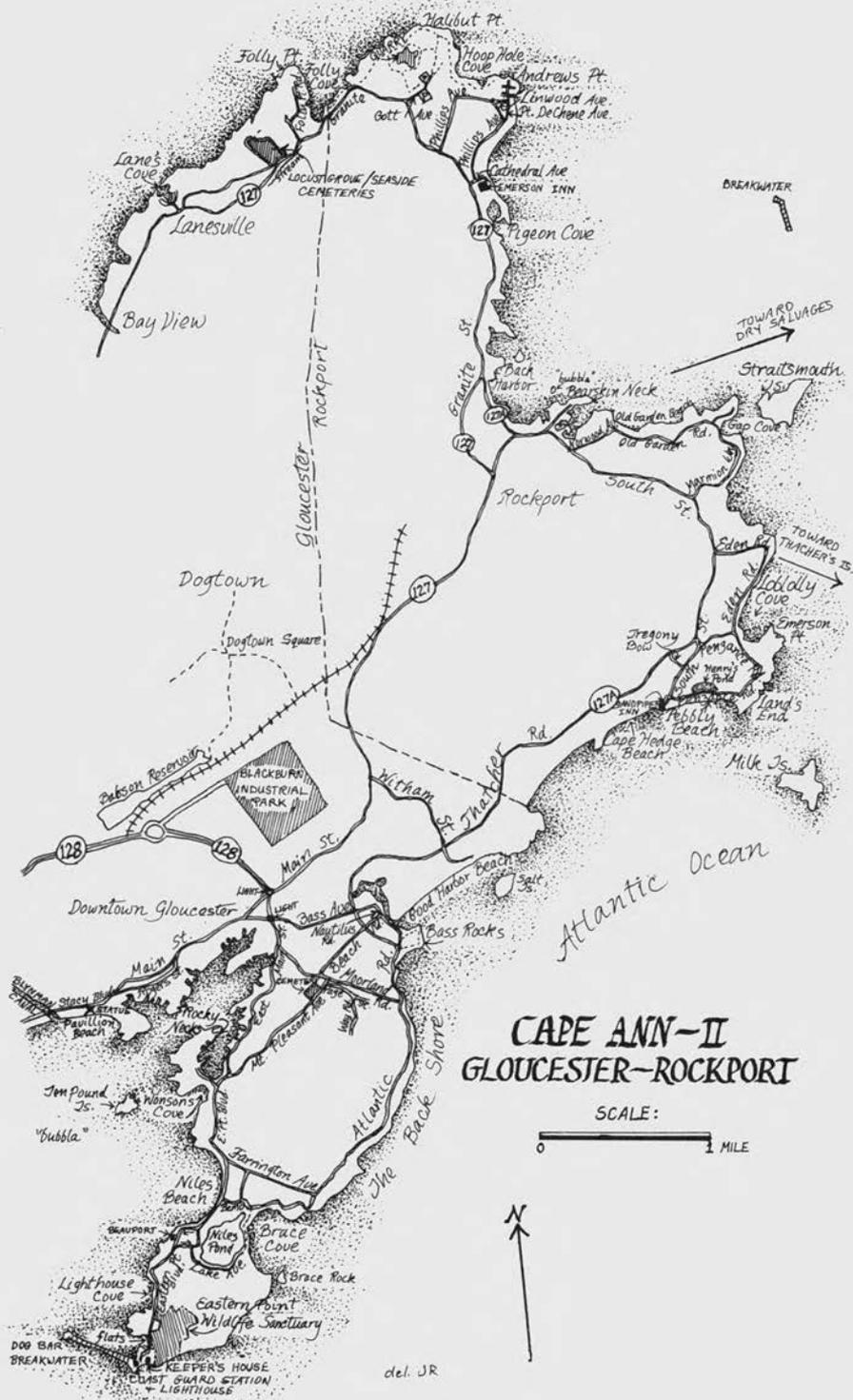
Thanks to the Trustees of Reservations and the enlightened government of Massachusetts, we can stop worrying that we will awake one morning to find Halibut Point blighted with the condominium clusters that have recently sprung up on choice shorefront in these parts like toadstools after a rain; the whole point is now under protection. However, now that the state has acquired the lion's share of the point, use of the area will probably increase. A management plan has already been drafted which calls for trail improvements, increased parking space, a visitor center at the old World War II submarine lookout tower, and a fulltime staff of three.

As to seawatching at Halibut, purists will not acknowledge that there is any alternative. Watching birds pass by from the lower rocks - these provide a measure of shelter when necessary as well as seating arrangements to suit all conditions and anatomies - it is no trick at all to imagine that you are on a remote island or in a boat, not just watching but, actually among the flocks of eider. From the top of the rock stack where there is no shelter whatever, the perspective is altogether different, and the migration can be seen laid out over the broad plane of water as if from the air. To partake of all this splendor you must dress appropriately for the weather, park in one of the two parking lots situated just off Route 127A (Gott Avenue), make your contribution to the maintenance of the place, and walk the pleasant half mile or so of trail down to the shore.

CAPE ANN-I MAGNOLIA - GLOUCESTER

SCALE:





CAPE ANN-II GLOUCESTER-ROCKPORT

SCALE:

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del. JR.

WINTER RESIDENTS

By late November all the species of seabirds that winter along Cape Ann's rocky shores are in residence though new individuals continue to appear erratically throughout the season. Common and Red-throated loons, Red-necked and Horned grebes, Great Cormorant, goldeneye, Oldsquaw, Bufflehead, eider, all three scoters, Red-breasted Merganser, Purple Sandpiper, one or two species of white-winged gulls, and Black Guillemot can be expected during any moderately thorough inspection of the coastline. This usual fare is often spiked by the presence of one or more slightly less common or more irregular species such as Barrow's Goldeneye, Harlequin Duck, King Eider, Thick-billed Murre, Razorbill, or Dovekie. Every few seasons, the area is graced by the visit of a true rarity such as Arctic Loon, Eared Grebe, Common Murre, or Ivory Gull. Even omitting these "write-ins," it is hard to think of a better way for an ornithophile to spend a calm winter day than poking along the baroquely jig-sawed margin of this headland, scanning each cove and beachfront for whatever avian surprise it might hold. In general, such expeditions are most successful during high to mid-tide since many littoral feeders move offshore at low tide, but this "rule" is not followed by all individuals. In any case, if you spend an adequate amount of time, you will inevitably encounter at least mid-tide at some point during your visit.

A geographer would doubtless consider the Annisquam River to be the natural western boundary of Cape Ann. The Cape Ann phone book, however, includes Essex within its domain, and the Gloucester Daily Times goes so far as to annex Manchester. I herewith propose the birdwatcher's Cape Ann to be Gloucester and Rockport, thereby including the subdivision of southwest Gloucester known as Magnolia and also Wingersheek Beach.

Accordingly, this paper tour of the coast will begin at the west end of Magnolia's Shore Road which leaves Hesperus Avenue to the south, right at the Manchester/Magnolia line. In reality, you will probably want to spend the hours immediately after dawn at Andrew's Point or Halibut Point (see above) to see if anything of interest has drifted inshore during the night. (If you begin the day looking due east, you will spend a lot of time puzzling over avian silhouettes bobbing in front of the rising sun.) The waters off Magnolia Point may host any of the species noted above, but the best reason for stopping here is the chance of finding the Harlequin Ducks that range along this part of the coast most winters; sometimes they can only be discerned working the near shore of Kettle Island to the southwest.

Turn left at the end of Shore Road (right follows the shore for a few more yards to a private drive), and then jog immediately right on Linden Avenue. From the point at which Linden joins Hesperus Avenue, it is about 0.4 mile to a quadrangle of municipal park, officially known as Rafe's Chasm Reservation.



Harlequin Ducks

Illustration by Julie Roberts

You will recognize the entrance by the small parking lot on the east side of the road and the post and rail fence running along the access trail through the woods to the shore. The chasm, reputedly named for a one-time Magnolian called Ralph, splits the granite ledge for some two hundred feet at the water's edge. Despite the name of the park, the chasm is on private property just to the north of the town land and is protected from close public scrutiny by imposing wire fences. That is all right because when the chasm was more accessible, some over-curious sightseer was always tumbling into the sixty-foot gorge. The sight now advertised here by a sign at the end of the park trail is "The Flume," a similar chasm visible across the cove to the west. None of this need be of much concern to birders as their interest in the place is centered on the Harlequin Ducks that not infrequently feed and perch at close range around the surf-washed rocks. As you walk along the shore edge, note the luxuriant purplish-green (winter) clumps of Bearberry, *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*, an ericaceous ground cover of rather local distribution in Essex County.

About 0.6 mile beyond the parking area for Rafe's Chasm is the much larger one for the Hammond Castle Museum. This is the creation of Jack Hammond, millionaire eccentric and holder of hundreds of patents in radar, radio, and television technology in which fields he was an early genius. The

castle represents a lifetime of eclectic art collecting and is worth the price of a visit (three dollars per adult for a guided tour), in the summer when birding is slack or even in the winter when the weather is cold (closed in January). Only one of the castle's curiosities will be noted here and only because it will unfailingly catch your eye if you follow the birding directions below: the tall gent striking a balletic pose in the garden, raising a conch above his head and clad only in a fig leaf and a coat of verdigris is Jack himself. Walk down the driveway at the north end of the parking lot, look through the portico of Gothic arches, and offshore to the right you will see Norman's Woe Rock. This is the scene of Longfellow's "Wreck of the Hesperus" and of many genuine, less sentimental founderingings. No one seems to remember who Norman was - probably one of the unlucky captains who lost his ship here. Compensating slightly for the threat it poses to mariners, this rock is good Harlequin Duck habitat along its edges. A legion of Great Cormorants roosts on it in winter, as Double-crests do in summer. Also scope along the shore of Mussel Point to your left, the near shore, and the water immediately before you which may be quite busy with an interesting assortment of the seabird species listed above. The peninsula with the lighthouse across the way is Eastern Point wither you will be led directly.

Heading north again on Hesperus Avenue, you will soon rejoin Route 127, usually known hereabouts as Western Avenue. Follow this north for 0.7 mile and turn right on Hough Avenue into Stage Fort Park. From the fence line above Cressy Beach you have a good view of the outer harbor where large flocks of goldeneyes and eiders and smaller numbers of other species sometimes drift. You may also see an impressive congregation of gulls over a long slick near the center of the harbor. The attraction is described with wry tolerance in Gloucester as "the Bubbla" (bubbler), the end of a pipe the other end of which is connected to the city sewer system. The outflow is four million gallons per day. In addition to the plebeian gulls (Herring, Great Black-backed and Ring-billed), Iceland, Glaucous, and kittiwake are to be expected here in winter. Little and Black-headed gulls have also been seen and "the Bubbla" seems a likely habitat for that inveterate offal-eater, Ivory Gull. In 1623 a few intrepid fishermen from the Massachusetts Bay Colony set up a fishing stage near where you're standing, an ill-fated attempt to begin Gloucester, which failed to attract a population fit for incorporation until 1642. The "fort" part of Stage Fort Park comes from the old breastwork above Half Moon Beach first built in 1673 and manned in the War of 1812, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War of 1898 though no notable action ever occurred here.

Exiting Stage Fort Park at the other end of the access road brings you back onto Western Avenue, which shortly crosses the "cut bridge" over the Blynman Canal and becomes Stacy Boulevard. Just north of the cut is the Gloucester High

School athletic field, and if the weather is nasty, it may be worth scoping the gulls that often roost there for Lesser Black-backed Gull. If there seem to be a lot of ducks or gulls off Pavillion Beach or along the seawall before the cut, stop and scope for Barrow's Goldeneye and interesting gulls; and, if so inclined, admire Leonard Craske's famous Man at the Wheel statue, erected in tribute to seafaring Gloucestermen and especially those many thousands who never returned.

A more prosaic landmark is the odd bit of dockworks standing in the water offshore to your left and usually thickly settled with gulls. This is the platform of the Greasy Pole. During the fiesta of St. Peter in the last weekend in June, anyone who has drunk enough beer is eligible to try to walk to the end of the slippery projection and snatch a red flag from its tip. Someone always manages to do so, but that of course has little to do with the appeal of the event.

Unless you want to stop for a beer at the Blackburn Tavern or grab a coffee-to-go at Dunkin Donuts, follow Rogers Street along the waterfront, stopping only to check the large gull flocks that roost on roofs to your right or gather to scavenge refuse from any fishy activity that may be in progress along the wharves. If you stay with the waterfront, you will go over a hill and come down on East Main Street which roughly parallels the east side of the harbor and the west margin of the peninsula known as East Gloucester. Along the first mile of East Main, continue to watch for gulls flocking by the wharves and on the flats in Wonson's Cove if it is low tide. You might pause for a moment in the parking lot at Niles Beach and scan the broad stretch of water before you; any of the common wintering waterbird species are likely to be present, though in my experience this is one of those likely looking spots that never fulfils its promise by producing a rarity. Perhaps that is because non-ornithological thoughts often intrude when one looks out from this vantage point. The ever changing vista looking across to the Magnolia shore and then south still seems a fair model for the one Fitz Hugh Lane painted in the 1860s except for the cut of the boats.

Glancing down the near shore and the stone-gated road to the south, we can anticipate our entrance into that bastion of summering pulchritude, Eastern Point. Only 160 years ago this choice real estate was selling, not very briskly, for twelve dollars an acre. These days you would have to add at least three zeros for an acre that could claim even a distant view of the water. From 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. on weekends and holidays between Memorial Day and Labor Day, a gentleman in uniform will stop you at the gate and ask your business. If you are visiting friends on the point or are bound for Massachusetts Audubon's Eastern Point Wildlife Sanctuary (have your membership card on hand!), you will be waved through; otherwise you will be politely but firmly urged to



Thayer's Gull

Photo by Chris Leahy

skip it or walk. No such obstacle confronts the winter birder. Once inside the gates, examine the fruiting trees in the yard to your left just in case Pine Grosbeaks or other noteworthy frugivores are munching therein. Then glance out the opposite window at Ten Pound Island gracing the entrance to the inner harbor. Winslow Homer shared accommodations with the lighthouse keeper here during the summer of 1880; he underwent a major change in style and painted in that time many of what most critics agree are among his finest watercolors.

Not far after the road takes you on an obligatory detour to the right, away from Niles Pond, you will see a sign for "Beauport." This is what Champlain called Gloucester when he stopped by early in the seventeenth century, but in the present context, it refers to an adjacent mansion (open summers only) of forty rooms, each elaborately decorated by another Gloucester-based eccentric, Henry Davis Sleeper, to reflect a particular period or mood. Of more interest to birders are the nearby Scotch Pines, likely to hold Red Crossbill in those years when this irruptive species favors us with its presence.

Just beyond Lighthouse Cove (see comments under Niles Beach for scenic and birding prospects), you will come into a luxuriant stand of oaks spanning both sides of the road. Look for Red-headed Woodpecker here in late fall and early winter. On the left is the entrance to the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Eastern Point Wildlife Sanctuary, of scant interest

at this season though the scrubby open area near the south end has produced Orange-crowned Warbler in late November and early December. The end of the road is a parking lot overlooking a small cove and flat, the Dog Bar Breakwater, and the Eastern Point Coast Guard Station cum Lighthouse. The little flat of the cove is often a fine place to sort out plumages of white-winged gulls at close range, and Purple Sandpipers are regular (if usually distant) on the breakwater. After an easterly gale, the latter is also a good place to confirm the leg color of Black-legged Kittiwakes.

As you return along Eastern Point Boulevard, the road takes you past the west shore of Niles Pond. There is little room to pull over here, but the traffic is usually light. If the pond hasn't frozen up completely (usually not until January) and the sun isn't in your eyes, you may want to pause here and look over the throng of resting and bathing gulls that is nearly always present. To work Niles Pond more thoroughly, continue north along Eastern Point Boulevard, and take your first right onto spruce-lined Bemo Avenue. Jog to the left and then immediately right and down the hill, and park where three big boulders block auto access to a sand track off to the right. Try to ignore the array of beer bottles that normally adorns this popular reveling spot and walk the track, scope in hand. The thick borders of Salt Spray Rose and honeysuckle have been known to harbor Orange-crowned Warblers and to provide perches for Northern Shrikes and Western Kingbirds, but these are by no means to be expected. Shortly, you will emerge onto the narrow embankment that separates Brace Cove to the east from Niles Pond to the west. It would not be very surprising to flush a Water Pipit or a Palm Warbler at this point, but your main concern is to scan the cove and the pond. Together they constitute one of the best places this side of Newfoundland to see numbers of white-winged gulls with fifty or more frequently present in late winter. And if you are the kind of birder-masochist who enjoys examining ten thousand gulls in the hope that one of them will turn out to be a Lesser Black-backed or that afterthought of evolution, Thayer's Gull, you can hardly do better than to hunker down amid the mugwort stems here and start scanning. The clientele at the Niles' seagull bathhouse is in continual flux; so by the time you've scanned the flock once, it's quite likely that the bird you're looking for has come in at the other end and so on ad infinitum.

Before you return, give the cove the once over for Barrow's Goldeneye and the stray alcid, and check the beach for wintering Sanderling, Dunlin, and Killdeer. While there is open water, Niles Pond usually holds a respectable variety of fresh water fowl. Mallard, Black Duck, teal, American Wigeon, Northern Pintail and Gadwall are regular, and classier species such as Eurasian Wigeon, Snow Goose, and Tundra (Whistling) Swan show up with surprising frequency. It's a good place to see Lesser Scaup "well enough to count" in late fall and early spring. The walk around the pond is

nice, but in winter you are unlikely to see anything of interest that you do not see from this vantage point. Finally, take a moment to drink in the handsome proportions of the rocky crescent of the cove held down at the south tip by Brace Rock, one of Fitz Hugh Lane's favorite subjects. The north headland of "Brace's" was once known as False Point, because not a few seamen dimly perceived the cove and the pond beyond through the murk of a foggy night and proceeded as if rounding Eastern Point, shortly of course discovering their mistake as they found themselves aground on the beach.

From where you parked, the road continues parallel with Brace Beach. From high to mid-tide, you can often stay in your car and inspect at wonderfully close range a variety of interesting gulls feeding at the surf line along this stretch. If the road remains passable (sometimes it's flooded, icy, or strewn with storm-tossed boulders), it emerges after a few turns at the south end of what the maps call Atlantic Road. In local parlance, the stretch from here to Bass Rocks is just The Back Shore. Every day of the year this two-mile succession of rocky coves and sprawling figures of granite makes a pretty admirable foreground for the ever-changing sea and sky; but at the end of a three-day northeaster when the wind comes around into the northwest, blowing the tops off the juggernautical combers and letting the sun work theatrical effects through the racing clouds, well . . . Big Sur, eat your heart out. In calmer weather the coves and shoals of this back shore attract most of the seabird specialties discussed above. Just drive along slowly, stopping where you notice something of potential interest. Residents are used to tourists poking along here gawking at the view, but you should check your rear-view mirror once in a while to make sure the line of traffic behind you isn't too long. Often the best variety of birds occurs in or near the last cove before Bass Rocks just beyond Moorland Road on the left. The Harlequin Ducks, King Eiders, Purple Sandpipers, white-winged gulls, and other birds (both rarer and commoner) that hang out here give no sign of being offended by the quality of the seaside architecture.

Continue left along Atlantic Road and take the second right (Beach Road). After all those rocks it is a pleasant surprise to come upon the soft pale strand of "Little" Good Harbor Beach, its unpretentious dunes, and the patch of golden salt marsh behind. There are usually some gulls collected here and sometimes winter Sanderlings. If you park near the entrance to the beach parking lot and walk in at this time of year, your Cape Ann list may end up the better for Horned Lark, Ipswich Savannah Sparrow, Lapland Longspur and Snow Bunting.

But on the whole, this "Good Harbor" is far more interesting for its geological history than as habitat for avian rarities. The perspicacious reader will want to know for a start where the good little harbor is. To the extent that it is

anywhere anymore, it has dwindled into the little wedge of a pond that lies at the intersection of Thatcher Road (127A) and Witham Street. As late as the 1750s, there was a lagoon in place of most of the present day salt marsh, a thirty-foot high "Piney Knoll" standing approximately where the wooden bridge crosses the tidal creek at the end of Beach Road and extending out along what is now the dune line, and a navigable creek separating this little peninsula from Briar Neck. In due course the pines that anchored the knoll were cut, a big storm washed the knoll into the lagoon, and the filling of the Briar Neck creek by its owner effected the last stage in the cooperative efforts of man and nature to turn harbor into marsh.

Almost all of the Rockport shore is accessible by road. How much of it to bird is therefore a matter of personal choice. One likes to believe that the traditional stops noted briefly below are the best and the generally neglected stretches of coast utterly and forever uninteresting, but this is probably a delusion. So by all means, experiment, especially if you are going over familiar territory for the fiftieth time. The hidebound itinerary is more or less as follows.

Continue north from Gloucester into Rockport on the eastern leg of 127A. About 1.5 miles past the Rockport line, turn right on Tregony Bow and then right again where it emerges on South Street. You will soon see before you to the left the stony skeleton of the fire-ruined Sandpiper Inn, a good place from which to scope the large flocks of ducks that sometimes occur off this north end of Cape Hedge Beach. Turn back on South Street and go immediately right onto Penzance Road. Before freeze-up, Henry's Pond often has an interesting duck or gull and commands at least a nod of respect for harboring three Wood Storks in June of 1955. Stop at the north end of Pebbly Beach and look around. The clump of rocks here often has Purple Sandpipers, and for some reason the strait between Land's End and Milk Island regularly attracts concentrations of feeding seabirds. Note the black battalions of cormorants lined up on the beach of Milk Island along with what looks like about a third of the world's population of Herring and Great Black-backed gulls. Perhaps this is the moment to remind you that all of the offshore islands are worth examining through the telescope in the hope of noting a perched Snowy Owl or Rough-legged Hawk. You can even entertain fantasies of Gyrfalcons and Golden Eagles with some justification.

Proceed along Penzance Road, keeping your eyes open for Northern Shrikes in the tops of the Emerson Point thickets. Pause at the southwest corner of Loblolly Cove and briefly look over beach, rocks, and water. Then turn right onto the bumps and craters of Eden Road, watching the water for birds and admiring the twin lights of Thacher's Island (variable spelling). A steady course will bring you back onto 127A.

Turn right and right again about 0.4 mile along onto Marmion Way. You will probably not be compelled to stop until you get to Gap Cove, where you can usually count on finding some gulls, eiders, and perhaps something more exotic feeding along the near shore or along the base of adjacent Straitsmouth Island (now owned by Massachusetts Audubon Society).

Turn right in another 0.4 mile onto Old Garden Road and pause again in the parking lot above Old Garden Beach. If, as is not unlikely, you see nothing else, turn your scope to the east and examine the little patch of foam and gull guano known as the Dry Salvages (pronounced to rhyme with wages). Unlikely though it seems, this unprepossessing little hazard to navigation apparently so inspired T. S. Eliot that he named one of his "Four Quartets" for it. The poem is strongly evocative of the Cape Ann marinescape. While you are looking that one up, you may want to peruse the fifth stanza of "Landscapes" called "Cape Ann." It has nothing to do with Cape Ann except, I guess, in the poet's imagination, but it is easily Eliot's most ornithological poem: eleven species in thirteen lines.

As it swings left, Old Garden Road becomes Norwood Avenue and brings you again out onto 127A which to the right leads you shortly into the center of Rockport. Turn right along the shop-lined peninsula of Bearskin Neck (somebody once killed a bear here using only his knife and hung up the trophy, the story goes), and park in the lot at the end. Looking west from here you will probably see a group of gulls, often including Glaucous and Iceland, gathered around Rockport's version of the "Bubbla." Check for Purple Sandpipers on the little breakwater behind you. (N.B.: During the Christmas season Bearskin Neck is thronged with consumers, making access by car unbearable to impossible.)

Emerging from the west side of town on 127A, slow down or stop along the Back Harbor, a particularly reliable spot for Red-necked Grebe. Climb up through Pigeon Cove and turn right on Phillips Avenue 1.2 miles beyond the junction of 127 and 127A. Go straight on the little road (Cathedral Avenue!) that swings behind the Ralph Waldo Emerson Inn until you can see the shore: another standby lookout for Purple Sandpipers, Red-necked Grebes, Black Guillemots, and interesting ducks. The transcendent ornithological fame of this spot derives from a lost Rock Wren which made the best of things here for a few months in the winter of 1965. Return to Phillips Avenue, turn right, and as Phillips veers left, continue ahead on Point DeChene Avenue to Andrew's Point. (See also discussion under Seabird Migration.)

If you stop at Andrew's Point first thing in the morning for a spot of sea watching you may "wipe out" the majority of the winter resident specialties of Cape Ann before you leave. A raft of Common Eiders is nearly always present off the point and contains one or more King Eiders with surprising frequency.

Hoop Hole Cove, between Andrew's and Halibut points, usually hosts a flock of Common Goldeneyes, and the chance of finding a Barrow's among them seems better than average. An hour of conscientious watching at Andrew's is almost certain to produce Red-necked Grebe, Purple Sandpiper, Black Guillemot, and a white-winged gull or two. Birders who enjoy being out in the winter may be interested to learn that there is a path that can be followed along the shore from the Andrew's Point side of Hoop Hole Cove all the way to Folly Cove. The path crosses some private property, but birders are rarely shot in the wintertime on Cape Ann.

If you prefer to drive, start back out Point DeChene Avenue and take the second right, a little dirt road (Linwood Avenue) that connects again with the U-shaped Phillips Avenue which in turn leads back to 127. The turn-off (Gott Avenue) to Halibut Point is 0.4 mile beyond this intersection, and 0.3 mile farther on is Folly Cove, which is worth a onceover both from the sea wall at the Folly Cove Inn and from the little pull-off at the head of the cove. Two tenths of a mile beyond the pull-off, Folly Point Road ascends between two granite gate posts. This is a private road, but the view from the cliffs at the point rivals Halibut's for spectacle and affords the opportunity to scan more shoreline if you are still missing a species or two.

If you are chased out of Folly Point, go right at the fork coming up on 127 and turn into Locust Grove/Seaside Cemetery. At the back of this cemetery, there are trails that lead down to the shore, and the oaks in the cemetery sometimes sustain a Red-headed and/or other interesting woodpecker through the winter. Below the other branch (Washington Street) of the above-noted fork in the main road is a little wooded stream and marsh which stays open quite late into the winter, making it a good spot to pick up wintering robins or a snipe if you decide to begin your year's list on Cape Ann.



Glaucous Gull

*Photo by Nathaniel C. Nash
Courtesy of Massachusetts Audubon Society*

When I was a kid, Dee Snyder and I used to check out every inch of coast from Lane's Cove to Bay View, doubtless following the lead of Maestro Griscom. Though we came up with a "good tick" now and then, I have never been particularly enthusiastic about this stretch except for Lane's Cove itself with its quaint proportions and imposing seawall that the even more imposing Atlantic knocked over during the blizzard of '78. However, don't mistake my prejudices for your own.

There must be someone out there who has seen a good bird at Goose Cove or the adjacent Annisquam flats. I think my front runner is Brant, regular in spring and fall, but I keep watching for the Great Crested Grebe or, at least, Barnacle Goose that waits in the destiny of the place.

If you absolutely must "break sixty" on January first on Cape Ann, you might try birding the road out to Wingaersheek Beach including the adjacent marshes. Dick Forster, Wayne Peterson and crew never failed to turn up a Clapper Rail, an Orange-crowned Warbler, a Seaside Sparrow, or something equally "sexy" out here in the days when the Cape Ann Christmas Count was in competitive form. Keep in mind, however, that they spent the day there and did not do a lot of birding from the car. A proven tactic is to work the northeast edge of the salt marsh at high tide starting at the beach parking lot.

PASSERINE MIGRATION

Why should you forsake Mt. Auburn or Marblehead Neck and come to Cape Ann during migration? For variety, maybe? I'm not going to try to persuade you that my neighborhood is "just as good as" the regular traps, but I insist on noting that Prothonotary, Yellow-throated, Cerulean, and Worm-eating warblers have all been seen within walking distance of my doorstep in East Gloucester. For "trash-birds" like Lincoln's Sparrow and Philadelphia Vireo, I usually don't have to go farther than my driveway which partly explains why I don't get to the Neck or the Dell as often as I used to. Anyway, if some emergency brings you out here in May or September/October, here are a few stops that regularly produce their share of first class birds.

Eastern Point. The tall oaks along Eastern Point Boulevard from the south end of Lighthouse Cove to the edge of the salt marsh on the Eastern Point Wildlife Sanctuary are a natural target for warblers and other migrants making a landfall in spring. The interior of the sanctuary tends to be less rewarding because of the denseness of the habitat and the lack of edges. Also, the trails are so poorly maintained that it is often hard to make headway through the Smilax thickets. In fall, the main attraction of this area is the brushy thickets between the southern edge of the sanctuary and the shoreline. From these, interesting warblers and sparrows can often be "pished" up. In October and early November, a

variety of sparrows can usually be seen feeding on the lighthouse keeper's lawn and along the little drive that runs up to the east of the house.

The open part of the sanctuary is a traditional roost for migrating Monarch butterflies from late August to early October. Concentrations vary from none to several hundred depending on annual population fluctuations. The point is also a good place to find migrant Buckeye butterflies in late summer and fall. If you find yourself here when the weather is fine but the birding slack, treat yourself to a walk out to the end of the Dog Bar Breakwater.

Niles Pond. The thickets and copses around Niles Pond can be very productive in both spring and fall. The best birding is from the parking area at Brace Cove (see above under Winter Residents) along Lake Avenue to Eastern Point Boulevard.

Mt. Pleasant Cemetery and vicinity. Hardly Mt. Auburn, this upper end of Mt. Pleasant Avenue in East Gloucester nevertheless seems to be another logical target for migrants hitting the peninsula in spring. On a good day a walk down Page Street and Way Road can be worthwhile. Considering how little attention this area gets, it must mean something that most of the rarer warbler species that have been recorded in Massachusetts have been seen in this neighborhood.

Halibut Point. Over 135 species of land birds have been recorded in Halibut's locust groves and thickets. As with the other migrant traps noted, "prime time" is May and late August through early November.

SHOREBIRDS

Though Cape Ann has more than a fair share of mud flats and salt marshes, I have neither seen nor heard of shorebirds of more than routine interest visiting any of them. Of course, they are seldom worked. By contrast, Brace Cove often has an interesting assortment of shorebirds in late summer and fall. Buff-breasted Sandpiper has shown up here at least once, and I'll hazard a guess that Baird's Sandpiper is as regular at Brace Cove as on Plum Island. Pebbly Beach also holds an interesting sandpiper (Baird's again) from time to time. And I have been surprised to discover what an abundance and variety of shorebirds roost and feed along the sea ledges of the outer Cape Ann (fifteen or more species have been recorded for Halibut, most of them commonly).

SUMMER RESIDENTS

There are no Mourning Warblers or Black Skimmers breeding on Cape Ann, so perhaps its resident birds will be of chief interest to its resident humans. However, though they harbor no great rarities, the areas briefly described below are very pleasant and interesting places to walk, especially if your interest in natural history extends to organisms other than feathered ones.

Dogtown is a surprisingly extensive expanse of uninhabited oak woods, Red Maple swamp, postage stamp bogs, heathy scrub, and huge and plentiful glacial erratic boulders, occupying the heart of Cape Ann. It is crisscrossed with trails but accessible to cars only at its edges, so that it is possible to experience wilderness here within a few hundred yards of ordinary modern bustle. Dogtown is of interest historically because of the cellar holes marking the site of an eighteenth century settlement of about sixty families that flourished briefly before the American Revolution. Due perhaps to a postwar shift in Gloucester's economy, Dogtown became a kind of backwoods slum whose last wretched eccentric was evacuated in 1830. The name is generally supposed to derive from the dogs kept for protection by the largely female population, but like almost everything else said about Dogtown's history, this is speculation. Anyone with the courage to spend the night in Dogtown Square under a full moon is apt (it is said) to witness a ghostly spectacle of awesome proportions though one should be careful these days to distinguish supernatural manifestations from those of partying teenagers. Curiosities of a later era are a highlight of the trail that enters Dogtown east of the Babson Reservoir from the Blackburn Industrial Park. Here, Gloucester scion and self-appointed keeper of the public morality, Roger Babson, had inspirational words and phrases (PERSEVERANCE, HELP MOTHER) carved into pathside boulders.

The birdlife of Dogtown is not exceptional. Field Sparrows breed near Dogtown Square, and Prairie Warblers are common in this and the other open brushy areas. The swamp forest accommodates typical species such as Chestnut-sided Warbler, Great Crested Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, Wood Thrush, and Veery. The best of Dogtown's natural history is the botany of its bogs in which Pitcher Plant, Sundew, and several species of orchids, including the rare Arethusa, thrive. A very local woodland dragonfly (Williamsonia lintneri) occurs here too in late April and May. Every Sunday morning starting at 10:00 A.M., the Rockport Conservation Commission conducts walks through Dogtown (and other scenic or interesting areas). These begin behind the town hall on Broadway, and dogs are not invited. For more detail and good maps of Dogtown, see Garland(1973) and Pope (1980) in the references.

Ravenswood Park. The main access and parking lot of this five hundred acre park are located on Western Avenue (Route 127), 1.1 miles east of the intersection with Magnolia Avenue and 0.6 mile west of the Hesperus Avenue intersection (watch for Ravenswood Chapel on the north side of the road). The Ravenswood forest is easily the best example of mature, relatively undisturbed, forest on Cape Ann and compares favorably with any in the eastern part of the state. Here you can walk beneath a tall canopy of aged beeches and hemlocks and with a little effort and luck encounter some bird species such as Pileated Woodpecker, Solitary Vireo, and Black-

throated Green and Blackburnian warblers that tend to demand this habitat. As with Dogtown, the avifauna of Ravenswood (which probably never included ravens) is overshadowed by its flora which includes the northernmost examples of the plant for which Magnolia is named.

At the turn of the century, Ravenswood was the home of a naturalist "hermit" named Mason Walton, and the site of his hut is marked on the trail map located at the entrance near the chapel. Walton looked the part of a rustic eccentric with a long white beard and a Whitmanesque twinkle in his eye, but he was a sociable sort of hermit, walking into Gloucester for breakfast every morning and leading thousands of visitors on nature walks around his domain. He also wrote a rather fanciful book of nature lore in which he claims among other things to have proven that female "Cow Buntings" (Brown-headed Cowbirds) return to the nests they have parasitized and help the foster parents rear the young.

If you visit Ravenswood, be sure to take the trail up to Ledge Hill to see the view travelers from the south first had of Gloucester as their coaches mounted this peak of the Old Salem Road. Ravenswood is abutted to the west by extensive town watershed land, much of it quite undisturbed and crossed by trails (see map). Here the illusion of wilderness may be captured even better than within the park, which is very popular with joggers, doggers, and horsepersons.

Kettle Island "rookery": If you station yourself on Magnolia Point between 5:30 and 7:00 P.M. on any day from April to September and look southwest, you can watch dozens of Snowy Egrets, Cattle Egrets, Little Blue Herons, and Glossy Ibis returning to their nesting/roosting sites on Kettle Island. You should also watch for the less common Great Egret and Tricolored (Louisiana) Heron. The birds occupied House Island, a mile or so to the west, until 1979 when they relocated for reasons unknown.

PELAGIC TRIPS

The current popularity of whale watching has proved a boon to birders: there are now numerous sailings to the inshore fishing banks, where large concentrations of pelagic birds often keep company with the sought-after cetaceans. Wilson's Storm-Petrels and Greater, Manx, and Sooty shearwaters are likely to be present in midsummer (though tubenoses are notably erratic in seasonal distribution), and by August and September the odds of seeing Cory's Shearwater, jaegers, Northern Phalaropes, and rarities such as Sabine's Gull improve. The Gloucester Fisherman's Museum (617-283-1940) runs morning, afternoon, and full day cruises daily June through September. There are also numerous sport fishing boats that do daily runs out of Gloucester and Rockport (see the Cape Ann phone book under Fishing Parties). Some of these do overnight cruises to George's Bank, where the vari-

ety and abundance of birdlife are often greater than inshore. If you are tempted to ship out on one of the latter trips, you should consider that accommodations tend to be rather spartan and that the fishing crowd has a "flavor" different from the birding/whaling crowd.

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The maps for this article were drawn by Julie S. Roberts.