

BIRDING POND MEADOW PARK, BRAINTREE

by Robert Campbell, Weymouth
and Glenn d'Entremont, Randolph

One of the beneficial aspects of the gasoline shortage was that it motivated birders to do more exploring of birding sites close to home. In the Boston area, there are many good locations that are scarcely birded at all, but that have real potential. Many of us tend to develop a pattern of visits to the same tried and true sites year after year in their appropriate seasons. We often overlook promising areas in our own neighborhoods.

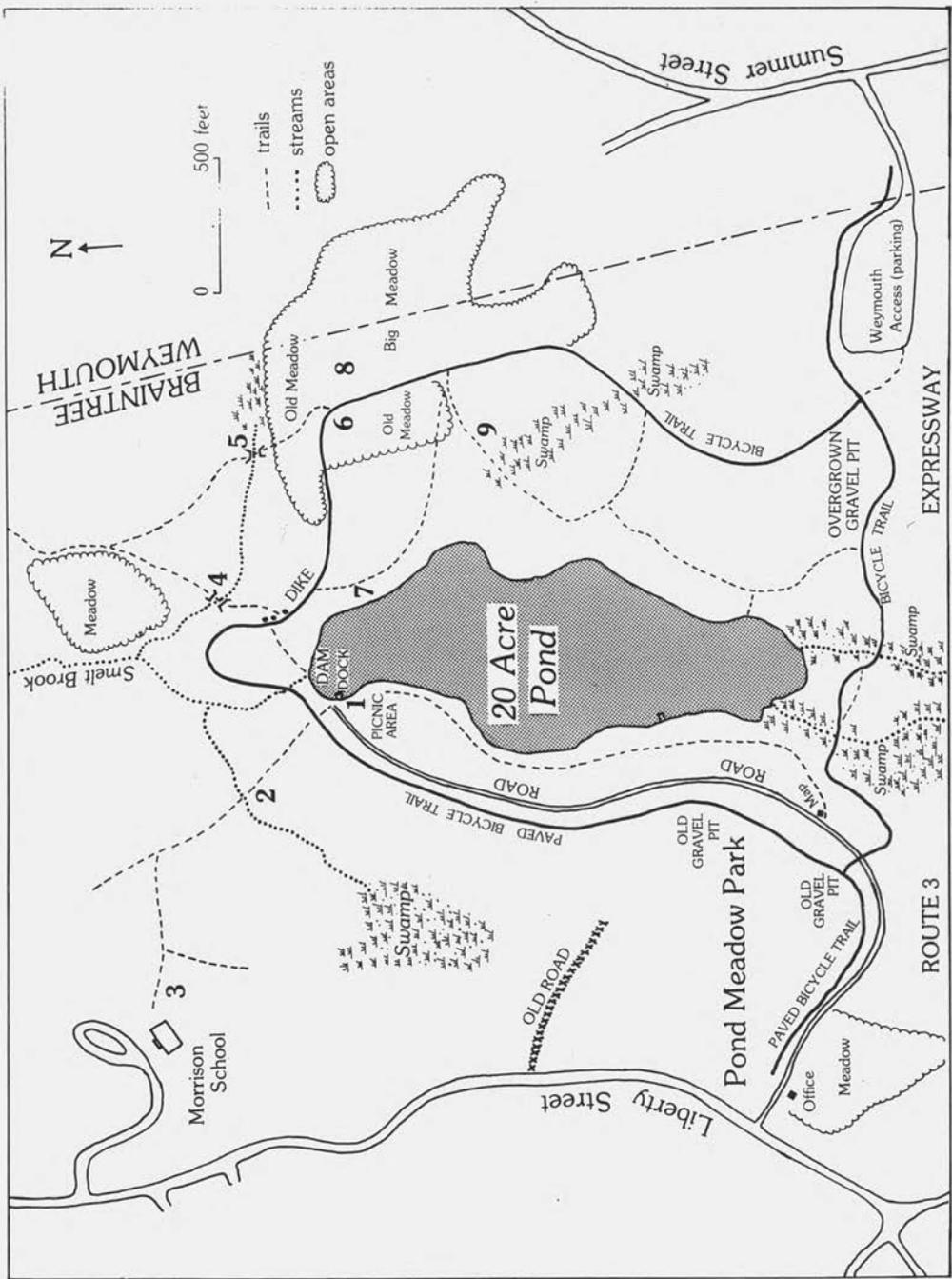
In the past few years, the authors have spent some time investigating the possibilities offered by Pond Meadow Park in Braintree and Weymouth. Pond Meadow Park was originally part of a flood control project for the Weymouth Landing area and was officially opened as a park in May of 1976. It is operated jointly by Weymouth and Braintree. The park comprises about 320 acres. It includes a variety of habitat - a twenty-acre pond, a meadow, marshy areas, deciduous woods, some open scrub area, and a few small pine groves. Much of the park is part of an old farm, and the visitor will notice many bits of evidence of the park's history such as old building foundations, escaped cultivated plant species, orchards, remnants of stone walls, and animal bones (mostly of pigs).

Access to the park is easy. From Route 3 south from Boston, take the Union Street exit in Braintree. Turn left under the Expressway and follow Union Street east past a Sunoco station to the first set of lights. At the lights, turn right onto Middle Street, go 0.5 of a mile and turn left onto Liberty Street (before the underpass). The park entrance is 0.1 mile on your right.

The front gate is open from 9 A.M. to 7 P.M. during Daylight Savings Time and from 9 A.M. to 5:00 P.M. thereafter. If the gate is open, you can drive down the dirt road to the dam at the far end of the pond. At other times, park so as not to block access to the road, and walk down.

At the dam, the first place to check is the picnic area at the edge of the pond. This is a good spot for spring migrants and seems to be particularly attractive to Warbling Vireos, which may nest here. Orchard Orioles have been seen here also. In early May, look along the sandy shore near the dam for Spotted or Solitary sandpipers. Every spring, one or two pairs of Spotted Sandpipers come in and visit for a week or so. This area is marked 1 on the map.

Before going around the pond, there is one short side trip which can be very productive. As you face the dam, there is a stony path to the left that is blocked off by a yellow pole gate. Walk



up this path, cross the paved bike trail, and continue straight down the path to a low swampy thicket. On an early winter morning this is an excellent place to find roosting Ruffed Grouse (2). In the spring, this is a good spot for warblers, vireos, and thrushes. As the path curves uphill to the left, look for Eastern Wood-Pewees and Great Crested Flycatchers, which seem to favor this area, as do Scarlet Tanagers. When the path forks at the top of the little hill, turn right and go down to another swampy spot directly behind the Archie T. Morrison elementary school (3). In May of 1983, two Hooded Warblers were seen here, one carrying nesting material! Blue-gray Gnatcatchers have nested here, and Winter Wren has been recorded. Check the bird feeders at the back of the school building. They are kept filled from late September until June.

Retrace your steps to the pond, and walk up onto the dam for a view of the pond. This really isn't much of a duck pond. The only regular species are American Black Ducks and Mallards, and a flock of Ring-necked Ducks that checks in every spring and fall. There are scattered appearances of other species of waterfowl, but nothing predictable. In the spring, Barn and Tree swallows catch insects over the surface of the water, and Northern Rough-winged Swallows are here every May. In early April and in October, look on the other side of the dam for Rusty Blackbirds, which appear here regularly along the stream.

After crossing the dam, you will come to a grassy dike alongside the pond. On the left side of this grassy area, there is a path entrance between two large boulders. Near the beginning of this path there is a small footbridge over a stream (4). Connecticut Warbler has been seen in the undergrowth of Jewelweed in September. In April, listen for Louisiana Waterthrush (two sightings): and for the woodland thrushes. If you come here in May, you should see one of Massachusetts' most beautiful insects, the Black-winged Damsel fly, whose preferred habitat is along these little shaded streams. Its metallic blue-green body and velvety black wings remind us that the birder who sees only birds and ignores the rest of the natural environment deprives himself of much enjoyment, both aesthetic and scientific.

As you walk farther along this path, you will notice an open area on your left. The undergrowth between this little field and the stream is a good place for American Woodcock and kinglets in the spring and is used as a grouse roost in winter.

Take the next path to the right. If it is spring, you will be in one of several Rufous-sided Towhee nesting territories. Follow this path, looking for warblers along the way, till you come to another little bridge on the edge of an old orchard (5). You should hear resident Yellow Warblers and Common Yellowthroats, and a glance at the trees will tell you that this is the place to look for Yellow-bellied Sapsucker in season. This section of the trail is very good for migrant warblers, and one of the authors has seen both Kentucky and Orange-crowned warblers here.

POND MEADOW SPECIES LIST

In referring to this list, one must remember that the area has had limited coverage by birders. Further observation would probably result in an increase in species recorded, more proven breeders, and more complete data on the relative abundance of the species present. Much of this article was drafted before the bicycle path was paved in 1984. It remains to be seen how the paving of this path will increase traffic in the park and perhaps affect bird populations.

Although many of the summer resident species may perhaps be presumed to breed in the park, we have listed as breeders only those species for which we have observed definite evidence of nesting. The symbols used in the list are the following:

SM = spring migrant Y = present year-round W = winter resident
 FM = fall migrant M = migrant both seasons U = uncommon to rare
 SR = summer resident B = known breeder

Pied-billed Grebe	UM	Eastern Wood-Pewee	SR	Yellow-rumped Warbler	M
Great Cormorant	UFM	"Traill's" Flycatcher	UM	Black-throated Green Warb.	M
Double-cr. Cormorant	M	Least Flycatcher	SM	Blackburnian Warbler	M
Great Blue Heron	UM	Eastern Phoebe	M	Pine Warbler	USM
Green-backed Heron	M	Great Crested Flycatcher	SR	Prairie Warbler	USM
Black-cr. Night-Heron	UM	Eastern Kingbird	SR	Palm Warbler	M
Mute Swan	USM	Tree Swallow	SR	Bay-breasted Warbler	M
Canada Goose	UM	No. Rough-winged Swallow	SR	Blackpoll Warbler	M
Wood Duck	M	Barn Swallow	SR	Black-and-white Warbler	M
American Black Duck	UY	Blue Jay	YB	American Redstart	SR
Mallard	YB	American Crow	Y	Ovenbird	SR
Ring-necked Duck	M	Fish Crow	USM	Northern Waterthrush	USM
Common Goldeneye	UW	Black-capped Chickadee	YB	Louisiana Waterthrush	USM 2x
Bufflehead	UW	Tufted Titmouse	YB	Kentucky Warbler	SM 1x
Common Merganser	UFM	Red-breasted Nuthatch	UW	Connecticut Warbler	UFM
Turkey Vulture	USM	White-breasted Nuthatch	YB	Mourning Warbler	SM 1x
Osprey	UM	Brown Creeper	Y	Common Yellowthroat	SRB
Sharp-shinned Hawk	UM	Carolina Wren	U	Hooded Warbler	SM 1x
Red-shouldered Hawk	UM	House Wren	SRB	Wilson's Warbler	M
Broad-winged Hawk	SR B?	Winter Wren	UM 2x	Canada Warbler	M
Red-tailed Hawk	Y	Golden-crowned Kinglet	M	Scarlet Tanager	SR
American Kestrel	Y	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	M	Northern Cardinal	SRB
Ring-necked Pheasant	UY	Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	MB	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	SRB
Ruffed Grouse	YB	Veery	UM SR?	Indigo Bunting	SRB
Northern Bobwhite	1x	Gray-cheeked Thrush	FM 1x	Rufous-sided Towhee	SRB
American Coot	UFM	Swainson's Thrush	UM	American Tree Sparrow	W
Killdeer	UM	Hermit Thrush	M	Chipping Sparrow	USM
Yellowlegs sp.	1x	Wood Thrush	SR	Field Sparrow	UM
Solitary Sandpiper	SM	American Robin	SRB	Savannah Sparrow	USM
Spotted Sandpiper	SM	Gray Catbird	SRB	Fox Sparrow	FM
American Woodcock	USR	Northern Mockingbird	SRB	Song Sparrow	YB
Ring-billed Gull	Y	Brown Thrasher	SRB	White-throated Sparrow	M
Herring Gull	Y	Cedar Waxwing	SR	Dark-eyed Junco	W
Great Black-backed Gull	Y	European Starling	Y	Bobolink	SM
Rock Dove	Y	Solitary Vireo	M	Red-winged Blackbird	SRB
Mourning Dove	Y	Yellow-throated Vireo	UM	Eastern Meadowlark	USM
Bl.-billed Cuckoo	UM SR?	Warbling Vireo	SR B?	Rusty Blackbird	M
Y.-billed Cuckoo	UM SR?	Philadelphia Vireo	UM	Common Grackle	SR
Eastern Screech-Owl	Y	Red-eyed Vireo	SR	Brown-headed Cowbird	SR
Great Horned Owl	YB	Blue-winged Warbler	M	Orchard Oriole	USM
Common Nighthawk	UM	Tennessee Warbler	M	Northern Oriole	SRB
Chimney Swift	SR	Orange-crowned Warbler	FM 1x	Purple Finch	UM
Ruby-thr. Hummingbird	SM	Nashville Warbler	M	House Finch	Y
Belted Kingfisher	UM	Northern Parula	M	White-winged Crossbill	UW 1x
Yellow-bell. Sapsucker	M	Yellow Warbler	SRB	Common Redpoll	UW
Downy Woodpecker	YB	Chestnut-sided Warbler	M	Pine Siskin	UM
Hairy Woodpecker	YB	Magnolia Warbler	M	American Goldfinch	Y
Northern Flicker	SRB	Cape May Warbler	M	Evening Grosbeak	UM
Olive-s. Flycatcher	SM 1x	Black-throated Blue Warb.	M	House Sparrow	Y

This path ends where it joins the paved bike path. You are now in the most active spring birding area in the park (6). To your left is a large meadow; to your right, the bike road goes back to the grassy dike and the pond. Between the meadow and the pond, we have seen all the common warblers, plus Mourning Warbler, House Wren, Philadelphia Vireo, both cuckoos, kinglets, and tanagers. Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Gray Catbirds, and Northern Orioles nest here every year. Walk down the path toward the pond, checking off the species on your field card as you go. Look on both sides of the dike for migrants, although the birds are usually more numerous on the side nearest the pond. In the little pine grove surrounding the picnic tables (7) a Great Horned Owl nested in 1977 and fledged one owlet in full view of the visitors to the park. Another nestling died when it fell from the nest.

Return up the path to the large meadow, observing birds that you missed on the way down. At the meadow (8), turn right and follow the path along the meadow's edge. On your left, in the meadow, look for Bobolinks and Eastern Meadowlarks; in the shrubbery to your right, you will certainly see more warblers and Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, as well as flycatchers, American Goldfinches, and Indigo Buntings. Red-tailed Hawks and Broad-winged Hawks reside in the area and are often seen soaring here. There is evidence that Broad-winged Hawks nest in the park itself.

Take the first path on the right leading into the woods toward the pond (9). In the tangled growth along the path, one of the authors found two Connecticut Warblers in September of 1982. Farther down the path, at the footbridge, a Winter Wren presented itself to be recorded on a Quincy area Christmas Count on one memorable day. This area has some of the oldest trees in the park and there is much evidence of woodpecker activity. The Pileated Woodpecker holes, alas, are many years old, evidence of a former presence.

At this point, you have covered the prime birding territories in the park. In terms of birds-per-hour efficiency, your best bet is probably to go back the way you came, looking for birds that were not seen when you came into the park, especially if you are parked near the dam. On the other hand, if you left your car at the front entrance, you may wish to go forward to look at some different habitat areas.

If you elect to go forward, continue over the bridge and follow the path. Take the trail that leads off to the right, and check the thickets on both sides. Someone is going to be lucky and find a chat here some day. During migration and breeding season, this area will have more towhees, catbirds, and thrashers, along with a sprinkling of migrant warblers, vireos, and sometimes flycatchers.

This trail eventually rejoins the bike trail, which you can follow back to your car. On the way, you will go through an old

gravel pit overgrown with weeds, a good spot for sparrows if you can hear them over the Route 3 traffic. The paved path leads down to an open marshy area, where you might see a water snake if you are there on a bright sunny morning. When the trail crosses the inlet to the pond, look for Rusty Blackbirds in season. Continue along the trail to the parking area.

Pond Meadow Park can be covered in an hour or two. When you finish, you are within easy driving distance of several other good birding areas. For example, you might continue your birding day at Great Pond in Braintree, the Squantum-Wollaston area, World's End or Wompatuck State Park in Hingham, or Fowl Meadow in Milton. Why not spend a day on this part of the south shore next spring?

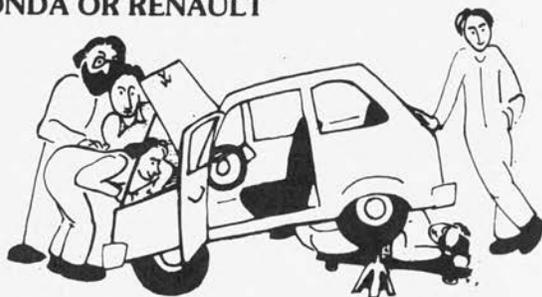
ROBERT A. CAMPBELL teaches fourth grade at the Archie T. Morrison School in Braintree. His original interest in natural history began with an enthusiasm for herpetology (he has observed and photographed both species of pit viper in Massachusetts), and he continues to maintain a small collection of live reptiles for study. He took up birding as a hobby in 1976. Bob met his co-author for the first time at the Penniman School in Braintree when he was teaching the sixth grade there and Glen was in his class. Since they have been birding together, Bob feels the roles of teacher and student have been somewhat reversed. He is grateful to Glenn and to David Brown of Quincy for tutelage in the fine points of birding.

GLENN d'ENTREMONT began his birding career with a trip to Manomet Bird Observatory in October of 1968. An accountant by profession, his concern is finding enough time to bird. His birding interests include field records and reports, looking for the unusual and the rare, and bird songs and vocalizations.

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