

HAWK-WATCHING SITES IN THE NEWBURYPORT AREA

by Edward M. Mair, Newburyport

The Newburyport area, famous as a year-round mecca for bird-watchers, also boasts a number of potential sites for watching hawks in migration. Although not producing the quantity of raptors seen at magnet sites like Wachusett Mountain or Mount Tom, the area has quality and variety. The spring hawk movement through this region is about equal to that in fall. Starting in 1986, the Eastern Massachusetts Hawk Watch (EMHW) will test these sites both in the spring and in the fall and will be looking for hawkwatchers to volunteer to cover the areas described in this paper.

Because these places comprise locations less frequently visited by most birdwatchers, detailed directions for finding them are given, and the birding possibilities are only briefly summarized. Also, a few of my favorite birding spots are marked on the map though not discussed at all in the text. As the birder moves along from one place to another, a number of the roads (e.g., Scotland Road, Turkey Hill Road, and Hale Street) can be birded as well as traversed, and it is worthwhile to scan the sky for hawks anywhere in Newburyport.

The directions given here are intended to describe the easiest routes for persons unfamiliar with the area rather than the shortest or fastest routes. Not all streets are shown on the map, and many street signs are missing. Here are a few key locations that the birder should become familiar with:

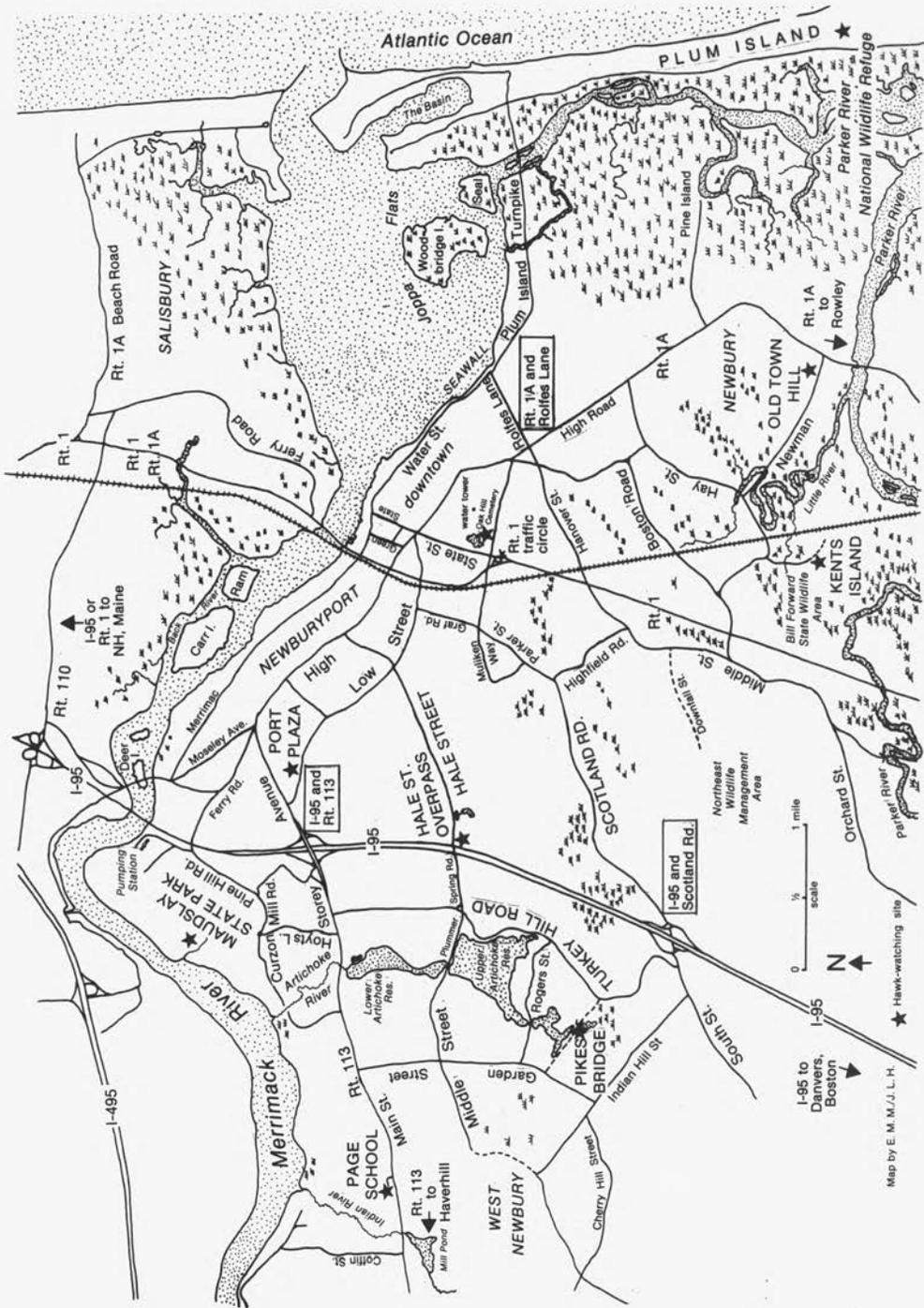
- 1) the intersection of Interstate 95 (I-95) and Scotland Road;
- 2) the intersection of I-95 and Route 113;
- 3) the Route 1 traffic circle;
- 4) the intersection of Route 1A and Rolfes Lane;
- 5) Pikes Bridge Road.

To avoid repetition, the following symbols are used after the name of each place:

- E = Exploratory site. Hawk migration has been observed at least once.
- C = Confirmed site. Hawk migration has been observed on many occasions, but there is no active organized hawk watch.
- A = Active site. EMHW hawk-watch site.
- S = Preferred site in spring.
- s = Hawks can be seen here in spring also.
- F = Preferred site in fall.
- f = Hawks can be seen here in fall also.

EAST OF INTERSTATE ROUTE 95 (I-95)

Plum Island (A,S). The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge is well-known to most New England birders for year-round birding.



Map by E. M. M./J. L. H.

In the spring, hawk-watching activity centers on the dune platform at Hellcat Swamp. The most abundant raptors are Sharpshinned Hawk and American Kestrel, but Merlin, Peregrine, Osprey, and several other species have been observed. Not much happens here in the fall. (Then, Page School is a better place for observing hawks.) The reader is referred to Richard Forster's excellent article, "Birding Plum Island," in *BOEM* 13 (June 1985): 116, for further information about the birdlife on the island.

Directions to Plum Island.

1. From the intersection of I-95 and Scotland Road, go east on Scotland Road 2.6 miles to the intersection with Muliken Way on the left and Parker Street on the right. Scotland Road becomes Graf Road at this point. Turn right onto Parker Street and proceed 0.3 mile to Route 1. You may cut straight across Route 1 and then shortly thereafter across State Street, or you may turn south on Route 1, go halfway around the traffic circle, and then turn right onto the continuation of Parker Street. You will pass the cemetery on the left 0.3 mile from the traffic circle and will come to Route 1A at 0.8 mile. Route 1A is the second of two immediate right turns. Follow Route 1A for 0.1 mile to the traffic light at Rolfes Lane.

Turn left on Rolfes Lane and drive to the end of it. Turn right onto Plum Island Turnpike and continue another 2.0 miles to the Parker River N.W.R. entrance road. Turn right and enter the refuge. Travel about 3.6 miles past the gate to the Hellcat Swamp parking lot on the right.

2. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, go east on Route 113 (Storey Avenue to High Street to High Road) 3.6 miles to Rolfes Lane. Follow directions above from Rolfes Lane.

3. To get to Plum Island from Pikes Bridge, turn right from the dirt parking area onto Turkey Hill Road. Go 0.8 mile to South Street and turn left. You will pass under I-95 at 1.0 mile. Follow directions above from I-95 and Scotland Road.

Park at Hellcat Swamp. To get to the platform, walk back up the road you came down about 0.1 mile to where a trail crosses the road. Follow the trail to the right, taking the right fork, and follow the boardwalk until you come up steps to the platform.

Old Town Hill (C,s,f).

This is a private reserve on a hill near the site where Newburyport's early settlers first built homes. The best vista is to the southeast. Most of the hawks observed from here are *Buteo* species.

Directions to Old Town Hill. Follow the Plum Island directions to Rolfes Lane. At the intersection of Route 1A and Rolfes Lane, travel south on Route 1A for 2.5 miles to Newman Road (there is a town green here.) Turn right, and park 0.1 mile farther at the entrance to the Old Town Hill Reservation. After parking here, follow the trail uphill until you come to a cleared area with a view to the southeast.

The Cemetery (E,S). This is an exciting place in the spring. There are mornings when this peaceful hillside drips warblers from its stately trees. Hawks have also been observed to the south.

Directions to the Cemetery.

1. From the intersection of I-95 and Scotland Road, follow the directions for Plum Island (1).
2. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, travel east towards Newburyport 0.2 mile to Low Street. Turn right. You will pass the back of Port Plaza on the left at 0.4 mile and Hale Street on the right at 1.5 miles. At 1.7 miles, turn south at a traffic light onto Route 1, and follow it to the traffic circle. Go halfway around the circle, and take a right onto Parker Street (between the doughnut shop and a hardware store). The entrance to the cemetery is on the left 0.3 mile from the traffic circle.

Hawkwatching will probably be best near the entrance, looking back across Parker Street, or take the right branch road inside the cemetery, find your way toward the big blue water tower on the hill, crawl through the fence (if you can) and look south.

Kents Island (E,F). This is a hill in the middle of a salt marsh in the Bill Forward State Wildlife Refuge. It is the former estate of author John Marquand and the place where he wrote many of his novels. It is a good raptor observation area throughout the year and provides a fine vista in the fall - a little known birding area well worth exploring.

Directions to Kents Island.

1. Follow Old Town Hill directions to Old Town Hill. Continue on Newman Road 1.0 mile until this road ends at Hay Street. Turn left and go 0.5 mile. Here, Hay Street takes a sharp bend to the right, but you should turn left out into the marsh. There is a parking area on the right at about 0.4 mile.
2. Follow Cemetery directions to the traffic circle. To get to Kents Island, head south on Route 1 from the traffic circle for 1.7 miles, when you will come to Boston Road. Turn left onto Boston Road, and travel 0.7 mile to the entrance to the Bill Forward S.W.R. (Just stay with the right forks in the road until you are clearly in the marsh.)

Park and walk 0.1 mile up the road to the house on the left. Go around to the front of the house.

Port Plaza (E,S). This is a shopping center located on Low Street, where you will see a Shaw's Supermarket and a K Mart. However, by chance last spring I found within half an hour fifty migrating hawks in the air over the parking lot. Then, I found many more, seen from across the road (Low Street) looking to the south.

Directions to Port Plaza. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, go east 0.2 mile to Low Street. There is a Shell Gas and Liquor Store on the corner. Turn right, and travel 0.2 mile to the back entrance of the shopping center on the left. The best hawkwatching is in this back area of the parking lot - near the K Mart garden shop.

WEST OF INTERSTATE ROUTE 95

Pikes Bridge (C,s,f). The best place for raptor observation is the "bridge" on this dirt road. This site, like the cemetery, is a good general birding spot that also happens often to have migrating hawks passing overhead.

Directions to Pikes Bridge.

1. From the intersection of I-95 and Scotland Road, travel west 0.1 mile to Turkey Hill Road. Turn right and go 0.8 mile to Pikes Bridge Road on the left.
2. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, go west on Route 113 toward West Newbury. At 0.7 mile, turn left on Turkey Hill Road. You will pass Plummer Spring Road on the right (called Hale Street on the left) at 1.6 miles and pass Rogers Street on the right at 2.3 miles. Continue onto Pikes Bridge Road on the right at 2.9 miles.

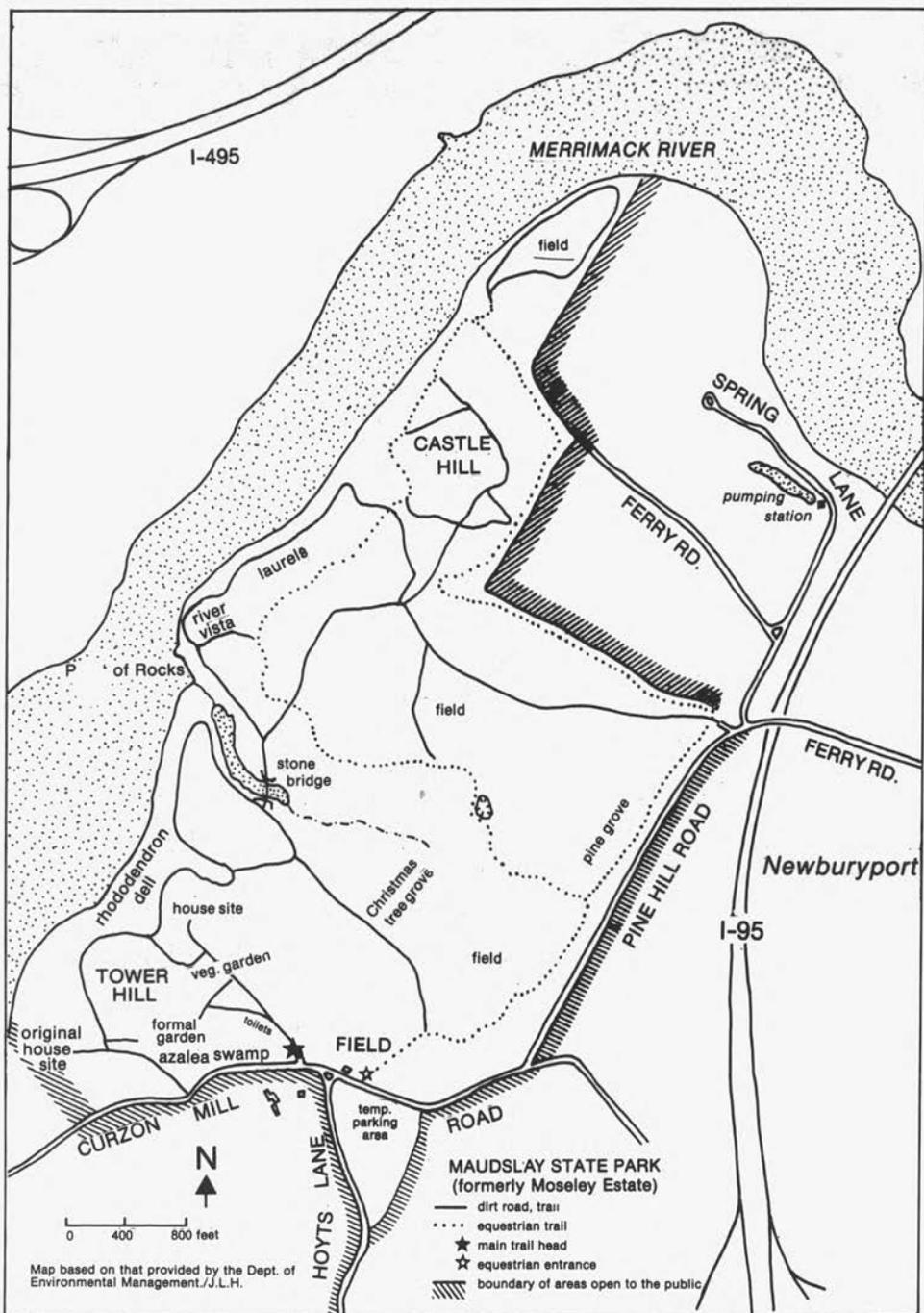
There is a dirt parking area at the entrance to Pikes Bridge Road but no street sign. Park here and walk 0.3 mile down the road to the "bridge."

Hale Street Overpass (C,f,s). This is a bridge over I-95 with good views of the sky in all directions. Hale Street is a handy connecting street to know when birding in the Newburyport area. Starting from Low Street (see Port Plaza), Hale street runs west, crossing Turkey Hill Road, the Artichoke Reservoir, and Garden Street. The name of the road changes within each town - to Plummer Spring Road, to Middle Street, etc., and the surface varies from dirt to paved. Hale Street eventually comes out on Route 133 in North Andover.

Directions to Hale Street Overpass.

1. From the intersection of I-95 and Scotland Road, follow Pikes Bridge directions to Pikes Bridge Road. Go north on Turkey Hill Road. You will pass Rogers Street 0.5 mile from Pikes Bridge Road and come to Hale Street on the right at 1.2 miles. Turn right. The overpass is obvious about 0.5 mile after the turn.
2. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, follow the directions given for Pikes Bridge to reach Hale Street. Turn left onto Hale Street, and go 0.5 mile to the overpass.

Parking is probably best along the street to the east of the overpass.



I-495

MERRIMACK RIVER

CASTLE HILL

SPRING

FERRY RD.

pumping station

laurels

River Vista

P of Rocks

field

stone bridge

mobodendron dell

house site

Christmas tree grove

pine grove

FERRY RD.

Newburyport

I-95

TOWER HILL

veg. garden

FIELD

original house site

formal garden

toilets

CURZON MILL

temp. parking area

ROAD

N

0 400 800 feet

HOYTS LANE

PINE HILL ROAD

Page School (A,F,S). This is now a public elementary school and was formerly the private Cushing Academy. The school sits atop a hill with its rear in the direction of the Merrimack River. The best hawk-watching location, both in spring and in fall, is behind the school. Broad-winged Hawk flights of two thousand and more have been observed here in the fall. Osprey migration is another highlight.

Directions to Page School.

1. From the intersection of I-95 and Scotland Road, follow the directions to Pikes Bridge Road. Drive down this dirt road across the "bridge," west to Garden Street. Turn right on Garden Street, and go 1.4 miles to Route 113. Turn left and travel another 0.8 mile to the Page School entrance on the right.

2. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, go west on 113 towards West Newbury. You will pass Turkey Hill Road on the left at 0.7 mile, pass Hoyts Lane (also called Gypsy Lane) on the right at 0.8 mile, and pass Garden Street on the left at 1.8 miles. The entrance to Page School is at the peak of a hill on the right at 2.6 miles.

Follow the school drive up, around, and in back of the school. Walk across the playing fields to where you can see the river below. This is the best place for hawkwatching in both the spring and the fall.

Moseley Estate (Maudslay State Park). This 467-acre estate, in the Moseley family since the 1860s, is now a beautiful new state park opened to the public in the fall of 1985 and renamed Maudslay State Park in honor of the family's original estate in England. The grounds were planted with dogwoods, laurels, azaleas, and ornamentals under the supervision of Charles Sprague Sargent, the designer of the Arnold Arboretum. Situated on a bend of the Merrimack River, these grounds are still unexplored for hawk-watching sites, and they may prove to be excellent. I have seen Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Osprey, Rough-legged Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, and American Kestrel on the property, although these birds were not necessarily migrants. There are maps posted throughout the park, and some potential sites, shown on the map on page 10, are Tower Hill, Point of Rocks, and Castle Hill. The fields directly across from the parking lot also hold promise.

Directions to Maudslay State Park. From the intersection of I-95 and Route 113, go west towards West Newbury. At 0.8 mile, turn right onto Hoyts (or Gypsy) Lane. Go 0.5 mile to Curzon Mill Road. Turn right, and you will find the parking lot on the right.

I have come to love the places described here for their beauty and solitude as well as for the wonderful hawk migration shows to be seen there. I feel the inclination to keep these places secret or, at least, unpublicized. Yet, I also see the pressures

of development encroaching on the areas that are not yet protected. One defense of these natural areas is their continued recreational use by birders and others. We welcome all to join us in enjoyment of these special pieces of land and of the raptor flights in the skies above them.

Beginning this year, 1986, the EMHW is seeking volunteers to test these sites for hawkwatching, both this spring on April 26 and 27 and in the fall. If you are interested in participating, please contact the author at 31 Plummer Avenue, Newburyport, MA 01950 (telephone 617-462-4796).

EDWARD M. MAIR, coordinator of the Eastern Massachusetts Hawk Watch for the north shore region, is a small-computer systems analyst who has conducted many training sessions for nonprofit organizations. He is president and founder of the Newburyport Birder's Exchange, author of *A Field Guide to Personal Computers for Bird Watchers and Other Naturalists* (Prentice-Hall, 1985), and father of a new daughter, Alexandra (first child), born in mid-January.

Are you interested in HAWKWATCHING this spring?

Some hawkwatchers will be out in March and early April, but the prime spring migration period is late April and early May. This year, the Eastern Massachusetts Hawk Watch will conduct coordinated hawkwatches on three weekends, April 19 and 20, April 26 and 27, and May 3 and 4, as part of a study throughout the New England area. The first weekend watch will focus on broadly based coverage across the region. Although we seek inland coverage on all three weekends, the watches on April 26 and 27 and on May 3 and 4 will focus on the coast, where observers may see numbers of American Kestrels, Sharp-shinned Hawks, and Merlins.

FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT HAWKS AND HAWK MIGRATION, the weekend watches on April 26 and 27 will have experienced leaders posted at specific sites in three areas: Newburyport, Greater Boston (including the South Shore), and Cape Cod. For further information on these special watches for birders new to hawkwatching, on the other weekend watches, or on hawkwatching in general, please write: EMHW, Paul M. Roberts, 254 Arlington Street, Medford, MA 02155 - telephone: 617-483-4263 after 8 P.M.



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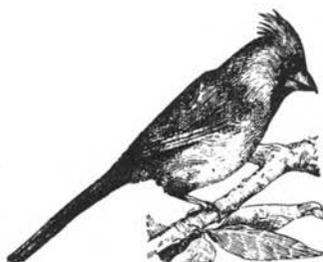
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