

For detailed maps of the Realty Road region, consult *The Maine Atlas* (Delorme Publishing Company), which is widely available in Maine.

## SUMMER BIRDING ALONG REALTY ROAD, AROOSTOOK COUNTY, MAINE

by Nicholas Komar

The American Realty Tote Road in Aroostook County, Maine, is a private logging road that provides an excellent opportunity to bird the vast wild lands of the North Maine Woods region. This region is rich in birdlife and other wildlife and offers the chance to see northern "specialty" birds such as Winter Wren, Gray Jay, Common Raven, Boreal Chickadee, Evening and Pine grosbeaks, crossbills, Three-toed and Black-backed woodpeckers, and others during the breeding season. Even Boreal Owl has been seen along this road. The relative abundance of Black-backed Woodpecker is especially welcomed by birders.

Realty Road, known locally as the "Reality Road," is open to the public for recreational purposes. A fee of \$2.00 per person is charged for the day or \$4.50 per person per day if you are camping at one of the many campsites along the road. The road is operated by the North Maine Woods Association, an organization of private (mostly paper companies) and public owners (the state of Maine) of the uninhabited spruce-fir forests of northern Maine.

To reach the road, from I-95 in East Millinocket, take Route 11 north to Ashland. Follow Route 11 through the town, and turn left just after you cross the Aroostook River. When the paved road bears left just past the Gateway Variety Store, go straight onto a dirt road. A sign there states that you are entering North Maine Woods and that *trucks have the right of way on this road. This caution must be taken very seriously.* This is Realty Road.

Realty Road will first take you through some potato fields. Check these fields for Upland Sandpiper, Horned Lark, Cliff Swallow, Bobolink, and Savannah Sparrow. After about six miles you will reach the Six-mile Checkpoint where you must stop, register, and pay applicable fees. As you continue west along the road, watch for Snowshoe Hare, Woodchuck, Red Fox, Coyote, White-tailed Deer, Moose, and Black Bear.

For three quarters of a mile beginning 1.2 miles beyond mile-marker 17 the spruce-fir forest has little underbrush and no major blowdowns and is relatively easy to walk through. This is probably the best place to enter the forest and the most likely area to find both Black-backed and Three-toed woodpeckers. In 1985, they both nested across the road from the scenic turnout at 18.6 miles. [Author's note: Miles given in the text such as "18.6 miles" refer to the total miles you have travelled since first entering Realty Road. Therefore, 18.6 miles is equivalent to 1.6 miles beyond mile marker 17.] Also be alert for Pileated Woodpecker, Boreal Chickadee, and Sharp-shinned and Broad-winged hawks.

SUMMER BIRD LIST FOR REALTY ROAD

A	Abundant	VU	Very Uncommon
VC	Very Common	R	Rare
C	Common	VR	Very Rare
U	Uncommon	O	Occasional

SPECIES	STATUS	SPECIES	STATUS
Common Loon	C	Ruby-crowned Kinglet	C
American Bittern	U	Veery	C
Great Blue Heron	U	Swainson's Thrush	C
Canada Goose	U	Hermit Thrush	C
American Black Duck	R	Wood Thrush	VR
Ring-necked Duck	R	American Robin	C
Greater Scaup	O	Gray Catbird	R
Common Goldeneye	C	Cedar Waxwing	U
Common Merganser	U	European Starling	R
Osprey	U	Solitary Vireo	U
Northern Harrier	VR	Warbling Vireo	VR
Sharp-shinned Hawk	U	Red-eyed Vireo	C
Broad-winged Hawk	C	Tennessee Warbler	C
Red-tailed Hawk	U	Nashville Warbler	VC
American Kestrel	R	Northern Parula	C
Ruffed Grouse	C	Yellow Warbler	U
Killdeer	U	Chestnut-sided Warbler	U
Spotted Sandpiper	C	Magnolia Warbler	VC
Common Snipe	C	Cape May Warbler	VC
American Woodcock	U	Black-throated Blue Warbler	U
Herring Gull	C	Yellow-rumped Warbler	VC
Barred Owl	C	Black-throated Green Warbler	U
Northern Saw-whet Owl	C	Blackburnian Warbler	A
Common Nighthawk	VC	Bay-breasted Warbler	C
Chimney Swift	U	Blackpoll Warbler	R
Ruby-throated Hummingbird	R	Black-and-white Warbler	R
Belted Kingfisher	VU	American Redstart	C
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	C	Ovenbird	U
Downy Woodpecker	VU	Northern Waterthrush	U
Hairy Woodpecker	VU	Mourning Warbler	U
Three-toed Woodpecker	VU	Common Yellowthroat	U
Black-backed Woodpecker	C	Wilson's Warbler	R
Northern Flicker	C	Canada Warbler	U
Pileated Woodpecker	U	Scarlet Tanager	U
Olive-sided Flycatcher	U	Rose-breasted Grosbeak	C
Eastern Wood-Pewee	R	Chipping Sparrow	C
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	VC	Savannah Sparrow	U
Alder Flycatcher	U	Fox Sparrow	O
Eastern Phoebe	VR	Song Sparrow	U
Great-crested Flycatcher	R	Lincoln's Sparrow	U
Eastern Kingbird	U	Swamp Sparrow	U
Horned Lark	VR	White-throated Sparrow	VC
Tree Swallow	C	Dark-eyed Junco	VC
Cliff Swallow	R	Bobolink	U
Barn Swallow	C	Red-winged Blackbird	C
Gray Jay	C	Common Grackle	C
Blue Jay	C	Brown-headed Cowbird	U
American Crow	C	Northern Oriole	VR
Common Raven	C	Pine Grosbeak	R
Black-capped Chickadee	U	Purple Finch	VC
Boreal Chickadee	C	Red Crossbill	VR
Red-breasted Nuthatch	C	White-winged Crossbill	VU
Brown Creeper	C	Pine Siskin	C
Winter Wren	C	American Goldfinch	U
Golden-crowned Kinglet	VC	Evening Grosbeak	A

This is not an inclusive list of all northern Maine woods species; it includes only those species that the author saw in the vicinity of Realty Road from May 25 to July 5, 1985.

The common breeding warblers in the forest are Tennessee, Nashville, Magnolia, Yellow-rumped, Cape May, Blackburnian, and Bay-breasted. Other birds commonly found throughout the spruce-fir forest anywhere along Realty Road are Ruffed Grouse, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Hairy Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Flycatcher, Blue Jay, Gray Jay, Black-capped Chickadee, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Hermit and Swainson's thrushes, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned kinglets, Purple Finch, Evening Grosbeak, Pine Siskin, American Goldfinch, Dark-eyed Junco, and White-throated Sparrow. Be alert at all times for Red and White-winged crossbills and Pine Grosbeaks to fly overhead.

From the scenic turnout, scan for Common Mergansers in the Machias River below, Olive-sided Flycatcher at the tops of the trees across the river, and Red-tailed Hawk soaring overhead. Also listen here for Northern Waterthrush and Canada Warbler, both commonly found near wet habitats along the road.

Continue west 1.3 miles from the scenic turnout to the Machias Dam Campsites. This is a fine spot to pitch a tent if you are camping. You must, however, reserve the site ahead of time. Information on how to reserve campsites can be found at the end of this article. Of the two campsites here, number 253 is farther from the road and prettier. Even if you are not camping, this is still a nice spot for birds. Listen for Olive-sided and Alder flycatchers singing from across the road. Walk along the path to the river, an excellent site for a swim if it is a hot day. Look for Common Merganser here, and scan the river's mouth (to the right) for Common Goldeneye, American Black Duck, and Ring-necked Duck. During the summer of 1985 I found a Greater Scaup at this spot, a highly unusual bird for Maine during the breeding season. This is also a good area for Moose. Listen here for Lincoln's Sparrow and for Swamp Sparrow, singing from the swampy edges of the estuary.

Continue west along Realty Road 0.4 mile. The second driveway on the left after the 20-mile marker is Machias Lake Camps, a sporting camp used for bear hunting in the fall. This is a convenient place to base yourself if you are staying for a few days. Cabins are spacious, comfortable, and well-equipped and cost \$12 per person per day. For information about staying here, contact Ivan and Peggy Porter, Ashland, ME 04732, telephone: 207-435-6977, well in advance of your trip. If you are not staying here, you should ask permission to bird on the lakeside property. Birds commonly found on and around this property are Common Loon, Great Blue Heron, American Bittern, Canada Goose, Ring-necked Duck, Common Goldeneye, Common Merganser, Osprey, American Kestrel, Killdeer, Common Snipe, Spotted Sandpiper, Herring Gull, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Kingbird, Alder and Olive-sided flycatchers, Yellow Warbler, Common Yellowthroat, and Chipping, Swamp, and Song sparrows.

At 1.4 miles farther west on Realty Road, there is a small but steep hill. The forest here, as in numerous places along the 20-mile stretch of road you have traveled, is deciduous. Listen here, or at any similar mixed-wood area, for Northern Flicker, Downy Woodpecker, American Robin, Wood Thrush, Veery, Red-eyed Vireo, Black-and-white Warbler, Northern Parula, Black-throated Green and Chestnut-sided warblers, Ovenbird, American Redstart, Scarlet Tanager, and Rose-Breasted Grosbeak.

Half a mile farther along on the left, you will see a large cleared area, overgrown with raspberries. If you stop here, remember to park well off the road, because heavy trucks have the right-of-way. It might be a good idea to park on the side road that you can see ahead of you. Like any clearing, this is a fine location for Mourning Warbler and Lincoln's Sparrow. The forest on the right is prime spruce-fir habitat and easy to walk through. Listen here for Solitary Vireo. I found a Northern Saw-whet Owl here as well.

Continue west on Realty Road, following the signs for McNally's to avoid taking any wrong forks. At approximately 27.7 miles, a small clearing on the right marks the entrance to an old overgrown logging road. Owling here yielded Northern Saw-whet and Barred owls. About a half-mile along the overgrown path, I saw and heard a Fox Sparrow singing in late May and early June of 1985. Fox Sparrows have not been thought to breed in the eastern United States, but one has been confirmed nesting in the state of Maine. Be alert for this species throughout the region in the proper habitat of shrubby areas associated with streams and thick stands of young spruce and fir. The song is a series of sweet slurred notes with a buzzy note at the end. To me, it sounds like "deee dooo cheery cheery cheery dooo dee dee zee" with the "zee" rising at the end. A little farther along the road (0.4 mile) at the Pratt Lake Campsite, listen for Black-throated Blue Warbler. Scan the lake for loons and the sky above for Osprey and Bald Eagle.

If you wish to continue at this point, you will find a pleasant side road to walk down at 36.9 miles, 8.8 miles beyond Pratt Lake Campsite. It is a very pretty road, known locally as Squirrel Pond Loop Road, and birding is good along its entire length. About one mile down this road where the road makes a turn to the right, a Three-toed Woodpecker was seen about 450 feet into the forest on the left. Unfortunately, the forest becomes quite swampy at that spot, and walking is difficult. Listen for Pine Grosbeak and Mourning Warbler in this area as well.

Most wilderness enthusiasts will want to continue west on Realty Road to the famed Allagash Wilderness Waterway (AWW) at 57.2 miles. To do so, you must pass through a locked gate at 44 miles that is staffed only from 6 A.M. to 8 P.M. Another good place to walk into the forest is at 56 miles, 1.2 miles before you get to the waterway. If you enter the forest here, walk straight in to the right

(north), just before the AWW entrance sign comes into view, and you will reach Glazier Brook after about 400 feet. Look for Common Merganser, and listen for Wilson's and Mourning warblers across the brook. Also, the concentration of Bay-breasted Warblers at this site is phenomenal.

It is not necessary to go as far as the Allagash River to see all the birdlife of this region. However, the Umsaskis Bridge crossing is a scenic site for a picnic, and free camping is also available there. At the bridge, listen for Warbling Vireo and Alder Flycatcher, and scan the lake for loons and Common Merganser. Moose may appear along the waterway early in the morning.

Beyond the bridge about 0.3 mile, red ribbon flags mark an entrance into the woods on the left. From the road, listen for Barred Owl, Swainson's Thrush, and Black-throated Blue and Mourning warblers. In 1985, Three-toed Woodpeckers nested in the forest on the left, and the chance of seeing Black-backed and Pileated woodpeckers here is also very good. Notice the cedar trees with the deep oval-shaped holes carved out by the Pileated Woodpeckers.

### **Practical Suggestions.**

Although Realty Road is a dirt road, it is maintained regularly and can be easily traversed by two-wheel-drive vehicles. A speed of 30 mph is reasonable along most of the road, although some bumpy sections necessitate slower speeds. North Maine Woods Association recommends against trying to average more than 20 mph.

A good map of the North Maine Woods region, showing all roads, overgrown logging roads, paths, etc., can be obtained at the Six-mile Checkpoint. A good compass is *an absolute necessity* for walking through the forest where there are no paths to guide you. You will find that spruce-fir forest looks remarkably the same in every direction. The use of bright flagging ribbon -- buy a roll or two at the Ashland Hardware Store -- to mark your route into the forest is a good precaution in the event that you do lose your sense of direction.

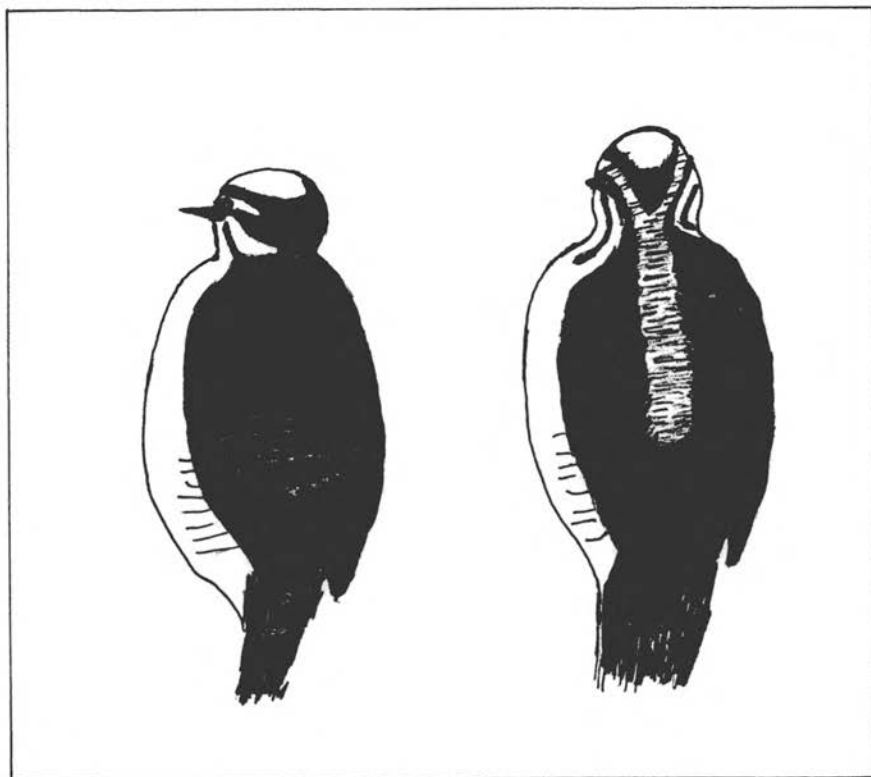
Wear heavy shoes when walking in the forest. The forest floor is quite damp, and you must be prepared to get shoes and slacks wet. The mosquitoes and black flies are most abundant in mid-June, so wear protective clothing and carry plenty of insect repellent. Headnets are advisable and are available at Bushey's Clothing Store in Ashland.

For camping information and to make campsite reservations, write to North Maine Woods Association, P. O. Box 382, Ashland, Maine 04732.

Although I have described and recommended specific roadside birding stops, it should be stressed that most of the bird species mentioned can be seen almost anywhere along the road in appropriate habitats. Therefore, if you equip yourself with map, compass, markers, insect repellents, and protective clothing,

I urge you to be adventurous and explore as much of the wonderful wilderness area of "Reality Road" as you can.

**NICHOLAS KOMAR**, a biochemistry major at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, spent six weeks in the summer of 1985 collecting data on bird territories in spruce-fir plots along the Realty Road as part of a long-term monitoring project sponsored by the state of Maine and private paper companies in an effort to learn more about the effects of pest control and logging on the wildlife of the spruce-fir ecosystem. A skilled birder since boyhood, Nick has birded for thirteen years locally in Newton, extensively in the United States, and abroad in Europe, Israel, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Peru. He served on the Bird Observer Field Studies Committee and has been a contributor to this publication.



*Black-backed Woodpecker (left) and Three-toed Woodpecker (right)*

*Illustration by Nicholas Komar*