

**NO SMOKING OR OUTDOOR FIRES IN THE RESTRICTED AREA.**

**TRAIL NUMBERS:** The trails on the map are indicated by name and/or number. Trails are marked by small (2"-4") green wooden blocks with white numbers, usually on trees at eye level.

**DISTANCES:** The island is about 0.7 mile wide and 1.7 mile long. Trails on the map are not drawn to scale, and distances are sometimes distorted to emphasize direction.

Map courtesy of Monhegan Associates, Inc.

## MONHEGAN: ISLAND OF POSSIBILITIES

by Scott Sumner

If you like the idea of large concentrations of birds and a real possibility for finding rare and unusual species, all rolled into a scenic and relaxing atmosphere, then Monhegan Island is for you. Located roughly three-and-one-half hours north of the Massachusetts-Maine border and ten miles off the coast of Port Clyde, Maine, Monhegan's location and size make a perfect union for birders. Because Monhegan is ten miles out to sea, the only land mass around, and only a mile and three-quarters long by a half-mile wide, the birds in migration are often quite concentrated. If you hit the weather right, the birding can be spectacular.

The rarities that have graced Monhegan's shores would ignite any rare bird alert in our region: Magnificent Frigatebird, Bridled Tern, Swallow-tailed Kite, Gyrfalcon, Ivory Gull, Band-tailed Pigeon, Chuck-will's-widow, Rufous Hummingbird, Say's Phoebe, Northern Wheatear, Yellow-throated Warbler, Lazuli Bunting, Painted Bunting, Lark Bunting, Henslow's Sparrow, LeConte's Sparrow, and Shiny Cowbird. Some of the uncommon but regularly occurring species include Western Kingbird, Philadelphia Vireo, Blue Grosbeak, Dickcissel, Clay-colored Sparrow, Lark Sparrow, and Yellow-headed Blackbird, to name just a few.

The trip begins once you board the *Laura B* at Port Clyde (without your car) and head out on the hour-and-twenty-minute ride to the island. On the way out, look for Common Loon, Great Cormorant (check small islands), Greater and Sooty shearwaters, Northern Gannet, Common Eider, scoters, Oldsquaw, Osprey, Merlin and Peregrine Falcon (fall), Red-necked Phalarope (sometimes very numerous), and Black Guillemot. Once you arrive at Monhegan and disembark, the rest of your time on the island will be on foot, so make sure to bring comfortable footwear. After unloading your luggage and checking on your accommodations, you are finally ready to bird.

Although the island is small, its network of trails is over seventeen miles long. However, the best birding is in and around the village on the west side of the island. Thus, if you visit during migration, you will not have to wait long for results. Some spots to visit a number of times are the Ice Pond, Swim Beach, the Martins' feeding station, and the Lobster Cove area. The village has a nice habitat mix, ranging from small deciduous to large coniferous trees, thickets, large swampy meadows, and the two-acre Ice Pond. The best way to bird these areas is by simply taking your time and working your way from one area to another. Every morning is another roll of the dice in terms of where to start, but these spots are so close to each other, it takes only minutes to walk from one to another. When the island is jumping, it does not matter where you begin.

The Ice Pond is just that: up to 1974 it was used to harvest ice. Now it is a skating rink in winter and a great birding area in spring and fall. The pond and the surrounding area have produced large numbers of flycatchers, thrushes, kinglets, warblers, vireos, and sparrows. By scanning the back of the pond, you might come up with a Green-backed Heron, American Bittern, Wood Duck, Yellowlegs, or Solitary Sandpiper.

From the Ice Pond, work your way back to the village, and check the numerous thickets and small trees. On a spring trip just a couple of years ago, we found an Orange-crowned Warbler in the apple trees in front of the schoolhouse. The warbler stayed for over five hours. As you approach the swampy meadow on the east side of the road, scan the wires for flycatchers (Western Kingbirds have shown up in fall), swallows, and the odd sparrow. While scanning, check the marsh for herons, ducks, sparrows, and blackbirds, and keep scanning up the hill to the lighthouse area for Merlins and Peregrines (at times abundant in fall), as well as other hawks.

Continue along the road until you come to Swim Beach. The big attraction here is passerines feeding on the sand. When the tired and hungry hit the beach, they are easily approached. On a spring trip in May 1986, I had to back up several times in order to focus on a Cerulean Warbler that fed there for several days. In May 1992 Bay-breasted, Canada, and Magnolia warblers put on a nice show.

The next stop is the May and September getaway of Tom and Josephine Martin. Tom has been feeding and photographing birds on Monhegan for over thirty-five years, and over one hundred of his photographs have been printed in the *Master Guide to Birding*. Tom's feeding station is worth several visits during the course of the day. Some of the highlights have been Red-headed Woodpecker; large concentrations of Rose-breasted Grosbeaks; Blue Grosbeak; Lazuli and Indigo buntings; Dickcissel (fall and spring); Clay-colored, Vesper, Lark, Lincoln's, White-crowned, and Harris' sparrows; Bobolink; Yellow-headed and Rusty blackbirds; Shiny Cowbird; Orchard and Northern orioles (on the oranges); and assorted finches. Tom's feeders are located next to the Careless Navigator Restaurant, immediately south of Swim Beach.

After the Martins' feeding station, continue along the road toward Lobster Cove. Again, the birding anywhere through the village can be great. Once you near The Trailing Yew Inn, between the church and Underhill Trail, you will start to come upon stands of spruces. The area from this point on down to Lobster Cove offers the best chance in the village for both crossbill species, although they are nothing to count on. Lobster Cove is mainly a wide-open area. The habitat consists of small brushy thickets, sprinkled with tiny spruce trees, with a fairly extensive short grassy area ending at the rocky shoreline. Scopes are not generally needed on Monhegan, but this part of the island makes you glad you brought one along. Scan the ocean for loons, shearwaters, Northern

Gannets (almost guaranteed), both Great and Double-crested cormorants, Common Eiders, scoters, Red-necked Phalaropes, Laughing Gulls, Black-legged Kittiwakes, and the ever-numerous Black Guillemots.

Around the cove itself, large flocks of Eastern Kingbirds, Blue Jays, and Cedar Waxwings can be found foraging on the rocks, migrating overhead, or hanging like ornaments on a spruce tree. At low tide Spotted Sandpipers can be found, along with flycatchers and warblers on the rocks. Recent trips have provided great looks at Olive-sided and Yellow-bellied flycatchers; Eastern Kingbird; Yellow, Chestnut-sided, Yellow-rumped, Blackburnian, and Palm warblers; and American Redstart. Just to the east of the cove lies a small grassy marsh. Even smaller now after a winter storm (1992), this area has been host to Marsh Wren, Dickcissel, Grasshopper Sparrow, and Sharp-tailed Sparrow. When you have completed your tour of Lobster Cove, head back to town and start over again.

If the birding should slow down a bit—and in the afternoon that is possible—get a map from your host or one of the merchants of the island, and head out to explore the rest of the island. Note the useful instructions and cautions on the back side of the map. The island's north and east sides offer panoramic views atop 160-foot cliffs, great places to watch Peregrine Falcons in the fall. The trails that follow the outskirts of the island are steep, so be careful. On the north side at low tide, harbor seals can usually be seen at—where else?—the Seal Ledges. The island's interior, with its cathedral forest made up of spruce and fir, hosts the same species you should come across in the village, with a few additions: Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-throated Sparrow, and maybe a few crossbills. If you are on the island during a full moon, a nighttime hike to the cliffs is a spectacular sight. The Burnt Head Trail is the easiest to take. (All trail signs are marked with numbers if not the name of the trail, and the map includes both.)

The best time to bird Monhegan is during the third and fourth weeks of May and all of September to Columbus Day. I have been leading trips there for the Hampshire Bird Club since 1984, and we have accumulated a list of over 190 species. I mentioned the types of birds that can be encountered, and over the years our club has witnessed some great migrations. Some of the weekend high counts have been 20 Peregrine Falcons, 5000 Red-necked Phalaropes, 70 Black Guillemots, 40 Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, 80 Northern Flickers, 300 Red-breasted Nuthatches, 800 Golden-crowned Kinglets, 300 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 30 Swainson's Thrushes, 4 Philadelphia Vireos (spring as well as fall), and 40 Red-eyed Vireos. We have seen 30 species of warblers, and their weekend totals have been just as impressive: 100 Northern Parulas, 50 Magnolias, 10,000 Yellowrumps, 50 Black-throated Greens, 250 Blackpolls, 125 Palm Warblers, 45 American Redstarts, and 25 Wilson's Warblers. We have also seen up to 5 Dickcissels and 4 Clay-colored Sparrows. This should tell you

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### Table 1. Amenities at Monhegan

Reservations for the inns and ferry are recommended. Reservations for groups should be made well in advance.

#### ACCOMMODATIONS

**The Trailing Yew**, Monhegan Island, Maine 04852

Room and board, and baggage transportation provided for the inn guests

Open mid-May through mid-October

Phone: 207-596-0440

**Monhegan House**, Monhegan Island, Maine 04852

Open mid-May through mid-October

Phone: 207-594-7983

**Hitchcock House**, Monhegan Island, Maine 04852

Rooms, efficiencies, and a cabin

Open year-round

Barbara Hitchcock

Phone: 207-594-8137

**Shining Sails, Inc.**, Monhegan Island, Maine 04852

Rooms, efficiencies, and cottage rentals

Open year-round

Bill Baker and Amy Melenbacker

Phone: 207-596-0041

**The Tribler Cottage**, Monhegan Island, Maine 04852

Housekeeping apartments

Open year-round

Martha Yandle and Richard Farrell

Phone: 207-594-2445

#### FERRY

**Monhegan Boat Line, *Laura B***

Captain James Barstow

P.O. Box 238, Port Clyde, Maine 04855

Call or write for ferry schedule.

Parking at Port Clyde is currently \$3 per day.

Phone: 207-372-8848

#### LUGGAGE HANDLING

**Monhegan Truckers Inc. (operated by Trigger Hitchcock)**

They meet each boat from May through October.

Phone: 207-594-8137

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what can happen when you hit the right weather patterns.

Monhegan is also a good place to take the nonbirder in your life. While you are birding, he or she can hike, read, photograph, paint, or just relax. Monhegan also lacks biting insects like mosquitos, midges, and black flies. Instead of the Big Three, Monhegan has a developing community of deer ticks, and yes, a few cases of Lyme Disease have been reported. The worst area for ticks is the grass around the lighthouse. If you stick to the trails and check yourself when changing clothes, you should not have a problem. As always, visiting birders should not trespass on private properties, so that future birders will be welcome to enjoy Monhegan's beauty and birds.

Table 1 shows a list of accommodations on Monhegan, the address and phone number for reservations on the *Laura B*, and a service on Monhegan to help you carry your luggage from the ferry dock to your accommodation. I recommend that you bring along a few items to ensure an enjoyable trip: (1) a good flashlight, because not all rooms in the inns have electricity, and streetlights . . . are you kidding?; (2) warm jacket, windbreaker, sweater, warm hat, and gloves (even though you may be there in late May or early fall, the weather can get pretty cold); (3) rain gear, if for no other reason than for the ride on the *Laura B*; (4) comfortable footwear, because you will be on your feet the entire time, and the trails can be wet and rocky; (5) spotting scope and camera (the birds and the scenery should use up a roll or two); and (6) a complete or partial food supply if you are renting an efficiency apartment; the island's General Store should carry whatever you may have forgotten. Some of the accommodations listed in Table 1 provide meals; check with your host when making reservations and plan accordingly.

For other accounts of birding in Monhegan during the summer and winter seasons, see *A Birder's Guide to the Coast of Maine* (1981) by Elizabeth and Jan Pierson, and *Bird Finding in New England* (1988) by Richard K. Walton.

To get to Monhegan from the Massachusetts-New Hampshire line, take Interstate 95 north to Portland. Once you near Portland, look for exit 6A, the exit for Interstate 295. Stay on Interstate 295, and you will run right back into Interstate 95 north again. Your next exit will be Bath/Brunswick (U.S. 1 north). Stay on Route 1 north until you come to the town of Thomaston. Go through Thomaston and look for State Route 131 south. Follow 131 south for about thirty minutes until you come to Port Clyde, where you will catch the *Laura B*. Good luck, and enjoy Monhegan!

**SCOTT SUMNER**, the western Voice of Audubon, has been birding for sixteen years. He has birded all across North America, including arctic Canada. Scott is past president of the Hampshire Bird Club, and founder and compiler of the Quabbin Christmas Bird Count.

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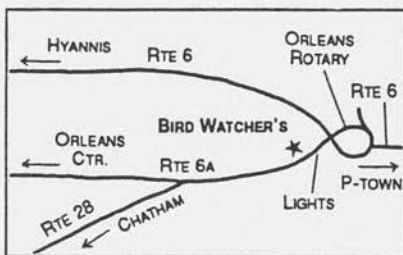
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