

BIRDING THE SOUTHERN MAINE COAST FROM OGUNQUIT TO KITTERY POINT

by Bridget A. Coullon

While the distance from Perkins Cove in Ogunquit to Fort Foster in Kittery Point, both located along the southern Maine coast, is only approximately twelve miles as the crow flies, this field trip can take an entire day if all the nooks and crannies are explored along the way. The best time of the year for the areas described below is undoubtedly winter because of the concentrations of seabirds (and lack of tourists). Some areas, such as Lake Caroline, Seapoint Beach, and Fort Foster, are also worth a visit during spring or fall migration. In the fall this trip could include a visit to Mount Agamenticus, one of Maine's best hawkwatch sites.

The southernmost part of the Maine coast consists of rocky outcrops interspersed with small sandy beaches that attract many visitors between June and October. Therefore, one's trip needs to be planned accordingly. Near high tide is the best time, but for seabirds it is not essential. The glare off the sea may sometimes be a problem, but since most areas have a winding shoreline, one can usually find a good nonsquinting angle. In winter dress very warmly, as it can be bitter cold at the more exposed locations. For food and facilities Ogunquit (Route 1), Perkins Cove, and Kittery (Route 1) have the most numerous choices, although there are restaurants and luncheonettes in the Village of York and along the length of Route 1. All roads mentioned below are posted with signs unless indicated otherwise.

Directions. After crossing the Piscataqua River from New Hampshire into Maine on Route 95 north, take Exit 4—The Yorks, Ogunquit, and make a left onto Route 1 north. (This exit is the last exit before the York toll booth.) Mountain Road, which leads to Mount Agamenticus, is 3.7 miles on the left opposite Flo's Diner. From this intersection it is approximately four miles to the road up the mountain (sign says "Mount Agamenticus Summit"), which is a right turn where the paved road ends.

Mount Agamenticus. Mount Agamenticus was at one time a ski area, so the crown of the hill and several slope areas were cleared for a lodge, tows, and trails. When the ski area went out of business, the land was purchased by the town of York and then managed by the town's Recreation Department. Today raptors can be viewed from a large open area, and trails wind through the wooded slopes. The summit also has a fire tower. Although the tower platform itself is not accessible, climbing the tower's stairs provides an excellent vantage point. A northwest wind prior to a predicted cold front in mid-September can bring in many species of raptors, especially Broad-winged and Sharp-shinned hawks, American Kestrels, Ospreys, Bald Eagles, and, on rare occasions, a

Golden Eagle. During spring migration, a walk up the road to the summit or on one of the trails will yield a good variety of songbirds.

Directions. Return to the intersection of Mountain Road and Route 1, and continue north on Route 1 for 3.5 miles. After passing the Ogunquit Playhouse on your right, take the first right turn on Bourne Lane, take another right on Shore Road, and follow the signs for Perkins Cove (about 0.4 mile). Free two-hour parking is available on the left just past Barnacle Billy's Restaurant.

The Marginal Way (Perkins Cove). From the parking lot walk left along the shore and toward the point. The path, called the Marginal Way, will take you back toward the center of Ogunquit, and from many places, you can view the coves and scan the ocean beyond for Harlequin Duck, Oldsquaw, Common Goldeneye, rafting scoters and eiders, possibly including King Eider, and other seabirds.

Directions. Return to the junction of Shore Road, turn left, and go 1.7 miles to the entrance of Cliff House, a hotel.

Cliff House and Bald Head. Bald Head, on which Cliff House is located, is one of the consistently good winter birding spots in southern Maine. The hotel owners allow birdwatchers to park in the designated "sightseeing" parking area and freely walk the property. While the hotel itself is closed from December to



March, the gates are usually open during the week from 7:00 AM to 4:30 PM for the maintenance staff. Call ahead during the week to verify weekend opening times (207-361-1000). It is possible to walk along the cliff on the ocean side of all the buildings. Regular sightings from here are Black Guillemot, Harlequin Duck, Common Goldeneye, eiders, scoters, grebes, and loons—even a Pacific Loon a few winters ago.

Directions. Return to Shore Road, turn left, and go one mile. Phillips Cove will be on your left, and a marsh and pond will be on the right. Both are worth scanning. At less than 0.1 mile beyond is a dirt road called Ocean Circuit Drive. Turn right onto Ocean Circuit Drive, and go as far as the small parking area, really a widening in the road, on the left as a pond (Lake Caroline) comes into view.

Lake Caroline (Passaconway Pond). Ocean Circuit Drive is at its best in the spring for migrants, but its year-round appeal is certainly the access to the nearby woods. The pond itself is not ornithologically interesting. There is a short walk to the left along the pond; for a longer walk, continue on foot along Ocean Circuit Drive, take the first left, and you will come to the old trolley-track bed going off to the left (barred to the right) and an old logging road going

straight ahead. Either road is a pleasant spring walk that can produce warblers, tanagers, thrushes, grouse, and other species.

Directions. Return to Shore Road, turn right, and go 1.2 miles to the bridge over the Cape Neddick River. The river and beach are worth a quick look. Continue on for about 0.3 mile, and at the stop sign, turn left onto Route 1A. Follow the road into York Beach, take a left onto an unnamed street at Shelton's Store (0.6 mile), go past the parking lot and a small public park, and turn left again on Ocean Avenue Extension. Stop where you can to scan the rocks and water, then continue, taking a right onto Kendall Road and a left at the next intersection. The name of the road is not indicated, but there is a sign to "The Lighthouse." Follow this road to the entrance to Sohler Park.

Cape Neddick Light. Locally called Nubble Light, this area is a good spot for Purple Sandpipers, often seen on the rocks offshore. In addition to the seabirds mentioned for the previous sites, Lapland Longspur, Snow Bunting, and an occasional Snowy Owl can be found here, the latter sometimes perched on one of the nearby roofs.

Directions. On leaving the park, turn left and go for one mile, then turn left again onto Route 1A. Long Sands Beach, true to its name at two miles long, should be checked for gulls and seabirds offshore. When high tide covers other roosting spots, the rocks by the Sun 'n Surf Restaurant should be checked for Purple Sandpipers. Farther along, the rocks opposite the York Harbor Motel often have good numbers of gulls. Regular winter visitors are Iceland and Glaucous gulls and, on rare occasions, a Lesser Black-backed Gull.

Continue another 1.5 miles from York Harbor Motel on Route 1A, and turn left at the sign for Stage Neck Inn. To explore this area, you can take either the left fork or the right fork; you can see the beach down the left, or sharper, fork, and the entire beach and neck area is small enough to walk around. There is parking at the beach or near the Stage Neck Inn swimming pool, which is down the right fork.

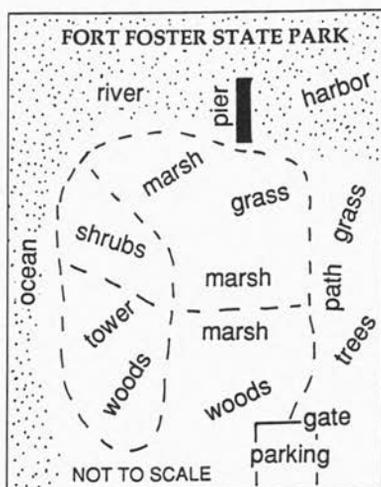
Harbor Beach and Stage Neck. The rocks and sea at Harbor Beach are worth scanning for Great and Double-crested cormorants and other seabirds in winter. For those who enjoy a walk along the rocky shoreline, The Cliff Walk (sign posted) goes about 0.5 mile along the coast. The area is overgrown with honeysuckle and is attractive to sparrows and migrating songbirds, especially in the fall. The path is narrow and rocky in places, and care should be taken if the ground is icy or if there is a lot of snow. Nearby Stage Neck consists of an inn and condominiums with ample parking near the swimming pool. From this area the east side of York Harbor can be viewed for loons, Buffleheads, and the usual array of seabirds.

Directions. Return to Route 1A, and turn left. In about 0.4 mile, turn left onto Route 103. Continue south on Route 103 for four miles, and take a left onto Cutts Island Lane, and left again onto Seapoint Road. It is almost a mile to the

Seapoint Beach parking area. Between April 1 and October 1 only Kittery residents can use the beach parking, but there is a small parking area where the road forks, and from there it is an easy walk to the beach.

Seapoint Beach, Seapoint, and Crescent Beach. This area is really two beaches with Seapoint jutting out into the sea between them and a large expanse of marsh behind them. It is particularly good for fall migrants such as American Pipit and American Bittern. Crescent Beach is a pebble beach and never cleared of seaweed. It is particularly attractive to shorebirds such as Black-bellied Plover and Lesser Golden-Plover and various species of sandpipers, sometimes including Buff-breasted Sandpiper. In winter Lapland Longspurs, Snow Buntings, and an occasional Short-eared Owl can be found here.

Directions. Retrace your route to the small bridge you crossed shortly after turning onto Seapoint Road, and continue straight for just over one mile from there. (Do not turn back onto Cutts Island Lane.) Turn left onto Pocahontas Road, cross the bridge, bear right, and continue for 1.2 miles to Fort Foster Park at the gate, and walk in.



Fort Foster State Park. This park has a variety of habitats—marsh, woods, river estuary, and ocean shore—and birding can be good at any time of the year except summer, when too many people are about. See the map to the left for a suggested route, but be sure to select the direction of the loop so that you do not have the sun in your eyes along the shore. Spring and fall migrants are often plentiful in and around the shrubs nearest the river mouth.

Directions. To get back to Route 95, return to the intersection just over the bridge, turn left onto Chauncey Creek Road for 0.5 mile, left again onto Route 103 (Tenney Hill Road), and right onto Haley Road at the Kittery Point Fire Station, where 103 bears to the left. Stay on Haley Road for approximately three miles, turn left onto Route 1 at the traffic light, and continue through Kittery for just under one mile to the entrance to Route 95. Happy birding!

BRIDGET A. COULLON has been birding for the past fifteen years, first in the mid-Atlantic states before moving to Maine seven years ago. She has become involved in banding as well as setting up and monitoring bluebird trails. As part of her involvement with York County Audubon Society, she has set up and led local field trips. Her interest in birds has taken her on many trips abroad including Morocco, Madagascar, the Philippines, and a number of South American countries. As her husband likes to say—it has become a disease!



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