

FIELD NOTES FROM HERE AND THERE _____

A Report on the Bluebirds in Spencer, Massachusetts

I started my "Bluebird Trail" ten years ago with seven boxes within the town limits. In 1995 we now have 145 boxes. I make all my boxes during the winter and then give them to anyone with the suitable habitat for bluebirds. I also monitor them throughout the nesting season. When I spot a suitable location in my travels around town, I ring doorbells and in most cases, the owners allow me use their property to put up one of the boxes.

We hope to increase the bluebird population in our area. Bluebirds may nest two or three times a season, and thus we clean the boxes out when the young have fledged to allow for reuse of the boxes. Generally, the birds have three to five eggs per nesting attempt and hence may fledge more than half a dozen birds per season from a single box. Bluebirds tend to return to the same area the following year.

For Spencer, we have seen the following number of fledged bluebirds:

1987	37
1988	44
1989	51
1990	68
1991	55
1992	125
1993	99
1994	99
1995	168

To increase the odds of a given box being successful, I have found that the following procedure works very well. In late fall when the pine trees shed their needles, I gather several bags and store them until spring. When the bluebirds arrive, I put a few handfuls at the base of the boxes. In many cases these are accepted, and they build their nest. A neat compact bowl of pine needles.

The advantage gained is that the female does not have to go long distances to find nesting material. I have watched her start a nest at noon, and she had it finished the following afternoon. This has to save a lot of energy compared with the normal five or six days required.

Bill Allan, Spencer, Massachusetts

The Birds of Post Office Square, Boston

Formerly a paved-over underground parking lot in the heart of Boston's financial district, Post Office Square was transformed into a beautifully designed and well-maintained park in 1991. Graced with two water sculptures, bowers, trees, and lawns, the Post Office Square park has become one of downtown Boston's most popular green spaces. On fine days, hundreds of people from the surrounding office complexes fill the park to eat lunch, meet friends, and enjoy the sunshine,

Early in 1995, I began to look more closely at the Post Office Square park to find out what species of birds could be seen. I was surprised at the results.

Although the park is quite small, the layout of the trees and shrubs ensures plenty of cover for feeding and protection. The density of the shrubs is such that it resembles a forest floor in miniature, attracting such species as Ovenbird and Hermit and Wood thrushes.

The park attendants continued to water the plants throughout the year, attracting birds such as Northern Waterthrush and Common Yellowthroat, which frequent damp habitats. Most warblers observed were arboreal, but other types, such as Blackpoll and Black-and-white Warbler, could often be observed alighting on the grass for short periods. In early spring and late fall the numbers of White-throated Sparrows begin to build up and compete with the ever-present House Sparrows.

In an effort to explain the attraction of the park for migrating birds, it must be realized that birds will use any habitat that is available to them in order to rest and feed before continuing their journey to their breeding or wintering grounds. Some birds merely pass through and tend not to linger for any great length of time. The Black-throated Blue Warbler that I observed flew in, landed on a bush, and took off again, all in the space of little more than a minute. Other birds such as Wood Thrush, Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, and Blackpoll Warbler tended to remain for longer periods because of the suitability of the park for their feeding requirements.

The time of day does not seem to matter. Unlike other sites, such as Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, where birds are more abundant early in the morning or in the evening, birds can be observed throughout the day at Post Office Square.

The two records of Yellow-breasted Chat were noteworthy. They tend to favor the coast during migration which would explain Post Office Square's attraction due to its proximity to Boston Harbor.

Perhaps the most surprising record of all was the arrival of a Barred Owl on Halloween. It slept for most of the day in a tree by the fountain and was enjoyed by numerous observers.

Migration came to a slowdown after the first week in November, but the arrival of a Hermit Thrush on November 9 and a Common Yellowthroat and Yellow-

bellied Sapsucker on November 10 were interesting.

The occurrence of birds at the park is also related to the same but more extensive movement of birds at other sites in Massachusetts. For instance, three Blue Jays occurring on October 12 coincided with a much larger movement of over 1500 Blue Jays at Cuttyhunk Island around the same time.

One explanation for Post Office Square's attraction is obvious. Seen from the birds' perspective, the park is a green oasis in a sea of high-rise buildings, providing a convenient rest stop before the bird continues on the next leg of its long journey.

Due to its small size, the park will never attract great numbers of birds. However, with over thirty species observed so far, the surprising diversity of the birds passing through certainly makes it worth a visit the next time you are in the city and have some time to spare.

Joseph M. Adamson, Dorchester, Massachusetts

BIRDS AT POST OFFICE SQUARE PARK

American Kestrel	Blackpoll Warbler
Peregrine Falcon	Black-and-white Warbler
American Woodcock	American Redstart
Ring-billed Gull	Ovenbird
Herring Gull	Northern Waterthrush
Great Black-backed Gull	Common Yellowthroat
Mourning Dove	Yellow-breasted Chat
Barred Owl	Rose-breasted Grosbeak
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	Song Sparrow
Eastern Phoebe	White-throated Sparrow
Blue Jay	Dark-eyed Junco
Black-capped Chickadee	House Finch
Hermit Thrush	House Sparrow
Wood Thrush	
American Robin	
Gray Catbird	
European Starling	
Tennessee Warbler	
Northern Parula	
Yellow Warbler	
Black-throated Blue Warbler	