

BIRDING THE GREAT WOODS OF LYNN

by John Quigley and JoAnne Benard

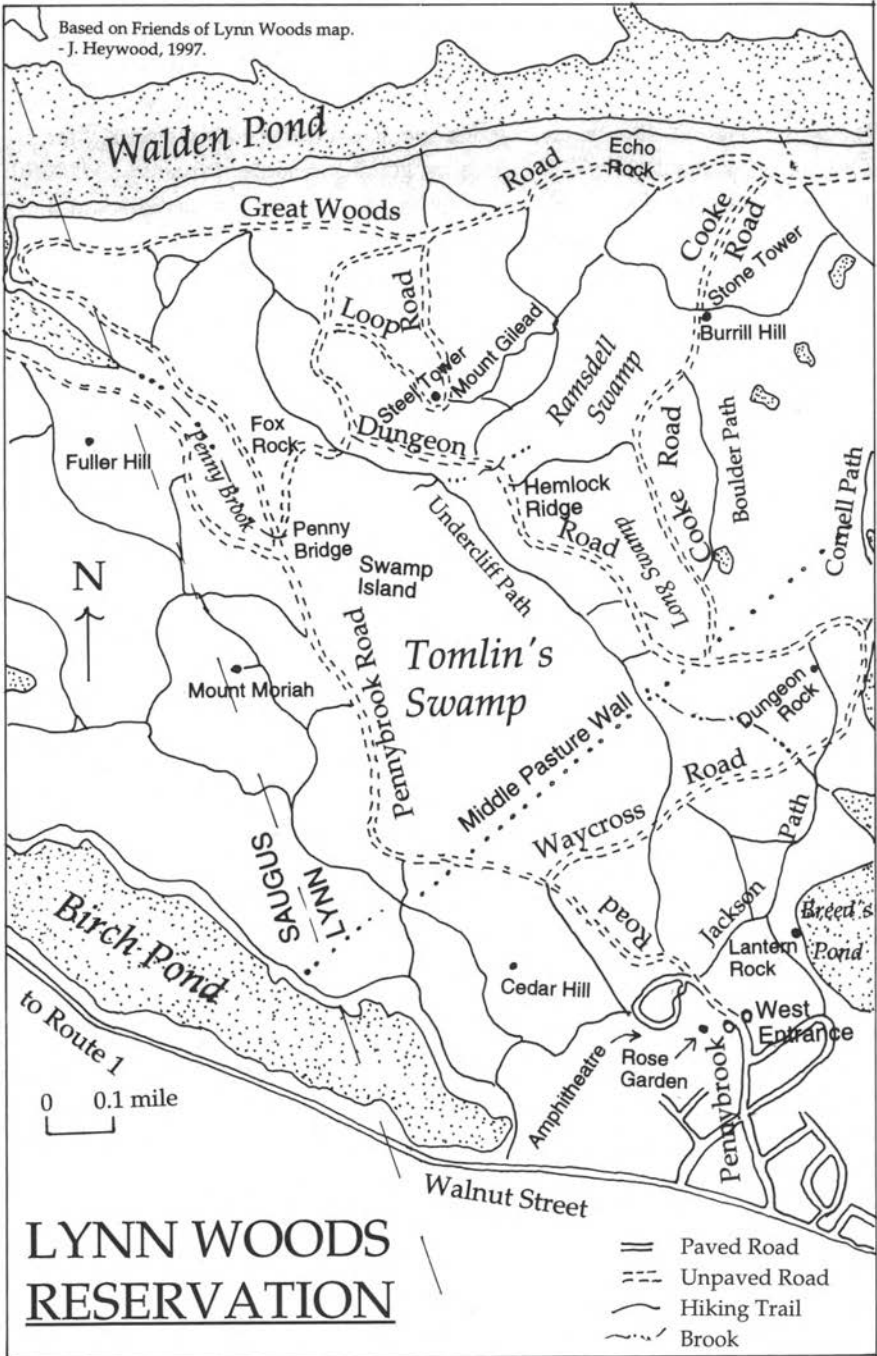
When you think of Lynn, a largely industrial suburb a few miles north of Boston, you might not consider it a likely place to go birding. However, Lynn Woods Reservation, the second largest municipal park in the United States, offers 2200 acres of diversity, including ponds, swamps, streams, and both deciduous and evergreen forests with rocky outcroppings. Many marked and unmarked roads, trails, and paths cross the hilly terrain.

Cyrus Tracy, a self-educated botanist who roamed Lynn Woods in the 1850s, was an extremely foresighted person. He helped incorporate an organization known as the Trustees of the Free Public Forest, which ensured that Lynn Woods would be kept free and open to the people of the community. This organization drafted the "Indenture of Trust," which was among the most important early efforts to provide permanent recreational space in America. Part of the Indenture states, "Whatever this city can do for the preservation of the forests, it is bound to do, not for the enjoyment of the living only but for the generations that succeed us."

Suggested Tour

This article outlines a four-mile route, marked by signs and landmarks, that will introduce you to both the human and the natural history of this unique location. The reservation is open dawn to dusk. Motorized vehicles are not allowed; please do not venture off the trails. During spring and fall migration, birds are well represented in the reservation and are especially plentiful along certain pond edges. Lynn Wood also offers good numbers of breeding birds in summer and solid populations of many resident species during the colder months.

Enter the reservation parking lot between two stone pillars at the end of Pennybrook Road (off of Walnut Street). Continue to the upper-level lot on the left beside the Ranger Station, where you can pick up a map. At the rear of the Ranger Station, you will see stone steps that rise through the rhododendrons. At the top of the steps is the Rose Garden, recently restored and offering a beautiful backdrop for birding and weddings. In spring the Rose Garden is a good place to view flycatchers; Sharp-shinned and Cooper's hawks consistently winter in the cedars here. The original Rose Garden included a birdbath, scheduled to be restored in the spring of 1997, as well as a feeding station. Continue to the back of the Rose Garden to the Amphitheatre, where outdoor Shakespeare performances took place in years past. Efforts to resume summer theater are in progress.



At the back of the Amphitheatre, follow the footpath to the top of the hill; you will see the east end of Birch Pond below you. The west end of this pond often harbors breeding Wood Thrushes, and Whip-poor-will is occasionally heard here. The hill you are on is a particularly good place for spring migrants. This plateau features a small area of pitch pine and scrub oak with mainly blueberry understory and is surrounded by large deciduous sapling stands, regenerating from fire disturbance. These habitats dominate the drier ridges in Lynn Woods and attract early successional species such as Brown Thrasher, Prairie Warbler, Rufous-sided Towhee, and Field Sparrow. Although declining regionally, the towhee is still common in these woods—though predators such as skunks, raccoons, opossums, foxes, cats, dogs, and humans, all common in Lynn Woods, threaten these birds. Backtrack now to the parking lot and spend a few minutes checking its perimeter (a surprisingly good spot for migrants).

Walk out of the parking lot and follow the continuation of Pennybrook Road through the iron gates. Pass Jackson Path on the right and at the next intersection take a right onto Waycross Road. White pine stands and mixed conifer woods are the primary habitat here. Great Horned and Barred owls occur here in winter; Pine Warblers sing here in spring and sometimes again in October. And many bark-gleaning birds, such as woodpeckers and nuthatches, favor this area.

Continue straight when you see signs indicating Dungeon Rock on the left and Jackson Path on the right. Eventually, you will pass the western shore of Breed's Pond on your right. When water levels drop in the fall, the northern two fingers of this pond attract shorebirds and openland birds: American Golden and Semipalmated plover, Killdeer, Greater and Lesser yellowlegs, Solitary, Spotted, Semipalmated, Least, and Pectoral sandpiper, American Pipit, and Horned Lark. In the early 1980s, a Gull-billed Tern hawked dragonflies here for three days. The eastern shore of Breed's Pond also attracts migrants. Orange-crowned, Worm-eating, and Mourning are among the warblers that have been found here. Gulls and ducks also frequent Breed's Pond. Lesser Black-backed Gull is a regular fall visitor, and a Greater White-fronted Goose spent a week here in December 1995.

Continue on Waycross Road past Cornell Path on your right. At the top of the hill, a sign will direct you to Dungeon Rock. The history of this man-made cave involves pirate lore and treasure. The Friends of Lynn Woods sponsor an annual reenactment of the legend in October, and literature about the tale is available from the Friends or at the Ranger Station. Bring a flashlight if you want to explore the cave on your own.

Continue down Waycross Road and take the next right onto Cooke Road. In about a quarter of a mile, on the right, you'll find an unmarked path (Boulder Path), near which Eastern Bluebirds nest in natural cavities. Bluebirds can also sometimes be seen throughout the drier sections of the reservation. Backtrack to

the intersection of Waycross Road and Cooke Road. Go right onto Dungeon Road and continue along the Hemlock Ridge section of the reservation. Northern Goshawk is seen here annually in the late fall and early winter, as well as a reliable flock of chickadees, titmice, and Golden-crowned Kinglets. Follow Dungeon Road, passing Fox Rock Road on the left. Scarlet Tanager is a common breeder in these woods, and in 1995 a pair nested on a hemlock limb overhanging the road at this intersection.

Bear right on Dungeon Road to Loop Road, on the right. This road leads to Steel Tower on Mount Gilead, at 272 feet the second highest elevation in Lynn Woods. This vantage point offers a spectacular view of the Boston skyline and can also be a good location for hawkwatching. If you look to your far left, you will see Stone Tower on Burrill Hill (285 feet), the highest point in the reservation. Built in 1936 by the Depression-era Works Projects Administration (WPA), this structure served as a fire lookout tower. As you continue down the other side of Loop Road, watch for a small resident population of Ruffed Grouse at the base (we eagerly await the first sightings of Wild Turkey). At a three-way intersection, take the lower left road, marked Great Woods Road. South of the intersection are areas of mature hardwood (mainly oak) interspersed with white pine and hemlock. This forest type contains many of the largest trees in Lynn Woods, and its complex vertical structure attracts many forest-interior birds like Red-eyed Vireo and Ovenbird.

Next, you will pass a picnic area on the right. In summer, if you brought lunch, you can eat while listening to Great-crested Flycatchers. Continue on Great Woods Road and you will see Walden Pond on the right (*our* Walden Pond). From this location, you can see the pump house on the opposite of the pond—a good location for migrants. In 1995 a Yellow-billed Cuckoo was present for the whole month of May.

Stay on Great Woods Road as it curves back to the east and becomes Pennybrook Road again. You will pass Fox Rock Road on the left and pass over Penny Brook (many years ago a penny was charged for crossing the brook). As you take this road back to the parking lot, you will pass Tomlin's Swamp on your left. This red maple swamp with highbush blueberry understory is a hotbed for insect larvae. Eastern Screech Owls reside here, and in the fall, migrants are funneled into the southern end of the swamp. Unfortunately, the Veery, which formerly bred here, is now absent from these woods. Follow this road back to the parking lot, listening for Eastern Wood-Pewee (during summer).

The impression that Lynn Woods leaves on a visitor is a lasting one. The primitive trails are exquisite in their wildness and leave plenty of room for exploration. You will come to love and appreciate "our" woods, as did the early activists who wisely preserved it for future generations. Remember as you walk through these exhilarating woodlands that this unsung area is in Lynn, MA; remember, too, that continuing efforts are necessary to ensure its continued

preservation.

Maps and information are available at the Ranger Station, 106 Pennybrook Road, Lynn, MA 01905, Monday through Friday (617-477-7123); or from the Friends of Lynn Woods, P.O. Box 8216, Lynn, MA 01904 (617-593-7773).

Directions

From Route 128 North or South, take Exit 43 in Lynnfield. (From this point, it is 4.0 miles to Lynn Woods.) At the bottom of the ramp, head east, following signs to Walnut Street, Saugus/Lynn. At 1.5 miles, bear left at the fork. You will cross over Route 1 and continue into Lynn (the boundary is unmarked) on Walnut Street. At a blinking light, turn left onto Pennybrook Road (opposite O'Callaghan Way). Go the end of Pennybrook Road and between two stone pillars into the reservation.

From Route 1 North or South, take the Walnut Street exit in Saugus and head east on Walnut Street into Lynn. At 2.0 miles, turn left at a blinking light onto Pennybrook Road.

John Quigley was born, and still lives, in Lynn. A runner as well as a birder, he has logged over 25,000 miles in Lynn Woods. He enjoys studying the birds (especially the gulls) of his home town; his Lynn life list is approaching 300 species.

JoAnne Benard is a registered nurse employed by the Department of Mental Health in Tewksbury, MA. A Lynn resident, she has been birding (often in Lynn Woods) for five years.

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