



## EXPLORING ESTABROOK WOODS

by Ron Lockwood

Estabrook Woods, with its wide variety of habitats, is an excellent place to spend a leisurely morning birding. The area totals about five square miles and is covered by an extensive system of trails. Much of the area belongs to Harvard University as part of the Concord Field Station, with smaller sections owned by the town of Concord, the Middlesex School, and private individuals. The canopy is generally dominated by mixed oak species, but there are some areas of mature white pine and hemlock. Black birch and white pine frequently form the understory. Wetter areas have red maple and a few yellow birch. There are three large ponds and various smaller ones, as well as extensive wetland habitat. Finally, open fields border the perimeter in several locations. This rich diversity of habitats is reflected in an abundance of bird life.

There is easy access to Estabrook Woods at a number of points. One is from Monument Street in Concord, about a mile past the Old North Bridge on the northwest side of the road and just east of Punkatasset Hill at what the maps call John's Junction. Another access point, this one from the north side, is in the town of Carlisle at the junction of Estabrook Road and Kibby Place. This is most easily reached by taking Russell Street east from Concord Street in Carlisle and turning right after 0.7 mile onto Bellows Hill Road. Then follow Bellows Hill Road for 0.4 mile and turn right onto Estabrook Road. After another 0.4 mile, the paved portion of Estabrook Road ends at Kibby Place. Estabrook Road continues south as a dirt road into Estabrook Woods. There is a large stone pillar at the beginning of the dirt road. Park along Kibby Place, and walk due south along the dirt road into the woods.

My preferred entrance is from Estabrook Road in Concord. To reach this entrance, take Lowell Street northwest from Concord center for 1.2 miles until you reach a four-way stop. Turn right here onto Barnes Hill Road, go east for 0.4 mile, and take your first left onto Estabrook Road. Drive another 0.4 mile and park when you see a small, signed parking area on the left-hand side of the road. Our tour of Estabrook will start from this parking area and will focus on what one should expect to encounter primarily during migration or the breeding season.

The properties bordering Estabrook Road are all private and so must be birded from the road; however, they can have a good variety of species. The fields to the west and at the end of the road are easily viewed for Eastern Meadowlark, Eastern Phoebe, Eastern Kingbird, Northern Mockingbird, Barn Swallow, and Eastern Bluebird. These fields have also hosted a pair of American Kestrels during the summer months, although none have been observed since 1995; this species is still to be expected during migration. To the

west at the far edge of the fields, American Woodcocks display during the spring. Prior to 1995 the road was bordered with a hedgerow that was excellent for Brown Thrasher; unfortunately, this area was cleared, and the thrashers haven't been present since. House Wrens are common along the road, and Carolina Wrens occasionally occur. Wild Turkey is rarely found here, but you might be lucky. Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Great Crested Flycatcher, Eastern Kingbird, American Redstart, Chestnut-sided and Yellow warblers, Warbling and Red-eyed vireos, Eastern Towhee, and Chipping Sparrow are all present during the summer. Eastern Screech-Owl and Great Horned Owl have both been observed in this area. During spring and fall migration, Estabrook Road can be good for warblers, as well as other migrants.

After birding Estabrook Road, enter the woods through the fire lane at the end of the road. You'll pass a beautiful beech tree on your left. Keep your eyes open for Meadowlarks and Bluebirds, also to your left. Occasionally Indigo Buntings are present in this area as well, although this varies from year to year. Once you reach the woods, you are at a crossroads (marked with the numeral one on the map). The main trail, which bisects Estabrook Woods and is also called Estabrook Road, is to the left and can be followed north all the way to Kibby Place in Carlisle. Directly in front of you is another trail heading more or less northeast, and to your right, a trail that heads south. It is this last trail that we will take.

The woods you are entering are part of Harvard University's Concord Field Station, which has been preserved for all time in large part due to the generous efforts of Professor Ernst Mayr of Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology. This area has been good for Northern Saw-whet Owl during the winter and early spring; Great Horned and Barred Owls frequent it, as well. You have a reasonably good chance (as owl-watching goes) of seeing or hearing either of the latter two. During spring and summer, listen for Pine Warblers as you continue to travel south down the trail. This species is fairly common in Estabrook and can usually be found wherever there are mature pines. Listen for Wood Thrush and Winter Wren (present in some years) along the path. Eastern Wood-Pewee, Ovenbird, and Scarlet Tanager are to be expected. Both species of cuckoo have been found on this and the next section of the trail.

If it is spring and you are here early in the morning, listen for the drumming of the Ruffed Grouse. There is a drumming log ahead on the left where a bird has been seen doing the full display. As with many of the gallinaceous species, the display of the Ruffed Grouse is a rare sight. The male struts back and forth with drooped wings, ruffed out neck feathers, and fully fanned tail. Occasionally he stops, settles back on his haunches, and starts to bring his wings forward, appearing to beat them against his chest. He beats slowly at first but accelerates, coming out of his crouch and appearing to stand on his tiptoes by the end. The sound is actually made from air compression, not from contact between the

wings and the breast, and can be heard from a great distance. Usually the grouse flushes from the log, but I have seen the display one time, so you may, as well.

As you continue south along the path, a fenced field will open in front of you, and the path will take a sharp left. There is a second path, marked with the numeral two on the map, which goes off to the right and loops back to Estabrook Road; this also can be productive. If you stay on the present path, you will head northeast with the fields to your right. This is an excellent area for Red-bellied Woodpecker and Northern Flicker. Wood Thrush and occasionally Veery sing on the left as you continue. Listen for Eastern Towhee, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Cedar Waxwing, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, Common Yellowthroat, Baltimore Oriole, American Robin, and Chipping Sparrow. Watch for Barn and Tree swallows out over the fields. Red-tailed Hawks frequent this area; American Kestrels were formerly summer residents and can still be found during the spring and fall. This is also a good place to look for Ospreys as they migrate along the Concord River to the east. During migration this stretch of trail can be quite productive with a variety of warblers, Blue-headed and other vireos, Fox Sparrow, and to a lesser degree, other sparrows.

The trail winds its way northeast along the fence line until you reach a small pond, labeled with the numeral three on the map, which has bullfrogs in the summer. In the open field near the pond is a stand of mangled birch trees; scan them for woodpeckers. Indigo Buntings are often present here as well. Several trails intersect in the vicinity of the pond. One trail travels west away from the pond, taking you back to the middle fork of the three forks previously mentioned (numeral one on the map) at the entrance to Estabrook Woods. There is a path to the east of the pond that travels south along the fields. This path can be good in migration and affords an excellent view of the fields and of another pond farther south. Instead, follow the path north of the pond back into the woods, and take the first trail to your right (numeral four on the map). If you were to continue along the path instead of taking the right-hand trail, you would also end up back at the middle of the three forks at the entrance.

The right-hand trail winds its way eastward through mixed woodlands. This is an excellent area for Ruffed Grouse, Hermit Thrush, Great Horned Owl, and Barred Owl. One memorable day I found an owl pellet underneath a towering White Pine next to the trail. Looking straight up from it, I spied two Great Horned Owls sitting side by side and looking straight down at me! Hairy Woodpeckers and Ovenbirds are also present, and during spring and fall Blue-gray Gnatcatcher is usually encountered here. Listen for Pine Warblers in the pines to the left of the trail. This trail passes just north of Punkatasset Hill and intersects another major trail just south of Hutchins Pond (numeral five on the map). This is Hutchins Pond Trail. Go right. As you hike to the south here, there will be a large opening in the woods on your right which extends up the hill. Chimney Swifts are usually present during the summer. If you desire, you can

climb to the top of Punkatasset Hill (about 300 feet in elevation), where you will most likely find Red-bellied and Hairy woodpeckers in addition to more common birds. Pileated Woodpeckers have been found in this area, as well.

From the open area, continue southward on Hutchins Pond Trail, which will take you all the way to the Monument Street entrance if you go that far. You will be passing through an area of woodlands interspersed with grassy openings. This is another good spot for Indigo Buntings. As you continue south you will reach a sign (numeral six on the map) stating that you are in Concord's Punkatasset conservation land; make a hard left here. As you go northward on this new trail there will again be fenced fields to the right. Look for Red-winged Blackbirds and Bobolinks. The Bobolinks are usually present early in the summer but tend to disperse as the fields are grazed by cattle. Eastern Kingbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, and Cedar Waxwings are often present, and Yellow and Blue-winged warblers breed along the edges of the field. This is also a good spot for American Woodcock in the evening. As you continue along the fence, you will see a black turnstile ahead of you on the right. This allows access to an overgrown area in the field which has Yellow, Blue-winged, and Black-and-white warblers. After birding this area, return through the turnstile to the trail and continue northward.

You will soon reach Hutchins Pond on your left, which usually isn't very productive but will occasionally have Wood Duck, Mallard, Canada Goose, Belted Kingfisher, or Great Blue Heron. Saw Mill Brook drains from the pond, and in early spring you might hear a Louisiana Waterthrush here. This is also a good place to listen for Winter Wren, Hermit Thrush, and Veery. Cooper's Hawk is occasionally seen in this area. During migration, this can be a good spot for warblers. Just north of here, the trail splits again; take the left fork, marked with the numeral seven on the map. We will return to the right fork later. You are now walking along the northeast side of Hutchins Pond. There is a small, overgrown orchard on the right with an easily missed trail going into it. This can be good for Chestnut-sided, Magnolia, and other warblers during migration. Great Crested Flycatcher, Scarlet Tanager, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Baltimore Oriole are also present here. Be warned, however, that this area is also frequented by nude-bathing men during the summer. Back on the main trail, you will shortly cross one of the streams that feeds Hutchins Pond. This has been a good area for Pileated Woodpecker and Winter Wren.

Not far beyond the stream, the trail tees back into Hutchins Pond Trail, which leads south to Monument Street. Turn south, and walk back along the west side of Hutchins Pond. Listen here for Brown Creeper, which is present all summer. This is another good area for Hermit Thrush and Veery. In some years Red-breasted Nuthatches are present. In 1995 a pair of Blue-headed Vireos spent the summer here. They were observed carrying food, but a nest was never located. Scarlet Tanager, Pine Warbler, and Eastern Wood-Pewee are usually



present also. A trail (numeral eight on the map) goes to the west near a small pond; it is usually quite birdy and can be excellent in migration. You may choose to take this trail; it follows a ridge to the northwest, passes the north end of a large pond called Mink Pond, and finally intersects Estabrook Road.

Instead, turn around and head north back up Hutchins Pond Trail until it comes to a fork (numeral nine on the map). The right and left forks are East and West Hubbard Trail, respectively, and pass along the east and west sides of Hubbard Hill. Hubbard Hill is about 250 feet in elevation and is forested primarily with black birch understory. Both trails are productive. During the spring and summer one can usually hear Black-throated Green Warblers singing on Hubbard Hill just north of the fork. Ovenbirds are quite common here, as well. West Hubbard Trail heads northwest along the west side of Hubbard Hill. There is an extensive marsh on the west side of the trail not far from the fork. During the summer of 1995 Red-shouldered Hawks successfully bred in this area, producing at least one fledgling. Unfortunately, there has not been a repeat performance to date. Fledgling Barred Owls have also been observed here. In some years the marsh has had Northern Waterthrush. The trail continues north of the marsh into another good area for Winter Wren, Veery, and Hermit Thrush. Eventually this trail runs into Estabrook Road.

East Hubbard Trail skirts the east side of Hubbard Hill and then turns northward, eventually running into the Carlisle Swamp. Pileated Woodpecker is a possibility along the trail, but the real treat is the singing Northern Waterthrushes that are present along the edge of the marsh. Listen for them along the east side of the trail. Scarlet Tanager, Veery, Hermit Thrush, and Wood Thrush are usually present. Great Horned Owls have been seen here, and Ovenbird is common. The trail continues up the west side of the swamp and eventually forks (numeral ten on the map). The right-hand fork goes north into Carlisle, and the left-hand trail heads west until it intersects Estabrook Road. Take the left-hand fork to Estabrook Road and then turn south (numeral eleven on the map).

As you continue south on Estabrook Road, you will hear singing Red-eyed Vireos. There are usually several in this area. Also, this is another spot to listen for Winter Wren. Farther south there will be a marsh on the west side, where Veeries are usually present. However, no Northern Waterthrushes have been found to date. In the spring, watch the trail sides for pink lady's-slipper. Hermit Thrush and Scarlet Tanager are also present along Estabrook Road. Eastern Wood-Pewee is quite common along this road, as well. Past the marsh and on the east side of the trail is Mink Pond. The lower end of the pond can be viewed from a couple of obvious vantage points. Great Blue Heron, Wood Duck, and Tree Swallow are usually present. Ring-necked Duck and Hooded Merganser can be found here in the spring, with the former sometimes lingering into May. Spotted Sandpiper can also be found, particularly during late summer. The

section of trail along Mink Pond is also very good during both spring and fall migrations, attracting mixed flocks of warblers. In the past these flocks have included Blue-headed Vireo, Northern Parula, American Redstart, and Black-and-white, Blackpoll, Pine, Yellow-rumped, Palm, Black-throated Blue, Magnolia, Chestnut-sided, and Canada warblers. Philadelphia Vireo has occurred during the fall migration, as well.

As you pass the south side of Mink Pond, the property on the west side becomes private. Please don't trespass. This area is one of dense shrubbery and is good for Gray Catbird and Eastern Towhee. In the fall, it is also possible to find Connecticut Warbler here. Great Crested Flycatcher, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Northern Flicker occur regularly here, and occasionally Pileated Woodpecker can be found here, as well. Continuing along the trail, you will come to the three forks and the fire lane that leads back to the parking area.

There are many variations on the theme set forth so far. Only a couple will be mentioned here. As you explore Estabrook Woods, you will find your own preferred path to bird.

One interesting loop is from the northeast corner of Hutchins Pond. This path is most easily accessed from the Hutchins Pond Trail entrance off Monument Street in Concord. Take the east path at the Punkatasset sign, and follow it to the fork on the east side of Hutchins Pond that is labeled with the numeral seven on the map. This time take the right trail, which is known as Two Rod Road. The orchard will be on your left. Look for Rose-breasted Grosbeak and Baltimore Oriole in this area. Continue north. Just beyond the orchard, there is another fork; keep right (numeral twelve). The left fork cuts over to East Hubbard Trail. This area is mixed woodlands and is excellent for Hermit Thrush and Scarlet Tanager. There are many side trails worth exploring. Eventually, to the left, you will see a side trail (numeral thirteen) that leads through hemlocks to the east side of the Carlisle Swamp and then loops back to Two Rod Road. Along this trail are Pine and Black-throated Green warblers, and from the ledge overlooking the swamp you can hear singing Northern Waterthrushes. Ovenbird is common throughout. After the loop, you will have to return down Two Rod Road, because there is no route across the Carlisle Swamp.

Another detour that is usually well worth the walk is west from Estabrook Road. As you walk south along Estabrook Road from the trail that tees into the road from the Carlisle Swamp (numeral eleven), look for a well-traveled path to your right (numeral fourteen). This path leads to Bateman's Pond and the Middlesex School campus. You will pass through a large stand of white pine, at which point the path tees into a broad path that runs roughly northeast-southwest (numeral fifteen). The property now belongs to Middlesex School. The school graciously allows access to their holdings in Estabrook Woods, but do not enter the campus proper. Unfortunately, the school has plans to develop a section of this property.

If you go right, the trail eventually loops to the left and goes into the Middlesex School campus. There are several side trails along this main trail that are worth exploring. Northern Goshawks have bred in this area. This is also a good spot for both Great Horned and Barred owls. Winter Wren is present some years. This area can be quite good in migration, as well. There is also a side trail, marked with the numeral sixteen, running along the shore of Bateman's Pond, where Belted Kingfisher and ducks can be found. Swallows are common around the pond, and Chimney Swift is usually present.

Backtrack along the main trail to the tee where you entered it (numeral fifteen), then continue on the main trail to the southwest. This area has had both cuckoos in the past. Continue past a small pond on the left-hand side of the trail. You will usually hear an Eastern Phoebe in the vicinity of the pond. Proceed along the path past a well-used side trail to the right, which is worth exploring some other time, until you reach a road. Go right (numeral seventeen). Walk southwest until the road runs into Hugh Cargill Road, which is unmarked but indicated by the numeral eighteen on the map. Take a hard left onto this road, and walk back to the northeast. After a short walk there will be a private residence with a large red barn on the left-hand side of the road. Take the trail that enters the woods to the right of the barn (numeral nineteen). This trail loops back to Estabrook Road and skirts a large wetland on the right. This is the same wetland that is not far north of Mink Pond and was previously described as we traveled south along Estabrook Road. Watch along the left side of the trail for the spot where the early settlers quarried lime. The stone has been worked, leaving several long and deep grooves. A right turn at the tee leads back to the parking area at the Estabrook Road entrance.

The birds you can expect in the vicinity of Middlesex School include Red-tailed Hawk, Northern Flicker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-eyed Vireo, Veery, Hermit and Wood thrushes, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Black-throated Green and Pine warblers, Ovenbird, Common Yellowthroat, Scarlet Tanager, and Baltimore Oriole. Occasionally Pileated Woodpecker and Ruffed Grouse are present, as well.

Winter birding in Estabrook is not nearly as interesting as birding during the rest of the year. In addition to the resident species one would expect to find, there are usually a few Brown Creepers and Red-breasted Nuthatches. Golden-crowned Kinglet is quite common. American Tree Sparrows can almost always be found along the edges, and Dark-eyed Juncos can be encountered practically anywhere. As mentioned earlier, Northern Saw-whet Owl has wintered here. Winter finches are found in only the most irruptive years. If there is sufficient snow, the extensive system of trails provides excellent cross-country skiing.

We've come to the end of our walk in Estabrook Woods, having visited fields, forests, and wetlands. There is a great deal more to explore in this extensive area with its varied and remarkable habitats. I hope this sample walk



will entice you to discover your own favorite route. If so, you will be rewarded by hours of great birding!

**Ron Lockwood** has a passion for sparrows and, since moving to Massachusetts, has been a volunteer participant in the Grassland Conservation Program of the Massachusetts Audubon Society. This involves both banding and surveying grassland species at the Devens Reserve Forces Training Area (formerly Fort Devens), and at Hanscom Field. Ron lives in Bolton with his wife, Susan.

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