

BIRDING THE BLACKSTONE VALLEY: UXBRIDGE- NORTHBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

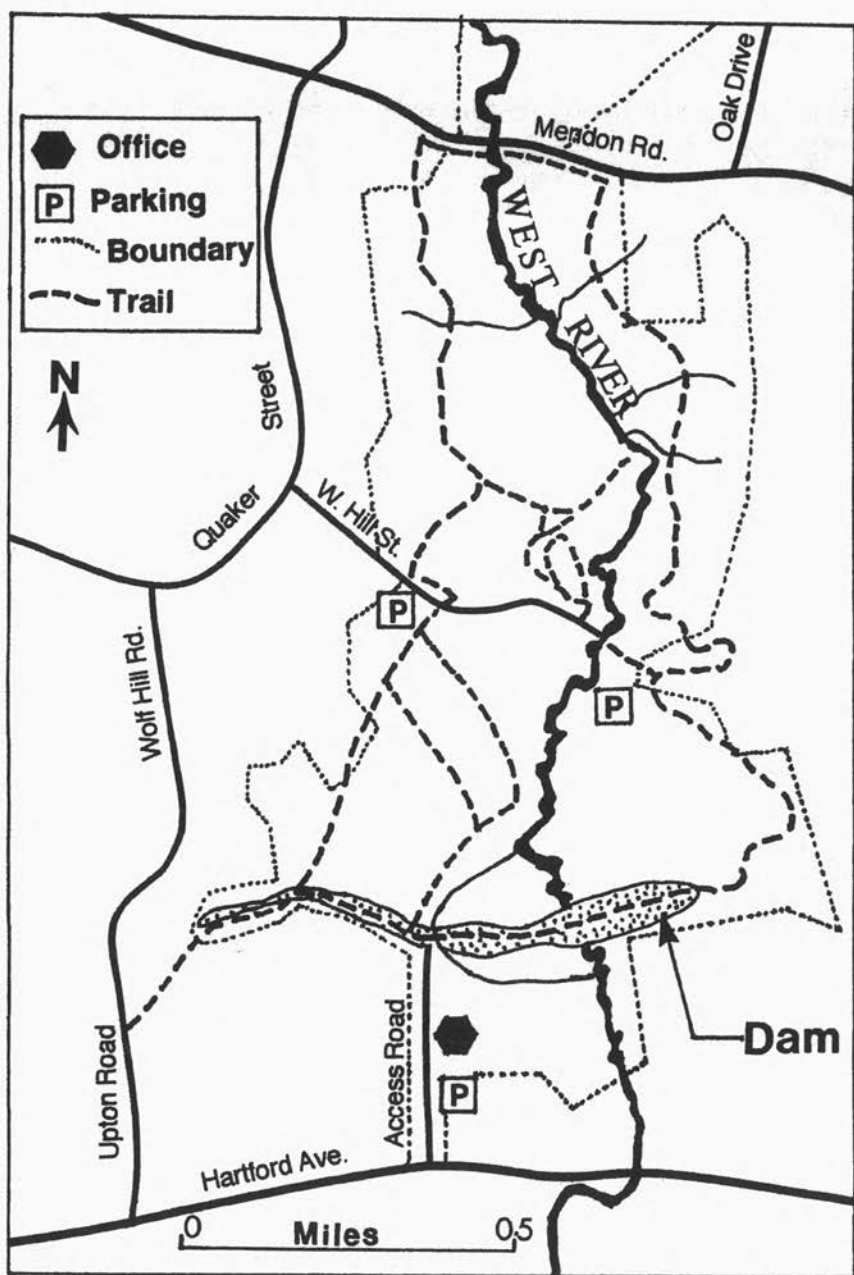
by Richard W. Hildreth and Strickland Wheelock

The Blackstone River begins near Worcester, Massachusetts, flows south along a fairly straight course and down quite a steep gradient, and empties into the sea near Providence, Rhode Island. In the vicinity of Uxbridge and Northbridge, in southern Worcester County, Massachusetts, two major tributaries join the Blackstone: the West River and the Mumford River. In this "tri-river" area, the coincidence of an interesting variety of habitats, an abundance of easily accessible public land, and an impressive history of birding activity combine to produce a destination for excellent inland birding at all seasons.

Besides being a productive birding destination, the region features historical sites associated with the Blackstone Canal, which operated from 1828 through 1847, as well as with other activities of the early days of the industrial revolution. The area also offers excellent opportunities for recreational activities such as hiking, biking, and canoeing. The area around Rice City Pond features some outstanding scenic views; this is an especially beautiful place to visit during the autumn foliage season.

The Uxbridge area is the destination for annual spring and fall field trips by the Forbush Bird Club. This area is also the heart of the Uxbridge Christmas Bird Count, which has been conducted continuously for 16 years, during which 118 species have been found. One of us (Strickland Wheelock) has birded the area since childhood, amassing many observations and records; in conjunction with others, he has operated a bird-banding station in the area since 1988, netting, over the years, roughly 9500 birds representing about 105 species. Highlights of the bird banding operation include the capture of twenty-eight species of warblers, including Orange-crowned and Hooded, as well as "Brewster's" warblers. Other interesting species netted include Grasshopper Sparrow and Acadian Flycatcher. The other author (Richard Hildreth) has birded the area for about twenty-five years in all seasons.

We describe, in some detail, seven easily accessible sites. Visiting all these sites could easily occupy an entire day. All these sites are shown and identified by number on the accompanying map (page 176.). Several of the sites are contained within the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. Stop in at the state park visitor center at 287 Oak Street in Uxbridge and pick up a copy of the excellent, detailed trail map. All the sites are inside the federally designated Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor. The National Park Service has produced an excellent map/brochure regarding the corridor, which is usually also available at the state park visitor center. One cautionary note: most of the



sites mentioned are multiple-use areas that allow hunting during the legal seasons. Only rarely do hunting and birding come into any conflict. During the fall waterfowl season, the ducks leave Rice City Pond and seek sanctuary at Whiten Pond in North Uxbridge. Sometimes, on a few Saturdays during the fall,

upland game-bird (mainly pheasant) hunting becomes so intense that it makes birding impossible. Hunting is not allowed on Sundays, and weekday hunting pressure is usually not great.

(1) West Hill Dam

Severe floods along the lower Blackstone River in 1955 prompted the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to carry out several flood control projects in the region. One of these projects was the construction of the West Hill Dam, completed in 1961, on the West River. The philosophy behind these flood control dams is that under normal conditions, the flood gates at the dam are left open and the reservoir behind the dam is empty. When conditions occur that threaten to produce flooding, the flood gates are closed, and water collects behind the dam. During a serious flood event, this retained water does not contribute to flooding conditions downstream. When the flood threat has passed, the water stored behind the dam is slowly and safely released.

At full capacity, the reservoir at West Hill Dam holds 12,400 acre-feet of water and covers 985 acres. Most of the time this large, mostly forested area serves as a recreation area, managed by the Corps of Engineers, and a wildlife management area. The great variety of habitats (coniferous and deciduous forest, overgrown fields, a variety of wetlands) makes it a very good birding site at all seasons. During a four-year period, Strickland Wheelock found more than 215 species of birds at this site and the nearby Rice City Pond site. This is also a very good site for other natural history pursuits; for example, in a single year Tom and Cathy Dodd found fifty-one species of butterflies, including a Sachus (the fifth Massachusetts record for this southern skipper) and a colony of the rare and very local Hessel's Hairstreak, an obligate resident of white cedar swamps.

The West Hill Dam site may be easily approached from two directions (see map on p. 176). There is an access road to the dam from Hartford Avenue in Uxbridge. At times this road is closed; park in the lot just before the gate and walk in. Stop at the office, not far north of the gate, for a trail map and brochure. When the gate is open, you can drive to the dam and park. The vista from the dam is good for searching for swallows and hawks aloft. Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Goshawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and American Kestrel all breed in the area and might be seen. In winter, Northern Rough-legged Hawk and Bald Eagle have been noted. Right at the dam is a colony of Northern Rough-winged Swallows along with one or more pairs of nesting Eastern Phoebes. In the woods and wood edges near the dam, the following breeding birds have been found: Great Crested Flycatcher, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, Black-throated Green Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, and Scarlet Tanager. If you follow the road north from the dam a short distance, you will reach a small parking lot in the pines. If you follow the "log boom" to the west from this lot,

you may find a nesting Northern Goshawk (if you do so in the nesting season in May, please don't approach too closely or disturb the birds unduly). In the vicinity of this lot you may find the following species: Great Horned and Barred owls, both nuthatches, Brown Creeper, Pine Warbler, and Blue-headed Vireo.

A short walk east from this lot is the river; look for Solitary and Spotted sandpipers. In the trees along the river, look for Warbling Vireo, Baltimore Oriole, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Scarlet Tanager. Follow the river a short way north for a good vantage onto the wetlands, which may provide a view of Wood Duck, Mallard, American Black Duck, Green Heron, Belted Kingfisher, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Least Flycatcher. Hooded Mergansers nest here. To the north of this lot is an area of overgrown fields. Several trails allow easy exploration. Along the east and northeast borders of the field area, many fine views out into the wetlands can be obtained. Breeding birds to be expected in the fields include Blue-winged and Prairie warblers and Indigo Bunting. You may possibly find Purple Finches or an Orchard Oriole in the pines bordering the marsh. During migration, this area is a good place to look for Olive-sided Flycatcher and Palm Warbler. Connecticut and Mourning Warbler have been found here. Overlooks into the wetlands here may produce Hooded Merganser, American Bittern, occasionally Sora, Eastern Bluebird, Swamp Sparrow, and Rusty Blackbird. Summer Tanager and Red-headed Woodpecker have been found here, as well.

In winter, during "finch years," the field area and wood edges are good places to find both species of crossbills, Pine Siskin, Common Redpoll, and Evening Grosbeak. Wild apples along the west side of the field area often attract overwintering robins. Each winter five species of owls are regularly found: Great Horned, Barred, Eastern Screech, Northern Saw-whet, and Long-eared.

To bird the northern part of the West Hill Dam site, it is probably best to enter the area from Quaker Street. Turn east from Quaker Street on West Hill Street (there are Corps of Engineers signs to West Hill Park). On the south side of West Hill Street, there is a large field worth scanning for raptors, Ring-necked Pheasant, Eastern Bluebird, and Bobolink. As soon as you enter the reservation, look for a parking lot on the right. From this lot you can follow the trail south to reach all the areas mentioned in the previous section. Walk east along the paved road to the recreation area. This road crosses the West River and allows access to many trails and interesting sites on the east side of the river. The swimming area, which can be viewed from the bridge, sometimes has a variety of shorebirds. Just to the east of the bridge is a picnic area under the tall white pines. This area is a small peninsula extending southward into the wetlands and offering some fine overlooks. It's a great spot to find Brown Creeper, Pine Warbler, Green Heron, and flycatchers. The West Hill Dam site has many trails and birding possibilities not mentioned; exploring with the trail map as your guide may bring you to some exciting finds.

(2) Rice City Pond

One of the best birding sites in southern Worcester County is Rice City Pond in Uxbridge. This large impoundment on the Blackstone River/Blackstone Canal is entirely within the Blackstone River and Canal Heritage State Park. This pond can vary greatly in appearance and size, depending on the water level and recent flood history of the Blackstone River. It can be one great expanse of water or a mosaic of mudflats and marsh. The Blackstone is a river which rises very quickly to flood stage after a storm and falls just as quickly afterwards; conditions can change rapidly in the pond.

During spring and fall migration (and in winter, if there is open water), the pond is a good site to search for waterfowl. Two first Worcester County waterfowl records occurred here: Fulvous Whistling-Duck in 1979 and Eurasian Wigeon in 1992. Mallard, American Black Duck, Wood Duck, and Hooded Merganser sometimes breed there.

When water levels are low, substantial mudflats are exposed. When the flats are exposed during spring and fall, a good variety of shorebirds can be expected. Common Snipe is abundant in the spring. This is a good site to find Semipalmated Plover in the spring. Killdeers are present during the warmer months and occasionally during the winter. Spotted Sandpipers breed here in good numbers (twelve or more pairs). In the warmer months, during periods of low water, a luxuriant marsh grows in the shallows. One of the most significant plants in this marsh is wild rice (*Zizania aquatica*); the pond derives its name from this plant. In the fall, when the wild rice is fruiting, great numbers of birds come to feed on it. Sometimes hundreds of blackbirds, Common Grackles, and Bobolinks (in the "Reed Bird" plumage) descend on the marsh and, within a week or two, consume most of the seeds. Many sparrows, as well as rails and ducks, also feed on the seeds.

The marsh, especially later in the summer, sometimes hosts Soras and Virginia and King rails. Green Herons, Great Blue Herons, and occasionally American Bitterns can be found. Late in the summer, this marsh is a good inland site to find "white" herons. Red-tailed Hawks are always present. During migration, Turkey Vultures, Ospreys, and Merlins pass along the valley and over the pond in good numbers. The pond is a good site to look for swallows, especially in the spring, when six species can sometimes be found. Bank Swallows from nearby colonies are over the pond all summer. The historic Blackstone Canal passes south out of the pond under Hartford Avenue via a beautiful keystone-arch stone bridge; a colony of Northern Rough-winged Swallows nests there.

The pond is accessible on both the east and west sides. To bird the east side, park at the state park lot on Hartford Avenue. At the edge of the lot there is a kiosk with a detailed map of the area. Just north of the lot is an open, grassy area. This area is well worth checking for birds at all seasons. Bird boxes along

the edge of this area often host Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds. King Philip's Trail (blue markers) begins here and can be followed for about 1.7 miles north to King Philip's Rock. Shortly after you leave the first grassy area, you will come to a second open area. This somewhat weedy area is great for sparrows in the fall. Several times Snow Buntings have been found here. During spring and fall migration, the trees around this clearing are a productive place to look for warblers and other landbirds. Orchard Oriole can sometimes be found here. When you reach this opening, head west to view the pond. At the northwest corner of this clearing, an unmarked trail leads out onto a small peninsula. The tip of this peninsula is the best spot on the eastern shore to view the pond. With a careful approach, you can often get fine, close views of waterfowl, marsh birds, and shorebirds.

Return to the open area and continue following the trail north into the white pine woods. Pine Warblers breed here and often arrive quite early in the spring. Great Horned Owls often breed here. Just after the trail leaves the pines, it crosses a small stream. This is a good spot to look for Winter Wren (both breeding and overwintering). The next spot along the trail which is productive for birding is an abandoned gravel pit that is overgrown with autumn olive. In the fall many birds gather here to feed on the autumn olive fruits. From the old pit, the trail passes through the deciduous woods to King Philip's Rock. Look for Winter Wren and thrushes along this stretch of the trail.

A trip all the way to King Philip's Rock is well worth the effort. The view from the rock is spectacular. It is a good spot to watch raptors passing along the valley during migration. In May, if the warblers are about, the rock offers a great opportunity to view them in the treetops below you. Worm-eating Warbler, Eastern Wood-Pewee, Scarlet Tanager, and Baltimore Oriole breed in the area. If you don't have time or inclination to hike the trail north from Hartford Avenue, you can park in the lot on Quaker Street and hike the very short distance to the rock.

To bird the west side of the pond, park in the lot on the south side of Hartford Avenue, just west of the canal. The Goat Hill Trail heads north from there along the west side of the pond. The trail passes along the steep hillside of Goat Hill, giving you a sort of aerial view of the pond. This is the best overlook for a quick look at the pond. If water levels are low, some flats are exposed quite close to this trail and it is possible to get good views of shorebirds. During spring migration, a hike along this trail may yield a impressive list of warblers and other landbirds.

(3) North of Rice City Pond

Along the Blackstone River and Blackstone Canal between Church Street in Northbridge and the north end of Rice City Pond are some excellent birding areas. Just north of the pond, the river meanders through a broad floodplain. The

precise nature of this area at any given time depends on the recent flood history. Severe floods remove most of the larger woody vegetation. Long periods without significant flooding allow some growth of small aspens, willows, and birches. Most of this floodplain is usually covered with herbaceous vegetation. One of the most significant herbaceous plants for attracting birds is ragweed, *Ambrosia artemisiifolia*. During years with significant flooding, this plant grows vigorously in the flood-deposited silt. In years without floods and silt deposition, the ragweed grows less vigorously, and if there are several years without silt-depositing floods, the ragweed is largely overwhelmed by other herbaceous species. During the years in which ragweed is abundant, its seeds attract many species of birds, sometimes in great numbers, during fall and winter. Sparrows of many species, American Goldfinches, House Finches, and sometimes Common Redpolls can be found here in large flocks. Stands of common reed along the river in this area are overnight roosting sites for sparrows and blackbirds in winter. This floodplain area is a good spot to look for Northern Harriers (five were found during the 1998 Uxbridge CBC) and Northern Shrikes. Short-eared and Snowy owls have been seen here in winter. American Kestrels have nested here, and accipiters often hunt over the floodplain.

If the water level is not too high, you can reach this area from the "blue trail" that follows the east side of Rice City Pond north to King Philip's Rock. This floodplain can also be reached from the trail on the west side, from the Goat Hill Lock site. Another way to explore the area is by canoe. An early-morning canoe trip from the launching site on Church Street all the way south to Rice City Pond can be great for birding and other wildlife-watching. As you silently drift along, mink, muskrat, otter, red fox, and white-tailed deer are frequently seen. Since the Blackstone River seldom freezes, this stretch can be run by canoe on calm, mild days even in the winter.

Another very accessible and interesting birding area is found in Northbridge, just south of Church Street, west of the river/canal. There are areas of forest along the river and canal, an area of overgrown fields, and an open "barrens" area (the topsoil was stripped off some years ago), all easily reached via the trail which leads south from the two Heritage State Park lots on Church Street; one of these, Larkin Recreation Area, is just west of the canal, and the other (for canoe launching) is between the canal and river. The trails from the two lots join and can be followed along the canal all the way south to Hartford Avenue in Uxbridge. Look for kingfishers and sometimes Green Herons along the canal. Northern Goshawk has nested several times in the area; this species is most frequently seen just south of the point where the two trails join.

A walk along this canal-side trail during spring or fall migration can be very productive. About one-half mile south of the parking lots, the trail emerges into a large, somewhat overgrown field (it is "brush-hogged" periodically). Bird boxes here attract Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds. Sometimes there are

breeding kestrels. This is a great place to look for sparrows in the fall. Along the main trail, between the parking lots and the field, you will see several westward-trending trails. All these trails to the west lead to the "barrens" area, now overgrown with stunted white pines and various "pioneer species" of woody plants. One interesting plant that occurs in this "barrens" area is the bayberry (*Myrica pensylvanica*); its waxy berries provide food for many birds. In years when there is a good crop of the berries, Yellow-rumped ("Myrtle") Warblers and Eastern Bluebirds can be found wintering here. Look (and listen) for Northern Bobwhite. Prairie and Blue-winged warblers, and Field Sparrows are usual here. The Common Roadside Skipper butterfly (which despite its name is anything but common in Massachusetts) is regularly found in these "barrens."

(4) Northbridge Sewage Beds

About 1.5 miles north of the junction of Hartford Avenue and Route 122, on the east side of Route 122, are the Northbridge Sewage beds. By the highway is a conspicuous bright yellow sign with black letters ("Town of Northbridge, Department of Public Works, Sewer Office, Wastewater Treatment Plant"), which identifies the site. The site is normally closed to vehicular traffic; visiting birders should park beside the access road just before it crosses the railroad and enters the site. The large property has an office building, several structures containing various sorts of wastewater treatment equipment, and a large number of filter beds. It is these "old-style" filter beds that make the site a worthwhile birding destination. The beds are diked structures, lined with a carefully raked layer of gravel. The beds are periodically flooded with wastewater, which forms a shallow pool. The water slowly drains away through the gravel and sand, cleaning the water before it flows away into the nearby Blackstone River. These filter beds attract shorebirds at all seasons.

During the summer, Killdeer and Spotted Sandpiper are always present and are presumed to breed. In the summer of 1998, Least Sandpipers were present during every month from May through September. During spring and fall migration, the following species are regular: Killdeer, Common Snipe, Greater Yellowlegs, Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, and Least Sandpiper. During the fall migration, Pectoral Sandpiper is often present; two were seen as late as October 26 in 1998. Other species occasionally found here are Semipalmated and White-rumped sandpipers and Black-bellied Plover. In winter, Common Snipes are nearly always present. Killdeers also sometimes overwinter. On January 2, 1999, during the Uxbridge CBC, a remarkable three Virginia Rails were found (called out with a tape) at the place where the processed wastewater flows out into the marsh. Since the filter beds are mostly small, it is possible (with a cautious approach) to get quite close to the feeding shorebirds for some fine, close views and photographs.

The small "peeps" can be hard to spot because the gravel in the beds is about the same color and size as the birds, so it sometimes takes some careful searching to find all the birds. The cycle of filter bed usage governs where the birds will be; birds are usually not found in completely flooded beds or in beds that have been totally dry for any significant time. To bird the area, walk all the roads and look into all the filter beds. In winter it may be necessary to hike all the dikes to find the few, elusive birds. In the summer, one caution when you are hiking along the dikes: the dikes are usually overgrown with rank herbaceous vegetation, most of which is stinging nettle, *Urtica* sp. If your bare skin comes in contact with this plant, you will have a very unpleasant and memorable experience. This nettle is the larval food plant of the Red Admiral butterfly, and often this very colorful butterfly is present in large numbers during the summer.

In the fall, Merlins are frequently seen here, and Peregrine Falcons sometimes occur, hunting the shorebirds. Red-tailed Hawks are usually aloft over the site at all seasons. Turkey Vultures are regular in the warmer months, and may even be seen in winter: two were present on February 14, 1999.

During spring and fall migration, large numbers of swallows (Tree, Barn, Bank, Northern Rough-winged, and sometimes Cliff) can be seen aloft over the filter beds. Bank Swallows nest nearby and can be seen here all summer. One of the most interesting sights (for RWH) occurred on a May day when both Least Sandpipers and Bank Swallows were feeding on the ground in one of the filter beds — two species of "little brown birds" busily feeding and jostling each other among the little brown stones. Another species that can be found among the stones during fall migration is American Pipit (pipits occasionally turn up during spring migration, as well). During the fall, another regular migrant is the Rusty Blackbird, usually found just to the east of the office building, in the red maple swamp.

In fall and winter, this site is a great place to look for sparrows. Large numbers and a good variety of species (including an occasional Clay-colored Sparrow) gather to eat the abundant weed seeds. Many of these sparrows overwinter, making the site a key stop during the Uxbridge CBC. One other migrant once seen at this site was the red bat (*Lasiurus borealis*), flying in the daytime during spring migration. During summer, common breeding birds include Eastern Bluebird, Pine Warbler, Savannah Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, and Indigo Bunting.

(5) North Uxbridge Pond

In North Uxbridge, just north of Hartford Avenue, the Mumford River passes under Route 122 and the railroad and flows east into Whitin Pond. This small, impounded pond is a good site for waterfowl from fall through early spring. As soon as the duck-hunting season begins in the fall, most of the waterfowl in the area find haven here (it is a no-hunting zone). The Mumford

River and part of the pond seldom freeze solid, so this is one of the key winter waterfowl sites in the region. Birds that can be found here include Pied-billed Grebe (spring and fall, in passage), Mute Swan (occasional in the spring), Canada Goose (sometimes several hundred in fall and winter), Snow Goose (occasional with the Canada Geese), Mallard and American Black Duck (numerous), Ring-necked Duck, Common Merganser, and Hooded Merganser. Ducks found in smaller numbers and possibly overwintering include Gadwall, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, American Wigeon, Wood Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and Ruddy Duck.

In winter, along the river near the railroad bridge, American Coot, Belted Kingfisher, and Great Blue Heron can sometimes be found. The thickets and weedy area west of the railroad and behind the church may yield a good variety of sparrow species, Carolina Wren, and Northern Mockingbird during the fall and winter. A large population of Rock Doves (forty or more) nearly always perches on the church roof, sometimes attracting raptors: a Peregrine Falcon and a Northern Goshawk have been observed attacking Rock Doves. Bald Eagle and Gyrfalcon have been seen here, as well.

To bird the area, park in the large lot south of Hartford Avenue, across from the Baptist Church. Walk north along the railroad; the pond and nearby river can be easily scanned from the embankment near the railroad bridge over the river. The nearby bridge on Route 122 that crosses the river should also be visited; look from the bridge west along the river. In really cold weather, the only open water will be here, and the ducks will be quite concentrated. This is a great place in winter to see American Black Duck, one place where the Blacks normally outnumber the Mallards.

(6) Capron's Pond

Another small impounded pond along the Mumford River is Capron's Pond, right in downtown Uxbridge. This pond, just east of the railroad and just north of Route 16, is often partly ice-free in winter, making it a worthwhile place to look for overwintering waterfowl. Multiflora rose thickets just north of the parking lot sometimes harbor overwintering thrushes or other "semihardy" species. The somewhat overgrown trail that heads north between the railroad and the pond is well worth checking during spring and fall for migrants. Among the alders along this trail is a good place to look for the Harvester butterfly, which has quite limited distribution in Massachusetts. To bird this site, park in the lot just east of the railroad on Route 16 (this is a private commercial lot, so park in the back, well out of the commercial use area). A trail at the north end of the lot leads to the pond and beyond.

(7) Flood Plain South of Rice City Pond

From Hartford Avenue in Uxbridge all the way to Route 16, the Blackstone Canal and River offer easy access to fine birding at all seasons. A trail follows the east side of the Blackstone Canal from Hartford Avenue south to a state park parking lot behind the Stanley Woolen Mill (just off Route 16). Along this trail are thickets and forested areas that are very productive, especially during migration. A large section of river floodplain, which is easily reached and very productive, is just east of the Heritage State Park Visitor Center (on Oak Street). The canal area, near the visitor center, is the most reliable place in Worcester County to find breeding Orchard Orioles. In the pond, on the canal just behind the visitor center, a Common Merganser with very small young birds was found, indicating probable breeding in the area.

To bird the floodplain area, park at the visitor center parking lot on Oak Street. Hike east across the bridge over the canal into a large field on the floodplain. This field was "maintained" for many years by cows from the Voss Farm (the barn has been restored and is used as the visitor center) and is now maintained by periodic mowing and "brush-hogging." The field itself and the Blackstone River to the east can be explored for birds profitably at any season. In winter, Great Blue Heron linger along the river. The field and environs is a good place to look for Northern Shrike. In winter, the river (which never freezes) is a good place to find Common Merganser. The field and the unmanaged flood plain to the south are places to look for big flocks of sparrows, House Finches, and sometimes redpolls in winter. Fox and Savannah sparrows are possible in winter. As with the case of the floodplain north of Rice City Pond, the status of the ragweed seed crop is a significant factor. Eastern Bluebirds and Tree Swallows nest in the boxes in the field, and Eastern Meadowlarks often breed in the field. Always check the big swamp white oak trees in the center of the field for perching raptors; at night, this is a great spot to see a Great Horned Owl silhouetted against the sky. The field is a good place to see (and hear) Ring-necked Pheasants. Always check the canal pond just behind the visitor center for ducks, shorebirds, Great Blue Heron, and other waterbirds.

To bird the trail along the canal, you can begin at the south end, from the lot behind the Stanley Woolen Mill (just off Route 16) and walk north. The thickets along the canal, near the parking lot, can be very productive. In Winter, Carolina Wren, Northern Cardinal, Tufted Titmouse, Gray Catbird, Eastern Towhee, Northern Mockingbird, and several species of sparrows can often be called out. During spring and fall migration, a walk along this trail will often produce a good list of warblers and other land birds. Wood Duck and Hooded Merganser may be found along the canal. This trail can also be explored by walking south from the lot near the health center on Hartford Avenue or from the visitor center lot.

While the coastal counties of Massachusetts have long been the ones best known to birders, more and more observers from throughout southern New England are beginning to discover what inland birders have known all along: interior portions of the Bay State offer excellent and varied habitats for birds, contain significant migration corridors, and yield their fair share of both rarities and large concentrations of common birds. The Uxbridge-Northbridge portion of the Blackstone River Valley illustrates the density and diversity of birds (and other wildlife) that can be found in the central portion of the state. This southern Worcester County region offers some of the best birding to be found in Massachusetts, and it offers an exciting destination at any time of year.

Richard W. Hildreth is a resident of Holliston, Massachusetts, with a lifelong interest in many natural history subjects. Now retired after more than thirty years as a scientist in the rare-metals business, he has (in theory) more time to spend on birds and butterflies. He is compiler of the Uxbridge CBC and is currently president of the Forbush Bird Club and the Massachusetts Butterfly Club.

Strickland Wheelock, a resident of Uxbridge, has been actively birding and banding in the Uxbridge area for over 40 years. Besides being a long-time member of the Forbush Bird Club, Strickland has been a leader of national and international birding trips for Massachusetts Audubon.

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