



## BIRDING IN THE ROWLEY AND NEWBURY AREA

Don Alexander, Rowley

Birders on their way to Newburyport and Plum Island may well enjoy looking for birds in Rowley and Newbury. As you go north on Route 1A, turn right 1 mile north of the overhead stop-light in the center of Rowley onto Railroad Avenue. Follow Railroad Avenue almost to the railroad tracks, where you may turn left onto a dirt road and enter the Rowley gravel pit. There has been a fine colony of Bank Swallows, as well as a nesting Belted Kingfisher, here in recent years. Unless the gravel pit is being worked hard, the birds do not seem to be disturbed by the activity. It is wise to listen for a possible Orchard Oriole in this area as it may have nested some years in the trees along Railroad Avenue near the gravel pit.

When you leave the gravel pit, return to Route 1A and continue north 1.2 miles to Stackyard Road. Turn right on this road and go to the parking area at the end of the road. Stackyard Road in migration season is a good place to look for migratory species. Especially during July, August and September it will pay you to stop at the various outlooks and to survey the marshes for shorebirds. In the fall, the edge is favored by Sharp-tailed Sparrows. In the winter this area is also a good place to look for a Snowy Owl. (CAUTION: In the winter the road may not be plowed all the way to the end. Also, sometimes in the early spring the road is very muddy after you pass the last house on the right.)

After returning to Route 1A, go another .3 mile to the north, and then take the next left. This is the road into the Rowley dump. Follow the road through the dump to the railroad tracks, along which you can drive as one set of rails has been removed. As you come to the tracks, turn left and go about .2 mile. On your left you will see the pond in back of the Rowley dump made famous by the presence of the Fulvous Tree Ducks in July of 1974. This cattail pond is a good nesting area for Pied-billed Grebes, Mallards and Black Ducks, as well as for Blue-winged Teal, Common Gallinules, Long-billed Marsh Wrens, Virginia Rails and possibly King Rails. It will pay to survey the marsh on the opposite side of the tracks, as there are many salt ponds there.

If you turn right along the tracks after passing through the dump, you will see a small wet area on your immediate right. Look it over well as various ducks and shorebirds feed there. A Ruff was there in 1974. Further along the tracks .2 mile is Stilt Pond---an excellent place for ducks and shorebirds. This is an especially good place to see Stilt Sandpipers in August. Thirty-five or more years ago, the late Ludlow Griscom was taken there for the first time, and he saw more Stilt Sandpipers than he had ever seen before in Essex County. That is how the pond got its name. Check the extensive marsh area opposite Stilt Pond. This is a good place for egrets and Glossy Ibises, as well as ducks, hawks and shorebirds. In the winter, Rough-legged and Red-tailed Hawks are seen regularly.

Retrace your steps to Route 1A, turn left, and you will come immediately to Pikul's farm. Look over the field opposite the house, as some goodies have been seen there over the years---Cattle Egrets, Glossy Ibises, Common Snipe in season, a Ruff, and a Western Meadowlark. Various ducks may also be seen in the small pond in this field. Also check the pasture which is on the same side of the road as the house. Much can be spotted right from your car.

Continue along Route 1A, cross Parker River, and turn left onto Newman Road, which runs by the base of Old Town Hill. This is a good road for spring and fall migrants. You soon come out into open marsh country, the area of this spring's Swainson's Hawk. At the end of Newman Road, turn right onto Hay Street, and you will return to Route 1A. Turn north (left) on 1A, and you will soon be at the blinking yellow light which marks Rolfe's Lane. Turn right into Rolfe's Lane, and you will come to the Joppa Flats (of Newburyport harbor). The airport and Plum Island will then lie to your right.

Another good place for shorebirds is Pine Island Road. This road leads off to the right from 1A, 2.6 miles north of Pikul's farm. Here, from the causeway, you can look over the marshes to good advantage. This is an excellent place for fall shorebirds, as salt hay is cut along this road. In late fall, at a time of high course tides, which usually come shortly after noontime, this is a fine spot to observe Sharp-tailed Sparrows that are forced up out of the marsh by the rising waters. Often you can see them right from your car. (NOTE: This causeway will flood at a very high tide.)

For those who prefer to get to Plum Island by Route 95, take the Scotland Road exit to the east. This takes you by the Common Pastures, which have been somewhat spoiled by industrial development. Scotland Road is also a good road for spring and fall migrants, as well as for wintering Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks. As one drives along Scotland Road, one should check the open fields for various species: Common Snipe in the spring, a possible odd shorebird, maybe an Upland Sandpiper (although the area around the Plum Island airport is now a better place for this species). The Little River, which crosses Scotland Road just below Highfield Street, has been dredged, and the marshes, which used to contain many ducks in the spring, are now ruined. Most of the area east of the Little River has now been spoiled by industrial development.

Highfield Road, by the way, is famous among birders as being one of the few spots in Eastern Massachusetts where the Long-eared Owl has been regular. Its favored roosting spot is in a small stand of pines which grow on the west side of the road just to the south of the railroad tracks. (If you come from Scotland Road, this stand of pines will be on your right immediately after crossing these tracks.)

If you prefer the Newburyport Turnpike (Route 1), you should turn left on Elm Street at Governor Dummer Academy. The playing fields here are excellent for Killdeers and American Robins in the early spring. Turn right at the school library into Middle Street. This road will soon bring you to the open marshes along the Parker River (again, where the Swainson's Hawk was seen this spring). You can follow Middle Street back to the Newburyport Turnpike, or you can turn off on Highfield Road to try for the Long-eared Owl.

Upon returning to the turnpike, proceed a short distance north to the traffic circle, take your right (Parker Street) at the Donot shop, and you will almost immediately come to the Newburyport cemetery---a spot that should not be missed in spring and fall migration.

If you stay on Route 1 at the traffic circle, go to the stop-light, and then take a left onto Low Street. Go along past the armory and take the first left, Hale Street, which is on the north side of the Common Pastures. This is another excellent road in spring and fall migration, and it is also along this road that the Henslow's Sparrows were seen last year. The Hale Street bridge over Route 95 has been torn down so that you can no longer go to Warbler corner or to the Artichoke Reservoir via Hale Street.

Check the accompanying map for a key to the places mentioned:

1. Rowley Gravel Pit
2. Stackyard Road
3. Rowley dump
4. Pond south of Rowley dump
5. Stilt Pond
6. Pikul's Farm
7. Newman Road (Old Town Hill)
8. Pine Island Road
9. Rolfe's Lane
10. Scotland Road
11. Newburyport Cemetery
12. Hale Street
13. Highfield Road (Long-eared Owl)
14. Governor Dummer Academy
15. Plum Island Airport
16. Plumbush
17. Sportsman's Lodge
18. Rowley Center.