



- 1 Gulls/Terns
- 2 Shorebirds
- 3 Diving Ducks
- 4 Owls
- 5 Herons
- 6 Cormorants
- 7 Warblers
- 8 Loons/Grebes

KEY

- Thickets
- Parking

BIRDS OF THE SQUANTUM AND WOLLASTON BEACH AREA

by Edward J. Morrier, Squantum

The Squantum-Wollaston Beach area has a surprising diversity of birds for land so close to the center of Boston. This is even more remarkable because much of this section of Quincy supports many industrial and commercial establishments, and only the marshes and beaches have substantial conservation protection. Squantum is a place where one can see such incongruous sights as a Snowy Owl perched on a junk pile, or a flock of Glossy Ibis flying gracefully over a field of burnt out boat hulks.

To reach Squantum from Boston and the north, take the Southeast Expressway to the Neponset exit, then follow the signs to Wollaston. From the south, take the Furnace Brook Parkway exit of the Southeast Expressway and follow the parkway to its end, where it meets Quincy Shore Drive. The area can also be covered by MBTA, but it requires considerable walking. Take the Red Line, Quincy Train, to North Quincy Station. Then walk down East Squantum Street approximately one mile to the Cove, or take the hourly Squantum bus and have the driver let you off on the causeway.

Squantum Start your Squantum birding at the Maswachuset Hummock and Cove Area. The Hummock is undergoing some landscaping work, including a new parking lot that is scheduled for completion this fall. From August to May, the Cove is particularly good for shorebirds and gulls at four hours before and after high tide. This is one of the best places in the state for Black-headed Gulls during the winter. The Cove can be observed either from the path along the west side of the hummock or from the sidewalk on Quincy Shore Drive, depending on the sun's direction. The large marsh to the east of the hummock should be checked during April and May for shorebirds and waders.

Walk across East Squantum Street and check the tidal pools to the northeast of the school for shorebirds and herons. This marsh should also be scanned for Short-eared and Snowy Owls during the winter. (There are few poles or other high points on this marsh, hence the owls, which are generally on the ground, can easily be missed.)

Proceed northeast up East Squantum Street and take the first left-hand turn onto Victory Road. Go past the two buildings that are on the right and park. (Make sure that you get all the way off the blacktop.) The marsh to the right and the inlet and sandbar beyond are the most productive areas for birds in Squantum. Snowy Egrets start arriving around the first of April, followed by Glossy Ibises and Black-crowned Night Herons. These are joined occasionally by Louisiana Herons and other waders. At high tide, check along the water line for rails. The bushes at the edge of the marsh hold migrating sparrows and a careful scanning of the surrounding marsh and upland can sometimes yield a shrike, hawk, or, in winter, an owl. The saltwater marsh at full tide has sheltered freshwater ducks, such as Hooded Merganser and American Wigeon, and the edge of the marsh builds up concentrations of Brant from February to April.

Now travel further up Victory Road to the Boston Harbor Marina, where you can turn around. (Access to the area beyond this point has been stopped for the present. See the notes at the end of this article for a discussion of the problem.)

Return to East Squantum Street and turn left, up the causeway to view the inlet from the east. Parking is permitted on Deerfield Street, or the other side streets to the right, except during the summer. Walk back across the causeway and scan the sandbar, mudflats, inlet, and bay for shorebirds, herons, and waterfowl, depending upon tide and season. The sandbar should be carefully checked and has the potential for unusual larids, such as Royal Tern and Glaucous Gull. Continue up East Squantum Street, bearing left at the brown brick apartment house, where Dorchester Street begins. Parking for Squaw Rock is about 1/3 mile up this street, on the left, immediately after the road goes up a short hill and turns sharply to the right. The thickets on Squaw Rock are good land bird traps during migration. The two best areas are marked on the map. If you have a telescope, go to the Miles Standish Monument and scan the sandbar and pond on Thompson's Island for herons, gulls, and terns.

Moon Island and Long Island The causeway to Moon Island and Long Island starts at the end of Dorchester Street. When there is a guard in the gatehouse at the start of the causeway, access to Moon Island is restricted to those who have a pass. Requests for birdwatching passes must be made in writing to: Superintendent, Long Island Hospital, Boston Health and Hospitals, Boston, Mass. 02169.

Parking is not permitted on the causeway, but scanning from your car can be rewarding.

Sea ducks, including King Eider, Brant, loons and grebes can be seen. The south side, at the approach of high tide, seems the most productive, but at all times both sides of the causeway warrant your attention.

Moon Island The sewage disposal plant makes Moon Island most enjoyable for those birders with blocked nasal passages! Nevertheless, the island is an excellent land bird migration trap, especially in the spring. From the causeway, bear left as you reach Moon Island. During May the thicket along this road is good for warblers. Drive past the sewage plant, after checking the sewage beds for shorebirds. Park after you round a sharp curve and go down a short incline for birding Moon Island hill. The trees at the base of the hill are good for warblers. The walk to the top is steep and may be very slippery. There are no formal paths, but a visit can be very rewarding for warblers and vireos in the spring and warblers and thrushes in the fall. American Woodcock are early spring arrivals and breed here. CAUTION: Make sure that the Boston Police Revolver Range is not in use before walking over the crest of the hill. Now return to the fork at the west end of Moon Island and take a left to go to Long Island.

Long Island A pass is always required to bird on Long Island. There is a strict sense of security on Long Island, and guards may often ask to see your pass even after you have entered the hospital grounds proper. Parking is allowed only at the large lot at the hospital, hence birding here is an activity for those who are willing to walk distances of a mile or more. The walk to the west end and pine grove (2 miles round trip), can be especially productive during late fall, winter, and spring for owls, sea and bay ducks, and grebes. From the parking lot walk north, down a road that starts to the left of the westernmost building. As the road curves, look for a path, that goes to the left, next to a fire hydrant that is partially hidden behind a steel fence. Start down this path and then immediately turn right toward the water. There is a grassy bluff that overlooks the bay, and at high tide, particularly during the late fall, ducks and grebes can be closely observed. Common Goldeneye are regular and Red-necked Grebe and Barrow's Goldeneye have been seen next to the shore. Return to the path and turn right. This path follows the bluff line, through thickets, but with some good views of the water. It leads to the beach near a small marsh. Follow the beach until you see a bluff, with a fence across it. After this bluff, there will be a marsh on the left. This marsh can be checked for herons, ducks and shorebirds. It is especially attractive to snipe in the spring, and to Solitary Sandpipers in the fall. The pine grove ahead is a land bird trap, particularly for the winter finches, but it is most noted for the birds of prey that it shelters. Most birders know it for its (resident?) Barn Owls. But during the early spring, Long-eared, Saw-whet and Great Horned Owls have been seen, as well as accipiters. Look for fresh owl pellets, to help in locating the general area that the Barn Owls are frequenting. They are seldom seen in the tall pines and are most often found in bushy, average-height trees. These owls perch close to the trunk or on surprisingly narrow branches.

I usually walk back to the parking lot via the road, checking the thickets and trees. One interesting side-trip is the blocked-off dirt road to Bass Point. The road goes through a small brushy thicket and skirts a small marsh, which sometimes harbor sparrows in November and December. The road ends at Bass Point, a good spot to look for ducks, grebes and loons. The beach should be scanned in winter for late shorebirds, Snowy Owls and Snow Buntings.

The east end of the island (1 1/2 miles round trip) houses old Fort Strong. From here, during the winter, you can see large concentrations of Common Eider and lesser numbers of other waterfowl. In the fall occasional pelagic species are blown near the island. Also in the fall, numbers of Laughing Gulls can be seen feeding in the rip off Deer Island. The walk to the east end can be either along the beach or through the hospital grounds and down the road. Grebes and loons congregate in the ocean swells in back of the hospital laundry facility, particularly in late winter.

Wollaston Beach Wollaston Beach and the bay beyond are a haven for loons, grebes, waterfowl, larids, and shorebirds during the spring, fall, and winter. During the summer the beach is filled with *Homo sapiens*, in various plumages and undergoing mysterious mating rituals. In whatever season, to check the area thoroughly, one must stop frequently to scan the length of the beach and water, because sightings are possible anywhere. The area supports large numbers of Buffleheads, White-winged Scoters, and Greater Scaups, occasionally with more unusual species, such as Black Scoter, Oldsquaw, and Common Goldeneye. The beach also attracts late concentrations of Sanderling and other shorebirds.

Specific points of interest:

1. The parking lot nearest the north end of the beach should be checked for unusual gulls during the winter.
2. The bay around the two yacht clubs is particularly attractive to waterfowl in winter.
3. The south end of the beach and Black's Creek is an especially good spot. Park at the small playground just north of Black's Creek. During the spring and fall, small gulls and terns are attracted to the rushing water at a tide change at the bridge over Black's Creek. Black Terns are possible here. The creek itself was habitually used by a variety of waterfowl, but during the winter of 1974-1975, as a result of extensive dredging operations, the area supported few ducks. Whether this situation will improve, now that the dredging has stopped, remains to be seen.

To check Half-moon Island, drive to the end of Wollaston Beach and take a left onto Shore Avenue, stopping at the seawall about four blocks down. Brant, King Eider, as well as the more common waterfowl feed in this area, particularly at low tide.

My personal preference for covering Wollaston Beach is to start at the Black's Creek end. I can then avoid the unsafe practice of continuously pulling in and out of the parking lots along the beach.

In summary, Squantum-Wollaston-Long Island reflect their closeness to urban living in terms of access problems, potential losses of habitat, litter, and intensive land use. Yet, through it all, the birds return. They can still find habitat that will support them, but unless the degradation of habitat and environment is halted, birders can expect to find fewer birds and smaller areas. For the present, however, anyone can enjoy exciting birding in this diverse environment.

Additional Notes

Jordan Marsh Access Road This marsh, bordering the Neponset River, is separated from the rest of Squantum. To reach it, follow the signs for the Jordan Marsh Warehouse. The marsh along the Neponset River and up Billings Creek should be scanned for owls in winter. The water surfaces and mudflats are attractive to ducks, gulls and shorebirds.

The Old Squantum Naval Air Station During the past two years, birders have been dismayed by the piecemeal loss of access to this area. Two years ago, the thicket was blocked off with fence, armed guards, and sentry dogs. The thicket is one of the best land bird migration traps on the south shore. In addition to large flights of the more common warblers and sparrows, Lincoln's Sparrows were regularly reported there, as were such other rarities as Yellow-breasted Chat, Blue Grosbeak and Summer Tanager. In 1973, the fresh water marsh sheltered a Purple Gallinule.

This summer, the whole area between the Jordan Marsh Warehouse, the Boston Harbor Marina, and Squantum Point has been blocked off and posted with no trespassing signs. This area is used by many different species of sparrows in migration, including the accidental Lark Sparrow. Its loss will be most felt, however, by those who are interested in the Snowy and Short-eared Owls, as both species spend much time there. The fact that birders are now denied access does not, of course, mean that the area is any less attractive to birds.

What it does reflect, however, is progressively greater commercial interest. Within the past two years, a high school complex, condominiums, and a housing development have been proposed. Although none of these projects have gone beyond the talking stage, it would seem that unless some conservation plan can be devised, the area will eventually succumb to development. From a conservation point of view, this is tragic, particularly since this is the last large tract of open land remaining on the shores of Boston Harbor.



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