

POCKET PLACES

The Grove at Salisbury

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It is not that the Grove at Salisbury is unknown so much as it is underappreciated. It is generally considered a pretty good place to get owls in the winter. Actually, it can be one of the most productive small places in the Commonwealth. On the right day it is unmatched for birding, for it is a perfect migratory trap. Located at a distance of about 500 yards from the open ocean, it is surrounded by a sparse open campground on one side and a wide salt marsh on the other. For birds coming off the ocean it is the first good place to stop, rest, and eat. Kind of a miniature High Island.

To find the Grove, just follow Route 1A north from Salisbury center, toward Salisbury beach. Look for the prominent sign for the Salisbury State Reservation on the right, and take that right and then drive past the gatehouse. Note that between Memorial Day and Labor Day there is an entry fee. The salt marshes will be on your right, and the cottages at the beach on your left. Follow the road to the campgrounds, which will be the first turn on the right. When you make that turn you will be basically facing the grove. On the immediate right will be a paved turnout where trailers empty their waste tanks. Just beyond, on the right side of the road, there is the Grove, which consists of a thicket and a mixed grove of pines, cedars, birches, sumacs, and generally heavy underbrush. The area is only about 500 to 600 feet long and less than 100 feet wide. There are trails that wind through the Grove, kept open by kids in the campgrounds who like to ride their bicycles through it. In the middle is a small rise with pines at the top. To the east of the rise is a brushy area with a few small birches and bordered by some cedars on the north. To the west of the rise the area is more open.

The Grove is a peculiar place and there are times when it is not a good idea to bird there, just as there are times when it holds the potential of being the best birding spot in the state. If it's a May morning and places like Marblehead Neck and Plum Island are active, it would be a good idea to try to fit the Grove into your birding schedule. With the potential for owls and winter finches, winter is always a good time to check it out. In fact, the only time when it is definitely inadvisable to bird the Grove is in the summer when the campground is full and school is out.

The Grove is a place that has the potential of giving you some of the most memorable birding moments of your life, as it has mine. A Scarlet Tanager so close that I could have reached out and touched it, a pair of Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, in full breeding array, at just above eye level, dancing around the trunk of a tree, while they quietly clucked and murmured at one another, a Worm-eating Warbler at my feet, turning over a piece of thatch and hungrily gobbling down some luckless grub. My life Long-eared Owl in a pine tree at the road's edge in typical Long-eared style — simultaneously right in front of me and nearly invisible. And a Connecticut Warbler deliberately and delicately walking along a low branch and then dropping down in the thicket to vanish. 