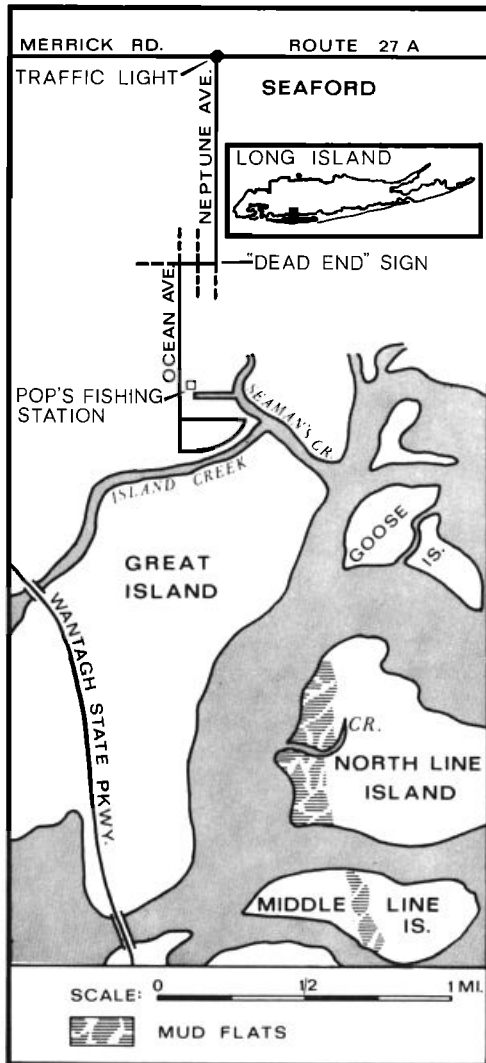


## The Site Guide

# The Line Islands Nassau County, New York

by *Thomas H. Davis*



**Location** At the western end of South Oyster Bay, one mile south of the town of Seaford, Nassau County, New York.

**Description** The islands are covered by spartina saltmarsh with an irregular border of tidal flats. Years ago they were altered by the creation of a grid pattern of mosquito-control drainage ditches. In 1974, Nassau County constructed a sewage outfall line from Wantagh south into the Atlantic Ocean off Jones Beach. This pipeline crossed the western edge of North Line Island and bisected Middle Line Island. Under the direction of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation the North Line Island portion of the pipe was back-filled in a manner attractive to birds. Vast expanses of open sand were created which are partly inundated at high tide, forming several irregular shallow pools of water. At Middle Line Island a narrow strip of sand and mud is exposed along the pipeline at low tide.

**Access and General Information** The Line Islands may be reached only by boat, available at a number of fishing stations (boat liveries) in nearby Seaford Harbor. Exit the Wantagh State Parkway at Merrick Road, continue eastbound about one mile to the traffic light at Neptune Avenue, then turn south (right) to Seaford Harbor. An alternate route is to exit the Seaford-Oyster Bay Expressway at Merrick Road, and proceed west for about 100 yards to Neptune Avenue. Pop's Fishing Station in Seaford Harbor offers birders their "Senior Citizen Discount", charging about \$15 per day rather than the normal \$21, for a boat and motor capable of transporting five persons. Pop's is located at 2855 Ocean Avenue; telephone (516) 785-2960. To visit the Line Islands in comfort, wear a water repellent windbreaker for the boat ride, be wary of the wake of larger boats, and be prepared to wade in knee-deep water when you reach the islands. Insect repellent is helpful on windless days. The best approach to North Line Island is up through a saltmarsh creek that empties into the bay at the center of the west side of the island (see CR. on map).

**Birding** The Line Islands currently offer the best opportunity in the Long Island area for observing large numbers of the shore-

birds that frequent tidal flats and salt-marsh. As a rising tide begins to cover feeding habitat throughout South Oyster Bay, birds begin gathering at North and Middle Line Islands. When the birds arrive they usually feed for a short while; soon their activity subsides into resting and preening. Thus you should time your visit to coordinate with an incoming tide, with the ideal arrival about three hours prior to full high tide. It is best to wait for the rising tide at Middle Line Island, then proceed to North Line Island. High tide occurs here about one hour later than at Sandy Hook, New Jersey, a location always listed in the daily tide tables of the local news media. Remember, too, that the time of the high tide advances (is earlier) about 50 minutes each day. As the tide ebbs, the shorebirds begin to disperse throughout the bay; at this time be sure your boat is not in danger of being stranded. If you feel especially ambitious follow the North Line Island creek east for several hundred yards to scattered pools in the saltmarsh.

The best variety of shorebirds is found from mid-July through August, a period when it is usually possible to observe 20 or more species. At this time the total population of birds in the area may range from 4 to 7000 or more. During September and October the number of birds may double or even triple, but the number of species gradually declines. The spring migration here has a similar monotone flavor.

Following is an annotated list of shorebirds recorded at the Line Islands since 1975. Abundance symbols reflect each species' maximum numbers during the July-August period (A = more than 1000 individuals, VC = more than 100, C = more than 10, U = up to 10, R = rare, not reported each year).

Am. Oystercatcher	C
Plover, Semipalmated	VC
Piping	U
Killdeer	U
Plover, Am. Golden	R
Black-bellied	A
Ruddy Turnstone	VC
Long-billed Curlew	(July 4-30, 1975)

Whimbrel	U
Sandpiper, Upland	R
Spotted	U
Willet	C
Yellowlegs, Greater	C
Lesser	VC
Red Knot	A
Sandpiper, Pectoral	U
White-rumped	U
Baird's	R
Least	VC
Dunlin	C (A later in year)
Dowitcher, Short-billed	A
Long-billed	R
Sandpiper, Stilt	U
Semipalmated	VC
Western	C
Godwit, Marbled	U
Hudsonian	C (recent maxima 15)
Ruff	R (at least 2 males July, 1975)
Sanderling	VC
Wilson's Phalarope	R

**Remarks** The Line Islands seem to have supplanted Moriches Inlet as Long Island's best place to observe the larger shorebirds such as Am. Oystercatcher, Whimbrel, Willet, Hudsonian and Marbled Godwits. A trip to the Line Islands, coupled with a visit to nearby Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge will offer visiting birders the opportunity to see many of the Northeastern shorebirds. Also consult Robert Arbib *et al.*, *Enjoying Birds Around New York City* (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1966) for directions to other Long Island shorebirding areas. The New York Rare Bird Alert, telephone (212) 832-6523, often reports the presence of Curlew Sandpipers, Ruffs, or more extreme rarities.

**Rating** Spring ★ (May), Summer ★★★ (July-August), Autumn ★, Winter ---.

This article was largely adapted from a bird-finding note published in the *Linnaean News-Letter* (30) 3, May, 1976. I especially owe Anthony Lauro a debt of gratitude for his assistance and field companionship in making these articles possible.

—9446-85 Road, Woodhaven, N Y 11421



*A shorebird selection . . . photographs by Harry N. Darrow*

*Above, American Golden Plover, Fire Island, N.Y.; right, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Jones Beach, N.Y.; below, Wilson's Phalarope, North Line Island, New York.*





*Above, dowitcher, sp.; right  
Baird's Sandpiper; below left,  
White-rumped Sandpiper; below  
right Whimbrel, all North Line  
Island, N.Y.*

