

schedules. In addition, the "Birds-Go-To-School Program" takes MBO's philosophies and demonstrations to additional thousands of school children in their classrooms, so that live exhibits may be seen and touched and where spontaneous enthusiasm can lead to questions about research, biology, and our environment.

For a limited number of serious older students, MBO also offers internships that provide an opportunity to live and work at the Observatory for weeks or months, to talk and work with the professional staff, and to carry on independent or supervised studies of their own.

In short, MBO is a center for research and education in environmental biology that not only seeks new information, but also advocates the urgent need for biological awareness, while educating laymen as to some of the techniques used in biological research. To do this, Manomet Bird Observatory is dependent on a core of devoted volunteer and professional staff, as well as contributions and supporting memberships.

BIRDING ON PLYMOUTH BEACH

Bruce A. Sorrie, Manomet Bird Observatory

When one thinks of birding on Plymouth Beach, one should recall the tern colony and the opportunity to observe at close quarters four species of nesting terns (Common, Arctic, Roseate, and Least). In fact, this may be the only easily accessible colony in the United States where one can watch the breeding activities of these four species.

The Least terns segregate themselves and nest on the stony ground beside the road, midway out on the three-mile peninsula. The larger terns choose the open dunes near the tip of the beach - the Commons throughout, the Roseates in the thicker patches of dune grass, the Arctic terns on the bare pebbly sand along the edge of the colony. Due to the excessively fragile nature of these dunes, it is essential that no one walk or drive on them. Low tides usually find the birds preening on the exposed sand flats on the bay side, providing excellent opportunities for the photographer.

A word on logistics: the best way to get to the beach is to drive south on Route 3 and take the exit marked "Plymouth Plantation Highway - Manomet." Continue east about a mile and take a left turn onto Route 3A. Proceed north about a mile to Bert's Restaurant, immediately north of which is the beach parking lot and road. When school is out, only vehicles with "Town of Plymouth Facilities" stickers may use the beach road and lot, so be prepared to park elsewhere. Since four-wheel-drive vehicles are necessary anyway, I suggest walking, which is the best way to see birds along the beach. High tides are best for viewing shorebirds, low tides for wintering waterfowl.

For much the same reason as the nesting terns, scores of other species are attracted to the beach. Black Terns (early June), Royal Terns (June-July), Black Skimmers (early to mid-June), and Laughing Gulls (May-June) are rare but regular visitors. At high tide, hundreds of shorebirds search the beach tideflats for invertebrates, and at low tide turn to the mussel beds. Common species from May to early June are: Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plover, Piping Plover (breeds on stony areas), Ruddy Turnstone, Spotted Sandpiper (1 or 2 pair breed in the dunes), Greater Yellowlegs, Knot, White-rumped, Least, and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Dunlin, Sanderling, Short-billed Dowitcher, and an occasional Willet. From late July through September these species return in even greater numbers, usually along with Western Sandpipers, Whimbrel, Hudsonian Godwit, and Golden Plover. Though most birds congregate near the tip of the peninsula, be sure to check both sides of the beach on the way out!

Other summer residents of the beach and marshes include Snowy Egret, Black-crowned Night Heron, Kestrel, Clapper Rail (probably breeds), Tree Swallow, Horned Lark, and Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

A storm in May might produce Northern and Red Phalaropes as well as Gannet, while one in June sometimes brings Wilson's Petrel, Gannet, and Parasitic Jaeger. Fall storms have produced Sooty and Greater Shearwaters (rare), Gannet and the Phalaropes.

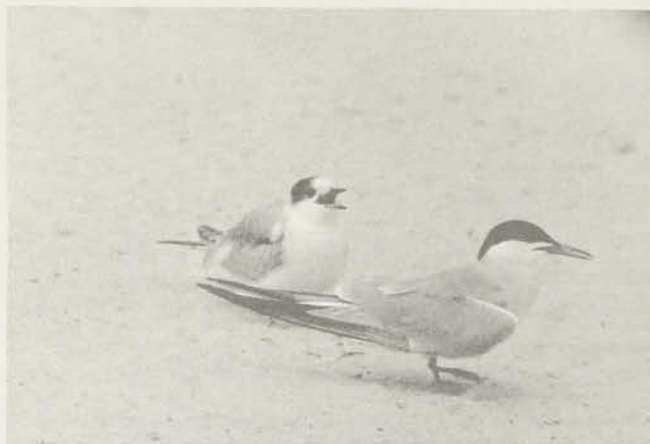
Good birding doesn't stop with cold weather and falling leaves, for abundant migrating and wintering waterfowl find food in the protective harbor. Nearly every eastern spe-

cies of loon, grebe, goose, and duck has been recorded here, most with regularity. Hundreds of Brant stop during migration, and a few winter over with Canada Geese. At least one Barrow's Goldeneye has appeared every winter since 1964. Clapper, Virginia, and Sora Rails are quite regular in the marshes at the base of the beach, at Manter's Point, or behind Boyer's Paint Store off 3A (ask permission). White-winged Gulls are not regular but have shown up surprisingly often. Good views of the harbor wildlife can also be had from the west shore: Boyer's Paint Store, the park off Fremont Street, Plymouth Rock and Town Pier, the breakwater (park at McGrath's Restaurant), and just north of the Cordage Plant (Boundary Street).

The winter beach is bleak, but a diligent observer who roughs it may find Snowy Owl, Horned Lark, Myrtle Warbler, Sharp-tailed, Seaside, and Ipswich Sparrows, and Snow Bunting (annually since 1968). Lingering shorebirds include Black-bellied Plover, Ruddy Turnstone, Knot, Dunlin, Semipalmated Sandpiper, and Sanderling.

Although Plymouth Beach does not enjoy a reputation as a "hot-spot" for rare birds, increased coverage by field observers in recent years has produced an impressive list of rarities at all seasons. Plymouth Beach may well be the "sleeper" of the Massachusetts coast.

The author is planning to publish an annotated list of the area's 190+ species and would be most grateful for additional notes on less-common birds.



Left - Young Common
Tern begging

Lower - Common
Tern Family

Photographs by
Deborah Howard



MAP OF PLYMOUTH BEACH

