



Wellesley College

Lake Waban

ST.

WASHINGTON

SERVICE DRIVE

MEADOW

Nehoiden Golf Course

16

Stream

THE "ESKER" RIVER

WOODEN BRIDGE Fuller

Brook

THE ARCHES

WABAN ARCHES, WELLESLEY

del. JR

## THE WABAN ARCHES, WELLESLEY

by Ken Winkler, Wellesley

Behind the Nehoiden Golf Course in Wellesley there is a piece of the Charles River dominated by an aqueduct rock-climbers call "the Waban Arches." It is joined to an old apple orchard by a streamside path. The whole area is excellent for birds, especially in spring and fall.

Park in the small lot at the intersection of Route 16 and Service Drive, almost directly across the road from the entrance to Wellesley College. Walk east on Service Drive and turn right on the path between the Cape Cods and the A-frames. On May 27, 1981 a Mourning Warbler skulked and sang in the bushes along the path, and in winter the feeder in back of the last Cape Cod is always worth a look. The path soon crosses a stream connecting Lake Waban (across Route 16 to the west) to the Charles. An Ash-throated Flycatcher, only the fourth ever recorded in Massachusetts, spent two days here in November 1980. Besides feeding on berries at the crossing, the bird was seen along the stream close to Route 16, and in the meadow in back of the A-frames, even perching for a while on a porch.

Once you cross the stream you are in the orchard. Before turning left and walking toward the Arches, you may want to walk down the path to your right. You may see flocks of robins, Cedar Waxwings, Evening Grosbeaks, and Pine Siskins in winter and spring, and Ruby-crowned Kinglets or Hermit Thrush in April. A Fox Sparrow spent the winter of 1979-80 around the garden near the yellow house further down the path, and there was a Boreal Chickadee in the spruces next to the house in March of 1981.

Return to the stream and walk toward the Arches. Yellow Warblers and yellowthroats are common in the streamside thickets in spring and summer, and I saw a Golden-winged Warbler here in May of 1981. On September 1, 1980 there were two Orange-crowned Warblers together in the thickets, but I haven't seen one since. In late spring and early summer a Rose-breasted Grosbeak may be singing high in the elms to your right. On September 1, 1980 I saw a Yellow-breasted Chat in the bushes at the base of the elms, and there was another Chat about 50 yards downstream on September 21, 1981. White-throated Sparrows can be seen and heard all along the path in winter and early spring, and a covey of bobwhite made a sudden appearance in the fall of 1981. In winter watch for Sharp-shinned Hawks.

Just after the elms the path forks. The forks join after circling around an open area with a mound of dirt and discarded plants in the middle of it. Before some bulldozing about a year ago the area was excellent for sparrows (mostly

White-throated and Song, but occasionally Field and Tree). The sparrows were joined by a female Dickcissel on October 7, 1979. The left fork around the mound, which follows the stream, takes you past thickets in which you may find a Philadelphia Vireo in fall, or a Blue-winged Warbler in spring. The right fork runs past thickets backed by tall trees. I have seen Lincoln's Sparrow in the thickets in spring, and Winter Wren and White-crowned Sparrow in fall. There was an adult Red-shouldered Hawk here in February 1980, and another in January 1982.

Other interesting birds seen or heard in the orchard or the nearby meadow include pheasant, both cuckoos, Bobolinks (in large flocks in spring, and in groups of 2 to 6 in fall), and Indigo Bunting. Fall warblers include Black-and-white, Canada, Nashville, Tennessee, Wilson's, Yellow-rumped, Palm, Redstart and Northern Waterthrush. On October 3, 1981, a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Broad-wing circled overhead in a passing funnel of air.

Soon after the forks join you will pass under some trees and come to a golf tee. Walk around the tee to your right, and continue up the path as it runs along the stream. The path is heavily wooded here and usually rather quiet, though you may hear Great-crested Flycatcher, Eastern Wood Pewee and Black-throated Blue Warbler in spring. Kingfishers sometimes fish in the brook or rattle high overhead. In late summer you may see Green Heron or Black-crowned Night Heron. As the path bends to the right you will see the Waban Arches. A path goes under the Arches, but I usually cross the small wooden bridge to the left. Just north of the bridge the stream you have been following joins Fuller Brook, which flows in from the east. They run together under the wooden bridge and the aqueduct, then curve through a marsh before they meet the Charles, which bends toward the Arches like a horseshoe. While you are on the bridge listen for phoebes in late March, catbirds in April, and cuckoos in May and June. This is a good spot for Rusty Blackbirds in March and September.

After you cross the bridge a path to your right takes you under the Arches. Follow the path along the river. A Red-bellied Woodpecker called and hammered along this path from February 14 to April 12, 1981, and a Western Kingbird was seen here on September 14, 1980. In fall and winter you may flush Ruffed Grouse, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers can be seen in summer. Wood Ducks are often on the river in spring, summer, and early fall (in October 1980 I saw a flock of 16), and in winter, farther down the path, there is usually a large flock of Mallards and Black Ducks. A male Green-winged Teal was with the Mallards and Blacks the winter of 1979-80, a female of the same species in 1980-81, and a female Common Goldeneye in January 1982. Large flocks of gulls, Common Crows, and sometimes Fish Crows fly over the river in winter.

(One flock of Fish Crows numbered 50.) Flickers, House Wrens, Red-eyed Vireos, and Northern Orioles all nest along the river, and Warbling Vireos, scarce before, became common in the spring and early summer of 1981.

Turn around and walk back to the Arches. Climb the steep path to your right and walk out to the middle of the aqueduct. I was looking for hawks here in April 1981 when a Pileated Woodpecker flew over my head. Another Pileated flew over the aqueduct in January 1982. You may see migrating flocks of Double-crested Cormorant or Canada Goose, but the only raptors I have seen here are Osprey, Red-tailed Hawk, and kestrel -- and always single birds. For the last year or so kestrels have been very rare, and migrating Ospreys are more common over Lake Waban, where single birds may linger for several weeks, in the fall.

Walk west to the other end of the aqueduct and continue along the esker. Study the holes in the trees for roosting owls. A red phase Screech Owl spends part of each fall and winter in a tall stump north of the esker (to your right). (The spot is marked by a yellow ribbon tied to a small tree on the south side of the esker (to your left).) On sunny mornings the owl may be sitting outside with its face tilted toward the sun. Late one afternoon, when the bird was sitting, squint-eyed, on the edge of its hole, I tried to perk it up by imitating a Great Horned Owl. The Screech Owl ignored me, but I did hear a faint imitation of my call, as if someone far away were blowing air into a coke bottle. I followed the sound and in a tall pine next to the river found a hooting Great Horned Owl. It showed only the mildest interest when I repeated my imitation.

The trees along the esker are good for warblers in spring. I have seen Black-and-white, Blackpoll, Parula, Blackburnian, Canada, Tennessee, Yellow-rumped and Redstart. Listen for Scarlet Tanager in summer. In the conifers where the esker comes to a 'T' I have seen Pine Warblers in the second week of April.

A hairpin turn to the right will take you down a path that leads to a small swamp. I saw an immature goshawk in the swamp in January 1982. Turn right at the swamp and follow the path through the woods, where you may see Ruffed Grouse. I watched a Pileated Woodpecker for about 20 minutes here in March of 1979, but the tree he worked on is now lying on the ground in neatly sawed-off pieces. The path will return you to the streamside path that took you to the Arches.

There are more than 100 visits to the Waban Arches recorded in my notebooks. I have seen 133 species, and another 16 on the Wellesley College campus. You won't see an unusual bird on every visit, but the area is a persuasive illustration of what philosophers call the principle of plenitude: given

enough time, if something can happen, it will. As Gilbert White wrote, "It is, I find, in zoology as it is in botany: all nature is so full, that that district produces the greatest variety, which is the most examined."

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