

FALL MIGRANT TRAPS OF COASTAL MASSACHUSETTS

by Soheil Zendehe, Somerville

"Since Essex County is on the Atlantic Flyway, its outlying points have always had a concentration of birds during migration. Plum Island, Marblehead Neck, and Nahant are natural stopovers for passerine birds in spring and fall, and are flooded with migrants in favorable weather." Thus writes Dorothy Snyder in her article on Marblehead Neck Sanctuary [BOEM 6(5): 157]. We can extend this statement to include many other peninsulas and points along the Massachusetts coast - places like Eastern Point in Gloucester, Squaw Rock Thicket in Quincy, the Glades in Scituate, and Morris and Stage islands in Chatham. The statement applies also to the outlying islands, particularly Nantucket, which hosts innumerable fall migrants including many western strays. Such places are called "migrant traps."

In response to the shortening days of late summer, many migratory birds fatten up in preparation for the flight south. By mid-August the warblers, thrushes, and other insectivorous birds that winter in the American tropics begin to migrate. The northwesterly winds of large high-pressure weather systems coming into eastern Canada and New England push the birds in a southeasterly direction and eventually up against our coast, which runs in a generally northeast-to-southwest direction. Some take off over the Atlantic in a direct flight to the Caribbean Islands or the northern coast of South America while others move southwestward along the coast in a building stream of migrants that backs up at seaward projections of the land. This in brief is the phenomenon that local birdwatchers exploit in observing the fall migration.

Hellcat Swamp and Kettle Hole (Plum Island). Plum Island is the most northerly of the many peninsulas, headlands, and barrier beaches on the Massachusetts coast which act as landbird traps. The tangles and fruit-bearing shrubs and trees in the Kettle Hole (Parking Lot 3) and Hellcat Swamp (Parking Lot 5) attract birds such as the Western Kingbird, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Connecticut Warbler [H. D'Entremont and S. Zendehe, *The Four Seasons at Plum Island (Part II - Summer-Fall)*, BOEM 7(3): 93-97, June 1979].

Eastern Point (Gloucester). Accessible via a circuitous route through East Gloucester and then south on East Main Street, Massachusetts Audubon Society's Eastern Point Wildlife Sanctuary and the wooded estates nearby have been known to attract Red-headed and Red-bellied woodpeckers and Orange-crowned Warblers in late fall [C. Leahy, *Birding Cape Ann*, BOEM 11(1): 5-26, February 1983].

Marblehead Neck Wildlife Sanctuary (Marblehead). Access is through Marblehead, east on Ocean Street across the causeway, right at the fork, and then left on Risley Road. The thick

underbrush here is attractive to many flycatchers. Philadelphia Vireo is a good possibility in the fall [D. Snyder, Marblehead Neck Sanctuary, BOEM 6(5): 157-165, October 1978].

Nahant Thicket Wildlife Sanctuary (Nahant). This four-acre patch of overgrown, shrubby woods is owned and operated by Massachusetts Audubon Society. It is accessible by driving nearly to the end on Nahant Road, taking a right on Wharf Street, the next left, and the next right (Forbush Street). A parking space on the right is reserved for birders. Birding here during fall "waves" produces much the same results as at Marblehead Neck [C. Leahy, Where to Watch Birds in Massachusetts No. 5, Two North Shore Migrant Traps: Marblehead Neck and Nahant, Massachusetts Audubon Society, 1973].

Squantum Thicket and Squaw Rock Thicket (Quincy). Squantum Thicket is an area of boggy and overgrown woods to the west of Victory Road, which joins East Squantum Street with the Boston Harbor Marina. Owls and flycatchers are to be looked for here in migration. An impressive roost of Black-crowned Night-Herons here in late summer and fall often contains a few Yellow-crowns as well.

Squaw Rock Thicket is reached by driving east on East Squantum Street, bearing left on Dorchester Street, and parking to the left at the top of the hill, just after the sharp right turn. In good migration "waves" a large variety of passerines stop here in the overgrown nook in the rocks facing Boston Harbor [E. Morrier, Birds of the Squantum and Wollaston Beach Area, BOEM 3(5): 156-159, October 1975].

The Glades (Scituate). This forested, rocky outcrop at the northeast corner of Scituate is a noteworthy migrant trap featuring flycatchers and a variety of other landbirds after the passage of cold fronts in the fall. It is privately owned; birders should stay on the roads and trails and act discretely. Parking for a car or two is available on Gannett Road in North Scituate near the iron gate blocking access to the property [W. R. Petersen, The Scituate Coast - A Birder's View, BOEM 8(6): 220-225, December 1980].

Morris Island and Stage Island (Chatham). These two wooded and privately owned hills at the southeastern corner of Chatham are mounds of glacial till surrounded by salt marshes and barrier beaches and accessible by a single road just south of Chatham Light Coast Guard Station. Parking is available on the sides of the causeway or at the parking lot for the U.S. Weather Station on the eastern bluff of Morris Island. Birders should visit this area only in the off-season, and then only very discretely. Walk the roads in this area to look for typical landbird migrants in the shrubbery and trees. In addition, a section of Monomoy National Wildlife Refuge lies along the eastern and southern shore of Morris Island. Access is from the aforementioned weather station. The tangles just back of the first line of low dunes can be productive migrant

traps [W. Bailey and P. Bailey, Where to Watch Birds in Massachusetts No. 18, Birding on Outer Cape Cod, Massachusetts Audubon Society, July 1981].

Mothball Pines (Nantucket). Warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers form the bulk of the birds seen here during the fall. This isolated patch of pines at the end of Hummock Pond Road has become known as the site of the Nantucket Banding Station established in 1955, where Edith Andrews conducts week-long banding workshops during the early fall [E. Andrews, Bird Banding on Nantucket: Highlights of 1981, BOEM 10(4): 187-188, August 1982].

SOHEIL ZENDEH, a member of BOEM's editorial board in charge of "where to go" articles, is a founder of TASL, a group concerned with censusing the birds of greater Boston Harbor, and also an organizer of the Friends of Belle Isle Marsh, an active conservation group committed to preserving the area for which it is named. For this latter effort, he was presented (with colleague Craig Jackson) the Audubon A award by the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

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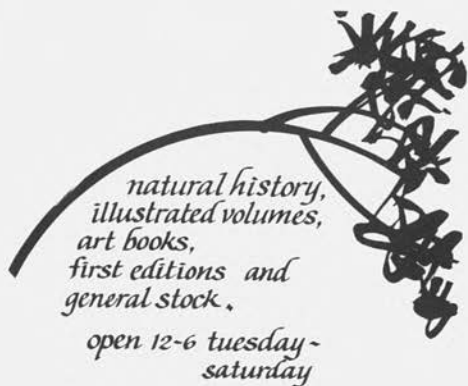


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