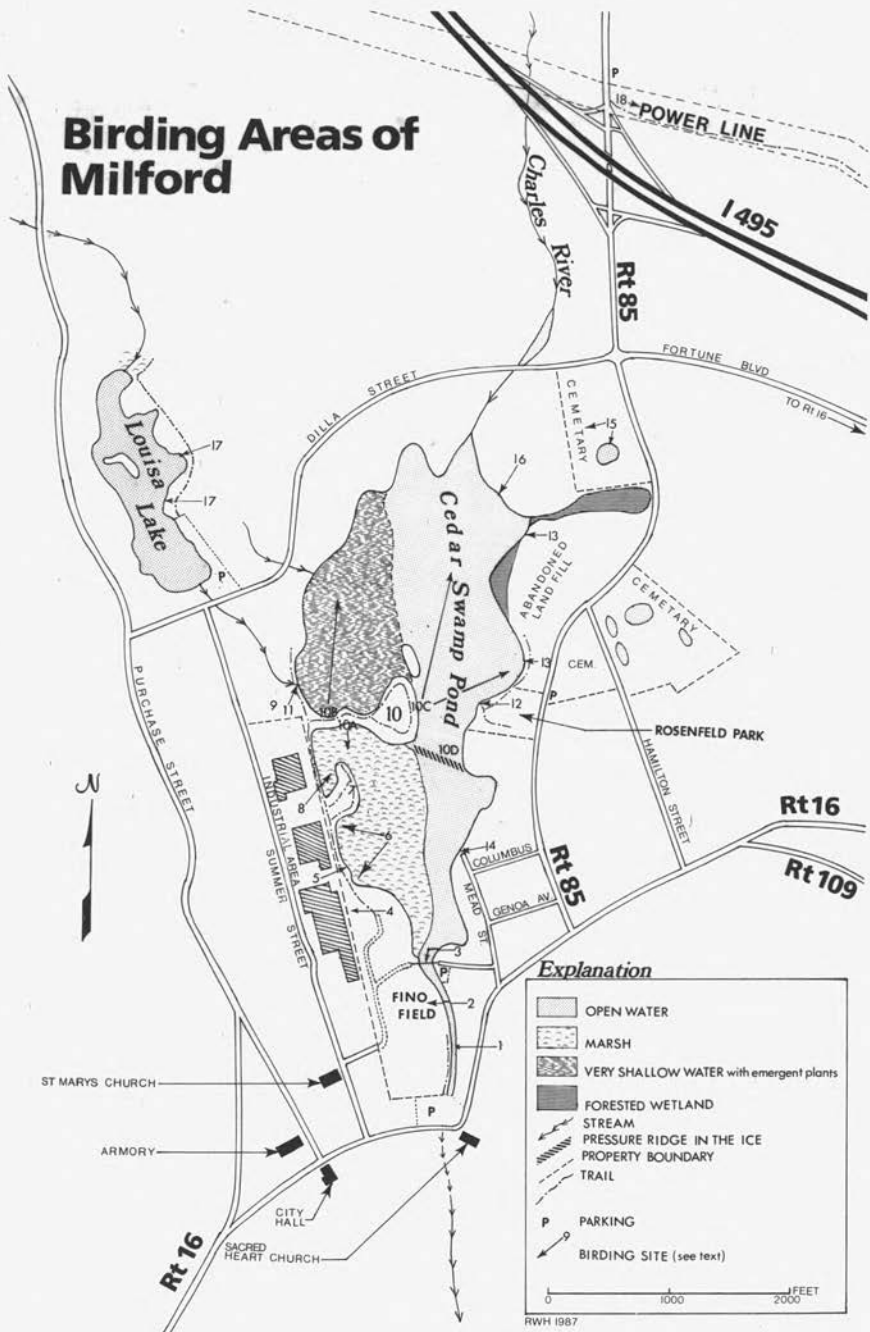


Birding Areas of Milford



BIRDING AREAS OF MILFORD

by Richard W. Hildreth

Within a mile and a half of downtown Milford (Worcester County) are three productive and accessible birding sites. These are Cedar Swamp Pond, Louisa Lake, and the power line east of Route 85. In almost any season, except the dead of winter, a half day of careful birding at these sites will result in a respectable list of species. To get to this area from the north via Route 495, take the Route 85 (Milford) exit. From east or west, follow Route 16. See the map for local details. The numbers on the map refer to the locations so numbered in the text.

Cedar Swamp Pond is a shallow impounded pond in Milford on the upper reaches of the Charles River Valley. This was formerly an Atlantic white cedar (*Chamaecyparis thyoides*) swamp that was in great part destroyed by the creation of a large municipal landfill, now abandoned. Few cedars are present today.

Because the chief attraction of the west side of the pond is marsh birds and waterfowl, an early start in the birding day is essential, just before dawn if possible. Park in the lot on Route 16 across from the Sacred Heart Church. Look for House Finches around the edges of the lot. Then follow the trail (1) north along the Charles River.

This section of the river does not freeze in winter, so it is a good location for ducks. Also in winter, American Goldfinches, House Finches, and sometimes Common Redpolls can be found feeding on alder along the river. Song Sparrows breed here, and some linger through the winter. American Robins, Gray Catbirds, and Northern Mockingbirds are common. A Gray-checked Thrush has been observed here during spring migration.

The open grassy areas of **Fino Field (2)** should be checked for Killdeers, American Robins, and Chipping Sparrows. A Black-crowned Night-Heron was once observed before dawn feeding in the field.

A foot bridge across the **Cedar Swamp Pond dam (3)** makes a good vantage point to view a major section of the pond to the north and a section of the river below the dam to the south. During the warmer months Wood Ducks, Mallards, American Black Ducks, and Common Moorhens can usually be seen. In winter, Mallards, American Black Ducks, and sometimes, Canada Geese are seen below the dam. In the spring and fall waterfowl season, a good variety of ducks can sometimes be viewed quite close up just above the dam.

Along the road (4) north from Fino Field are an abandoned railroad grade and industrial buildings to the west. The area along the railroad is overgrown with weeds and shrubs. This is a good site to search for sparrows during fall

migration. American Kestrels, Mourning Doves, American Robins, Common Yellowthroats, and Northern Orioles are regular inhabitants of this area.

Along the edge of the marsh (5), the shrubs and a stand of Japanese knotweed should be checked for Yellow Warblers, Common Yellowthroats, Song Sparrows, and Swamp Sparrows.

There are good places (6) along the marsh and at Overlook Point (7) from which to view the area and the small ponds (8) where the following species can be found in the appropriate season: American Bittern (spring), Least Bittern, Wood Duck, American Black Duck, Mallard, Northern Harrier (winter), King Rail (seen in 1987 and 1988), Virginia Rail, Sora, Common Moorhen, Killdeer, Common Nighthawk (spring), Chimney Swift, Tree and Barn swallows, Red-winged Blackbird, Rusty Blackbird (spring and fall), and Common Grackle. There is a stand of Russian olive near the road at Overlook Point that, when fruiting, attracts robins, catbirds, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, Cedar Waxwings, and inevitably, starlings. The small ponds attract Solitary Sandpipers in the spring and are good sites for close views of Virginia and Sora rails.

An open upland shrubby area (9) provides a habitat where Rufous-sided Towhees, Brown Thrashers, Northern Mockingbirds, and Chipping Sparrows can be found.

The Island (10) is an elevated tract of land surrounded by the marsh-pond with a narrow neck of land connecting it to the western shore. A large number of species have been seen on or from the island. The neck of land provides on the south side (10A) close-up views of species in the marsh. To the north (10B) is a section of the pond with shallow water and many emergent plants but not quite a true marsh. This is a good spot for ducks, as well as Pied-billed Grebes, Common Moorhens, and American Coots (fall). In summer, Eastern Kingbirds hawk for insects over the water. To the north and northeast of the island (10C) can be seen Pied-billed Grebes, Great Blue Herons, waterfowl, and Common Moorhens. Otters may also be observed here. The island itself has migrating warblers during spring and fall, and Warbling Vireos have nested here.

When Cedar Swamp Pond freezes in winter, most of it can be safely explored on the ice. However, a pressure ridge (10D) sometimes forms here resulting in very thin ice or open water along it, which attracts gulls and crows. In winter, ice seldom forms at the point where the stream from Louisa Lake enters the pond (11). With a careful approach views of many ducks can be obtained. In spring and summer Gray Catbirds, migrating warblers, Common Yellowthroats, and Northern Cardinals are found here.

To bird the east side of Cedar Swamp Pond, park beside the cemetery on Route 85 across the road from Rosenfeld Park. Take special care crossing the very busy highway. During open hours in summer, you may be able to drive into the Rosenfeld Park lot. A trail (12) leads from the parking lot to the pond.

Approach the pond carefully so as not to flush waterfowl and waterbirds that are often close to the shore. During periods of very low water, flats are exposed along the channel close to the eastern shore. In the late summer and fall, shorebirding can be interesting. Killdeer, yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, and Common Snipe may be seen here. A Water Pipit was once seen on the flats. This is a good vantage point to see Great Blue and Green-backed herons and Black-crowned Night-Herons. Pied-billed Grebes, several species of ducks, Common Moorhens, and American Coots (fall) can be expected. During fall migration, Ospreys and Merlins are seen. Landbird species found here include American Kestrel, Killdeer, Mourning Dove, Ruby-throated Hummingbird, Common Yellowthroat, Song Sparrow, and American Goldfinch.

Walk north along the east shore of the pond from Rosenfeld Park to the abandoned landfill site (13). Very good views of the pond can be had from several locations that are productive during the spring and fall waterfowl seasons. The old landfill is overgrown with weeds which attract sparrows in the fall. An American Kestrel is nearly always present. In winter this is a good place to find American Tree Sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, American Goldfinches, and in some winters Common Redpolls.

At the north end of Mead Street (14), good views of the eastern side of the pond can be obtained. This site is good for a quick look during the spring and fall waterfowl season.

Pine Grove Cemetery (15) is an old cemetery with big trees and woods adjacent, a good birding site during spring migration, especially for wood warblers. In summer look for ducks and Green-backed Heron in the pond.

When melting first occurs in the early spring, the ice leaves the northern end of Cedar Swamp Pond before other areas are open. Ducks are often concentrated in the open water west of the cemetery (16). Carefully approach the pond through the woods at that season to get close views of a good variety of waterfowl species.

Louisa Lake (17) is a small shallow impounded pond with a flood control dam. A large lot on Dilla Street allows plenty of room to park. Drive to the rear (north end) of the lot, and park to view the pond. Here a good assortment of ducks, Great Blue Heron, and Spotted Sandpiper can often be seen. Follow the road along the east shore to the north end of the pond, where there is another flood control structure. American Kestrel, Least Flycatcher, Eastern Phoebe, American Robin, Warbling Vireo, and Northern Cardinal are species that occur here in summer. This site is most worthwhile during the spring and fall waterfowl seasons. Because this area is very heavily used for a variety of recreational activities, birding without interruption is difficult unless you get out early.

To bird along the power line (18) east of Route 85, park on the northbound side of the highway just north of where the line crosses the road. A trail follows the power line east up a steep grade that provides a strenuous hike. The woody vegetation along the line is kept down by cutting and the use of herbicides. The open country here attracts a distinctive breeding bird fauna. Typical birds to be found are Turkey Vultures, Red-tailed Hawks, which nest on the power pylons, American Kestrels, Eastern Kingbirds, Eastern Bluebirds, Northern Mockingbirds, Brown Thrashers, Prairie Warblers, Indigo Buntings, and Rufous-sided Towhees. Bird species seen along the edge of the clearing include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Northern Flicker, Great Crested Flycatcher, and Scarlet Tanager. During fall migration the open power line high on the hill makes a good hawkwatch site.

A provisional checklist of 140 species seen at the three Milford sites from 1983 through 1988 has been compiled by the author, who would be very interested in bird observations from this area. To obtain a copy of the list and to report birds, please write Richard W. Hildreth, 135 Washington Street, Holliston, MA 01746, or call 508-429-5085.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This article first appeared in 1987 in The Chickadee, (57: 1987) and is reprinted here in modified form with permission of the author and the publication.

RICHARD W. HILDRETH has been a naturalist from childhood and received early training and encouragement at Massachusetts Audubon's Wildwood Camp at Barre, where his interest began to focus on birds. He is an exploration geologist, trained at Boston University, who has worked for twenty years as a research and development professional with NRC Inc., a firm specializing in rare metals such as tantalum and niobium. A lifelong Massachusetts resident, Hildreth is chiefly interested in inland birding in the upper Charles River basin and Blackstone Valley area. His favorite out-of-state areas are Washington County, Maine, and coastal New Jersey. He leads trips for the Forbush Bird Club, is the compiler for the Uxbridge Christmas Count, and an active participant in the butterfly atlas project.

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