

BOOK REVIEW: *BIRDING CAPE COD*

by Marilyn S. Murphy

Birding Cape Cod by the Cape Cod Bird Club and Massachusetts Audubon Society, illustrated by Barry Van Dusen, maps by Janet Heywood, cover by John Sill; Arey's Pond Press, South Wellfleet, Massachusetts, 1990; 125 pages; \$12.95 (soft cover).

Cape Cod is a difficult place to look for birds, particularly shorebirds. Surrounded by three different bodies of water, the Cape has a lifetime supply of cul-de-sacs and a bewilderment of tides and tidal ranges. It is no surprise that one of Massachusetts' most celebrated birds of 1990, the Spotted Redshank, was never sighted outside the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, though many a frustrated birder can testify that it was often elsewhere.

Recent changes on the Cape have exacerbated its natural difficulties for birders. No one needs to be reminded of the effects of development on Cape Cod habitat and land access: the private point associations at once-cherished overlooks, the asphaltting of Hyannis, condominiums, retirement communities, golf courses, shopping malls, midsummer traffic jams. Even Stage Island has succumbed to overdevelopment, the consummation of the 1960s' crusade by the good citizens and selectmen of Chatham to exclude Stage and Morris Islands from the emergent National Seashore.* Development has transformed the Cape and continues to threaten despite the current economy. If a Rhode Islander has his way, an amusement park with boats and canals will be constructed on Route 6 near Truro's Corn Hill so that, in the words of the developer, children of summer visitors won't be bored when they come to the Cape.

It is no wonder that birders who still cross the bridge head for the best known, easiest-to-find, and least dispiriting destinations: Sandy Neck, Monomoy, Fort Hill, and Race Point, and assume that the days of exploring the lanes and picturesque byways of old Cape Cod are gone forever. Or are they?

* Jonathan Moore, legislative aide to Senator Saltonstall during Congressional hearings on the formation of the Seashore, considered four areas crucial for inclusion in the National Seashore: "... the pond areas in Wellfleet-Truro, Great Island in Wellfleet, Fort Hill in Eastham, and Morris Island in Chatham. He said 'the only one we lost was Morris Island, which was a very special political case. I considered it a jewel, and I still am very upset that it was not included in the Seashore boundary.'" (Francis P. Burling, *The Birth of the Cape Cod National Seashore*, Plymouth, Massachusetts: Leyden Press, 1979)

There has long been a need for a birder's guidebook to the Cape, and now, happily, the Cape Cod Bird Club and Massachusetts Audubon Society at Wellfleet Bay have provided one. Written by local birders, *Birding Cape Cod* is a site-description guide to selected public lands throughout Cape Cod including Monomoy.

Maps by Janet Heywood reflect the sound editorial decision of the committee that one good map is worth hundreds of words. These excellent maps, twenty-seven in all, are the cornerstone of the book and are placed in proximity to their relevant site descriptions.

The format and production of *Birding Cape Cod* are exceptional. The book is handy in size, the typeface is attractive and easy to read, and illustrations by Barry Van Dusen add interest throughout. The eye-catching Piping Plover on the cover is the work of John Sill.

Birding Cape Cod is divided into regional areas: the Upper Cape, the Mid-Cape, and the Outer Cape, with each town and site treated separately. Information is given about the best times of year and weather or tide conditions to bird that area, nesting species, other species seen in the recent past, trails, and parking. Over one hundred locations are described in a concise, well-written text that smacks not at all of committee prose. *Bird Observer* readers will recognize several Blair Nikula pieces published earlier in the journal. The Nikula chapter on Monomoy, originally printed in *Bird Observer* (15 [3] June 1987: 112), is essential reading for any birder planning a trip there.

Because public lands, in general, are the focus of *Birding Cape Cod*, birders should be cautioned not to look for information about well-known hot spots such as the chicken farm in Truro.

Light conditions go unnoted in most of the site descriptions. Great Pond in Eastham may be "one of the best freshwater ponds for birding on the Outer Cape," but you won't enjoy the birds there with the sun eyeballing you. For locations with only one vantage point, check Janet Heywood's maps before setting out. So many sites are described, that all but the most seasoned Cape Cod birders will find new locations to explore. The variety of areas and the currency of species and other information make these site descriptions invaluable. Both locations and species are included in the index.

Also included is an introduction with information on subjects ranging from habitats to ticks, a chapter on pelagic birding, and an annotated list of Cape Cod specialties. The list of specialties is a mystery to this reader. Do people really go to Cape Cod looking for Great Cormorants, Brant, Snowy Owls, and Lapland Longspurs? Reproduction of the Cape Cod Bird Club checklist would have been a helpful addition to or substitute for this mystery list, but, curiously, the availability of the checklist goes unmentioned. The impact of the hunting season on a birder's itinerary also is not addressed although much of the Cape,

particularly the National Seashore, becomes a hunter's playground around the end of October, and birdlife hunkers down.

But these are minor omissions and do not diminish the success of this publication for which all responsible deserve accolades. *Birding Cape Cod* ranks among the best of the regional guides, and anyone with a glimmer of interest in birding the area should own a copy. You won't want to cross the bridge without it.

MARILYN MURPHY recently retired from Houghton Mifflin Company where she was Research Librarian. She spent several months in 1990 birding the Outer Cape, "trying to figure out the tides in Nauset Marsh and counting the cars on Route 6."

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