

BIRDING RHODE ISLAND'S EAST BAY BIKE PATH

by Steve Davis

Rhode Island's increasingly popular East Bay Bicycle Path runs 14.3 miles from Providence to Bristol along a former railroad line. Since the path runs close to the east side of Narragansett Bay and across some of its tributaries, it connects several good birding areas. Although the path is used by a gratifying number of cyclists, in-line skaters, and walkers, the birds seem unbothered. Perhaps the lack of internal combustion engines makes this so.

As shown on the accompanying map, the path in many places parallels Rhode Island state routes 103 and 114 and, consequently, is accessible by road at many points. This is convenient for the birder more interested on a given day in birding than in the beautiful sights and recreational activities that the path affords. In fact, the winter birding possibilities of the East Bay Bicycle Path are perhaps more impressive than those of the warmer seasons, and, although pleasant winter weather does not rule out the use of a bicycle or of walking, a car may be useful at that season. The better birding areas along the path are all easily accessible by auto, with convenient parking, and the area merits visits at any season even by nonbikers. In this article, birding locations will be identified by mileage from the northern end of the bike path and by road description.

Technically, the northern terminus of the bike path is at India Point Park just south of Interstate 195 in Providence. Nevertheless, many people begin the bike path at the parking lots along Veterans' Memorial parkway at miles 1.2 and 2.0 of the bike path. These sites on the bluff afford a view of downtown Providence, the Providence harbor, and the very northern end of Narragansett Bay, which is called the Providence River. It is worth a glance to see what waterbirds might be present. There formerly was a berm with a water impoundment below the bluff, and about 40 species of birds have been identified there, including White-rumped Sandpiper and White-winged Scoter. Since the berm has been filled in, the birding opportunities are more limited.

At mile 2.0 the path follows a causeway between the Providence River and Watchemoket Cove. The cove is divided by Veterans' Memorial Parkway into inner and outer sections. The outer section is well seen from the bike path; the inner section is seen by leaving the bike path at the parking lot at mile 2.0 and riding a short distance (0.3 miles) along the road. Watchemoket Cove is a reliable winter location for two specialties: Eurasian Wigeon and Black-headed Gull. Winter regulars also include Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Canvasback, Hooded and Red-breasted mergansers, Bonaparte's Gull, Great Blue Heron, Red-tailed Hawk, and, of course, Mute Swan. Summer birding is less impressive at Watchemoket Cove, but shorebirds and herons can be seen.

Try not to let the marsh smell bother you; "Watchemoket" supposedly is the Narragansett word for "place of the bad smell."

The bike path continues from Watchemoket Cove about 2.3 miles to Riverside Square. This section of the path, although running partly along present and former industrial areas, has several lovely, close views of the bay with the Squantum Club at mile 2.9 and the Pomham Rock Lighthouse at mile 3.8. Waterbirds that are common along this stretch include Double-crested (summer) and Great (winter) cormorants, Red-breasted Mergansers, Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Mallards, and Black Ducks. Two small coves along here on the east side of the path are good locations for herons, shorebirds, and Belted Kingfisher. A prominent Rhode Island birder's home is near this section of the bike path and the bay, and his yard list (including seen from yard) is over 170. At Riverside Square at mile 4.3 to 4.4, there is a parking lot for the bike path and several places to get snacks.

Nine-tenths of a mile after passing Riverside Square and at mile 5.3 total, the path runs along the estuary of Bullock's Cove. The waters and marsh here can be productive for gulls, herons, all three mergansers, Ruddy Duck, and American Coot. Eurasian Wigeon is possible in winter. Here the path crosses Crescent View Avenue. Although there is a blinking yellow light at this crossing, care should still be taken in crossing Crescent View Avenue since the traffic visibility is not good to the east and cars often are traveling faster than expected. Parking for a few cars is available here at the East Bay Hardware lot.

A spur from the bike path can be taken from this point 0.4 miles to the west to Bullocks Point Avenue. A left on Bullocks Point Avenue will take one immediately to the restored 1895 Loeff Carousel and after 0.3 miles to a fork in the road at the beginning of the peninsula known as Narragansett Terrace. A left at the fork will take one in 0.3 miles to a colony of Monk Parakeets. They are most easily found near Clifton Avenue, but the massive nests are obvious. Continuing to the end of the point (about 0.5 miles) will produce a nice view of northern Narragansett Bay and of Bullocks Cove, where Brant are reliably seen in winter.

Returning to the bike path and proceeding south, one begins the midsection of the bike path, which travels primarily away from the Bay. There are a few brief views of the east side of Bullock's Cove where Monk Parakeets can sometimes be found, and then the path, separated by trees, enters a residential part of Barrington. Don't miss the spectacular copper beech in a yard just to the west of the path. Along this section, woodland birds such as Carolina Wrens and kinglets can be seen and heard. From mile 7.5 to mile 8.0, the path runs along Brickyard Pond. In winter various ducks can be seen here including the mergansers, Ruddy Ducks, Gadwall, and teal. A wintering Great Blue Heron or Black-crowned Night-Heron may also be found. At mile 8.3 the path crosses the entry road to the Barrington YMCA. Not only can this parking lot be used for

parking, but the woods between the adjacent baseball field and Brickyard Pond is a good place for woodland birds. At mile 8.7 the path crosses Route 114 in the center of Barrington. This is a location with several convenient places to eat: a sub shop and a pastry shop are immediately adjacent to the path, and other shops are nearby. There is also very convenient parking here.

At mile 9.1 the path crosses the Barrington River bridge. It is worth stopping here to scan the estuary upstream. The river to the south can be productive. In 1991 the Tufted Duck was first seen there. The Egyptian Goose that is occasionally found here is not wild. This is also a spot in winter for Pied-billed Grebes.

Four-tenths of a mile later is the second bridge, which crosses the Palmer (or Warren) River. The estuary here is definitely worth scrutiny. Good views can be attained from the bridge, and in an additional 0.3 miles at mile 9.8, one can turn off the bike path at Kelly Road to the parking lot of the German American Club for a view of the eastern section of the estuary. This location, also called Belcher's Cove, is especially good for wintering ducks: great flocks of scaup, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Black Ducks. A "Patagonia Picnic Table Phenomenon" (that is, get birders in a likely spot and unusual birds will be found there) occurred here in 1991. When this writer was trying to find the Tufted Duck, a Short-eared Owl flew by. When two other birders came to this spot a day or two later looking for the Tufted Duck and the Short-Eared Owl, they found neither of those birds, but discovered a Bald Eagle in the trees across from the German American Club. While these three birds are not regular at this site, this demonstrates the surprising potential of this relatively urban location.

The next 0.4 miles can be used to catch up for the time spent searching the Palmer River estuary, as the bike path cuts through a built-up part of Warren. Although not great for birding, this section has some welcome features. At mile 10.3 where the path crosses (appropriately) Route 103, there is Hall's Seafood and Deli, a good spot for lunch. Across Route 103 is a parking lot with a brick building to the west that houses the Warren Police Station and Fire Station. It also houses a convenient pair of restrooms. At mile 10.4 is a bike shop right on the bike path, and at mile 10.5 there is another aptly named Park and Ride commuter parking lot.

After crossing Route 114, South Main Street, at mile 10.6 the path begins a long gradual descent as it moves closer to the bay. Lovely views are present and the bird possibilities may change somewhat as the path travels through a cattail area. At mile 13.4 the path crosses the access road to Colt State Park, Rhode Island's best legacy of the gun that won the west. At this point riders may want to ride into the park for excellent views of the middle part of Narragansett Bay. Brant and Ospreys are visible here (at different seasons), as are many of the bay waterbirds. The lagoon and marsh in the park are worth checking: Common

Snipe and Cooper's Hawks have been seen here. There are several areas in the park of cultural interest: the Coggeshall Farm homesite in the park is a working historical farm, and the Colt stables are impressive.

There are two options for traveling through the park. One can stay on the main road, loop around back across the lagoon bridge, and return to the bike path where the loop started, or one can turn right off the main park road at the southern end and soon find oneself on Poppasquash Road that runs along the western and southern sides of Bristol Harbor. Poppasquash Road is crossed by the bike path (at mile 14.0) about 50 yards before it returns to Route 114. Both Bristol Harbor and the pond that is surrounded by the bike path to the east and Poppasquash Road to the south and west are worth checking. This area has been known for Black-crowned Night-Heron, Hooded Merganser, and Bufflehead, and it is a good site for Barrow's Goldeneye. There may also be shorebirds on the beach on the south side of Poppasquash Road. From Poppasquash Road the path runs another 0.3 miles along Bristol Harbor to its end at Independence Park. Cyclists can take Route 114 into the center of Bristol, where there are several excellent sandwich shops and some historical sites. There is also public parking at this end of the path, as there is in Colt State Park.

Adventurous riders can proceed along Route 114 to the southern part of Bristol where Blithewold Mansion can be explored. Another option is to ride along the waterfront 0.3 miles to the Bristol town dock where the ferry to Prudence Island can be boarded. Prudence Island in Narragansett Bay is fraught with unpaved roads and deer ticks carrying Lyme Disease, but riders with mountain bikes or hybrids and protected by DEET will find it a quaint and enjoyable destination.

Rhode Island's East Bay Bike Path is a triple delight: it supplies an opportunity for exercise, beautiful scenery, and interesting birding.

ACCESS

Northern End: From Interstate 195 Eastbound from Providence: Take exit 4 ("Taunton Ave./Riverside") in East Providence, just at the end of Washington Bridge. Keep to the right. This will be Veterans' Memorial Parkway. About 0.3 miles up the hill is the first parking lot.

From I-195 Westbound: Take exit 6 ("Broadway") in East Providence. Take a left onto Broadway at the end of the ramp. Proceed south on Broadway about 1 1/2 miles to its end at Watchemoket Cove. Take a right onto Veterans' Memorial Parkway, and in 0.4 miles is the second parking lot, or in 1.2 miles is the first parking lot.

Southern End: Park either at Independence Park on Thames Street just north of the center of Bristol or in Colt State Park, the entrance of which is 0.3 miles to the north on Hope Street.

A Partial List of the Birds of Rhode Island's East Bay Bicycle Path

Common Loon	Ruddy Duck	Blue Jay
Pied-billed Grebe	Osprey	American Crow
Horned Grebe	Bald eagle	Fish Crow
Great Cormorant	Sharp-shinned Hawk	Black-capped Chickadee
Double-crested Cormorant	Cooper's Hawk	Tufted Titmouse
Great Blue Heron	Red-tailed Hawk	White-breasted Nuthatch
Great Egret	Ring-necked Pheasant	Carolina Wren
Snowy Egret	American Coot	House Wren
Little Blue Heron	Killdeer	Ruby-crowned Kinglet
Green Heron	Greater Yellowlegs	Wood Thrush
Black-crowned Night- Heron	Semipalmated Sandpiper	American Robin
Mute Swan	White-rumped Sandpiper	Gray Catbird
Snow Goose	Common Snipe	Northern Mockingbird
Canada Goose	Laughing Gull	European Starling
Brant	Black-headed Gull	Yellow Warbler
Black Duck	Bonaparte's Gull	Yellow-rumped Warbler
Mallard	Ring-billed Gull	Northern Cardinal
Blue-winged Teal	Herring Gull	Rufous-sided Towhee
Gadwall	Great Black-backed Gull	American Tree Sparrow
Eurasian Wigeon	Common Tern	Song Sparrow
American Wigeon	Rock Dove	Swamp Sparrow
Canvasback	Mourning Dove	White-throated Sparrow
Greater Scaup	Monk Parakeet	Dark-eyed Junco
Lesser Scaup	Short-eared Owl	Red-winged Blackbird
Tufted Duck	Chimney Swift	Common Grackle
White-winged Scoter	Belted Kingfisher	Brown-headed Cowbird
Common Goldeneye	Downy Woodpecker	Baltimore Oriole
Barrow's Goldeneye	Northern Flicker	House Finch
Bufflehead	Eastern Phoebe	Pine Siskin
Hooded Merganser	Eastern Kingbird	American Goldfinch
Common Merganser	Horned Lark	House Sparrow
Red-breasted Merganser	Tree Swallow	
	Barn Swallow	

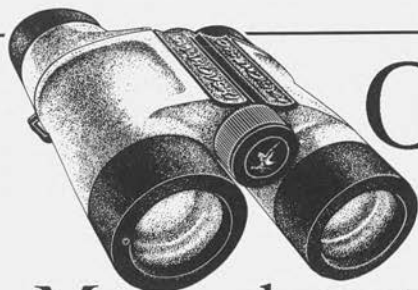
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