



BIRDING THE SUDBURY VALLEY

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Probably no other area in America has had as thorough and continuous an ornithological coverage as the Concord-Sudbury Valley region of Massachusetts. Beginning with Henry Thoreau's accounts, continuing with the tireless exploits of William Brewster, and on through the era of Griscom and his disciples, the Sudbury Valley has a well-documented history. Unfortunately, much of this history is a story of decline, and sadly, this is particularly true today. For a more detailed account of Sudbury Valley ornithology, see Birds of Concord, by Ludlow Griscom.

The area was one of rural farmlands, with a major river system and adjacent meadows. However, what few farms existed even a decade ago have now disappeared as tremendous pressures from land developers and urban sprawl have taken their toll. Last year, for example, I did not record a single Least Flycatcher in the Valley in an area where they had previously been termed "common." So also, the Orchard Oriole, which had occupied the area nearly continuously since 1887, has not bred there since 1962 and occurs now only as a straggler. Constant encroachment on the marshes and meadows have further reduced the numbers of waterbirds.

What then is left in the Sudbury Valley? The area is still a relaxing half-day or a leisurely full-day birding adventure, especially in late March and April. It is most productive during or after rainy weather or under cloudy conditions. (The exception to this rule is in birding at Round Hill for hawk flights.) Ideal sunny conditions have the disadvantage of bringing out numerous canoeing and boating enthusiasts who scatter the waterfowl to unknown locales. Birds which are commonly sought out in the Valley include ducks, hawks, marsh birds, swallows and blackbirds.

When birding the Sudbury Valley, you should include Great Meadows National Wildlife Refuge in Concord in your itinerary. For further information see Bird Observer, Vol. 1, No. 5, pp. 109-113. Other areas are described below.

Pelham Island Road, Heard's Pond, Wayland

Because of its diverse habitat, this is the most rewarding area in the Valley for a number of species. Heard's Pond is the main objective. Various ducks, including Ring-necked Ducks, Pintails, teal, Common and Hooded Mergansers and even Canvasbacks and Pied-billed Grebes are to be looked for here. Check the gulls resting on the water or on the ice for Iceland, Glaucous, and Ring-billed Gulls (even for a Lesser Black-backed Gull, if you are an optimist). During rainy weather in late April and May, thousands of swallows may be seen flying low over the pond. All the common species will be present, and occasionally one can find a Purple Martin. In late May, if you are really lucky, a Black Tern may be present. The wet woodland adjacent to the pond is probably the best general area for landbirds in the Valley. Rusty Blackbirds can easily be found in late March-April. Early warblers (Yellow-rumped and Palm) are most reliable here in good numbers, and others are usually present in May. Thrushes, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks and Scarlet Tanagers are numerous at times, and I have recorded Blue-gray Gnatcatchers on several occasions. If birds are obviously present, it is well worth persisting in your searches.

The Great Meadows Refuge has a subsidiary parking lot and trail in the above-mentioned woodland. Park here and walk along the old path north to the edge of Wash Brook meadows. Along the path you will surely flush Wood Ducks, if someone hasn't done so before you. The vantage point over the meadows is poor, but by clapping your hands you can easily flush teal and sometimes Pintail, American Wigeon, or, rarely, a Northern Shoveler. In late April-May this is a good area to hear or see Common Gallinules, Virginia Rails, Soras and Long-billed Marsh Wrens. I have had both King Rail and Least Bittern from this spot.

To the east of Heard's Pond is Heard Road, which is a dead-end street. Park here and enter the Conservation Area. Mockingbirds abound, and in winter an occasional Northern Shrike may be found. Walk to the river and look for Pied-billed Grebes, American Coots, and ducks. Watch for Ospreys (also at Heard's Pond) both in spring and in fall.

Warbling Vireos still breed in the tall shade trees at the beginning of Pelham Island Road, just off Route 20.

When you are birding the Valley, it pays to spend a good deal of time in this area. Remember, Red-headed and Black-backed Three-toed Woodpeckers were seen here in 1974!

For a better vantage point for Wash Brook, drive west on Route 20, past the Wayland dump (left) to the top of the hill, where there is a pull-off on the left (south) side of the road. Park here along the road and scope the marsh. If the water is high and vegetation is low, this offers a good vantage point for ducks. The Wayland dump has recently (1974-1975) had Fish Crows, and occasionally white-winged gulls appear in the winter and spring.

Water Row Road, Sudbury

This area can be reached by driving north from Wayland center and bearing left on Route 27. Drive about one and one-half miles to Water Row Road on the right (the first right after you cross over the river). About three hundred yards down the road is a dangerous curve where you can park with discretion. There is a rock ledge here which affords an excellent vantage of the river. Birds to be looked for include grebes, teal, Pintail, Ring-necked Duck, American Wigeon, Wood Duck and perhaps a Northern Shoveler. When the water is high, species such as Greater Scaup, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, and even Horned Grebe have been seen. In the winter this is also a good lookout spot for hawks. Usually Red-tailed Hawks are seen, but one sometimes finds a Rough-legged Hawk or Goshawk.

Proceed along Water Row Road, stopping where it looks good (e.g., the field beyond the Riding Stable), or wherever birds are in evidence. In winter I have seen Goshawk and Northern Shrike in this area more frequently than anywhere else in the Valley.

Round Hill--Sudbury

At the end of Water Row, take a right (east) on Sherman Bridge Road. About 1/4 mile on your left is Round Hill Park (at the dilapidated building). A path leads from there up the hill. When weather conditions are right, and if you are persistent enough, this is a good spot for viewing migrating hawks. Often swallows and other landbirds can be observed as well. Warblers and kinglets are seen here in spring, and banding results indicate that in some years warblers are again present in some numbers in the fall, although I have been significantly unsuccessful in finding many. In mid-April, if no hawks are flying, you can enjoy the engaging songs of Field Sparrows, which are common.

Continue east along Lincoln Road (Sherman Bridge Road) to Route 126, stopping at Stone Bridge to view the river. Look for ducks and grebes here. Pileated Woodpeckers are known residents in the vicinity.

Turn left (north) at Route 126 to Route 117. Turn left again and proceed about two miles to the intersection with Sudbury Road, known as

Nine-Acre Corner--Concord

Next to the Heard's Pond area, this is the most productive area in the Valley, and it is the place where you are most likely to find something unusual. Geese feed in the fields and on the golf course. Occasional Snow Geese have put down in rainy weather in early April. Ducks are present from mid-March through April along the edge of the flooded fields and river. Ring-necked Ducks are present in some numbers, and Wood Ducks, teal, Pintails, American Wigeons and Gadwalls are often found. Horned Larks are regularly present in spring and fall; and Water Pipits are occasionally there in spring and are frequently seen in fall.

The flooded fields are the most likely area to find shorebirds. Killdeer are present from mid-March on, and Common Snipe are particularly common in April. Depending on the condition of the fields, other shorebirds can be found. These species include Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, and Pectoral, Least, Solitary and Spotted Sandpipers. There is always the possibility of almost any other shorebird species. American Golden Plovers can rarely be found here in late September or early October; and it was here that I saw my first Massachusetts Ruff.

In spring and fall the fields are covered with blackbirds, although I defy anyone to find anything other than the common ones! If it is a nice day, keep your eyes skyward

for passing hawks.

When you are in the area during the winter, drive south from the four corners at Nine-Acre Corner to the road that leads to the golf course clubhouse. The road is lined with crabapple trees, and Cedar Waxwings, American Robins and Pine Grosbeaks (when present in the Valley) can generally be found here.

When you have finished birding, if you still have some time on your hands, retrace your route east on Route 117 about three miles to Massachusetts Audubon's Drumlin Farm Sanctuary. There you can visit the Nature Center and browse in the fine bookstore (closed Mondays).

If you are interested in a leisurely spring trip, try the Sudbury Valley. You might be surprised!

PUFFIN EGG TRANSPLANTS

by Wayne Hanley, M.A.S.

There are 54 new Common Puffins in Maine coastal waters this autumn as a result of an experiment carried out by Stephen W. Kress of the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. The puffin, in case you have forgotten, is a short, plump bird that looks like a small penguin hiding behind an enormous parrot bill. In breeding season, bands of yellow, blue-gray and vermilion make the huge bill a colorful spectacle.

Prior to 1900 the edibility of puffin eggs almost extirpated puffins from the southern rim of their range. Too many potential puffins were truncated sunny-side-up in Maine and Canadian skillets. Apparently there never were many puffins on the Maine coastal islands. The bird is an arctic resident, more acclimated to the frigid barrenness of Greenland. Even in winter, puffins rarely venture as far south as Massachusetts.

Until Kress carried out the transplant last summer, Matinicus Rock, with possibly 80 to 100 pairs, was the only confirmed breeding area for puffins in Maine waters. The presence of a few pairs in summer around Old Man Island made it a possible breeding site. Otherwise, the nearest southern breeding island was Machias Seal, which is a Canadian island just off the Maine coast, far downeast.

Financed by a grant from the National Audubon Society and a few wealthy contributors, Kress removed 68 puffin chicks, each about two weeks old, from burrows on Great Island, Newfoundland, and had them flown by private plane to Bangor, a 1000-mile trip. The chicks were collected with permission of the Canadian Wildlife Service. Veterinarians inspected chicks and found them free of Newcastle disease, but four were held for further study.

The remaining 64 chicks were taken to Eastern Egg Rock in Muscongus Bay where they were placed in artificial burrows. Puffins, and a few other seabirds, dig burrows for nests, much like woodchucks. Forty-nine chicks were placed in burrows made of ceramic chimney tiles. The other 15 were placed in burrows dug into the earth. To prevent Great Black-Backed and Herring Gulls on Eastern Egg from preying on the chicks, wooden doors with a quarter-moon arch cut out at the bottom were placed over the burrow entrances. The arch not only provided ventilation but also admitted some light during the day. Puffin chicks, which are rather discrete housekeepers, excrete toward daylight, thus keeping the burrow interior clean.

From July 17 through August 24, two people remained on the island. Their main duty was to place a thawed smelt in each burrow entrance three times daily. Young puffins are fed by their parents that way.

As the chicks matured, the burrow doors were opened each evening so that the young could come out and exercise their wings. On August 24, the last of the 54 chicks left the burrow site and flew away.

The 10 chicks which were not released were involved in an experiment by the Mount Desert Biological Laboratory which studied the effect of DDE, a metabolite of DDT, on puffins.

These were the first Common Puffins fledged on Eastern Egg Rock since 1907. Investigators now must wait three years to learn whether the former chicks will return as breeding birds to Eastern Egg Rock.