

POCKET PLACES

Sanford Ponds Wastewater Recycling Facility

Nancy McReel

Old weather saw: *When ditches and ponds offend the nose, Watch for rain and stormy blows.*

A birder soon learns that sewer ponds attract birds. It may be more pleasant to go to a town's sewer ponds in fair weather because birds, especially ducks, like these places for the small plants and microorganisms they find there. The food is great and most birds do not have a keen sense of smell. In Sanford, Maine, there are four ponds with a connecting roadway around each, all inside a gated chain-link fence. The gate is open when the rest of the facility is open. Outside the fence is woodland with the Mousam River running through it.

Migration time is most productive for a visiting birder. Ducks are most abundant from September to freeze-up in early December, with a high concentration in October. There has been a report of a Snowy Owl sitting on a post there in January, gazing silently at the snow- and ice-covered ponds.

Some high counts are 150 Ruddy Ducks, 250 Ring-necks, 50 Green-winged Teal, 10 Blue-winged Teal, 200 Mallards and Blacks. Northern Pintail, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Gadwall, American Coot, Pied-billed Grebe, and Wood Duck — all are fairly regular partakers of the available goodies.


Open spaces and mown verges around the ponds appeal to grassland species. Some of the regulars are Horned Larks, Snow Buntings, American Pipits, and a variety of sparrows including Swamp, Lincoln's, Savannah, and Song.

Shorebirds working the edges are Spotted and Pectoral sandpipers. The shrubs and trees bring in Pine Siskins and migrating warblers. Yellow-rumped Warblers in the hundreds may be spouting up from the bushes like popcorn.

Naturally all these birds interest hawks and other predators. Sharp-shinned, Red-tailed, and Rough-legged hawks zoom in for a catch, while Northern Harrier, Osprey, or Common Raven may be curious about all the activity.

Inside the entrance gate the driveway curves through acres of lawn with some planted evergreen trees, all surrounded by a maple-oak woodland. This is an appealing invitation to come and see. A number of Maine birders now visit the Sanford ponds regularly and report sightings on maine-birds@mainebirding.net or Maine Audubon birdalert. A trip could be combined with a visit to the Kennebunk Plains or Wells Harbor to cover additional habitats.

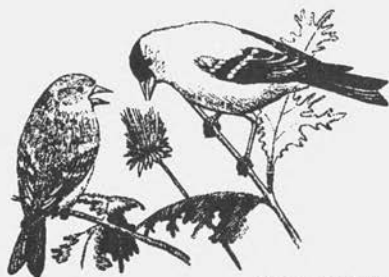
Directions: From Wells drive West on Route 109 toward Sanford. At the traffic light at the junction with Route 4, turn North toward Alfred. Go about 1 mile to a

blinker. Turn East on Gavel Rd. and drive another mile to the end, traveling through the open gate of the Wastewater Recycling Facility. The gate is open from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. The first time that you visit, please stop in at the office to sign a liability agreement. The area is not shown on my copy of Delorme. It is, however, on Topozone.com and on the USGS topo map. 

Nancy McReel has conducted monthly bird surveys in southern Maine for Woodlot Alternatives, Inc. and the Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge for 15 years, and has participated in a bird banding project at the Wells Reserve for 10 years. Responsible for all this interest in birding was a small Yellow Warbler that flew by her window thirty years ago.

Note from Arcadia

We have a PhD student who is studying goldfinch mating and nesting behavior, mostly out near the Ibis Pool area. She is recording vocalizations as well as color banding. So if you see some goldfinches with bands, they are her study birds. She has a notebook in the lobby at Arcadia if you have any goldfinch observations. A female kestrel has been hanging out for quite some time now, with multiple observations, including sitting on the kestrel box. But if it is nesting, I'm not sure where. We've also been seeing a female harrier in June and early July. Hopefully they are nesting or considering the area for future nesting. Keep an eye out for the juveniles. There is also a nesting pair of kestrels off Munn's Ferry Road in Gill and by the horse barns near UMass, Amherst.



GEORGE C. WEST

In the newly planted grasslands, no Bobolinks or Savannah Sparrows nested, only Red-wings and Song Sparrows. I'm advocating for a planting of shorter grasses in the large cucumber field if and when we get that piece. Grasshopper and Vesper sparrows prefer the shorter grasses, rather than the sea of tall Canada wild rye and timothy.

Cooper's Hawk continues to breed here. We had our first nesting pair of Blue-headed Vireos at Arcadia. The Great Blue Heron colony is going strong with over 12 nests. We had 33 Bobolink territories in the older, established grasslands, but only 2 Savannah Sparrows. Eight additional Savannah Sparrows nested in adjacent fields, including the cucumber fields, which weren't cultivated until July. Chestnut-sided Warbler is just hanging on, and Veery was low.

*Dave McClain, Conservation Caretaker
Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, Easthampton, MA*