

Exploration of the Burrage Pond WMA is most easily undertaken on foot, particularly since the area is generally off limits to vehicular traffic. The easiest access to the area is via the main dikes leading from both the Elm Street and Hawks Avenue entrances. From these main dikes there is a network of connecting cross dikes that makes it possible for birders to gain access to practically all portions of the property. Although some of the smaller cross dikes are somewhat overgrown, the intrepid birder can nonetheless readily traverse them. For viewing waterfowl in Burrage Pond, the Hanson entrance often affords the best observation. Two cautionary notes for visitors are not to walk on the cranberry bog areas and to be watchful for poison sumac (*Rhus vernix*) along some of the more overgrown cross dikes. 🐦

Literature Cited

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Birds of Late Summer

Raymond J. Seamans

Do you know that super-birding-spot of southeastern Massachusetts, the Great Cedar Swamp? Roughly two square miles in extent, it was, prior to the recent development of several large cranberry bogs, very wild and inaccessible country. A network of good sandy roads has now been built up, and from one or another of these the eye may explore almost any part of the area. Besides the reclaimed land, there are a fine hemlock grove, a few knolls covered with pine and beech, a field of two or three acres, a number of small stumpy ponds, considerable meadow region, sand banks galore, and acre upon acre of the swamp proper—a hideous morass of unknown depths presided over by the spectral remains of drowned cedars. This is the place

where feral Nature makes its last impressive stand in the region. What a site for a bird sanctuary! It first endeared itself to me as the breeding locale of many pairs of Water-Thrushes and Brown Creepers, but I have since come to esteem it for many other reasons—for its great Night Heron rookery, its Bank Swallow colony, its breeding Canada Warblers, Blue-headed Vireos and Rough-winged Swallows, its hordes of Black Ducks and Wood Ducks, its visitant Yellow-crowned Night Herons and Little Blues, its Painted Trillium, Calopogon and Mountain Laurel, and its Deer, Raccoon and Otter. There is powerful appeal in the mysteries of its past. But, most of all, I love it for the secrets yet to be revealed to me within its borders.

Of the many entrances to this natural paradise, I chose, this September morning, the road which leads behind the big cranberry cannery. It passes the stumpy cove that the southward-bound Teal call their own. The first Blue-wings, I wagered, should be there today. A multitude of waterfowl took vocally to wing at my approach—Wood-ducks, Blacks, Green and Black-crowned Night Herons. There were dozens of each species, although their ranks are thinning daily now. With difficulty I picked out in the maze of wings the characteristic blue forearms of three Teal. Sometimes, when my presence brings fear to a peaceful group of birds, I heartily wish they might be able to discriminate between their friends and their enemies. Yet I know few more thrilling sights in Nature than that of Black Ducks bolting away in alarm at express-train speed.

All the roadsides were white with Hawkweed gone to seed, and Pokebushes bowed low with their late-summer burdens. I walked the gauntlet of “a clamorous clan in cobalt clad” and thought that feathered vocabulary reached its peak in the Jay. Their autumn fluency, like that of the politicians, is unexcelled. Blessings on the Cooper’s Hawk that yelled suddenly near by and throttled their din for a time. Curious Towhees in patchwork plumage, no two alike, peered at me from all sides. I have often marveled at the way parent Terns, for instance, distinguish their own young from the throng of offspring milling on the spit. But it must be an easy matter for Mother Towhee to call all the neighboring juveniles of her species by name, so great is the diversity of their markings. With surprising difficulty I coaxed a House Wren from his pile of brush. When he finally did emerge, it was to threaten me in no uncertain terms, suggesting very saucily and at great length that I go hiss else-where. The tirade attracted his big relative, Thrasher, to the scene, and that worthy contributed his opinion of the case with a peculiar, choking wheeze. I moved along.

The proprietors of “Water-Thrush Lane” have been gone six weeks. Four short months ago the concert was just beginning. They were back when expected, after a nine months’ absence, to make the floating island sacred. From half a dozen throats the paragon of warbler songs rang through the recesses of the swamp. Now the long wait is on again. Faith in the coming of another May is at low ebb in September, but the bird-seeker need never despair. Each season boasts its quota of interesting birds. If the Water-Thrush goes, the Kinglet, the White-throat, the Siskin will soon be cheerfully present. Click! Did somebody cock a pistol? I glanced up to find myself surrounded by a formidable posse. He who startled me called “pee-a-wee” and sallied forth again, the audible snap of his bill signaling the demise of another public enemy. Cousin Pewee sat on a cedar stump relishing a large dragonfly. Above the

range of this huntsman, a few belated Barn Swallows took prey. Landing light as a feather at the foot of a towering tree, Brown Creeper commenced his hitching, barber-pole ascent. Red-capped Downy, too, was content to play the luck of the bole so long as a prying Prairie Warbler kept his distance. Swamp Sparrows picked at the mud. It was “bad medicine” for the insects in this particular nook. As I turned from the slaughter, I beheld a Woodchuck heading directly for me, full speed ahead. Closer and closer he plunged, until I braced for the assault. Not five feet away, he veered from the path and dived into a hole in the bank. Poor creature, he had believed his retreat cut off. How frightened he must have been! I recall drying my forehead.

The hemlocks were almost deserted today. A furtive Vireo and a fly-catching young Redstart were the only bird inhabitants in evidence. I passed through and walked out on the dike, where a series of queer sights was in store. At once I descried the familiar paradox of a pure white Little Blue Heron stalking about the shallows with nicely measured tread. A berry-eating quintet of tardy Kingbirds was mildly surprising, but I rubbed my eyes at a Downy Woodpecker who gathered sustenance from a mullein stalk. Then—shades of Anhingas and Sandhill Cranes!—a great Blue Heron flew several rods with neck outstretched. The suspicion that I had discovered a rugged individualist was confirmed when Herodias came to rest on a distant stump and spread his wings, Cormorant-fashion, to the breeze. I watched him hold that uncanny pose for several minutes. Then, glancing idly at a flock of Crows overhead, I spotted something that nearly broke my taut credulity, for one of their member displayed great white bars across each wing, the area proportionately large as on a Spotted Sandpiper. I followed him out of sight, then looked weakly about me lest I miss any Wild Turkeys or Flamingoes. But the freak show was over.

I trailed a fresh Deer track until it left the path to skirt the swamp. Here was the grove beloved to a certain few as the home of the variegated-leaved Pipsissewa. Midget forms flitted high in the pines, and I caught a few snatches of song. The author proved to be a bright Blackpoll, his music as radically changed as his plumage. The sandy four-corners where the Rattlesnake Plaintain blossomed was possessed today by the White-topped Aster, Fleabane, and Gall-of-the-Earth. This crossroads is a favorite gathering-place of the birds. A good-sized family of Bob-whites whirred away as I arrived. Everywhere Morning Doves were dusting. A great Hairy Woodpecker bellowed “All aboard” and bounded off with that mail-must-go-through gait. A mixed company of Chipping Sparrows and Pine Warblers were feeding in a small area of tall grass. I found they were robbing the extensive traps of a gigantic Golden Garden Spider. This handsome arachnid, fully an inch in diameter, hung motionless while his larder was being riddled but made an agile getaway when touched with a blade of grass.

A flock of fifty-two Cedar-birds flew up from their pokeberry dinner and clustered in a sapling. Nearly all were striped young-of-the-year. “It is almost fall when we get on the wing,” they seemed to admonish. “You had better order that ton of coal.” Then I made out two White-throats in the swarm of wayside sparrows, and that, for me, spelled the end of summer. 🐦

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