



REVERE-WINTHROP REVISITED

by Soheil Zende, Cambridge

I find myself concentrating on birding local areas intensively. In particular, I have been going to the Revere-Saugus-East Boston-Winthrop area on the average of once a week from mid-summer through fall, and somewhat less frequently during the spring. Although Robert Stymeist has previously written about this area for BIRD OBSERVER (Vol. 2, No. 6, November-December 1974), the following notes---in the form of additions, amendments and updates should be of interest.

My purpose in writing about this area is to encourage other people who live nearby to drive less and bird more, to go to this area often enough so that something approximating day-to-day coverage can be realized, to rediscover the wealth and variety of the natural world in the Boston Basin before industry and greed bulldozed it.

By documenting the importance of this section of the coast to resting, nesting, feeding and migrating birds, birders can help make a case for the protection of estuarine wetlands, tidal marshes, and other coastal features in Greater Boston. The Environmental Protection Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General is right now investigating and may be starting to fight the filling of Saugus Marsh. A small muddy area in the Belle Isle Marsh of East Boston-Revere, which in September harbored innumerable shorebirds, snipes, Laughing Gulls, and rails, is already gone---a school or something is being built there. We must be constantly on the watch to protect what is left.

I. Point of Pines

Point of Pines is the northern terminus of Revere Beach. One can park at the rotary at the north end of Revere Beach Drive and walk north along the beach. This is my recommendation during the summer on holidays and weekends, when the residents of Point of Pines community become very proprietary about their beach and have been known to hire overweight, off-duty policemen to chase off intruders. The residents really can't stop anyone from walking on the beach---only those parking in the community and walking to the beach. At dawn and at sunset, when the atmosphere is magical and the view magnificent, have no fear of parking on any of the streets perpendicular to Point of Pines and walking out onto this great and fertile feeding ground for our shore migrants.

Ideally one should arrive at Point of Pines two hours after low tide. At this time, the incoming tide concentrates the gulls and shorebirds into smaller and more compact flocks. By standing in one spot approximately in the middle of the huge mudflat (barefooted in July and August) one can scan all the birds for a period of an hour to an hour and a half before they finally fly off---sometimes in spectacular formations---to their high tide roosts.

From midsummer until extreme cold sets in around December the following gulls are to be expected: 100-500 Bonaparte's, 20-50 Ring-billed, several hundred each of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. Laughing Gulls in small numbers can be seen until mid-November. Little Gulls and Black-headed Gulls may show up from late August on. Arctic, Common, and Least Terns can be seen until fall.

The regularly expected shorebird species are Semipalmated Plover (many), Killdeer (occasional), Black-bellied Plover, Red Knot, Semipalmated Sandpiper (hundreds in July and August), Sanderling and Dunlin (hundreds late September through December), and White-rumped Sandpiper.

Cormorants are always visible from the beach. As the fall progresses, hundreds of Black Ducks become regular. Eiders, Buffleheads, Common Goldeneyes, scoters, Greater Scaups and Red-breasted Mergansers, as well as both loons and Horned Grebes can be expected.

Highlights from the last two years are

Marbled Godwit	2	August 17-September 7, 1975
Whimbrel	1	September 4, 1975
Manx Shearwater	3	July 13, 1976
Royal Tern	1	July 31, 1976
Black Skimmer	4	September 18, 1976
Peregrine Falcon	1	October 2, 1976.

II. Pines River

A visit to Revere-Winthrop should always include a check of the Pines River at or around low tide. Access is from Route 1A. If you are traveling north, observe the following landmarks: Wonderland on the left, and then a rotary; approximately 3/4 mile north on 1A, Route 60 crosses (traffic lights); another 1/2 mile and another set of lights; after this look for a "STAY RIGHT FOR LEFT TURN" sign, go right, cross 1A at the lights, and you will be on Mills Avenue driving along the Pines River. If you are southbound from Point of Pines or from Lynn on 1A, the first right after the Point of Pines on-off ramp leads to Mills Avenue.

The river often has cormorants and some ducks. Terns can be seen flying and diving. The near shore is shingles, coarse sand and mussel beds: look for yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones and Semipalmated Plovers. There is a large mudflat at the south end of Mills Avenue that is exposed at low tide. This should be scanned for specialties among the scattered flocks of peep and yellowlegs. A Willet was here September 6, 1976.

With your telescope scan the opposite shore of the Pines River. Though smaller shorebirds are difficult to make out at that distance, Red Knots, dowitchers, yellowlegs and Whimbrels (2 on May 15, 1976) should be conspicuous on the mudflats. Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons are also often seen at the water's edge. Great Blue Herons arrive in mid-September, and a half-dozen can be seen wading the river or preening in the tall grass above the river in October.

At the height of the shorebird migration, it is worthwhile to get back on 1A southbound and pull off at the very next parking area (dirt). Walk discreetly around the stores and the boatyard, smiling lots at everyone who is staring at the strange scope-toting visitor. Scanning the river, its estuaries, and all exposed mudflats should reward you with close-up looks at Snowy Egrets and a variety of shorebirds. Least Sandpipers are more common here than on the outer beach. It is time for someone to find Stilt Sandpipers, godwits and rails in this marsh.

Despite obvious urban blight and leaching from the vast Saugus dump-incinerator nearby, the Saugus Marsh, created by the Pines and Saugus Rivers, remains one of the great wild areas in Greater Boston and deserves much attention and protection by naturalists and birders.

III. Saugus Marsh

On any birding trip to the Revere-Winthrop area, a useful and often productive stop is the Saugus Marsh. From the Revere Beach Parkway take Route 107 north. After going through a few commercial blocks and a rotary, Route 107 becomes a divided highway cutting across the Pines River Estuarine Wetland---Saugus Marsh. You will cross several branches of the Pines River at each of which a short stop-and-look is advisable. In summer and early fall look for shorebirds, herons, and gulls; in late fall and winter, for wintering ducks such as Red-breasted Mergansers and Buffleheads. About 1/2 mile north of the rotary, you will notice a high earthen dike approach Route 107 on the left and then run parallel to it for several miles. This would have been I-95 but for ex-Governor Sargent. About 1 mile north of the rotary there is a short dirt road crossing the marsh and leading from 107 to the top of the dike. There is no access to this from the northbound side of 107, but a cautious U-turn several hundred yards north of this spot will bring you back to the dirt road. (If you have gone as far as the huge incinerator-dump on the right, or if you have crossed the Saugus River into Lynn, you have gone much too far.)

In the past one could easily drive to the top of the dike. Recently, a cable across the dirt road has prevented access by car, but then someone bent the fence out of the way, so you can drive again. The top of the dike can be windy and cold, so a car up there is useful. The view of the marsh in all directions is grand.

Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, many ducks and shorebirds, Snowy Owls, Kestrels, Marsh Hawks, Ring-necked Pheasants, terns and gulls, swallows, Eastern Meadowlarks, Horned Larks and Snow Buntings have all been seen from the top of this dike. It remains to be seen whether rails or a Short-eared Owl will turn up here. Anything seems possible in this, the largest marsh in Greater Boston.

IV. East Boston Puddle

The East Boston Puddle---all right, call it Salt Pan---offers good birding and is no more than a 20 minutes drive from most northern sections of the city. Glossy Ibis, Snowy Egret, Little and Great Blue Herons and American Bittern have all been seen here. Both dowitchers, Hudsonian Godwits, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs and all varieties of peep use this as a rest stop at high tide. Also to be seen are Ring-billed, Black-headed, Laughing and Bonaparte's Gulls, Least and Common Terns, and Belted Kingfishers.

The Puddle is part of the Belle Isle Estuarine Wetland and is just east of Bennington Street, north of Orient Heights MBTA station. The easiest way to find it from Bennington Street is to turn east on Leverett Street at Eddie Mack's II Restaurant. Follow the pavement until it narrows and turns into dirt, at which point you should park. The Puddle is now to the left and ahead of you. Walk into the marsh; it is not particularly wet. But be careful not to step on nails in all the junk that is lying around.

In July, August, or September, if you arrive at sunrise and about two to three hours before high tide, the avian spectacle will soon take your mind off the unsightliness and trashiness that blights this marsh. In the morning the light is just right, and for an hour or more you can enjoy the dozens of feeding egrets, the hundreds of Short-billed Dowitchers, and all of the other shorebirds and marsh-dwellers that feed, preen and rest here. In October Long-billed Dowitchers and Greater Yellowlegs, as well as the ubiquitous Killdeer, are standard fare. By November, Black-headed Gulls in small numbers can be expected, especially at extreme high tide.

The Puddle, alas, is shallow and freezes rapidly; so by mid-November the chances of finding shorebirds or gulls here diminishes. Still it is worth checking this area for lingering or wintering rails, bitterns, and sparrows, as well as an occasional Kestrel or Merlin.

New Director for Massachusetts' Division of Fish and Wildlife

Matthew Connolly, Jr., has been sworn in as the new State Director of the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. Mr. Connolly's first important position in state government was that of State Ornithologist. In the past seven years, Connolly has been in charge of planning state parks, he has directed the Office of Conservation Services, and, most recently, he completed the Coastal Zone Management Plan.

As Director, he hopes to bring some planning techniques to the Division's work, particularly in the area of selecting and justifying land purchases. Another problem that Mr. Connolly wants to resolve is "the apparent canyon" between people who call themselves sportsmen and those who refer to themselves as environmentalists. He would like to become involved in more projects that deserve the label of education.

The filling of the position of State Ornithologist may tell a great deal about this new administration. Recently, this position has been held by people who served as Assistant Directors, making the position mainly another administrative job. Connolly intends to appoint a genuine ornithologist to the post, someone to start taking the Division's responsibility for non-game species seriously.

The results of a capable, enthusiastic administration should be noticeable, but as subtle improvements in already existing programs.

FOR SALE OR SWAP - A very sturdy Flip-lock Tripod - suitable for a tall person - I need a small, light tripod (suitable for a short person). Paula Butler, 722 Pleasant Street, Belmont, Massachusetts 02178 - Telephone 484-2148.
