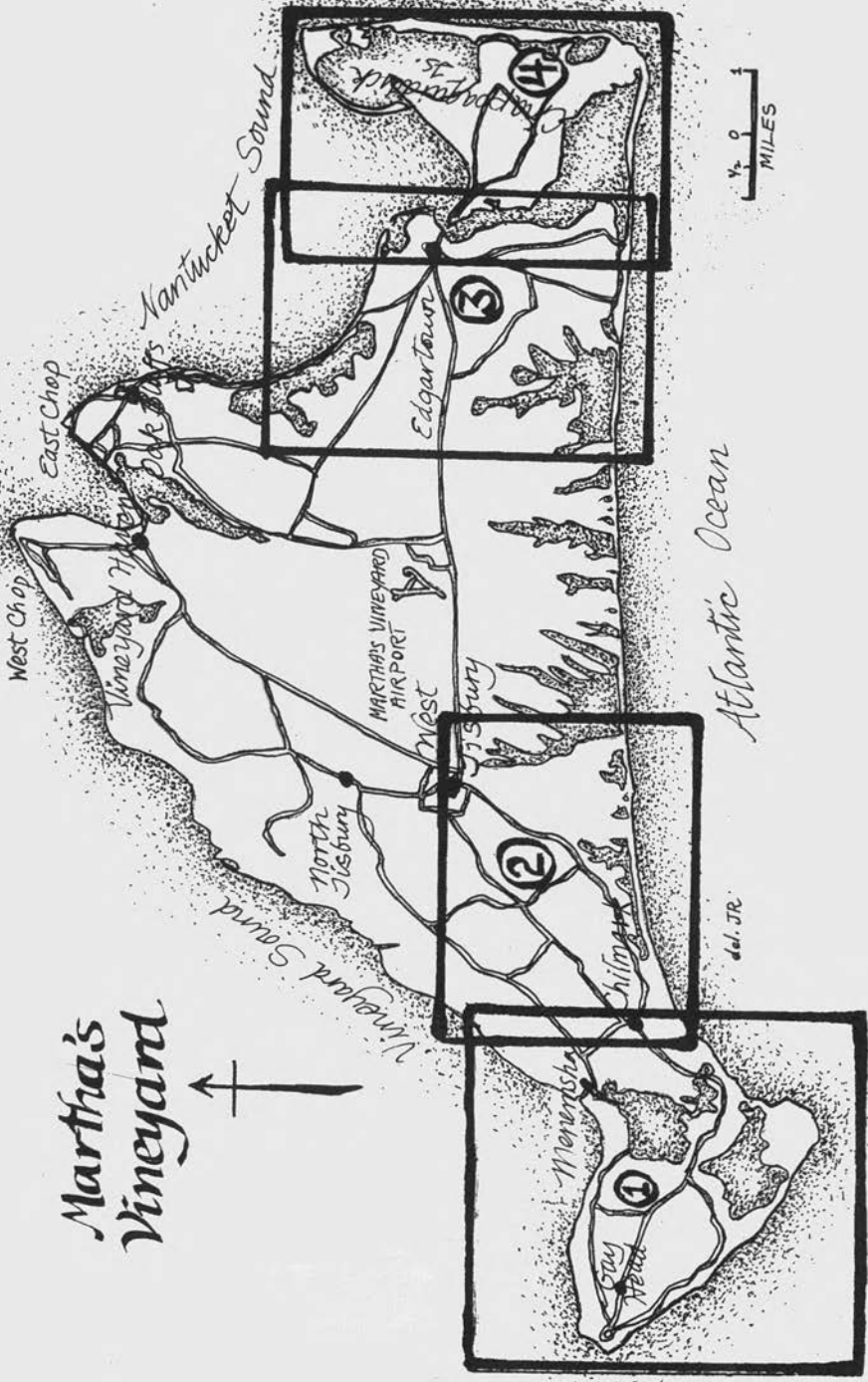


# Martha's Vineyard



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## A GUIDE TO BIRDING ON MARTHA'S VINEYARD

by Richard M. Sargent, Montclair, New Jersey

A total of 357 species have been recorded on Martha's Vineyard. This represents 85 per cent of all the birds recorded in the state of Massachusetts. Probably the most famous of them, excluding the now extinct Heath Hen, was the Eurasian Curlew, first identified on February 18, 1978, and subsequently seen by several hundred birders during the month that it remained "on location." Of the 357 species, approximately 275 are regular, occurring annually. The variety of species present and the overall charm of the Vineyard make it a fun place to bird.

The Island is reached by ferry from Woods Hole and if you plan to take your car it is very advisable, if not a necessity, to make advance reservations with the Steamship Authority for both in-season and out-of-season trips. And here a note of caution: much of the property around the ponds and access to many of the back areas is private property and posted. The areas discussed in this article are open to the public and offer a good cross-section of Vineyard birding areas. If there are private areas you want to cover, be sure to obtain permission before entering them.

The Vineyard is roughly triangular in shape with the base of the triangle twenty miles, east to west, and the height, north to south, ten miles. It is of glacial origin with much of the north shore hilly and formed by glacial morain. To the south there are broad, flat outwash plains cut by many fresh water or brackish ponds separated from the ocean by barrier beaches.

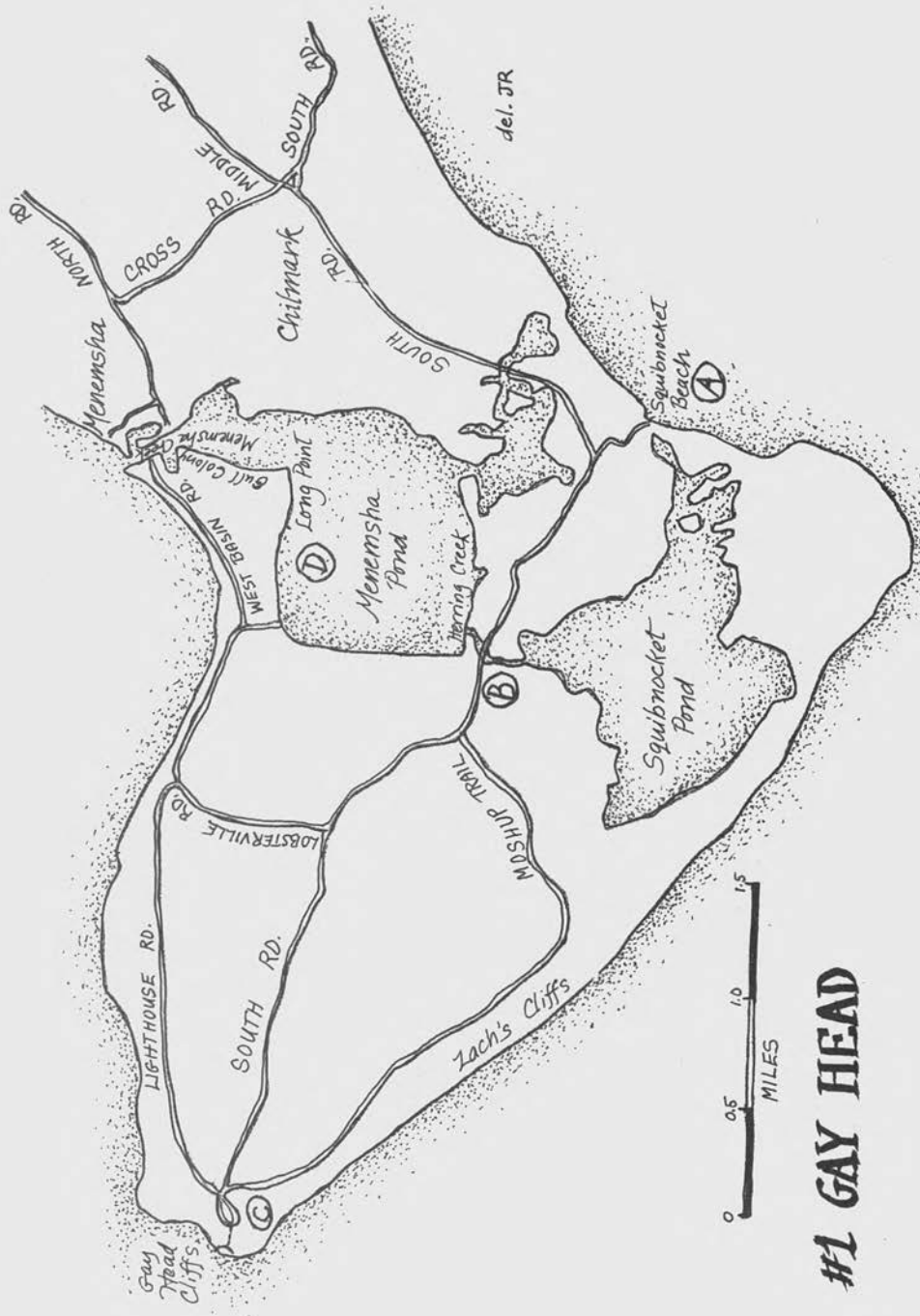
Probably the best time to bird the Vineyard is the month of September. The warbler migration is in full swing and the shore birds are still going through. Anyone used to birding Monomoy will be disappointed with the Vineyard shore birds. There are two basic reasons for this. It is just enough west of the major flight line to miss the heavy concentration of the southern migration and, more importantly, there are very few good mud flats. Probably the best area is the southwest corner of Chappaquiddick when there are low tide mud flats in Katama Bay. Passerines are pretty much where you find them but a trip through the Quenames "loop" should prove interesting in this area.

The following areas are covered by detailed maps and discussion:

1. Gay Head
2. Quenames Loop
3. Katama
4. Chappaquiddick

### I. GAY HEAD

(A) Squibnocket Beach. From the parking lot, walk to the right along the beach about 1/4 mile. At low tide Mussel Shoals are exposed where you may see Semi-palmated, Piping, and Black-bellied Plovers; turnstones; Semi-palmated Sandpipers; and Sanderlings. Also present will be the four common gulls of the Island--Great Black-backed, Herring, Ring-billed



# #1 GAY HEAD

and Laughing, together with the three terns--Common, Roseate and Least. In late summer look also for Forster's and Black Terns. In recent years off Mussel Shoals there have been from four or five to more than 20 summering Common Eider, much of the time on the large rock off the shoal. In the winter this same rock plays host to Purple Sandpipers.

(B) Herring Creek. On the way to Gay Head, stop at Herring Creek where it passes under the road. Along the creek to the left is a favorite spot for Snowy Egrets and Black-crowned Night Herons. Also, on occasion, a Pied-billed Grebe and Blue-winged Teal may be seen.

(C) Gay Head. The outlook here is not particularly productive in the summer, but in the winter it is the best place on the island for Razorbills and murre as well as the normal winter sea ducks and scoters.

(D) Menemsha Pond. Lobsterville Road gives a good outlook onto Vineyard Sound where there are usually summering Common Loons. Continuing along the road will take you to the northwest corner of Menemsha Pond where you can park and walk the north shore of the pond for shore birds, gulls and terns. It was at Long Point during our annual February census of Island birds that we first found the Eurasian Curlew. Continuing north along Menemsha Creek is a large nesting colony of Herring and Great Black-backed Gulls. Without a long walk, the eastern end of the West Basin Road will take you fairly close to the gull colony.

## 2. QUENAMES LOOP

Three miles east of Chilmark on the South Road you will pass Meeting House Road on the left. Take the dirt road on the right about half a mile east of Meeting House Road and follow this making the loop shown on map #2. Stop at open places along the road. Puddles in the road can be particularly productive. All the side roads, two of which are indicated, are private roads and should be avoided. Particularly in September the Loop can be good for warblers, chickadees, Red-eyed and Philadelphia Vireos, both nuthatches, Hairy and Downy Woodpeckers, phoebes, pewees, and both cuckoos, as well as the other common passerines.

## 3. KATAMA

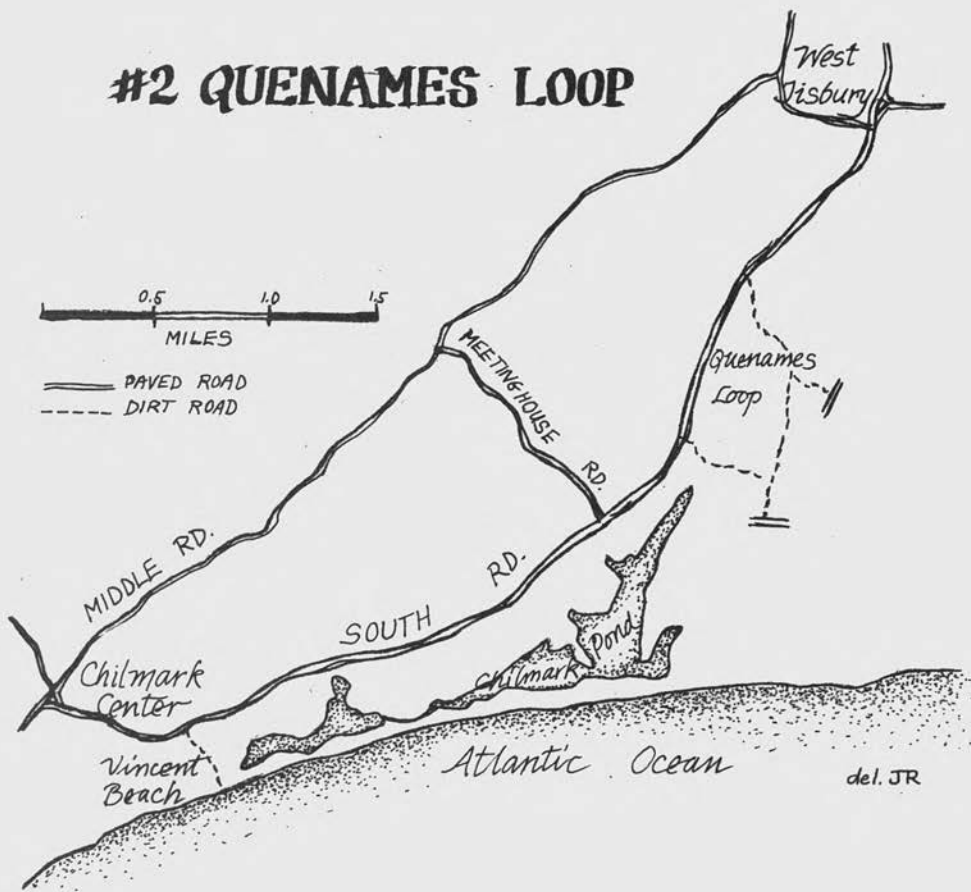
(A) Sengekontacket Pond. Most of this pond can be covered by car from the Edgartown-Oak Bluffs road. The best places for shore birds are the tidal flats around Sarson's Island. With a scope most of the standard shore birds are usually seen at one time or another during the summer, including Semi-palmated, Piping and Black-bellied Plovers; Ruddy Turnstones; Spotted, Least, Semi-palmated and Western Sandpipers; both yellowlegs, knots, Dunlins, dowitchers and Sanderlings. The island and the inlet are gathering places for large numbers of gulls and terns--Great Black-backed, Herring, Ring-billed and Laughing Gulls; and Common, Roseate and Least Terns, with Forster's and Black Terns in September. This is also a likely spot to find an Arctic Tern.

(B) Felix Neck Wildlife Sanctuary. The entrance to the Sanctuary is about 2 1/2 miles from the center of Edgartown on the Vineyard Haven Road. The sanctuary manager is Gus Ben David and the sanctuary is usually open daily from sunrise to sunset. There is a very attractive

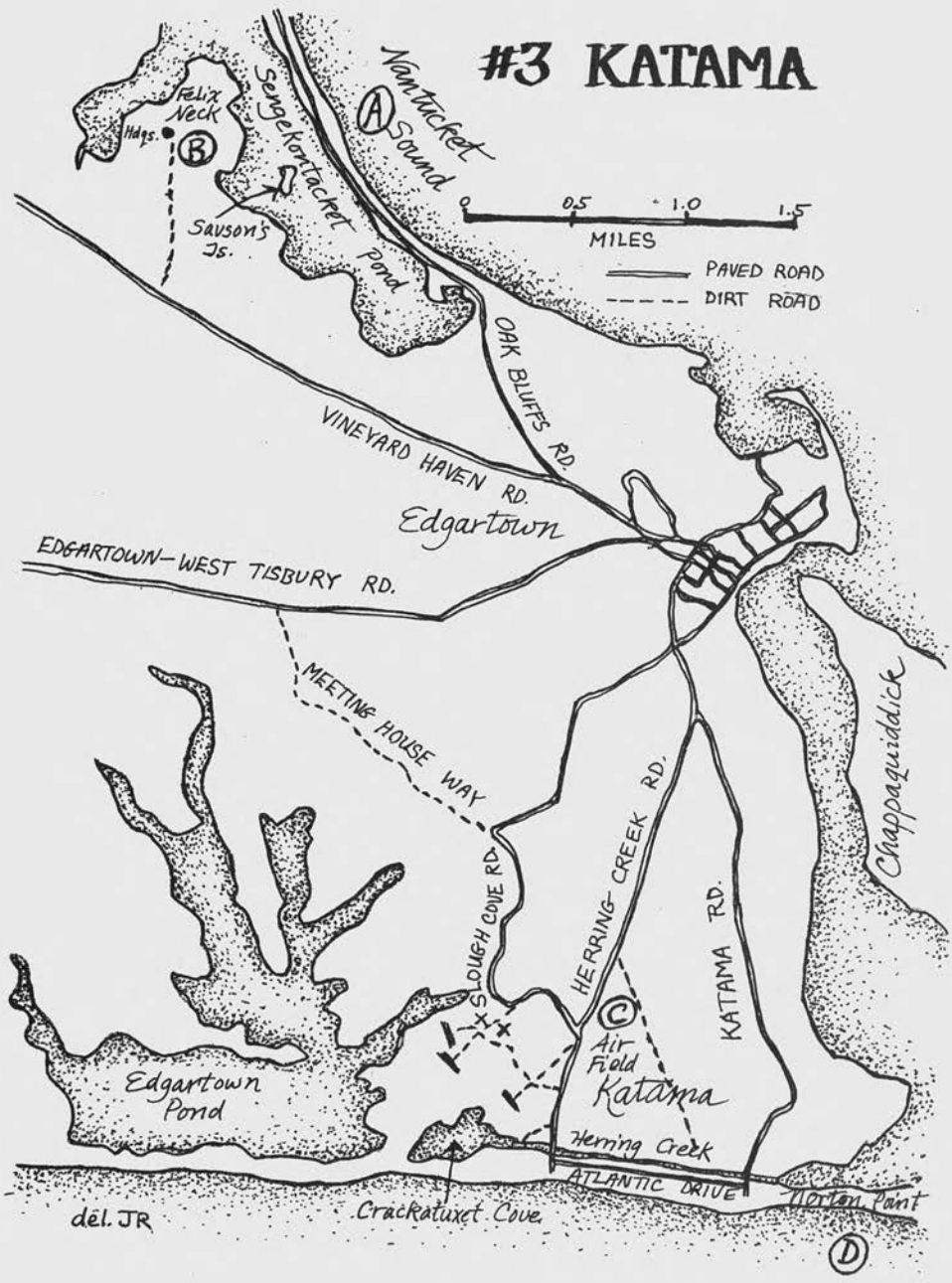
# #2 QUENAMES LOOP



— PAVED ROAD  
- - - DIRT ROAD



# #3 KATAMA



Felix Neck  
Hags. (B)

Savson's Js.

Sauglotacket Pond  
Nantucket Sound (A)

0.5 1.0 1.5  
MILES

PAVED ROAD  
DASHED ROAD

VINEYARD HAVEN RD.  
Edgartown

OAK BLUFFS RD.

EDGARTOWN-WEST TISBURY RD.

MEETING HOUSE WAY

Edgartown Pond

SLOUGH COVE RD.

HERRING CREEK RD.

(C)  
Air Field  
Katama

KATAMA RD.

Chappaquiddick

Herring Creek

ATLANTIC DRIVE

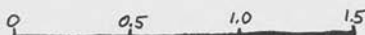
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Crackatuxet Cove

Norton Point

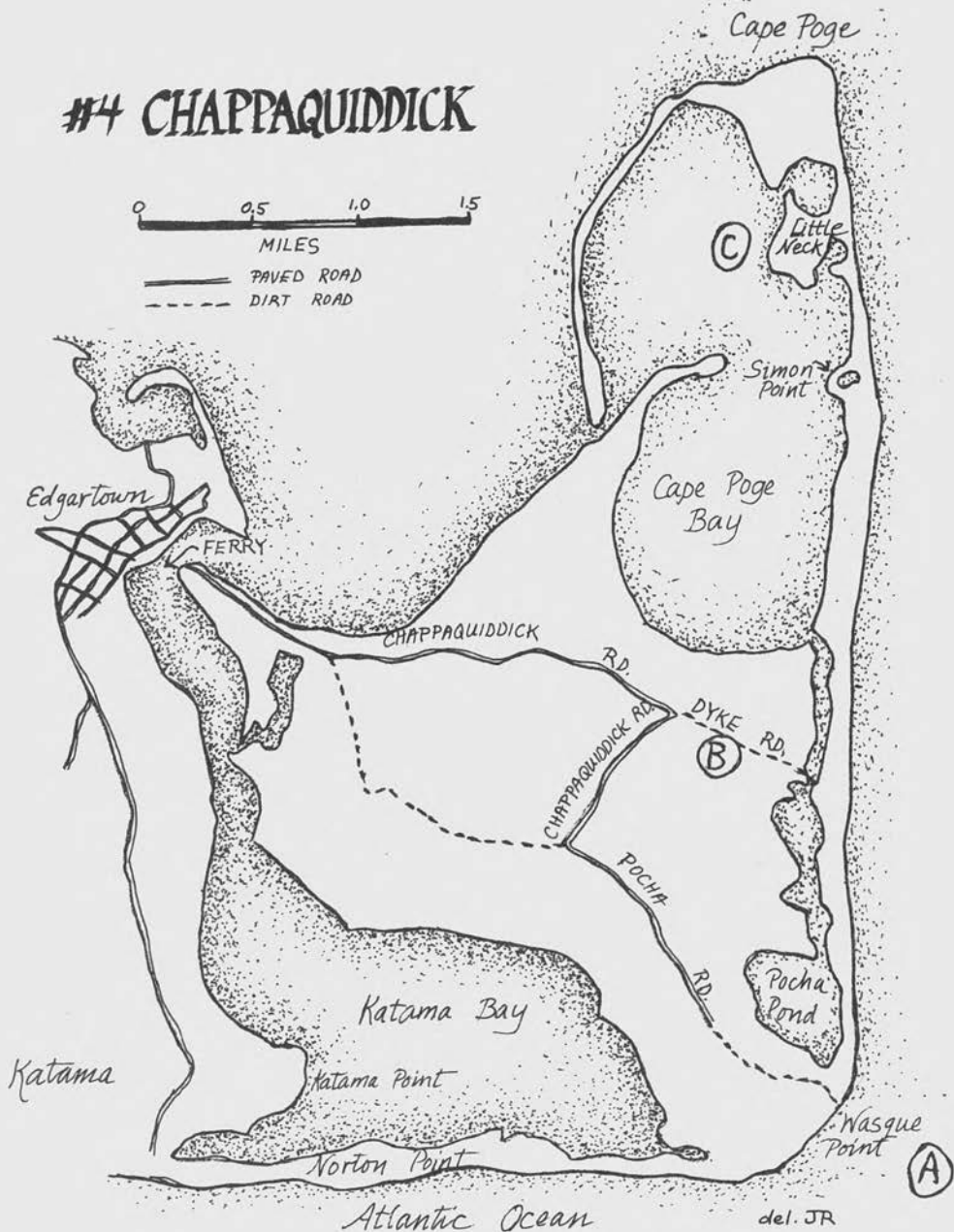
(D)

# #4 CHAPPAQUIDDICK



MILES

— PAVED ROAD  
- - - DIRT ROAD



shop at the sanctuary center as well as interesting exhibits and wild-life trails leading to the salt marshes surrounding Felix Neck. Of special interest is the waterfowl pond. This pond is populated by many species of ducks, some captive but many wild birds which have been attracted by the pinioned birds and the food which is liberally distributed. It is the best and by far the easiest way to add a Wood Duck to your island list as they fly in and out at will. There is a blind for convenient observation. There are many feeders around the headquarters buildings which attract a variety of song birds; an Osprey nesting pole is an added attraction.

(C) Katama Plains. The Katama Airfield runway, from the airport buildings south along Herring Creek Road, is where the Buff-breasted Sandpiper is usually first seen on the Vineyard in the first week of September. Continuing south and turning right on a dirt track just before Herring Creek permits access to the eastern end of Crackatuxet Cove--a fresh water pond which should produce a Great Blue Heron, Mute Swans, geese, Mallards, Black Ducks and teal as well as some shore birds and maybe a Pied-billed Grebe. Walking east along the north side of Herring Creek could put up a Short-eared Owl. Keep an eye open for Red-tailed and Rough-legged Hawks over the plains. Take Slough Cove Road and scope the fields indicated by "X" on the map. (Please do not walk in the fields.) There should be many Black-bellied Plover and Killdeer; this is the best place on the island for Upland Sandpiper. By the third week in August the Golden Plover should arrive.

(D) Norton Point. Norton Point forms the southern shore of Katama Bay and connects Chappaquiddick with the main part of the island (see also map 4). At the Katama end there are good flats at low tide for the usual gulls, terns and shore birds. (See species listed under Sengekontacket Pond.)

#### 4. CHAPPAQUIDDICK

A small island east of the Vineyard, Chappaquiddick is reached by a two-car ferry from Edgartown. The fare is nominal and ferries operate on demand during daylight hours.

(A) Wasque Point. The salt water pond at Wasque Point is good for shore birds--quality rather than quantity. This is an excellent spot for White-rumped and Pectoral Sandpipers. In the sand and dunes on the ocean side of the pond are Piping Plovers and Horned Larks together with nesting Least and Common Terns. At low tide there are extensive tidal flats in the eastern arm of Katama Bay--a good place for shore birds, gulls and terns. Look off Wasque Point for shearwaters and Gannets.

(B) Dyke Road. About 3/10 of a mile from the western end of Dyke Road, on the left, is Mytoi. This consists of a small pond landscaped to represent a Japanese garden and is a good stopping place for warblers and other small birds. Walk around the pond and in the pine woods behind the pond. After covering Mytoi, continue along Dyke Road by car to the bridge which will afford a good view of salt marshes in both directions. Herons, egrets, and possibly Whimbrels may be seen here. Look for Osprey along the edge of the woods.



(C) Little Neck. The road ends on the east side of Dyke Bridge and becomes a jeep track suitable only for 4-wheel drive. A good part of the area to Little Neck is owned by The Trustees of Reservations and a beach permit is required to drive the area. For those who have a permit or can get a ride, or are willing to tackle the 2 1/2 mile walk, the trip to Little Neck can be rewarding. The ponds at Simon Point and Little Neck generally produce Whimbrels, oystercatchers and Willets, all of which are difficult to find elsewhere on the island. The salt marsh at Little Neck is a good place for Sharp-tailed Sparrows and with luck you may flush a Yellow-crowned Night Heron from one of the small salt ponds.

#### PELAGIC BIRDING

Very little has been done in the way of regular ocean birding trips off the Vineyard. All three regular shearwaters are usually reported each year from shore sightings. In June of 1963, a nesting Manx Shearwater was reported at Penikese Island (just north of Cuttyhunk) and other sightings around the Vineyard have subsequently been reported. The Leach's Petrel also nests on Penikese and is irregularly reported off the Vineyard. The Parasitic Jaeger is regular but the other jaegers and Red and Northern Phalaropes are not. These birds are reported in large numbers off Cox's Ledge by pelagic trips made from Montauk but this ledge is really nearer the Vineyard than Montauk. Any reports of ocean trips would be very welcome.

#### WINTER BIRDING

The most exciting part of winter birding is the larger numbers and variety of species of waterfowl. In the summer, about all you can expect to see are Pied-billed Grebes, Mute Swans, geese, Black Ducks, Mallards, Blue-winged Teal, Wood Ducks, an occasional summering eider and an odd scoter. Last February, over a three-day weekend, we had 33 species of waterfowl. Enormous rafts of scoters feed off Wasque Point. Large rafts of eider were seen from the ferry as well as in Nantucket Sound off Oak Bluffs and in the ocean off Gay Head. For three of the last four years we have had Barrow's Goldeneye in February--twice off Katama Point in Katama Bay and last February off Sarson's Island in Sengekontacket Pond.

#### ACCIDENTAL SPECIES

If you do bird the Vineyard, I hope this article will make your trip more enjoyable. If you see any unusual species, I would greatly appreciate your advising me, giving me details of time and place and the observers involved. My address is 38 Prospect Avenue, Montclair, New Jersey 07042.

#### EDITOR'S NOTE:

The following references provide additional information on the birds of Martha's Vineyard:

1. Griscom, L. and G. Emerson, Birds of Martha's Vineyard (1959). Privately printed, Athoensen Press, Portland, Maine.
2. Keith, R., and E. L. Chalif, A Supplemental List of Martha's Vineyard Birds (1968). Sponsored by Massachusetts Audubon Society.
3. Sargent, R. M., Check-list: Birds of Martha's Vineyard. Revised 3-31-75 by the Vineyard Gazette.