

BIRDERS' CONDUCT: A PROBLEM AT PLUM ISLAND

Bird Observer received the following letter, dated November 29, 1979, from George W. Gavutis, Refuge Manager of the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge:

Dear... (Birders):

During recent months, we have noted a significant increase in violations of refuge regulations by birders. While we see birding as one of our most desirable public uses, we also recognize that violations by this group generally result in more significant and direct conflict with our primary responsibility of preserving wildlife and its habitat. While we more or less routinely write tickets for illegal parking and speeding (primarily by beach users and casual sightseers), we have often been more lenient and issued verbal warnings to birders for trespassing into closed areas and destroying vegetation by driving onto the newly-seeded road shoulders. The continuing abnormally mild weather on this past Thanksgiving weekend resulted in very heavy use and abuse of the refuge (more abuse than we noted from beach users all summer and fall in fact), despite the presence of a gateperson and two officers. Birders (many of them not local) outnumbered all other users much of the time and significantly contributed to our problems.

As a courtesy to your group and for whatever assistance you might provide in passing the word, I wish to advise that, effective immediately, I have instructed our law enforcement personnel to begin issuing citations for the aforementioned violations.

Particularly troublesome problems are:

1) Ignoring fences, "closed area" signs, and the "closed to foot travel" sign in the Stage Island field. This has resulted in reduced migratory waterfowl use of the field, pool, and ponds, and has served to drive wildlife into hunters on the State land south of the field and Stage Island Pool. When confronted, practically everyone says they didn't think or realize they were doing any harm.

2) Illegal parking on the newly-seeded road shoulders between Lot 7 and the State Park and elsewhere.

3) Illegal parking on the newly-seeded road shoulders adjacent to the "New Pines." This is an area covered by special birding permits and all parking should be on the road service during periods of low public use -- not on busy warm weekends. No parking lot is provided at this spot because of our shared concerns that greatly increased use and abuse of this area would result. Parking could be restricted to the Subheadquarters lot (¼ mile north) and eventually the new parking lot planned for the new headquarters. The present subheadquarters lot is very small and often filled with clammers. Many badly compacted and deeply eroded trails are developing in the Pines and yet we fear that installation of boardwalk might lead to even greater use and parking problems.

We would welcome any constructive comments or suggestions your group might have concerning these or any other subjects affecting the welfare of the refuge and its continued use by the public.

Permit for Birding:

1. On North and South Pool dikes within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile north and south of Cross Dike Tower as marked by signs. (July 15 - September 30)
2. For parking and birding within 100 yards of Subheadquarters building year-round.
3. Parallel parking on refuge road (not vegetated shoulders) adjacent to North Pool field for birding in The Pines - from Labor Day to Memorial Day during periods of low public use and when not constituting a traffic hazard.
4. Parking in Nelson's Island lot and walking for birding onto Nelson's Island. (July 15 - Sep. 30)

OUR CONTRIBUTORS

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WILLIAM E. DAVIS, JR., who resides in Foxborough, is an Associate Professor of Science in the College of Basic Studies at Boston University. A research associate of Manomet Bird Observatory, he has worked on the Clark's Island heron project and is currently studying bird vocalizations. His own illustrations accompany the article.

JACK M. GRUGAN majored in wildlife biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder. A resident of Boston, he is pursuing a career in law.

HAROLD F. MAYFIELD epitomizes the amateur ornithologist. His work established the affinity of Kirtland's Warbler for jack-pine country in lower Michigan and led to preservation of this limited habitat. Through continuing census efforts, Mayfield has documented the fortunes of this rare species, which is one of very few in North America whose total population can be said to be exactly known.

ALISON WEBBER resides in Weston and is employed by a graphics firm in Boston. Bird Observer is pleased to be the first publication to present her work.