

PARKER RIVER NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The refuge is located 35 miles north of Boston, Massachusetts on Plum Island, which lies 3 miles east of Newburyport. The refuge encompasses the southern 2/3 of Plum Island. Headquarters is located separately, next to the lighthouse, on the inhabited northernmost tip of the island.



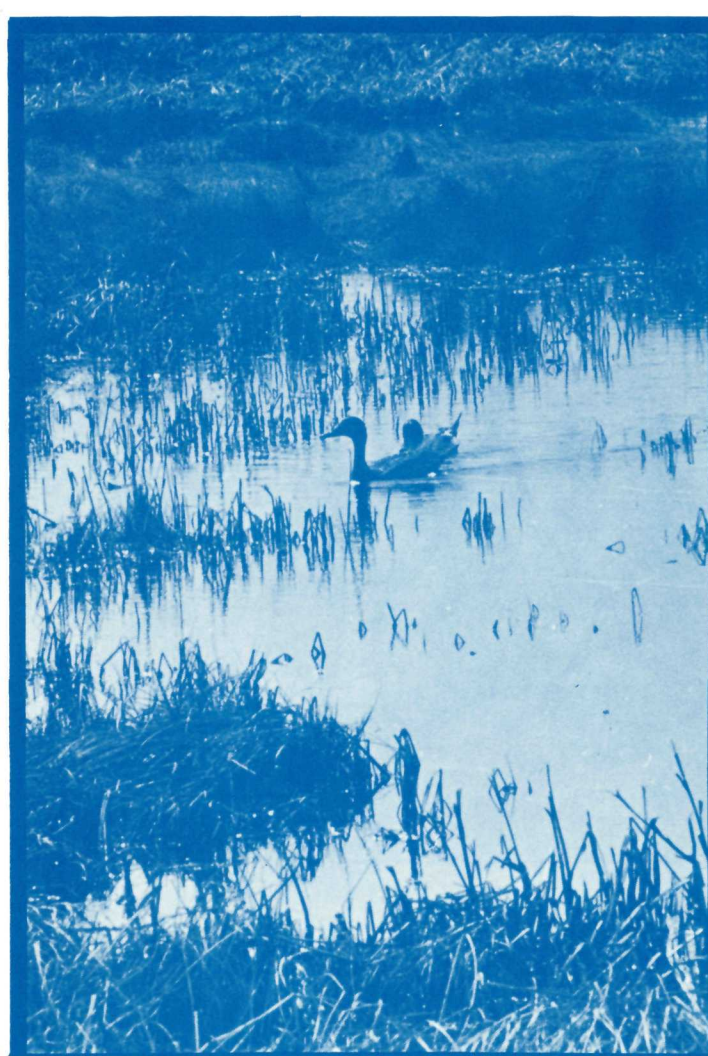
HISTORY—Plum Island was discovered by Champlain in 1601 and mapped by Captain John Smith in 1616. Smith reported many large shell heaps which attested to long use by Indians. Indians resided in Essex County and the presence of flint arrowheads and other artifacts in the upland fields and the marsh edges further indicated the island's popularity with the coastal Massachusetts Indians. All artifacts are protected by the "Antiquities Act" of 1906 and may not be removed from the refuge.

The first actual historical mention of Plum Island was on March 2, 1639, when Ipswich formally claimed it and issued a permit to keep "fourscore" of hogs on the island. Eventually, it was divided among the towns of Ipswich, Rowley, and Newbury, and later on with Newburyport.

Uncontrolled grazing of hogs, cattle and horses did much damage to vegetation and was declared illegal in 1739. Saltmarsh hay was the big industry for 200 years, but gave way to waterfowl market hunting camps in the mid-1800's. The remains of two major shipwrecks from the late 1800's and early 1900's can often be seen at low tide. Two farms, hayfields, an apple orchard, a hotel, and 58 summer camps have existed on what is now Parker River National Wildlife Refuge.

In the early 1930's, the Massachusetts Audubon Society acquired 1,600 acres as a bird sanctuary. That plus an additional 3,050 acres was acquired to establish the 4,650-acre Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in 1942. Fire control, planting, and limitations on foot and vehicle travel have helped to stabilize many of the dunes by promoting the return of natural vegetation such as beach plum, bayberry, and dune grass. Conditions of early land misuse have now begun to heal.

HABITAT AND MANAGEMENT—The refuge portion of Plum Island is one of the few natural barrier beach-dune complexes left in the northeastern U. S. The six miles of wild ocean beach and sand dunes is for the most part heavily vegetated with dune grass, false heather, beach plum, wild cherry, bayberry, rose, willows, aspen, and pine.



Small glacial drumlin deposits of rock and clay occur in four locations and provide a habitat contrasting sharply with the barrier beach type.

Normal tides average 8 feet, with bimonthly tides of over 11 feet flooding the salt marshes up to the base of the dunes.

Saltmarsh hay is sold at a nominal fee to local farmers who cut, bale, and market it for mulch and packing material. The mowed salt marshes are favored feeding and resting areas for waterfowl and multitudes of shorebirds.



UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF THE INTERIOR

U.S. FISH
AND
WILDLIFE SERVICE

As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department of the Interior has responsibility for most of our nationally owned public lands and natural resources. This includes fostering the wisest use of our land and water resources, protecting our fish and wildlife, preserving the environmental and cultural values of our national parks and historical places, and providing for the enjoyment of life through outdoor recreation. The Department assesses our energy and mineral resources and works to assure that their development is in the best interests of all our people. The Department also has a major responsibility for American Indian reservation communities and for people who live in island territories under U.S. administration.



For more information contact:

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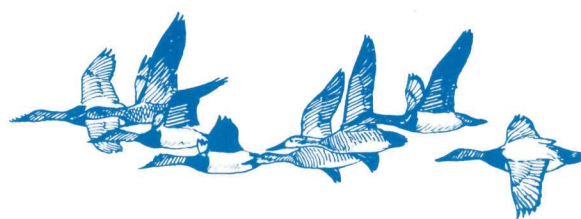
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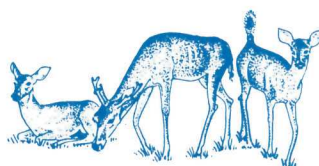
Two miles of man-made dikes have created 262 acres of fresh-water marsh in three major pools. Natural waterfowl foods produced in these pools differ greatly from the food available in the saline tidal marsh, thus attracting a greater variety of water birds and wildlife.



Over 80 acres of mowed grass pasture is used heavily by geese, rabbits, and an occasional deer. Canada geese may be viewed at close range on these fields.



BIRDS—The refuge is one of over 365 national wildlife refuges totaling 32 million acres. Parker River Refuge serves as a valuable salt marsh feeding and resting area for migratory waterfowl in the Atlantic Flyway. Peak concentrations of up to 25,000 ducks and over 6,000 Canada geese occur during spring and fall migrations. Most abundant are the black duck and green-winged teal, with the mallard, pintail, wigeon, blue-winged teal, bufflehead, and scaup occurring in smaller numbers. Canada geese, blue and green-winged teal, mallards, black ducks, pheasants, and many other birds nest on the refuge. Warbler and shorebird migrations are of major interest to birders. A list of over 270 species of birds seen on the refuge is available at the "information stop" or at refuge headquarters.



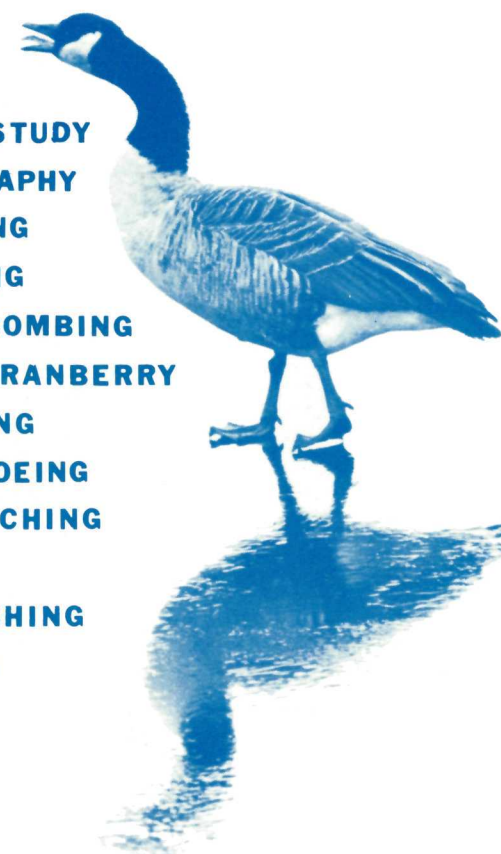
MAMMALS—Rabbits, foxes, skunks, weasels, muskrats, seals, woodchucks and deer are the mammals most easily observed. A complete listing of all mammals and their habitats is available.

REPTILES AND AMPHIBIANS—A number of interesting species of turtles, snakes (no poisonous snakes have been recorded), salamanders, toads, and frogs occur on the refuge. A complete listing is available.

Parker River

National
Wildlife
Refuge

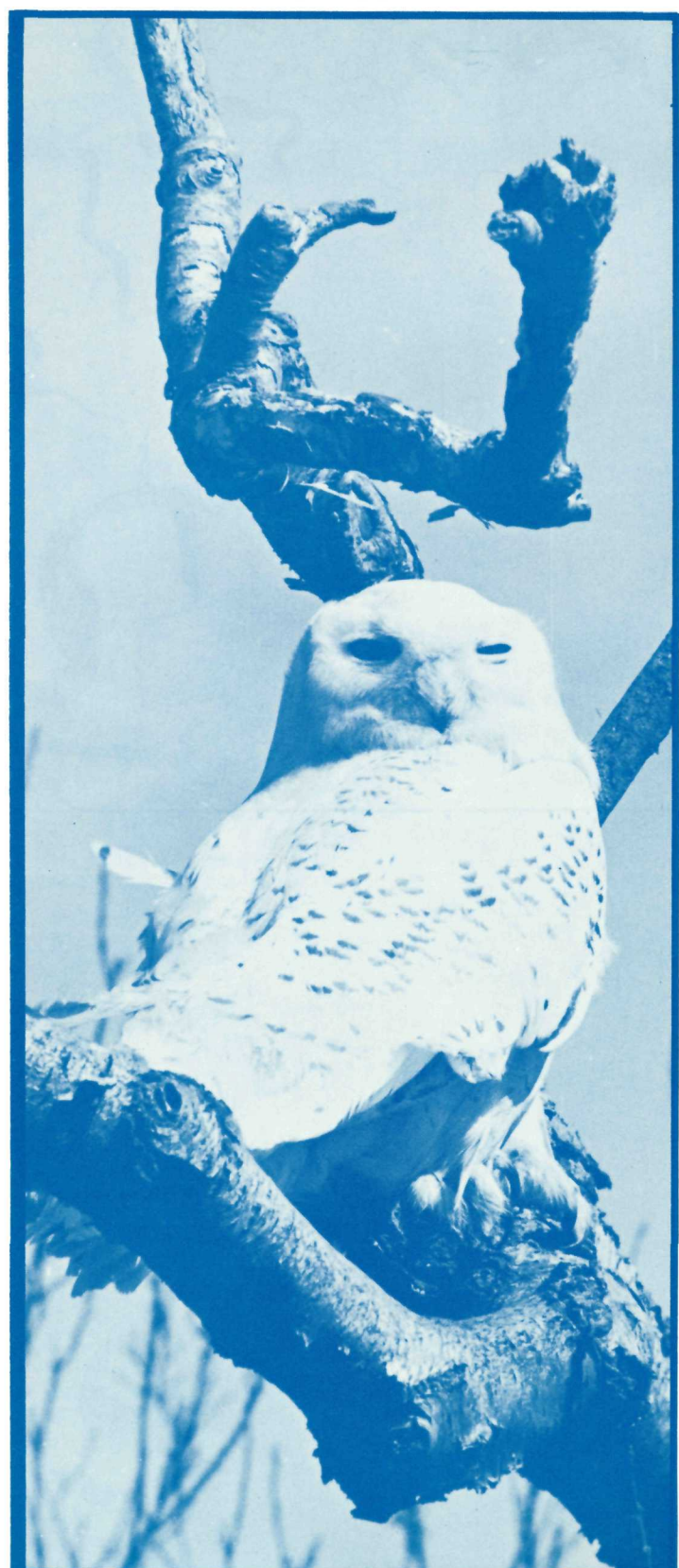
NATURE STUDY
PHOTOGRAPHY
CLAMMING
BICYCLING
BEACH-COMBING
PLUM & CRANBERRY
PICKING
SNOWSHOEING
BIRDWATCHING
HIKING
SURF FISHING
HUNTING
BOATING



PLUM ISLAND
MASSACHUSETTS

GUIDE TO SEASONAL REFUGE EVENTS

Woodchucks emerging from winter hibernation, and cock pheasants crowing and strutting (March-April)
Northbound waterfowl migrating and courting (March-April)
Waterfowl beginning nesting (mid April – late June)
Annual Plum Island clean-up; all volunteers welcome (last Sunday in April)
Northbound shorebirds and wading birds (April-June)
Warblers migrating (early May)
Muskrats, skunks, rabbits, and deer with young (May)
Parker River Environmental Training for Teachers (May)
Night fishing with permits begins (May 1)
Striped bass migrating in from southern waters (mid May)
False heather, wild roses, and honeysuckle flowering (mid May)
First goose broods (mid May)
Massive public visitation on refuge beach often requires refuge closure to prevent overcrowding (May-September)
Duck broods (early June – late July)
Red fox kits often seen on roads at dawn and dusk (June-July)
Mosquitoes (June-August)
Purple loosestrife flowering (late June-August)
Greenhead flies (July-August)
Southbound shorebird flights (late July–September)
Warblers migrating (August)
Egret concentrations (August-September)
Swallows flocking (late August-September)
Plum and cranberry-picking season (August 25-October 31)
Licensed retriever field trials (September)
Mourning doves abundant; green-winged and blue-winged teal and monarch butterflies southward bound (September)
Salt marsh fall color changes, striped bass and hawk southward migrations (October)
Night fishing ends (October 15)
Southward bound Canada geese and other waterfowl (mid October-December)
Youth Waterfowl Hunter Training Program (October)
Waterfowl hunting seasons (October-January)
Marshes freeze over (December-February)
Winter songbirds (December-February)
Snowy owls, rough-legged hawks, diving ducks, sea ducks (January-February)
Heavy snowstorms often block refuge roads for extended periods (mid December – mid March)





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Newburyport, Massachusetts

