

Parker River

National Wildlife Refuge Birds



A Refuge for Birds

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1942 to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitat for migratory birds. Located along the Atlantic Flyway on the Massachusetts coast, the Refuge is of special significance to waterfowl and shorebirds, including the federally threatened piping plover. Consisting of 4,662 acres (1,883 hectares) of diverse wetland and upland habitats, the Refuge also supports a great variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and other wildlife.



Northern Harrier
©J. Haydock

Trails and Other Facilities Provide Excellent Viewing, Several Wheelchair Accessible

Parker River Refuge is accessible by motor vehicle and foot over mostly gentle terrain. Several miles of foot trails meander through dune, shrub/thicket, freshwater marsh, and other Refuge habitats. Observation towers and platforms afford commanding views of the Refuge and surrounding lands and waters. A 6.3 mile (10.1 kilometer) roadway runs the length of the Refuge and provides several pull-offs. For your safety, roadside parking is prohibited and the 25 mph (40 kmph) speed limit is strictly enforced.

Wheelchair accessible birding sites include the Salt Pannes Wildlife Observation Area, the North Pool Overlook, the 0.3 mile (0.5 kilometer) Pines Trail, and the observation platforms overlooking the beach and ocean at parking lots 1 and 7.

Birding Best in Spring, Summer, and Fall

Parker River Refuge is noted as one of the finest birding areas in the nation with more than 300 species recorded. While any season can produce a memorable visit, spring, summer, and fall offer the best birdwatching opportunities. Each season's highlights are described below.

Spring (March - May)

Piping plovers first return in March to nest on the ocean beach.¹ Purple martins begin to arrive in mid-April and are most easily observed from parking lots 1 and 4 at provided compartment houses. Raptor migration is best in April and early May with prime viewing available in parking lot 1. Top single-day flights of American kestrel, sharp-shinned hawk, and other species consist of several hundred birds. Peak migratory bird diversity occurs during the latter half of May. At this

¹ Each year the Refuge beach is closed to all public entry April 1 to mid-late August to provide undisturbed nesting habitat for the piping plover. Sections of the beach not being used by nesting birds may be reopened beginning July 1.

time a day's tally may result in one hundred or more species. Major waves of passerines, especially warblers, vireos, thrushes, and flycatchers, are the main attraction. Hellcat Wildlife Observation Area and the Pines Trail are popular viewing sites.

*Summer
(June - August)*

Good birding continues into early June with passerine migration still in progress. By early July, southbound shorebird migrants begin to arrive with numbers peaking in August. Viewing is normally best at the Salt Pannes Wildlife Observation Area at high tide and Stage Island, Bill Forward, and North Pools when water levels are low. Beginning in mid-August, large numbers of herons during some years congregate at Bill Forward Pool and other Refuge roost sites. In even greater concentrations, migrating tree swallows can be observed in marsh, beach, and other open habitats. Also at this time, warblers, vireos, and other fall passerine migrants become apparent.



*American Goldfinch
©J. Haydock*

*Fall
(September -
November)*

Passerine migration continues into early September and shorebird diversity is at its height. Peregrine falcons occur most regularly from mid-September through November. During October, sizeable numbers of yellow-rumped warblers can be found in Refuge thickets. In October and November, dabbling ducks dominate at the freshwater pools, complemented here and in deeper water areas by a diversity of divers. Mid-October through November is best for viewing northern gannets with strong onshore ocean winds most favorable.

*Winter
(December -
February)*

Emerson Rocks (parking lot 7) attracts wintering loons, grebes, and sea ducks including common eider, white-winged scoter, and oldsquaw. Also at this tidal area, purple sandpipers can sometimes be observed on exposed rocks. Two winter specialties are snowy owl and rough-legged hawk, found most commonly in Refuge grasslands and other open habitats. Northern shrike, another winter feature, is most frequently located in roadside trees and shrubs.

Please remain an unobtrusive observer by viewing birds and other wildlife from an appropriate distance and staying within designated public use areas.

**Arrive Early
to Avoid
Disappointment**

During the warmer months, the Refuge sometimes fills to capacity and is subsequently closed for several hours. Arriving early may help you avoid this inconvenience.

Checklist Provides Seasonal Probabilities of Seeing Individual Species

This checklist provides information on the likelihood of seeing individual bird species through the seasons. This likelihood is based on the species' observability and is dependent upon many factors including its size, color, behavior, habitat preference, habitat conditions, relative abundance, and frequency of occurrence.

Prepared in accordance with the Seventh Edition of "The American Ornithologists' Union Check-list of North American Birds," this brochure lists 305 species which have been observed on or from the Plum Island section of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. It also includes two separate lists of birds of extremely rare occurrence.

Seasons

Sp Spring March - May
Su Summer June - August
F Fall September - November
W Winter December - February

Sighting Likelihood

5 very good to excellent
 4 good to very good
 3 fair to good
 2 poor to fair
 1 very poor to poor

The probability of seeing a bird may vary within a season. The value assigned to each bird in this checklist represents the highest value that generally occurs within that season.



Black-crowned Night-Heron
 ©J. Haydock

For specific information on Massachusetts birds concerning such factors as seasonal abundance, habitat preference, and early and late seasonal dates, refer to "Birds of Massachusetts" by Richard R. Veit and Wayne R. Peterson, and the "Birds of Essex County Massachusetts - a Field List," published by the Essex County Ornithological Club of Massachusetts in association with Essex County Greenbelt Association and the Peabody Essex Museum.

Additional Symbols

* represents a species known or suspected to nest on the Refuge

bold indicates a federally listed threatened or endangered species

Song sparrow
 © J. Haydock



LOONS - GREBES

	Sp	Su	F	W
___ Red-throated Loon _____	3	-	4	2
___ Common Loon _____	4	2	4	4
___ * Pied-billed Grebe _____	2	2	2	1
___ Horned Grebe _____	4	-	3	4
___ Red-necked Grebe _____	2	-	2	2

SHEARWATERS - STORM-PETRELS

___ Northern Fulmar _____	1	1	1	1
___ Greater Shearwater _____	1	1	1	1
___ Sooty Shearwater _____	1	1	1	-
___ Manx Shearwater _____	1	1	1	-
___ Wilson's Storm-Petrel _____	1	1	1	-
___ Leach's Storm-Petrel _____	1	1	1	-

GANNETS - PELICANS - CORMORANTS

___ Northern Gannet _____	3	1	4	3
___ Great Cormorant _____	2	-	2	2
___ Double-crested Cormorant _____	5	5	5	2

	Sp	Su	F	W
BITTERNS – HERONS – IBISES				
American Bittern	2	-	2	2
* Least Bittern	2	2	1	-
Great Blue Heron	4	5	5	2
Great Egret	5	5	5	-
Snowy Egret	5	5	5	-
Little Blue Heron	2	2	2	1
Tricolored Heron	2	2	2	1
Cattle Egret	1	1	1	-
* Green Heron	3	3	2	-
* Black-crowned Night-Heron	2	2	2	1
Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	1	1	1	-
Glossy Ibis	3	3	2	1

SWANS – GEESE – DUCKS

Tundra Swan	1	-	1	1
* Mute Swan	3	3	3	2
Whooper Swan	3	3	3	2
Snow Goose	2	1	3	3
Brant	3	1	3	1
* Canada Goose	5	5	5	5
* Wood Duck	2	2	2	-
* Green-winged Teal	5	3	5	2
* American Black Duck	5	4	5	5
* Mallard	4	4	4	4
* Northern Pintail	3	2	4	3
* Blue-winged Teal	2	4	3	-
* Northern Shoveler	2	1	2	1
* Gadwall	3	3	3	2
Eurasian Wigeon	1	1	1	1
American Wigeon	2	2	3	2
Canvasback	1	-	1	1
Redhead	1	-	1	1
Ring-necked Duck	2	1	2	1
Greater Scaup	2	-	2	2
Lesser Scaup	1	-	1	1
Common Eider	4	2	4	4
King Eider	1	-	1	1
Harlequin Duck	1	-	1	1
Oldsquaw	3	-	3	3
Black Scoter	3	2	3	2
Surf Scoter	3	2	3	2
White-winged Scoter	4	2	4	4
Common Goldeneye	4	-	3	4
Barrow's Goldeneye	1	-	-	1
Bufflehead	4	-	4	4
Hooded Merganser	2	-	2	2
Common Merganser	2	-	2	2
Red-breasted Merganser	3	2	3	3
* Ruddy Duck	1	1	2	1

VULTURES - HAWKS - FALCONS

	Sp	Su	F	W
Turkey Vulture	2	1	2	1
* Osprey	3	3	3	-
Bald Eagle	1	1	1	1
Northern Harrier	4	3	4	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk	4	-	3	2
Cooper's Hawk	2	1	2	1
Northern Goshawk	1	-	1	1
Red-shouldered Hawk	1	-	1	-
Broad-winged Hawk	1	-	1	-
Red-tailed Hawk	3	2	2	2
Rough-legged Hawk	3	-	3	3
Golden Eagle	1	1	1	1
* American Kestrel	4	3	3	3
Merlin	3	1	3	1
Peregrine Falcon	3	1	3	1
Gyr Falcon	1	-	1	1

GROUSE – QUAIL – TURKEYS

* Ring-necked Pheasant	1	1	1	1
Wild Turkey	1	1	1	1

RAILS – CRANES

* Clapper Rail	2	2	2	-
* King Rail	2	2	2	-
* Virginia Rail	2	2	2	-
* Sora	2	2	2	-
* Common Moorhen	1	1	2	1
* American Coot	1	1	2	2

PLOVERS – SANDPIPERS

Black-bellied Plover	3	4	4	2
American Golden-Plover	1	2	2	-
Semipalmated Plover	3	5	4	-
* Piping Plover	2	2	1	-
* Killdeer	4	4	3	1
American Oystercatcher	1	-	-	-
Black-necked Stilt	1	1	-	-
American Avocet	-	1	1	1
Greater Yellowlegs	4	5	5	1
Lesser Yellowlegs	4	5	5	-
Solitary Sandpiper	2	2	2	-
* Willet	4	4	2	-
* Spotted Sandpiper	3	3	3	-
Upland Sandpiper	2	2	2	-
Whimbrel	2	2	2	-
Hudsonian Godwit	-	2	2	-
Marbled Godwit	-	1	1	-
Ruddy Turnstone	2	3	2	1
Red Knot	2	3	3	1
Sanderling	3	4	4	3

	Sp	Su	F	W
Semipalmated Sandpiper	4	5	5	-
Western Sandpiper	-	2	2	-
Least Sandpiper	4	5	4	-
White-rumped Sandpiper	3	3	3	-
Baird's Sandpiper	-	2	2	-
Pectoral Sandpiper	2	3	3	-
Purple Sandpiper	2	-	2	2
Dunlin	2	1	4	3
Stilt Sandpiper	1	3	3	-
Buff-breasted Sandpiper	-	2	2	-
Ruff	1	1	1	-
Short-billed Dowitcher	3	4	3	-
Long-billed Dowitcher	-	3	3	1
Common Snipe	2	1	2	1
* American Woodcock	2	2	2	1
* Wilson's Phalarope	2	3	3	-
Red-necked Phalarope	1	2	2	-
Red Phalarope	1	1	1	-

JAEGERS – GULLS – TERNS – AUKS

Pomarine Jaeger	-	1	1	-
Parasitic Jaeger	-	1	1	-
Laughing Gull	2	2	2	-
Little Gull	2	1	2	1
Black-headed Gull	1	1	1	2
Bonaparte's Gull	2	3	2	2
Ring-billed Gull	3	4	4	2
* Herring Gull	5	5	5	5
Iceland Gull	2	-	2	2
Glaucous Gull	2	-	2	2
Great Black-backed Gull	5	5	5	5
Black-legged Kittiwake	1	-	1	1
Gull-billed Tern	1	1	1	-
Caspian Tern	2	1	2	-
Royal Tern	-	2	1	-
Roseate Tern	2	2	2	-
* Common Tern	4	4	2	-
Arctic Tern	-	1	-	-
* Forster's Tern	-	2	2	-
* Least Tern	3	3	2	-
Black Tern	2	2	2	-
Black Skimmer	-	1	1	-
Dovekie	-	-	1	1
Thick-billed Murre	1	-	1	2
Razorbill	1	-	1	1
Black Guillemot	1	-	1	1

DOVES – CUCKOOS – OWLS – SWIFTS – HUMMINGBIRDS

* Rock Dove	2	2	2	2
* Mourning Dove	4	5	3	2
Black-billed Cuckoo	2	2	2	-

	Sp	Su	F	W
Yellow-billed Cuckoo	2	2	2	-
Eastern Screech-Owl	1	1	1	1
* Great Horned Owl	1	1	1	1
Snowy Owl	2	-	2	3
Long-eared Owl	1	-	1	1
Short-eared Owl	2	-	2	2
Northern Saw-whet Owl	1	-	1	1
Common Nighthawk	1	2	2	-
Whip-poor-will	1	1	1	-
Chimney Swift	3	3	3	-
* Ruby-throated Hummingbird	2	2	2	-
* Belted Kingfisher	3	3	3	2

WOODPECKERS – FLYCATCHERS

Red-headed Woodpecker	1	-	1	-
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	2	-	2	-
* Downy Woodpecker	3	3	3	3
Hairy Woodpecker	1	1	1	1
Northern Flicker	4	1	3	1
Olive-sided Flycatcher	1	1	1	-
Eastern Wood-Pewee	2	2	2	-
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	2	2	2	-
Acadian Flycatcher	1	1	-	-
Alder Flycatcher	2	2	2	-
* Willow Flycatcher	3	3	2	-
Least Flycatcher	2	1	1	-
Eastern Phoebe	3	3	3	-
* Great Crested Flycatcher	2	2	2	-
Western Kingbird	-	-	1	-
* Eastern Kingbird	5	5	3	-

LARKS – SWALLOWS – JAYS – CROWS

* Horned Lark	2	1	2	3
* Purple Martin	5	5	1	-
* Tree Swallow	5	5	5	-
* Northern Rough-winged Swallow	2	2	2	-
* Bank Swallow	3	3	3	-
* Cliff Swallow	1	1	1	-
* Barn Swallow	4	4	4	1
* Blue Jay	2	1	2	1
* American Crow	5	5	5	5
Fish Crow	1	1	1	1

TITMICE – NUTHATCHES – WRENS

* Black-capped Chickadee	3	3	3	3
Boreal Chickadee	1	-	1	1
Tufted Titmouse	1	1	1	1
Red-breasted Nuthatch	2	2	2	1
White-breasted Nuthatch	1	1	1	1
Brown Creeper	2	1	2	1
* House Wren	1	1	1	-

	Sp	Su	F	W
Winter Wren _____	2	1	2	-
* Marsh Wren _____	4	4	3	-

KINGLETS – THRUSHES – THRASHERS

Golden-crowned Kinglet _____	2	-	3	1
Ruby-crowned Kinglet _____	3	-	3	1
Blue-gray Gnatcatcher _____	2	2	2	-
Eastern Bluebird _____	1	-	1	-
* Veery _____	2	2	2	-
Gray-cheeked Thrush ¹ _____	1	1	1	-
Bicknell's Thrush ¹ _____	1	1	1	-
Swainson's Thrush _____	2	2	2	-
Hermit Thrush _____	3	-	3	1
Wood Thrush _____	2	1	2	-
* American Robin _____	5	5	5	2
* Gray Catbird _____	5	5	5	1
* Northern Mockingbird _____	4	4	4	2
* Brown Thrasher _____	4	4	3	-

WAXWINGS – SHRIKES – STARLINGS

American Pipit _____	2	-	2	1
Bohemian Waxwing _____	1	-	1	1
* Cedar Waxwing _____	2	4	3	2
Northern Shrike _____	2	-	2	2
Loggerhead Shrike _____	1	1	1	-
* European Starling _____	5	5	5	5

VIREOS – WOOD WARBLERS

White-eyed Vireo _____	1	-	1	-
Blue-headed Vireo _____	3	1	3	1
Yellow-throated Vireo _____	1	1	1	-
Warbling Vireo _____	1	1	1	-
Philadelphia Vireo _____	1	2	2	-
* Red-eyed Vireo _____	3	2	3	-
Blue-winged Warbler _____	2	1	1	-
Golden-winged Warbler _____	1	1	1	-
Tennessee Warbler _____	2	2	2	-
Orange-crowned Warbler _____	1	-	2	-
Nashville Warbler _____	2	2	2	-
Northern Parula _____	4	2	3	-
* Yellow Warbler _____	5	5	2	-
Chestnut-sided Warbler _____	3	2	2	-
Magnolia Warbler _____	3	2	3	-
Cape May Warbler _____	2	2	2	-
Black-throated Blue Warbler _____	3	2	3	-
Yellow-rumped Warbler _____	4	1	5	3
Black-throated Green Warbler _____	3	2	3	-
Blackburnian Warbler _____	3	2	2	-

¹ Precise data not available due to difficulty in differentiating these two species in the field.

	Sp	Su	F	W
Pine Warbler _____	2	1	2	1
Prairie Warbler _____	2	2	2	-
Palm Warbler _____	3	-	3	1
Bay-breasted Warbler _____	3	3	3	-
Blackpoll Warbler _____	3	2	3	-
Cerulean Warbler _____	1	1	1	-
Black-and-white Warbler _____	4	3	3	-
* American Redstart _____	5	4	3	-
Prothonotary Warbler _____	1	1	1	-
Worm-eating Warbler _____	1	1	1	-
Ovenbird _____	3	2	2	-
Northern Waterthrush _____	3	2	2	-
Connecticut Warbler _____	-	-	1	-
Mourning Warbler _____	2	2	2	-
* Common Yellowthroat _____	4	4	3	1
Hooded Warbler _____	1	1	1	-
Wilson's Warbler _____	3	3	3	-
Canada Warbler _____	3	3	3	-
Yellow-breasted Chat _____	1	1	1	-

TANAGERS – SPARROWS

Summer Tanager _____	1	1	1	-
Scarlet Tanager _____	3	2	2	-
* Northern Cardinal _____	3	3	2	2
Rose-breasted Grosbeak _____	3	2	2	-
Blue Grosbeak _____	1	-	1	-
Indigo Bunting _____	2	1	2	-
Dickcissel _____	1	1	1	1
Eastern Towhee _____	4	4	3	1
American Tree Sparrow _____	3	-	4	4
Chipping Sparrow _____	3	2	3	-
Clay-colored Sparrow _____	1	1	2	-
* Field Sparrow _____	3	3	2	-
* Vesper Sparrow _____	1	-	1	-
Lark Sparrow _____	-	-	1	-
Lark Bunting _____	1	1	1	-
* Savannah Sparrow _____	3	3	4	2
* Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow ¹ _____	3	3	3	-
Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow ¹ _____	3	1	3	1
* Seaside Sparrow _____	2	2	2	1
Fox Sparrow _____	2	-	2	1
* Song Sparrow _____	5	5	5	2
Lincoln's Sparrow _____	2	1	2	-
* Swamp Sparrow _____	2	1	2	1
White-throated Sparrow _____	3	1	3	2
White-crowned Sparrow _____	2	-	2	-
Dark-eyed Junco _____	3	-	4	2
Lapland Longspur _____	2	-	3	2
Snow Bunting _____	3	-	4	3

¹ Precise data not available due to the recent taxonomic "splitting" of the sharp-tailed sparrow.

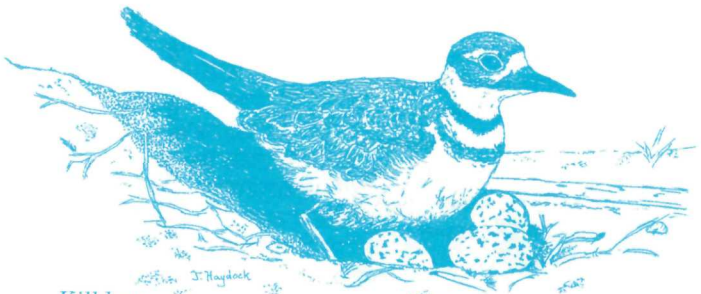
BLACKBIRDS – FINCHES

_____	* Bobolink _____	4	4	2	-
_____	* Red-winged Blackbird _____	5	5	2	2
_____	* Eastern Meadowlark _____	2	-	2	1
_____	Yellow-headed Blackbird _____	1	1	1	-
_____	Rusty Blackbird _____	2	-	2	-
_____	* Common Grackle _____	5	5	2	2
_____	* Brown-headed Cowbird _____	4	4	2	-
_____	* Orchard Oriole _____	2	2	-	-
_____	* Baltimore Oriole _____	3	3	2	-
_____	Pine Grosbeak _____	1	1	1	1
_____	* Purple Finch _____	3	3	2	1
_____	* House Finch _____	3	3	3	2
_____	Red Crossbill _____	1	-	1	1
_____	White-winged Crossbill _____	1	-	1	1
_____	Common Redpoll _____	1	-	1	1
_____	Pine Siskin _____	1	-	1	1
_____	* American Goldfinch _____	5	5	2	2
_____	Evening Grosbeak _____	1	-	1	1
_____	* House Sparrow _____	5	5	2	2

REFUGE VISITORS

The following is a list of resident or migratory bird species of eastern Massachusetts that are of extremely rare Refuge occurrence.

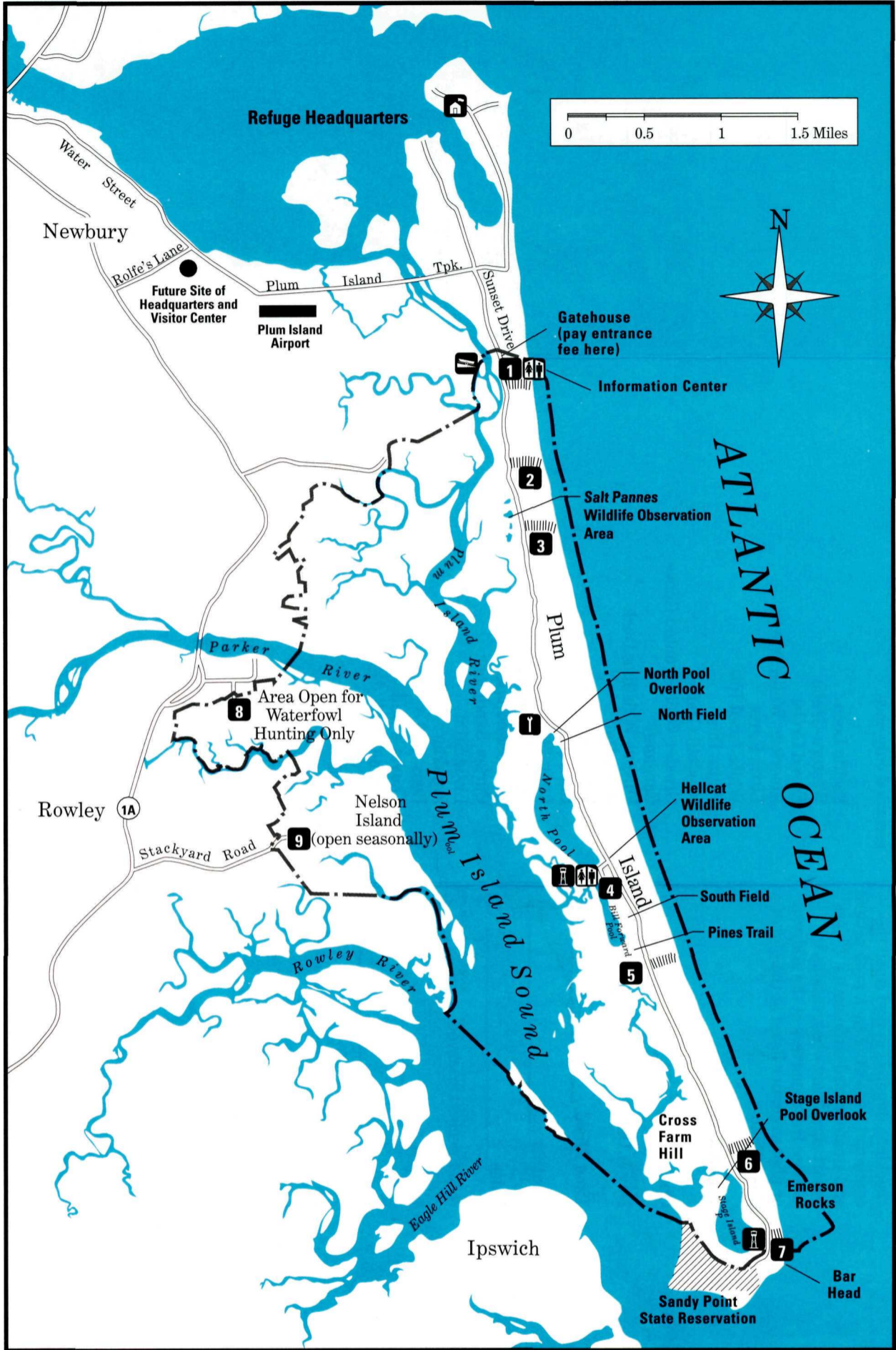
Cory's Shearwater
 Ruffed Grouse
 Yellow Rail
 Long-tailed Jaeger
 Common Murre
 Atlantic Puffin
 Barn Owl
 Common Raven
 Carolina Wren
 Sedge Wren
 Grasshopper Sparrow
 Henslow's Sparrow



Killdeer
 ©J. Haydock

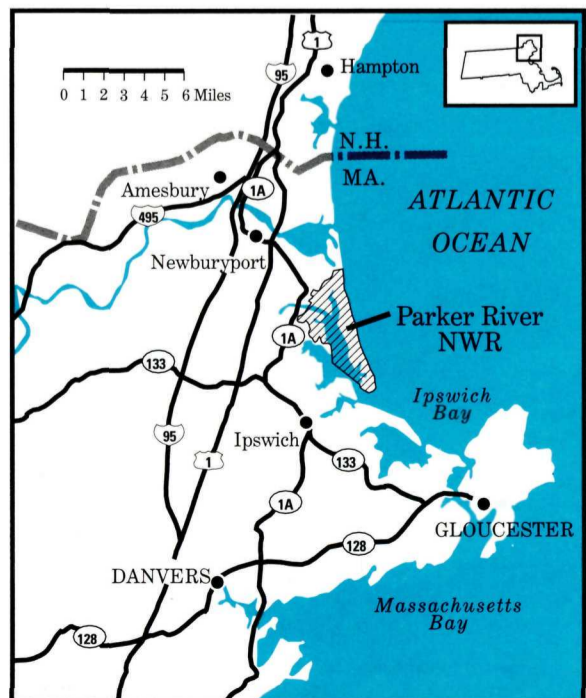
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge Newburyport, Massachusetts

Directions: The Refuge is located approximately 32 miles north of Boston and occupies the southern three-fourths of Plum Island. From Route 95 take the Newburyport exit (57) and travel east on Route 113, then Route 1A for a total of 3.5 miles to the intersection with Rolfe's Lane. Please refer to the map below for further assistance.



LEGEND

- Refuge Headquarters
- Refuge Boundary
- Maintenance Area
- Rest Rooms
- Designated Parking Area
- Boardwalk to Beach
- Boat Ramp
- Observation Tower



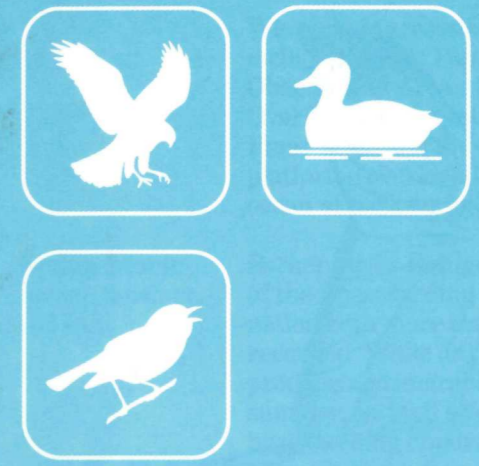
Parker River National Wildlife Refuge Birds

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
261 Northern Boulevard, Plum Island
Newburyport, Massachusetts 01950
978/465 5753
Fax: 978/465 2807
Email: r5rw_prnwr@mail.fws.gov

Hearing impaired visitors may call the
Massachusetts Relay Service at TDD/800 439 2370

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD
<http://www.fws.gov/>

April 1999



Acknowledgments

We are indebted to the many visiting ornithologists and birders who have over the years contributed significantly to the Refuge avian data base. The accuracy of future checklists depends in part upon the continued support of such professional and amateur bird enthusiasts. Please report significant observations to Refuge Headquarters at the address or phone number listed at the end of this brochure.

THANK YOU!

Observer(s) _____
Day & Date _____
Time Afield _____
Weather _____
Tides _____
of Species Observed _____
Remarks _____

REFUGE VAGRANTS

The following is a list of bird species whose normal range does not encompass eastern Massachusetts and that are of extremely rare Refuge occurrence, some having been recorded only once.

- Pacific Loon
- Western Grebe
- Eared Grebe
- American White Pelican
- Little Egret
- White-faced Ibis
- White Ibis
- Sandhill Crane
- Greater White-fronted Goose
- Garganey
- Fulvous Whistling Duck
- Black Rail
- Wilson's Plover
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Long-billed Curlew
- Spotted Redshank
- Terek Sandpiper
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Little Stint
- Franklin's Gull
- Ross' Gull
- Thayer's Gull
- Sabine's Gull
- Ivory Gull
- Sandwich Tern
- Sooty Tern
- Swainson's Hawk
- Chuck-will's-widow
- Black-backed Woodpecker
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Fork-tailed Flycatcher
- Say's Phoebe
- Vermilion Flycatcher
- Black-billed Magpie
- Sage Thrasher
- Black-throated Gray Warbler
- Yellow-throated Warbler
- Kentucky Warbler
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- LeConte's Sparrow
- Harris' Sparrow
- Western Tanager
- Hoary Redpoll

Field Notes