



Parker River

National Wildlife Refuge

Birds

A Refuge for Birds

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1941 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 4700 plus acres of diverse wetland and upland habitats, the refuge also supports a great variety of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects and other wildlife.

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 Bill Forward Bird Blind, 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, 5 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 350 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 as follows.

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 lot 1 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 time a day's tally may result in one hundred or more species. Major waves of songbirds, 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 songbird 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 songbird migrants become apparent.

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. Generally, sections of the beach start opening in mid-July as chicks fledge.



Bill Thompson

Black-capped Chickadee

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 long-tailed duck. 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 306 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
S	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.

For specific information on Massachusetts birds concerning such factors as seasonal abundance, habitat preference, and early and late seasonal dates, refer to the website www.massbird.org.



Blue Jay

Additional Symbols

• represents a species known or suspected to nest on the refuge

bold indicates a federally listed threatened or endangered species

Ducks, Geese, & Swans

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

Gallinaceous Birds

___ Ring-necked Pheasant	1	1	1	1
___ Wild Turkey •	1	1	1	1

Loons & Grebes

___ Red-throated Loon	3	1	3	3
___ Common Loon	4	2	4	4
___ Pied-billed Grebe •	2	1	2	1
___ Horned Grebe	3		2	4
___ Red-necked Grebe	2		2	2

Fulmars & Shearwaters

___ Northern Fulmar	1			1
___ Greater Shearwater			1	1
___ Sooty Shearwater			1	1
___ Manx Shearwater	1	1	1	

Storm-Petrels

___ Wilson's Storm-Petrel	1	2	1	
___ Leach's Storm-Petrel	1	1	1	

Gannets

___ Northern Gannet	2	2	3	2
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Cormorants

___ Great Cormorant	1		2	2
___ Double-crested Cormorant	5	5	4	1

Bitterns, Herons, Egrets & Ibises

___ American Bittern	2	1	2	2
___ Least Bittern •	1	2	1	
___ Great Blue Heron	4	4	4	2

	Sp	S	F	W
___ Great Egret	5	5	4	
___ Snowy Egret	5	5	4	
___ Little Blue Heron	1	2	1	
___ Tri-colored Heron	1	2	1	
___ Green Heron •	2	2	1	
___ Black-crowned Night-Heron •	2	3	2	1
___ Yellow-crowned Night-Heron	1	1	1	
___ Glossy Ibis	2	3	1	

Vultures, Hawks & Falcons

___ Turkey Vulture	2	1	2	1
___ Osprey •	4	4	2	1
___ Bald Eagle	1	1	1	2
___ Northern Harrier •	5	3	5	5
___ Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	1	2	1
___ Cooper's Hawk	2	1	3	1
___ Northern Goshawk	1	1	1	1
___ Red-shouldered Hawk	1		1	1
___ Broad-winged Hawk •	1		1	
___ Red-tailed Hawk •	2	2	2	3
___ Rough-legged Hawk	2		2	3
___ American Kestrel •	4	1	2	3
___ Merlin	3	1	3	3
___ Peregrine Falcon	3	1	4	3
___ Gyrfalcon	1		1	1

Rails, Gallinules, and Coots

___ Clapper Rail •	2	3	1	
___ King Rail •	1	2	1	
___ Virginia Rail •	2	3	1	1
___ Sora •	2	3	1	
___ Common Moorhen •	1	1	1	
___ American Coot •	1	1	1	1

Plovers

___ Black-bellied Plover	2	4	4	1
___ American Golden-Plover	1	1	2	
___ Semipalmated Plover	2	4	4	
___ Piping Plover •	3	3	1	
___ Killdeer •	5	5	2	

Oystercatcher

___ American Oystercatcher	1	1		
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Avocets

___ American Avocet		1	1	
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Sandpipers, Phalaropes, and Allies

___ Greater Yellowlegs	5	5	5	1
___ Lesser Yellowlegs	3	4	3	
___ Solitary Sandpiper	1	1	1	
___ Willet •	4	5	2	
___ Spotted Sandpiper •	2	3	2	
___ Upland Sandpiper	1	1	1	
___ Whimbrel	1	2	2	
___ Hudsonian Godwit		1	2	
___ Marbled Godwit		1	1	
___ Ruddy Turnstone	2	2	2	1
___ Red Knot	1	2	2	
___ Sanderling	2	3	4	2
___ Semipalmated Sandpiper	2	5	4	
___ Western Sandpiper		1	2	
___ Least Sandpiper	3	4	3	
___ White-rumped Sandpiper	2	3	3	
___ Baird's Sandpiper		1	1	
___ Pectoral Sandpiper	1	2	2	
___ Purple Sandpiper	1		1	2
___ Dunlin	2	1	4	2
___ Stilt Sandpiper	1	3	2	
___ Buff-breasted Sandpiper		1	1	
___ Ruff	1	1	1	
___ Short-billed Dowitcher	2	4	3	

	Sp	S	F	W
___ Long-billed Dowitcher	2	3	1	
___ Wilson's Snipe	2	1	1	1
___ American Woodcock •	3	2	1	
___ Wilson's Phalarope	2	2	1	
___ Red-necked Phalarope	1	1	1	
___ Red Phalarope	1		1	
Jaegers, Gulls & Terns				
___ Parasitic Jaeger	1	1	1	
___ Laughing Gull	1	2	2	
___ Little Gull	1	2	1	1
___ Black-headed Gull	1	1	1	1
___ Bonaparte's Gull	2	3	2	1
___ Ring-billed Gull	3	4	4	3
___ Herring Gull •	5	5	5	5
___ Iceland Gull	1		1	1
___ Lesser Black-backed Gull	1	1	1	1
___ Glaucous Gull	1		1	1
___ Great Black-backed Gull	5	4	4	5
___ Black-legged Kittiwake	1		1	2
___ Caspian Tern	1	1	1	
Roseate Tern	1	2	1	
___ Common Tern	3	5	2	
___ Arctic Tern	1	1	1	
___ Forster's Tern •	1	1	1	
___ Least Tern •	2	4	1	
___ Black Tern	1	1	1	

	Sp	S	F	W
Auks				
___ Thick-billed Murre				1
___ Razorbill	1		1	2
___ Black Guillemot	1		1	1

	Sp	S	F	W
Doves, Cuckoos, Owls, Swifts & Hummingbirds				
___ Rock Pigeon •	3	3	3	3
___ Mourning Dove •	5	4	3	3
___ Black-billed Cuckoo •	2	2	1	
___ Yellow-billed Cuckoo	1	1	2	
___ Great Horned Owl •	1	1	1	1
___ Snowy Owl	2		1	3
___ Long-eared Owl	1		1	1
___ Short-eared Owl	2		1	2
___ Northern Saw-whet Owl •	1		1	1
___ Chimney Swift	2	2	2	
___ Ruby-throated Hummingbird •	2	2	1	

	Sp	S	F	W
Nightjars				
___ Common Nighthawk	1	1	1	
___ Whip-poor-will	1	1	1	



Green heron

	Sp	S	F	W
Kingfishers				
___ Belted Kingfisher •	2	2	2	1
Woodpeckers & Allies				
___ Red-bellied Woodpecker	1		1	1
___ Yellow-bellied Sapsucker	1		2	
___ Downy Woodpecker •	3	3	3	3
___ Hairy Woodpecker	1	1	1	1
___ Northern Flicker	4	1	3	1
Tyrant Flycatchers				
___ Olive-sided Flycatcher	1	1	1	
___ Eastern Wood-Pewee	2	1	1	
___ Yellow-bellied Flycatcher	1	1	1	
___ Alder Flycatcher	1	1	1	
___ Willow Flycatcher •	2	4	1	
___ Least Flycatcher	2	1	1	
___ Eastern Phoebe •	3	2	3	
___ Great Crested Flycatcher •	2	2	1	
___ Western Kingbird		1	1	
___ Eastern Kingbird •	4	5	2	
Shrike				
___ Northern Shrike	2		1	3
Vireos				
___ White-eyed Vireo	1		1	
___ Blue-headed Vireo	3		2	
___ Yellow-throated Vireo	1		1	
___ Warbling Vireo	1	1	1	
___ Philadelphia Vireo	1	1	2	
___ Red-eyed Vireo •	2	2	3	

	Sp	S	F	W
Jays, Crows, Larks & Swallows				
___ Blue Jay •	4	2	4	3
___ American Crow •	5	4	4	4
___ Horned Lark •	2	1	2	4
___ Purple Martin •	4	4	1	
___ Tree Swallow •	5	5	4	1
___ N. Rough-winged Swallow •	2	1	1	
___ Bank Swallow •	2	3	2	
___ Cliff Swallow •	1	1	1	
___ Barn Swallow •	3	3	2	

	Sp	S	F	W
Chickadees, Nuthatches & Wrens				
___ Black-capped Chickadee •	5	3	4	4
___ Tufted Titmouse	1		1	1
___ Red-breasted Nuthatch	3	1	3	2
___ White-breasted Nuthatch	1	1	1	1
___ Brown Creeper	2	1	2	1
___ Carolina Wren	2	1	2	1
___ House Wren •	1	2	1	
___ Winter Wren	2	1	1	
___ Marsh Wren •	4	4	3	1

	Sp	S	F	W
Kinglets, Thrushes & Thrashers				
___ Golden-crowned Kinglet	2		3	1
___ Ruby-crowned Kinglet	4		3	1
___ Blue-gray Gnatcatcher	2	1	1	
___ Eastern Bluebird	1		1	
___ Veery •	2	1	1	
___ Gray-cheeked Thrush	1		1	
___ Bicknell's Thrush	1		1	
___ Swainson's Thrush	2		1	
___ Hermit Thrush	3	1	2	1
___ Wood Thrush	1	1	1	
___ American Robin •	5	5	4	4
___ Gray Catbird •	4	5	4	1
___ Northern Mockingbird •	4	4	4	3
___ Brown Thrasher •	4	4	3	1



Red-winged blackbird

George Gentry/USFWS

	Sp	S	F	W
Starlings, Pipits & Waxwings				
___ European Starling •	4	4	4	4
___ American Pipit	1		3	1
___ Cedar Waxwing •	2	4	3	1
Wood-Warblers				
___ Blue-Winged Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Tennessee Warbler	1		1	
___ Orange-crowned Warbler	1		1	
___ Nashville Warbler	2	1	2	
___ Northern Parula	3	1	2	
___ Yellow Warbler •	4	4	1	
___ Chestnut-sided Warbler	2	1	1	
___ Magnolia Warbler	3	1	2	
___ Cape May Warbler	1		1	
___ Black-throated Blue Warbler	2	1	2	
___ Yellow-rumped Warbler	4	1	4	3
___ Black-throated Green Warbler	3	1	2	
___ Blackburnian Warbler	2	1	1	
___ Pine Warbler	2	1	2	
___ Prairie Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Palm Warbler	3		2	
___ Bay-breasted Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Blackpoll Warbler	2	1	2	
___ Black-and-white Warbler	3	1	2	
___ American Redstart •	3	3	3	
___ Worm-eating Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Ovenbird	2	1	2	
___ Northern Waterthrush	3	1	2	
___ Connecticut Warbler			1	
___ Mourning Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Common Yellowthroat •	3	4	2	
___ Hooded Warbler	1	1	1	
___ Canada Warbler	2	1	2	
___ Yellow-breasted Chat	1	1	1	1
Tanagers, Sparrows & Towhees				
___ Summer Tanager	1		1	
___ Scarlet Tanager	2	1	2	
___ Eastern Towhee •	4	4	3	1

Eugene F. Hester/USFWS



Northern cardinal

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!

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.

	Sp	S	F	W
___ American Tree Sparrow	3	3	5	
___ Chipping Sparrow	2	1	2	
___ Clay-colored Sparrow	1	1	1	
___ Field Sparrow•	4	3	2	1
___ Vesper Sparrow•	1	1	1	
___ Lark Sparrow	1		1	
___ Savannah Sparrow•	4	3	4	2
___ Grasshopper Sparrow		1	1	
___ Saltmarsh Sparrow•	2	4	2	1
___ Nelson's Sparrow•		1	1	
___ Seaside Sparrow•	2	2	2	1
___ Fox Sparrow	2		1	1
___ Song Sparrow•	5	5	4	4
___ Lincoln's Sparrow	1	1	1	
___ Swamp Sparrow•	3	1	2	1
___ White-throated Sparrow	4	1	4	3
___ White-crowned Sparrow	2			2
___ Dark-eyed Junco	3		4	2
___ Lapland Longspur	1		2	1
___ Snow Bunting	2		3	2
___ Northern Cardinal•	4	3	3	4
___ Rose-breasted Grosbeak	2	1	1	
___ Indigo Bunting	1	1	1	
___ Dickcissel	1		1	
Blackbirds, Orioles & Finches				
___ Bobolink•	3	5	2	
___ Red-winged Blackbird•	5	5	2	1
___ Eastern Meadowlark•	1	1	1	1
___ Rusty Blackbird	1		1	
___ Common Grackle•	5	5	2	1
___ Brown-headed Cowbird•	5	4	2	1
___ Orchard Oriole•	1	1		
___ Baltimore Oriole•	2	3	2	
___ Purple Finch•	4	3	2	1
___ House Finch•	4	3	2	1
___ White-winged Crossbill	1		1	1
___ Common Redpoll	1		1	2
___ Pine Siskin	1		1	1
___ American Goldfinch•	5	4	3	2
___ House Sparrow•	3	3	2	2

- Fulvous Whistling Duck
- Greater White-fronted Goose
- Garganey
- Pacific Loon
- Eared Grebe
- Western Grebe
- American White Pelican
- Little Egret
- White-faced Ibis
- White Ibis
- Swainson's Hawk
- Black Rail
- Sandhill Crane
- Pacific Golden-Plover
- Wilson's Plover
- Black-necked Stilt
- Spotted Redshank
- Terek Sandpiper
- Long-billed Curlew
- Bar-tailed Godwit
- Red-necked Stint
- Little Stint
- Curlew Sandpiper
- Franklin's Gull
- Thayer's Gull
- Sabine's Gull
- Ross's Gull
- Ivory Gull
- Sandwich Tern
- Sooty Tern
- Chuck-will's-widow
- Black-headed Woodpecker
- Say's Phoebe
- Vermillion Flycatcher
- Ash-throated Flycatcher
- Couch's Kingbird
- Scissor-tailed Flycatcher
- Fork-tailed Flycatcher
- Black-billed Magpie
- Cave Swallow
- Northern Wheatear
- Sage Thrasher
- Black-throated Gray Warbler
- Yellow-throated Warbler
- Western Tanager LeConte's Sparrow
- Harris's Sparrow
- Chestnut-collared Longspur
- Black-headed Grosbeak
- Yellow-headed Blackbird
- Bullocks's Oriole
- Pine Grosbeak
- Hoary Redpoll

Refuge Visitors

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

- Cackling Goose
- Tundra Swan
- Canvasback
- Ruffed Grouse
- Northern Bobwhite
- Cory's Shearwater
- Cattle Egret
- Black Vulture
- Golden Eagle
- Yellow Rail
- Pomarine Jaeger
- Long-tailed Jaeger
- Gull-billed Tern
- Royal Tern
- Black Skimmer
- Dovekie
- Common Murre
- Atlantic Puffin
- Barn Owl
- Eastern Screech-Owl
- Barred Owl
- Red-headed Woodpecker
- Pileated Woodpecker
- Acadian Flycatcher
- Loggerhead Shrike
- Fish Crow
- Common Raven
- Boreal Chickadee
- Sedge Wren
- Bohemian Waxwing
- Golden-winged Warbler
- Cerulean Warbler
- Prothonotary Warbler
- Louisiana Waterthrush
- Kentucky Warbler
- Lark Bunting
- Henslow's Sparrow
- Blue Grosbeak
- Evening Grosbeak

Notes

Location _____
 Date _____ Time _____
 Observers _____
 Weather _____

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950
978/465 5753
978/465 2807 Fax
email: FW5RW_PRNWR@FWS.GOV
www.fws.gov/refuge/Parker_River

Federal Relay Service
for the deaf and hard of hearing
1 800/877 8339

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
http://www.fws.gov

For Refuge Information
1 800/344 WILD

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