

A Birding Guide to Lexington Conservation Areas By Keith Ohmart

Mention spring birding and all thoughts typically turn to Mt. Auburn Cemetery on the Cambridge/Watertown line. But local birders knowledgeable about such things are keenly aware that acre for acre, there are several locations right here in Lexington that rival Mt. Auburn, and in the case of the Arlington Reservoir (187 species reported), actually nudge Mt. Auburn (182 species reported) out of the top spot in terms of number of species sighted over the last ten years according to the popular website eBird, maintained by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Arlington Reservoir and the adjacent LexFarm fields hold top honors due to the wide variety of habitat ranging from the reservoir itself bordered by woodland edges and the open fields of neighboring LexFarm. Marj Rines of the Menotomy Bird Club is on record as stating that this location offers the best birding per square inch of any location in the state. While productive at any time of the year, highlights include spring migration for warblers and a wide assortment of migratory songbirds, followed by late fall for migrating ducks and other waterfowl. Parking is available in the parking lot for the Town of Arlington's swimming area on Lowell Street.

In very close competition in terms of the number of species recorded (182 species) is Dunback Meadow. Again variety of habitat is the key, ranging from expansive open marshlands and meadows to extensive forested sections. Expect to see a wide range of warblers, vireos, and flycatchers on spring migration along with the occasional raptor soaring over the open marsh. Park either along Allen Street across from Pitcairn Place or in the parking lot of the Town's Cotton Farm property on Marrett Road and walk across the street to follow the marked path into the property.

Weighing in at just over 100 species is the Lower Vine Brook property off of Grant Street. Over fifteen species of warblers in addition to tanagers, orioles, rose-breasted grosbeaks, thrushes and cuckoos can reliably be seen during the peak of spring migration on the section of the property between Vine Street, Hayes Lane and Brookwood Road off Saddle Club Drive. Best parking is on Vine Street off Woburn Street opposite 121 Vine Street.

Also in the 100-120 species range are the larger Willards Woods property (accessible from the property's parking lot on North Street between Adams and Burlington Streets), and Arlington's Great Meadows in East Lexington. Both properties offer extensive woodlands, meadows and in the case of Arlington's Great Meadows, a large peat marsh bordered by the Minuteman Bikeway. Best parking for Arlington's Great Meadows is either the parking lot of the former nursing home located at 840 Emerson Gardens Road, or the parking lot of the Waldorf School, 739 Massachusetts Avenue, during non-school hours.

One more suggestion if you have the time and inclination, is to take a walk along the power line corridor between Grove Street and Turning Mill Road. This stretch provides excellent edge habitat and attracts species such as prairie warbler, towhees, indigo bunting and other edge habitat specialists not found on most of Lexington's other properties. Best parking is the lot on Turning Mill Road under the power lines. Walk the trails in both directions on either side of Turning Mill Road.

And as an online aid in either preparing your visit to these properties or recording your trip list of what you have seen, check out the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's eBird website (<https://ebird.org/home>). Here you will be able to look up records of what has been seen on each property as well as record your own sightings. To locate the records for any of the properties mentioned in this article click on Explore, then Explore Hotspots and type in the name of each property. So stick close to home this spring and enjoy some of the best bird watching in eastern Massachusetts. Best times for all areas will be late April through the end of May. Trail maps for all properties may be found on the Town of Lexington's Conservation Department's web page (<https://www.lexingtonma.gov/conservation>).