

Birding in Dunback Meadow

by Bobbie Hodson

While there are many beautiful and varied conservation areas in Lexington, Dunback Meadow (DM) has been and remains my favorite for birding in all seasons. Not only does it have a varied habitat of woods, fields and water; but it also has a rich possibility of birds. Nearly 200 birds have been located here including many breeders.

There are several trails, which intersect mid way in what birders call "the four way intersection". One trail starts at the Allen St entrance and crosses Clematis Brook on its way to Bacon St. The other main trail runs from Clarke Middle School through several meadows and woods until it reaches Bowman School. Preferred entrances are via Allen St and Clarke School where parking is ample. From Clarke School one can also take a shorter trail, one of the Access Lexington trails through pine woods, which then joins the Allen St trail.

In late summer, early fall, DM has many ruby-throated hummingbirds gathering for a final intake of food before their long migration south. Also, coming through in a more leisurely travel than in the spring are the warblers, vireos, and thrushes which are migrating south as the supply of insects decreases. Once October arrives, sparrows of many varieties start to appear in small flocks. They are eating the many different seeds from the grasses and weeds. Several of these sparrows, including Dark-eyed Junco, American Tree Sparrow, and White-throated Sparrow; stay with us for the winter.

Throughout the fall DM has many residential birds, such as Chickadees, Tufted Titmouse, White-breasted Nuthatches, Downy Red-bellied, and Hairy Woodpeckers, Mourning Doves, and Blue Jays. Flocks of Bobolinks are often in the meadows in early fall. Cardinals grace the trees with their vivid red feathers throughout the year. Often the pine woods has several varieties of owls, such as Barred, Screech, and Great Horned. In unusual times, Long-eared Owls and Northern Saw-whet Owls are a joy to observe.

And there are coyotes, turtles, foxes, and deer within this area. These are best observed early mornings.

The better areas for birding are within a few hundred yards around the 4-way intersection. Here there is water, meadow and woods, and birds thrive in edges where there is food and safety more readily available. Going up the hill to Allen St offers a rich birding habitat with catbirds, jays, warblers, and the usual residents. Going toward Bacon St or toward Bowman one can find land birds such as hawks, goldfinch, sparrows, and in fall the Connecticut Warbler, a rarity seen most falls.

Dunback's birding changes from day to day. By walking in this relaxing conservation area, even if the birds are not plentiful on one day, enjoy the walk and come back the next day.