

MAINE BIRDING TRAIL GUIDE TO ACADIA

Excerpted and updated from
The Maine Birding Trail:
The Official Guide to More Than
260 Accessible Sites
Bob Duchesne - published by
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Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island (MDI) was the first National Park east of the Mississippi River. It is a park that was more assembled than created, weaving its way through and around communities and private properties as parcels were donated and purchased over time. Thus, the towns and villages are as much a part of the Acadia experience as the park itself. This guide describes MDI as a whole. The 15-minute drive between Ellsworth and MDI is scenic, with salt marshes and ponds that contain Mallards, American Black Ducks, and occasionally Hooded Mergansers.

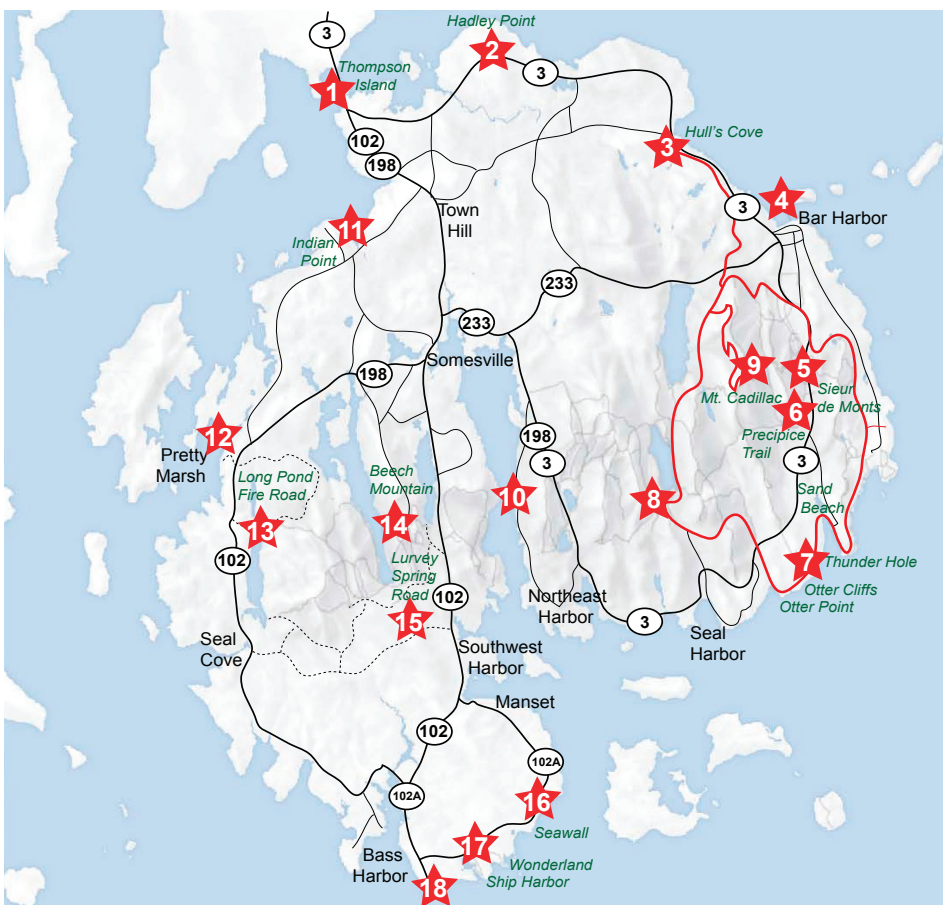
1. Thompson Island is the first true Acadia National Park birding experience. This picnic spot provides excellent access to viewing the channel. The lot is gated in winter, but visitors may park across the street in the visitor's center lot and walk in. As is typical of the Maine coast, waterfowl are abundant in the offseason. From October to May, Thompson Island is a good place to look for Common Goldeneyes, Greater Scaup, Common Loons, Double-crested Cormorants, and Red-breasted Mergansers. In summer, Ring-billed Gulls are typically abundant, while Laughing Gulls and Bonaparte's Gulls visit

the channel infrequently. On Route 3, just beyond the parking lot, there are a couple of places where the ocean approaches the road. Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs are sometimes present in these shallows in the spring and fall.

2. Hadley Point is a municipal beach and boat launch that is excellent year-round. Due to its sheltered location on Eastern Bay, subarctic breeders linger longer in spring and arrive earlier in autumn. Even in August, Red-necked Grebes and Bonaparte's Gulls begin to arrive. It's a fine place for Common Loons and the less common Red-throated Loon. Check for shorebirds August-October. Hadley Point Road is 3.7 miles from Thompson Island along Route 3 toward Bar Harbor. Turn onto the road; follow to the end.

3. Hull's Cove is the first true look at open ocean along Route 3 on the approach to Bar Harbor. Common Eiders are always present. At high tide in the offseason, Common Goldeneyes, Buffleheads, Long-tailed Ducks, Surf and White-winged Scoters, and Black Guillemots are often present. Hull's Cove is 7.3 miles from Thompson Island. The entrance to the Acadia Park Loop Road and a park visitor center are just beyond the cove.

4. The Bar Harbor Sand Bar sometimes shelters thousands of sea ducks in the lee behind Bar Island during high tide, when six feet of water cover the bar.





Common Eiders gather, joined by Common Goldeneyes, American Black Ducks, Mallards, and occasional Greater Scaup. Surf Scoters, Common Loons, Red-breasted Mergansers, Long-tailed Ducks, and Buffleheads should also be observable. Scan the eiders carefully for a King Eider. Before leaving, swing a spotting scope onto the islands for Bald Eagles. To reach the bar from Route 3, turn onto West Street 2.1 miles past the visitor center. Turn left onto Bridge Street and proceed to the dead end at the bar. The nearby resort has been renovated in recent years and ongoing expansion is likely. Steer clear of construction activities. In winter, the last few feet of road before the bar can be exceedingly icy.

The Bar Harbor Town Pier is always worth a scan. Black Guillemots and Common Loons are always close, accompanied by Long-tailed Ducks in winter.



In summer, this is also the place to sign up for a whale-watching trip. Whale-watching provides some of the best pelagic birding in the state. Finback and humpback whales are the main quarry for these boats, though the endangered right whale is a possibility and the smaller minke whales are relatively common. Harbor porpoises are almost a certainty on any trip. Sea birds are drawn to the same food sources as the whales, so expect to encounter Great and Sooty Shearwaters, especially later in the summer. Manx shearwaters are less common but show up regularly. Cory's shearwaters are a remote possibility. Wilson Storm-petrels are likely from mid-June until September, sometimes joined by Leach's Storm-petrels. Tens of thousands of Leach's Storm-petrels nest on nearby islands, but their nocturnal behavior makes sightings an uncommon treat. Northern Gannets are inevitable. Parasitic and Pomarine Jaegers are possible, especially later in the season. Northern Fulmars arrive still later. With favorable winds, very large flocks of Red and Red-necked Phalaropes often invade the whaling grounds in August and September.

The Bar Harbor Whale Watch Company has a fleet of boats: 207-288-2386 See: www.barharborwhales.com.

5. The Park Loop Road navigates the park's features on the eastern side of Mount Desert Island. Sieur de Monts is the best warbler watching spot on the island. The mountain spring alone would be enough to attract birds, but this is also home to the Wild Gardens of Acadia. Mature deciduous trees - mostly oak, sugar maple, hawthorn, and beech - predominate around the spring. The garden is divided into 12 sections, each an example of the different habitat types found in Acadia. Thus, it is a wild garden, not a typical suburban flowering garden. The Bird Thicket provides plants that are attractive to fruit and seedeaters. Red-eyed Vireos are very common, while the most frequently occurring warblers are Yellow, Black-throated Green, Common Yellowthroat, American Redstart, and Ovenbirds. Also look for Black-and-White, Northern Parula, Chestnut-sided, and Yellow-rumped Warblers around the parking lot. Common flycatchers include Eastern Phoebes near



the buildings, Eastern Wood Pewees in the mature trees beyond the Abbe Museum, and Alder Flycatchers in the brushy fields on the outskirts of the site. Woodpeckers are abundant in the area. Hairy, Downy, and Pileated Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers, and Northern Flickers are seen regularly.

There are several walking paths available, but the most productive trail exits the parking lot on the right side of the Wild Gardens. At the outset, the small trees are handy for American Redstarts and Chestnut-sided Warblers. As the path leaves the saplings and enters the grove of mature hemlocks, Blackburnian Warblers, Scarlet Tanagers, Hermit Thrushes, and Ovenbirds are a good bet. Beyond the grove, the

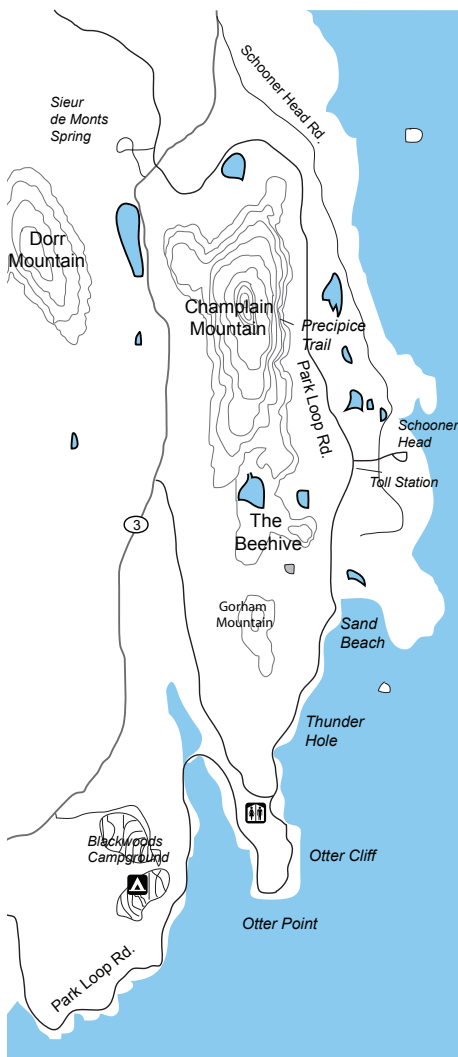
trail circles a damp, open area that is promising for Nashville Warblers, Swamp Sparrows and Alder Flycatchers. A new boardwalk trail provides another loop through mature, bottomland forest. Other enjoyable paths lead southward from the parking lot, past the Abbe Museum, and onto a small pond called "The Tarn." Check the pond carefully because there are always ducks hidden in the reeds. Black-throated Blue Warblers are usually heard singing from the extensive stands of birches on the mountainside beyond the pond.



the sunlight, so that sitting in the sand is pleasant even in January. Common Eiders, Common Loons, Red-breasted Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Horned Grebes should be present in winter. The loons especially favor the left shoreline. Red-throated Loons and Harlequin Ducks have appeared here occasionally.



The walking path from **Sand Beach** to **Thunder Hole** to **Otter Cliffs** showcases Black-capped Chickadees and Golden-crowned Kinglets in any season. Common Eiders are present year round, though their numbers triple in winter. A scan of the water in winter usually reveals Black Guillemots, Red-breasted Mergansers, Horned Grebes and possibly Red-necked Grebes. In winter, Great Cormorants replace Double-crested Cormorants and their white faces and wing patches should be evident as they fly by. From late summer well into December, Northern Gannets can often be seen in the distance. The rocks along this section of the coast are an excellent place to look for Purple Sandpipers in winter. Peeps on the wing in winter are almost certainly these. However, when they are roosting motionless on rocks, or feeding quietly, they are surprisingly easy to overlook. Their coloration blends with the quartz-laden granite, making them appear as innocuous bumps or vegetation on the rocks.



6. The Precipice Trail is a summer highlight. Peregrine Falcons have nested here since 1991. In early summer, rangers and docents are stationed below the peak to point out the locations of the falcons. During the nesting season, the trail is closed. When the trail reopens in mid-August, it offers a spectacular climb to the summit of Champlain Mountain. In several places, iron ladders hammered into the cliff assist the hiker over vertical passes. Though this sounds challenging, kids and adults alike enjoy the climb. The view from the top is spectacular. The ascent takes most people about an hour.

7. Sand Beach is a fun stroll year-round. Its pure southern exposure has created a small sand beach that is rare north of Portland. It is sheltered from prevailing breezes and faces into

Thunder Hole is one of Acadia's top attractions. At times, the surf crashes into the natural grotto with explosive force. However, it requires the right combination of tide and wind to get the full effect. It's a great place to scan for sea ducks and harbor seals.

Otter Cliff lies just beyond a gate that is closed in winter. In the off-season, it is an excellent spot for irruptive crossbills, especially White-winged. In some years they may be found anywhere among the cone-bearing trees along the park loop road. The cliff is panoramic but, despite the name, there are no otters. A bell buoy offshore marks a rock reef that is visible at low tide. In winter, Great Cormorants are a good bet, sometimes roosting on the bell.

Continue around the bend and down to **Otter Point**. The woods in this area are full of Golden-crowned Kinglets, Black-capped Chickadees, and Red-breasted Nuthatches. A short path leads to Otter Point and it's worth another scan, especially along the rocks for wintering Purple Sandpipers.

Proceed around the corner and downhill to the **Fabri Picnic Area**. This was the site of an early World War I radio communications facility that was, at the time, the most advanced in the world. Scan the inlet from this vantage point for more Common Loons and Red-breasted Mergansers. In breeding season, this is a particularly good spot for warbler variety.

At the bottom of the inlet, the Park Loop Road makes a deep U-turn over a causeway that carries water in and out of a tidal pond. Buffleheads and American Black Ducks are likely. Continuing back up the hill on the far side of the cove, there are

more scenic overlooks. It is not marked, but Acadia's **Blackwoods Campground** is in the woods behind the loop road here. Within another mile, the road turns away from the ocean and reenters woods that are normally noisy with Black-capped Chickadees, Red-breasted Nuthatches, Golden-crowned Kinglets and Brown Creepers.

Most of the Park Loop Road is closed and unplowed in the winter, to the benefit of snowmobilers and cross-country skiers. However, the most popular 2-mile section from the Entrance Station to Otter Cliffs is open and accessible from a winter entrance. Heading south from Bar Harbor on Route 3, note the ball fields on the right. In about 0.7 miles, the road forks in front of the Ocean Drive Dairy Bar. Bearing left leads to the winter entrance, marked by a small sign. For 2.5 miles the road advances through birch and aspen groves, and frozen marshes impounded by beavers. At the T intersection, a left turn leads to a scenic overlook parking lot. The trail to seaside is paved but it is often icy in winter. A right turn leads to the Entrance Station. There is no entry fee from November through April. The winter exit from the Park Loop Road bears right just before Otter Cliff and returns to Route 3.

8. Jordan Pond House, like Sieur de Monts, features mature stands of deciduous trees and



supports a greater concentration of warblers and other neo-tropical migrants. It gets crowded around the restaurant in summer, especially during lunch when diners enjoy the popovers that have been the kitchen's claim to fame for more than a century. The Bubbles are two scenic knobs that tower above a section of the Park Loop Road just beyond Jordan Pond. It is one of the park's favorite hiking places. It is dominated by mixed and open foliage, also making it favorable for warblers.

The Carriage Roads around the Jordan Pond House and Wildwood Stables once belonged to the summering wealthy. Some go for miles. This is generic birding at its best. Hikers, bikers, equestrians, and birders use this network of carriage trails in the park for their adventures. There are no particular hot spots, but any of the passerines typically found in Acadia may be encountered while traversing these trails. The width of the trails is an advantage because they usually offer good birding visibility. During the summer, it's hard to venture far without hearing the high, reedy whistle of the Cedar Waxwings that nest throughout the park.

9. Cadillac Mountain receives the first ray of sunshine in the U.S. each morning. Drive up if only for the view. Expect it to be cool and breezy. The birding is ordinary, except in September when it is one of the two best places in the park for hawk watching. (The other is Beech Mountain.) During hawk migration, naturalists staff a daily hawk-watch and encourage participation. On a good day – typically a day when northwest breezes follow a cold front– American Kestrels and Sharp-shinned Hawks pass closely,



joined by a few Cooper's Hawks, Broad-winged Hawks, Ospreys, Turkey Vultures, Peregrine Falcons, Merlins, and Bald Eagles. Interestingly, Eastern Towhees nest on the mountaintop, though they are uncommon outside of southern Maine. Dark-eyed Juncos and Yellow-rumped Warblers can also be expected around the summit.

10. Somes Sound: Natural fjords bordering the Atlantic are rare. This is the only one in the United States. Glaciers scoured the earth between two peaks and depressed the earth beneath. When the glaciers receded, the sea rushed in. Somes Sound is unremarkable in summer, spectacular in fall

foliage, and interesting during the winter. All the usual Acadia sea ducks are seen here, and since Somes Sound is more sheltered from ocean breezes, the ducks are sometimes more readily observable. The ocean scenery on this road is lovely. In winter, cascading ice flows encrust the cliffs. In spring breeding season, where Sargeant Drive leaves the shoreline and enters a mature forest, Blackburnian and Pine Warblers inhabit the white pines and oaks. There is a small park in this area that is mostly used by weekend picnickers and volleyball enthusiasts. Look for Common Yellowthroats, American Redstarts, and Chestnut-sided Warblers in the shrubs surrounding the park. In the secondary growth behind, look for Black-throated Green Warblers and Northern Parula. These give way to canopy warblers in the mature trees behind. There is a portable toilet in summer. The park is unmarked but the open gates should be apparent. On the approach to downtown Northeast Harbor, look for a sign that points to Sargeant Drive along Summit

Road. Bear right again on Millbrook Road, leading to Sargeant Drive, which hugs Somes Sound until returning to Route 198.

11. Indian Point Blagden Preserve is a property of The Nature Conservancy. It is located on land that escaped the devastating fire of 1947. At the entrance, an aged oak stands where it was planted on the day of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Tall red spruce, white cedar, and balsam fir predominate and there is an 8-acre stand of tamarack on wetter ground in the center. The variety and maturity of the foliage supports abundant wildlife, numbering at least 12 species of warbler and 6 species of woodpecker, including rarely seen Black-Backed Woodpeckers. At the end of the trail, there are over a thousand feet of shoreline. Harbor seals frequent the ledges offshore. After crossing the causeway onto MDI, take Route 102/198 toward Somesville. In 1.8 miles, turn right onto Indian Point Road, and then bear right at the first fork in 1.7 miles. The entrance is about 200 yards farther ahead and is marked by a small sign. From Somesville, reach Indian Point Road via Oak Hill Road. Turn left at the intersection and go 200 yards to the entrance.

12. Pretty Marsh is a tiny village that contains a park picnic area of cathedral-like quality. Tall cedar, spruce, and hemlock trees tower above it, making a pleasant home for nuthatches and woodpeckers. A short walk to the shoreline overlooks Pretty Marsh harbor. Toilet facilities are available.

13. The Long Pond Fire Road sneaks into the woods just beyond the picnic area at Pretty Marsh. The small dirt road is easily overlooked. It winds its

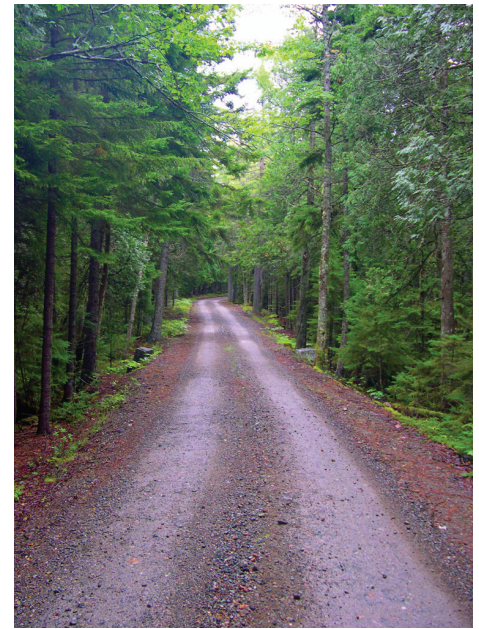


way through a mixed forest that should produce a great variety of woodland species. There is more spruce and fir along this road than is typical of the island, so crossbills and northern forest songbirds are more likely than elsewhere on the island. Since it is off the beaten track, drive slowly with windows down and listen for songs in early summer, and the chatter of foraging flocks in late summer. The road brushes Long Pond at a popular launch for fisherman. Long Pond Road is about 4.7 miles long and exits onto the Hodgdon Road on its south end. Returning along the main road to the original entrance creates a loop of 5.7 miles.

14. Beech Mountain is just a pleasant hiking area eleven months of the year. In September, if the winds are from the northwest, it's a hot spot for hawk watching and is a popular alternative to Cadillac Mountain. Cadillac is usually preferred for its accessibility by car and for the presence of expert hawk-watchers to assist, but Beech Mountain often presents a closer view of the birds. Raptors from far up the coast fly a straight line toward Cadillac, but often skirt the edges upon passing the peak. Beech Mountain is the next major crest on the route south and its smaller size often "focuses" the birds around its cliff face. Furthermore, the preferred ledge for hawk watching overlooks a valley between peaks so that hawks can be seen as they flash beneath or above. Other birds such as irruptive crossbills and finches sometimes traverse the valley during a hawk watch. A morning fallout of autumn warblers is also more likely to concentrate over the smaller, wooded Beech Mountain than the larger, treeless Cadillac. On Route 102 just south of Somesville, turn west at the Fire

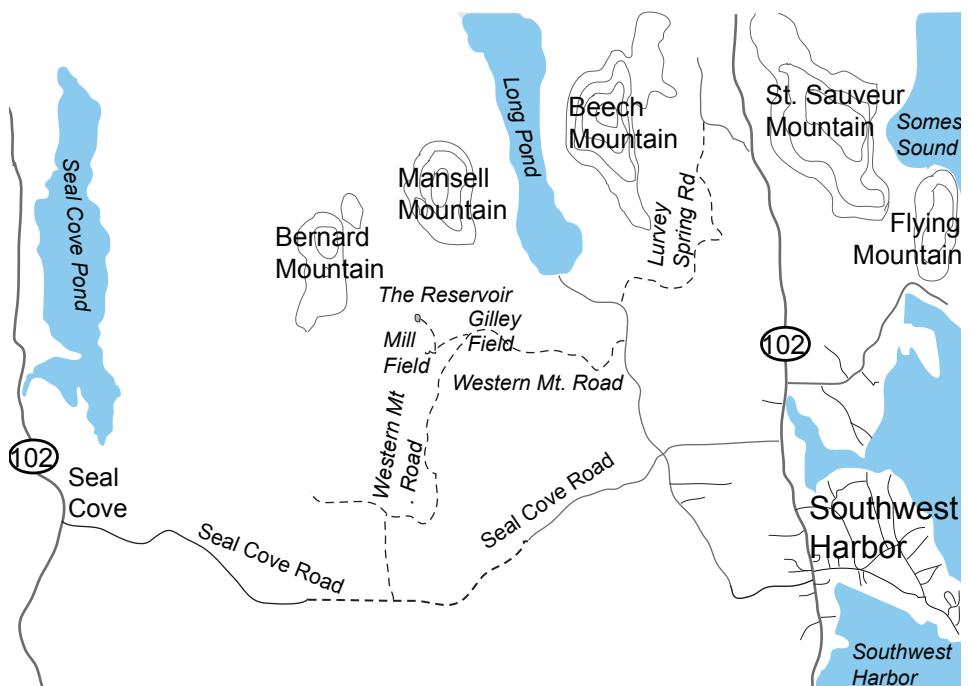
Station, then a left four miles to Beech Mountain. Park on the right upon entering the lot and take the trail at the right-hand (northeast) edge of the lot. Follow it uphill for about a mile over sometimes steep and challenging terrain. It's short enough that reasonably fit birders can carry a spotting scope, portable chair, and picnic, with frequent pauses to admire the view. There will be several small ledges, but stop at the major ledge about 200 feet below the summit.

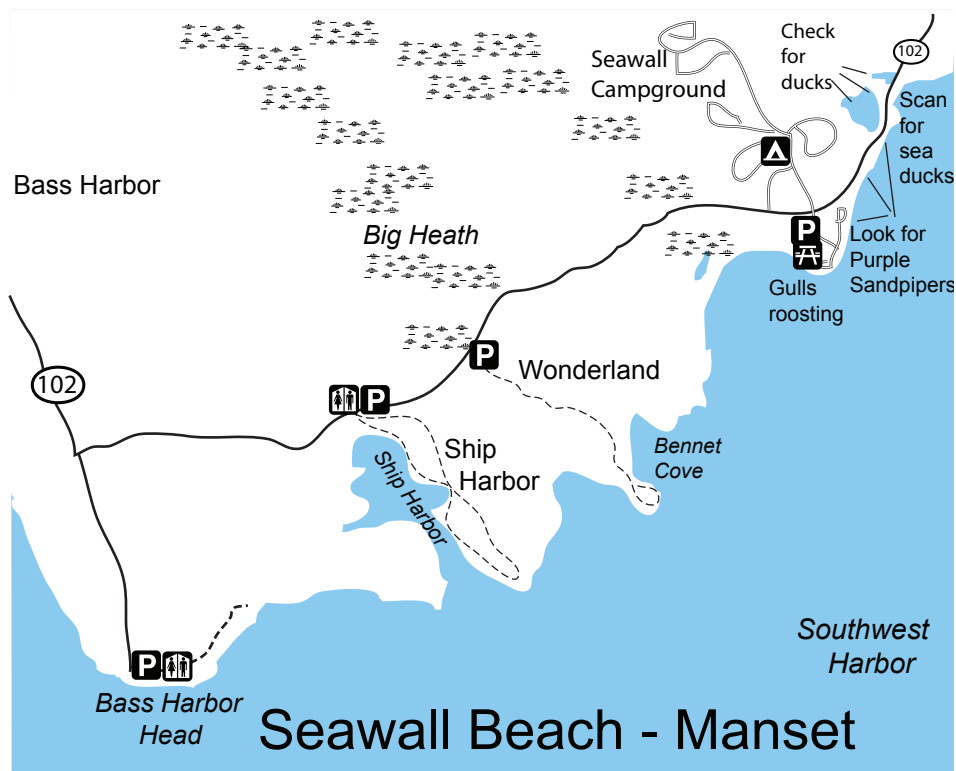
15. The Lurvey Spring Road is another lightly-used road that can be good for birding. It runs through mature woods from Route 102 (just north of Southwest Harbor) toward Seal Cove, transiting through hemlock, gray birch, and beech as it leads to Long Pond Road and later Seal Cove Road. The Western Mountain Road branches off Seal Cove Road to the north and leads to several interesting areas hidden deep in Acadia. These roads also contain mature trees, but the dampness of the woodland floor is signaled by the preponderance of fern, moss, and cedar. Follow the signs to a couple of interesting features: Mill Field



and the Reservoir. Both areas are adjacent to lesser-used trail entrances in this part of the park. The tiny reservoir is particularly interesting and the open space around the edge is attractive to a variety of warblers and passerines. Just over a mile south of Ikes Point on Route 102, turn west toward Echo Lake Beach, then left again onto Lurvey Spring Road toward Seal Cove. Drive slowly; listen carefully.

16. Seawall in Manset is where some of the best birding on Mount





Wonderland contains a higher ratio of conifers and open, dry ledges, so boreal species may be more likely here. Blackpoll Warblers can sometimes be found near the shoreline. From a dense, wet beginning, the trail transitions through white spruce and jack pine to an unusual concentration of blue-tinted white spruce and roses. Open areas are good for American Redstarts, Nashville Warblers, and Yellow-rumped Warblers. In a good cone year, look for both Red and White-winged Crossbills in the spruce trees. On offshore ledges, perched Bald Eagles are a common site.

Ship Harbor is a longer trail and offers a bit more mature growth and habitat diversity than Wonderland, so there is an improved opportunity for both coniferous and deciduous loving warblers. Be alert for crossbills. There is a summer composting toilet at the trailhead.

18. Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse is the grandest on the island. It is a popular tourist attraction, and the shrubs and secondary growth adjacent to the lighthouse and in the neighboring yards attract a fair share of common warblers.

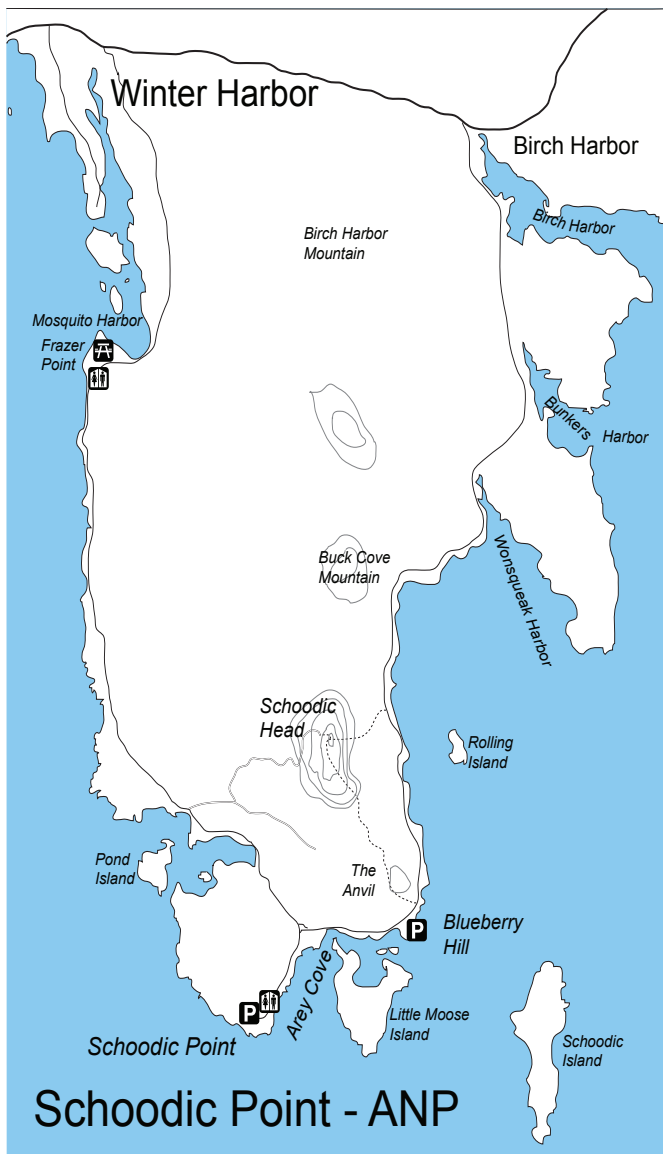
Bass Harbor is the nearest thing to a quaint fishing village on Mount Desert Island. It is more sheltered, so Long-tailed Ducks, Buffleheads, Red-breasted Mergansers, Common Loons, American Black Ducks, Mallards, and various gulls drift among the anchored boats in winter.

Desert Island begins. South of Southwest Harbor, Route 102 makes a circuit loop, starting with a left onto Route 102A to Manset, later returning to Route 102 via Bass Harbor. Route 102A leads to a very rocky beach called Seawall. The ocean view is one of the best places for sea duck watching, especially in winter. Common Eiders, Buffleheads, Horned and Red-necked Grebes, Black Guillemots, all three scoters, both cormorants, Long-tailed Ducks, and Red-breasted Mergansers are present at various times. Look also for Bonaparte's Gulls, which sometimes flock in large numbers. This is a good place for a spotting scope. In the immediate ledge area, stay alert for Purple Sandpipers in winter. Across the street, there are always ducks around whenever the pond is not frozen. Just beyond, a picnic area opposite the campground is plowed in winter and is populated with at least three species of gull. Farther along the road, be alert to the boggy area opposite the Wonderland trail. This is the

Big Heath, and it offers the best opportunity for boreal birds that are not common on MDI. Palm warblers nest in early June. Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided Flycatchers are known to nest here, as do Lincoln's Sparrows.

17. Wonderland is the first of two trails that shelter nesting warblers. Given their proximity, Wonderland and Ship Harbor share much in common.





Schoodic Point is a separate part of Acadia National Park. Although it shares some of the habitat characteristics of the larger park on Mount Desert Island, there are important differences. The Schoodic portion is more strongly boreal, with uncommon sightings of Spruce Grouse, Boreal Chickadee, and Black-backed Woodpeckers a possibility. The park loop road is closer to the water, with frequent pull-offs, making it easy to scan for waterfowl. Schoodic is one of the most exposed points of land anywhere on the coast and one of the best places to scope for distant sea birds. From Route 1, follow the signs to Winter Harbor along Route 186 to Schoodic Point.

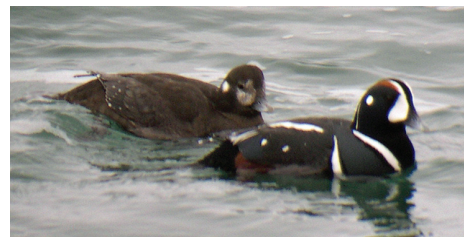
coniferous forest with a smattering of birch trees. Through spring and summer breeding season, this is a warbler paradise. At about 2.3 miles beyond Frazer Point a gravel road appears on the left. The road climbs a mile up Schoodic Head, followed by a few hundred yards of footpath to the summit. The road is closed in winter, but even in summer birders often elect to park at the bottom and hike the length. The spruce-fir mix is adequate for boreal specialties. Spruce Grouse, Black-backed Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Flycatchers, and Boreal Chickadees occur here but none are common. Swainson's Thrushes are present. In irruptive seasons, it's good area for White-

Frazer Point:

The first contact with salt water after entering the park loop road is a causeway called Mosquito Harbor, worth a brief stop. In season, Belted Kingfishers forage over the wide tidal river. Immediately afterward, pull into Frazer Point. The open space and low shrubbery entice warblers, and the picnic area provides a wide-open look at the channel. Good binoculars or a spotting scope are required, because the sea ducks tend to stay rather distant here. There is a seasonal rest room.

Schoodic Head:

For the next couple of miles, proceed through low



winged and Red Crossbills. Barred Owls and Northern Goshawks patrol the woods around the summit.

Schoodic Point: Continue along, lingering for a quick scan wherever there is water. Where the road forks right to Schoodic Point and becomes two-way traffic, take the time to check the birds of Arey Cove. At any time of year expect Common Eiders, Red-breasted Mergansers, and Black Guillemots. All three scoters are found here during the year. In winter, it's a good chance for Red-throated Loons.

Schoodic Point extends into the Atlantic, and Northern Gannets may be passing in any season but mid-winter. Harlequin Ducks are becoming more common in winter. Expect the usual suspects: Common Eiders, Common Goldeneyes, Long-tailed Ducks, scoters, cormorants (Double-crested in summer; Great in winter), Horned and Red-necked Grebes, loons, Buffleheads, and Black Guillemots. There are plenty of gulls around, so don't overlook a chance Glaucous or Iceland in winter.

Continuing eastward there is another trail towards Schoodic Head opposite the parking lot for Blueberry Hill. Ruby-crowned Kinglets and many warblers lurk



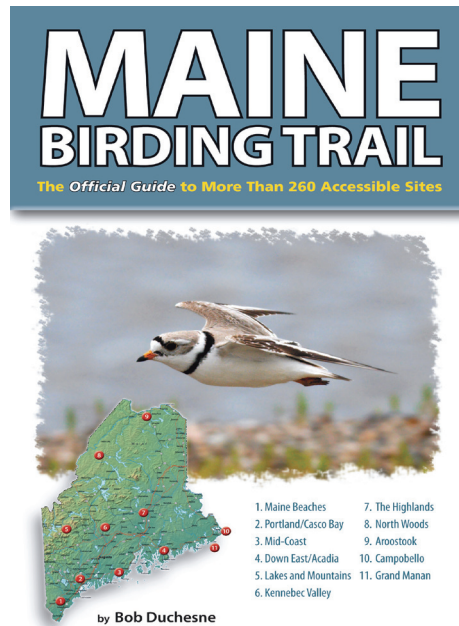
along the beginning of this trail in spring and summer. These include American Redstart, Nashville, Chestnut-sided, Black-throated Green, and Yellow-rumped. Spend ample time scanning the waters off Blueberry Hill. In winter, Great Cormorants are abundant and Thick-billed Murres have been sighted on multiple occasions. To exit the park, follow the road to Birch Harbor, turning left to remain in the Acadia area or right to continue toward Washington County.

Other resources:

Rich MacDonald is a local birding guide who operates the Natural History Center in downtown Bar Harbor. He can be reached at 207-801-2617 (store) or 207-266-9461 (mobile). E-mail: Rich@TheNaturalHistoryCenter.com.

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