

## Birding in Dunback Meadow by Bobbie Hodson

While there are many beautiful and varied conservation areas in Lexington, Dunback Meadow has been and remains my favorite for birding in all seasons. It has varied habitats of woods, fields, and water, lending itself to a rich possibility of birds. Nearly 200 species of 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 Street entrance and crosses Clematis Brook on its way to Bacon Street. The other main trail runs from Clarke Middle School through several meadows and woods until it reaches Bowman School. Preferred entrances are via Allen Street and Clarke School where parking is ample. From Clarke School one can also take a shorter trail, one of the *ACROSS Lexington* routes through pine woods, which joins the Allen Street trail.

In late summer and early fall, Dunback Meadow 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 in their summer territories. 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 Dunback Meadow has many residential birds, such as Chickadees, Tufted Titmice, White-breasted Nuthatches, and Downy, Red-bellied, and Hairy Woodpeckers, as well as Mourning Doves and Blue Jays. Flocks of Bobolinks are often seen in the meadows in the 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 as well. These are best observed in the early mornings.

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

Dunback’s birding opportunities change 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, when you are sure to see something new.