

Birds of Wing Island



A Summary Statement

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Wing Island is a coastal barrier island located behind the Cape Cod Museum of Natural History on Cape Cod, Massachusetts. It consists of 122 acres, including a large expanse of salt marsh surrounding the island, a not easily accessible beach, and acres of uplands, consisting of forested areas and an array of shrubs.ⁱ Wing Island has been hosting a bird banding station for the past 22 years.

237 species of birds have been documented utilizing this unique habitat and 151 species have been banded.

According to the State of the Birds 2022, North America has lost 3 billion breeding birds in all habitats since 1970.ⁱⁱ It is imperative we be proactive and do all we can to save these birds, especially those in sharp declines.

The following bird species that utilize **Wing Island** and the surrounding waters and saltmarsh are protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act.ⁱⁱⁱ Other species on this list are of special concern as they are on a path to becoming endangered, and possible extinction, if we do nothing to help them. We should be protecting our wildlife areas on behalf of those especially vulnerable. (*Indicates banded species):

Waterfowl:

- 1) Black Scoter

Cuckoos:

- 1) Black-billed Cuckoo*

Shorebirds:

- 1) American Oystercatcher
- 2) American Golden-Plover

3) Piping Plover- threatened status MA



- 4) Whimbrel
- 5) Red Knot- threatened MA
- 6) Semipalmated Sandpiper
- 7) Short-billed Dowitcher
- 8) Lesser Yellowlegs

Jaegers:

- 1) Parasitic Jaeger

Gulls, Terns, Skimmers:

- 1) Great Black-backed Gull
- 2) Least Tern – special concern MA
- 3) Roseate Tern- endangered MA
- 4) Common Tern- special concern MA
- 5) Forster's Tern
- 6) Black Skimmer

Loons:

- 1) Common Loon- special concern MA

Petrels, Shearwaters, Diving-Petrels:

- 1) Cory's Shearwater

Hérons, Ibis, and Allies:

- 1) American Bittern- endangered MA
- 2) Little Blue Heron

Vultures, Hawks, and Allies:

- 1) Northern Harrier* - threatened MA
- 2) Bald Eagle- special concern MA

Owls:

- 1) Snowy Owl
- 2) Short-eared Owl- endangered MA

Kingfishers:

- 1) Belted Kingfisher

Falcons and Caracaras:

- 1) Peregrine Falcon- special concern MA

Thrushes:

- 1) Bicknell's Thrush*
- 2) Wood Thrush*

Finches, Euphonias, and Allies:

- 1) Evening Grosbeak

New World Sparrows:

- 1) Grasshopper Sparrow*- threatened MA
- 2) Field Sparrow*
- 3) Vesper Sparrow*- threatened MA
- 4) Nelson's Sparrow*
- 5) Saltmarsh Sparrow*



- 6) Seaside Sparrow*

Yellow-breasted Chat*

Blackbirds:

- 1) Bobolink*
- 2) Eastern Meadowlark
- 3) Orchard Oriole*
- 4) Rusty Blackbird

Wood Warblers:

- 1) Blue-winged Warbler*
- 2) Prothonotary Warbler*

- 3) Connecticut Warbler*
- 4) Mourning Warbler*
- 5) Cape May Warbler*
- 6) Cerulean Warbler*
- 7) Northern Parula*- threatened MA
- 8) Bay-breasted Warbler*
- 9) Blackpoll Warbler*
- 10) Kentucky Warbler*
- 11) Prairie Warbler*



- 12) Canada Warbler*

Cardinals, Grosbeaks and Allies:

- 1) Scarlet Tanager*
- 2) Rose-breasted Grosbeak*
- 3) Dickcissel*

Wing Island is an important stop-over site for birds traveling during their spring and fall migrations from as far away as the Arctic and South America. Waterfowl, loons, shearwaters, skimmers, gulls, terns, and jaegers use the ocean waters for feeding and resting. Shorebirds, gulls, terns, Peregrine Falcon and Snowy Owl use the beach for either breeding (Piping Plover and Least Tern), feeding or resting (or all three). This beach is unique in a way that differs from other beaches in Brewster. Due to the fact that it is a great deal farther from the mainland makes it less attractive to beachgoers. One has to traverse not one, but two saltmarshes to reach the beach which can be trying at high tide, making the area much more attractive to birdlife. The surrounding saltmarsh is needed for herons, hawks, Short-eared Owl, Belted Kingfisher, blackbirds (except Orchard Oriole), sparrows and Dickcissel. The upland area is especially important also for songbirds. Prairie Warblers are of special concern because they are restricted to a very limited habitat and with numbers dwindling, Wing Island is a perfect habitat to encourage breeding. On a special note, **Wing Island** holds the North American record for the oldest Prairie Warbler at 10

years 3 months old! That is quite a feat considering this small bird weighs only 7.5 grams (about the weight of 3 peanut M & M's) and travels back and forth twice a year between the continental U.S. and the Caribbean. The many fruits and berries in the fall of Wing Island help to sustain migrants as a place to build up fat before continuing on their long migration journey.

The proposed boardwalk by the Town of Brewster that includes an elevated boardwalk from Drummer Boy Park to the middle of another elevated boardwalk will have a major detrimental impact on birds that use **Wing Island**. The endangered Short-eared Owl had been spotted utilizing the salt marsh between Quivett Creek and Wing Island as it forages for food over the salt marsh. Endangered American Bitterns as well use the reeds near Drummer Boy and **Wing Island** to hunt for food. Numerous banded Saltmarsh Sparrows with full brood patches (meaning females are sitting on eggs) have been photographed for proof of their breeding activities directly in the salt marsh. Seaside Sparrows, Eastern Meadowlarks, and Bobolinks are other birds of special concern that use the saltmarsh.

The proposed boardwalk will encourage more people to use the island and beach at a detriment to the bird life trying to breed or feed. Most of the birds on this list don't want to be where people are. Encouraging hordes of people to use this land will drive the birds away. Birds have strong site fidelity and when their habitat is gone, they don't move to another location to breed, they just stop breeding, hence the plummeting population declines of so many species. More people means more trash left behind on the beach, another issue harming birds that use the beach and ocean. The trail system on **Wing Island** at this time consists of narrow trails. If those are widened in the future to account for extensive foot traffic, it could minimize the fruits and berries the birds feed on.

Protecting a valuable and vulnerable habitat should be our main priority. As humans we have a duty to protect this land and all of inhabitants, not have it there just for the enjoyment of our fellow man.

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ⁱ <https://sites.google.com/site/brewsterlands/about-us/wing-island>

ⁱⁱ [State of the Birds 2022](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/birds-of-conservation-concern-2021.pdf>