

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (Plum Island)

By Sandy Selesky

The Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (Plum Island) is best from October through May but can also be good in June and July for nesting birds. Mid-August to October is good for sandpipers.

(Beware: Greenheads and mosquitoes are VERY bad from July through September so bring lots of bug spray and wear a hat.)

Directions:

Rt. 495 north to ext 55 (Salisbury/95 to Newburyport sign). Turn right at the end of the exit ramp, which is East 110. Turn right after the Burger King light to get on Rt. 95 south. Take this one exit and get off (Newburyport). Turn left at the light off the exit ramp. Keep going straight for several miles until you see the sign for the center of Newburyport and turn left. Make the 2nd right towards the center of town and keep going straight through Newburyport (on Ocean Ave.).

You can also go straight from Exit 55/Salisbury to the end and turn right at the light and straight until you go over the Rt. 1 bridge. Take the first exit off the bridge and turn left on Ocean Ave.

Go past the shops, past the harbor on your left, past the small airport on your right, over the Plum Island bridge with marshes on both sides. After you go over the bridge, turn right on Sunset Rd. Take this road (with marshes on your right and houses on your left) to the Parker River NW Refuge booth. You'll have to pay \$5 per car or buy an annual duck stamp for \$15 that allows you to enter as many times as you want for a year (that ends June 30 of each year). If you are 65, or older, you can buy a lifetime pass for all of the national Wildlife Refuges for \$10.00.

Where to Go

Go down the refuge road to various parking lots. I do most of my photography on the beach (Emerson rocks and beyond to the right off the LAST (Sandy Point State Reservation) parking lot or the next to the last parking lot. There are usually sandpipers on the beach here at high tide in spring or late August – October at high tide (and by the water's edge at low tide) and sometimes terns nesting in the area that can make for great flight shots as they come and go with fish in their beaks overhead. Part of the area is roped off for endangered nesting piping plovers and least terns but you can still get them coming and going if

you're lucky in early June. And this past November I got some great images of a snowy owl resting on the sand beyond the furthest reservation parking lot.

Anything can be seen, however, as you drive down the road. The salt pannes after Parking Lot 1 on the right can also be interesting for ducks, swans, sandpipers, or other wading birds like snowy egrets and great egrets during the spring, summer, or early fall months. In winter you could see snowy owls in the fields or perched on trees, short-eared owls flying or perched on posts or trees, raptors such as northern harriers flying low over the salt panes, fields and dunes, merlins or other hawks perched or flying.

In the spring the migrating and nesting birds such as bobolinks, tree swallows, warblers, scarlet tanagers, rose-breasted grosbeaks, and Baltimore orioles, and even woodcocks. You might even see a red fox, coyote, or white-tailed deer running in the field or crossing the road in early morning or towards dusk. Patience is the name of the game as well as going back many times at different times of the year. Don't give up if you don't see much. There's always another day when that peregrine falcon may come flying down from the sky to snatch a bird in front of you and start eating it in the tree ahead.

