

Self Guiding Nature Trail Conservation Area



The Groton Long Point Association, Inc.

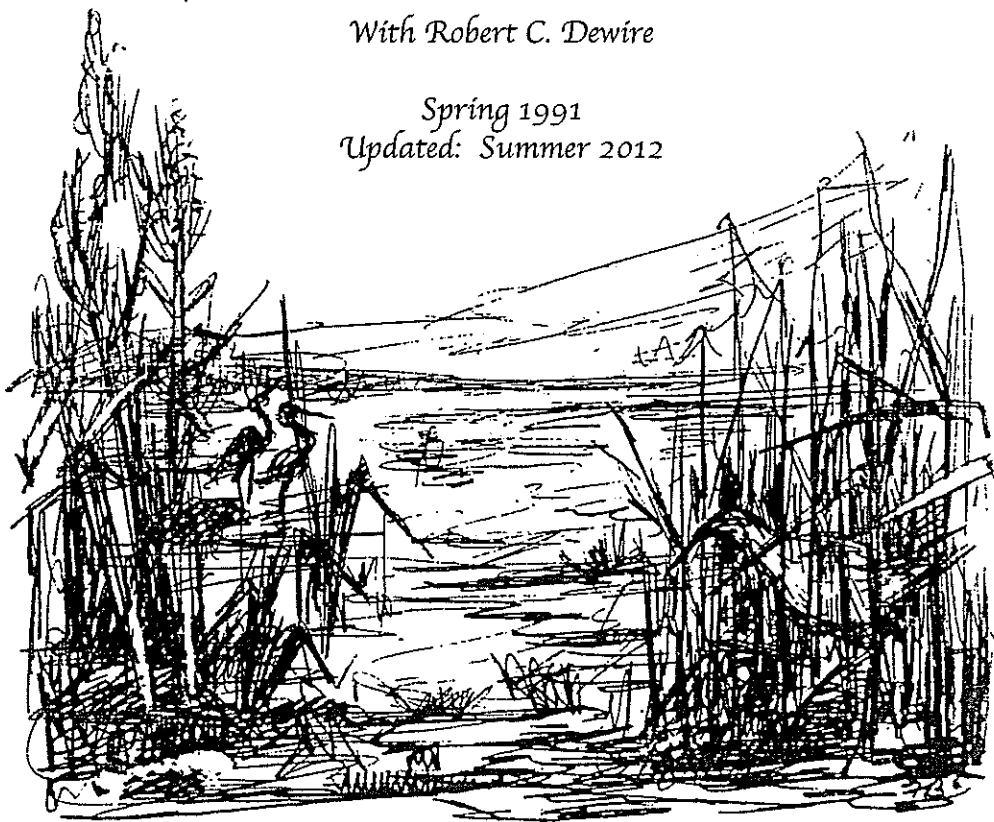
Prepared by the Conservation Commission

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With Robert C. Dewire

*Spring 1991
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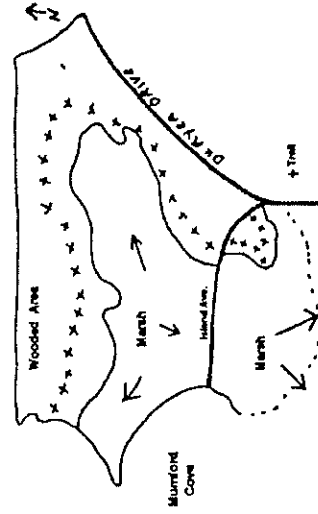
Welcome to Our Nature Trail

Just minutes from your doorstep is a beautiful natural area comprising about one-third of the total acreage of Groton Long Point. It is a diverse landscape consisting of salt marshes, a fresh water stream, a lowland forest, and glacial deposits, to name only a few of its characteristics.

This guide will lead you on an approximately 45 minute walk along a one and one-half mile trail (round trip) designed and cut by the Conservation Commission. There are 26 specific stops identifying the plants and animals you will most likely encounter. Painted blue blazes about eight feet above the ground on many of the trees will help you follow the path. Secondary (side) trails are marked with white blazes.

Although the trail is cleared, cautious walking with proper foot attire is a must as you will come across fallen branches, nuts/acorns, and wet leaves.

The Conservation Commission asks that you help preserve the attractiveness of the area by taking out with you any litter you bring into the area and by picking up and disposing of any litter carelessly left behind by previous visitors.



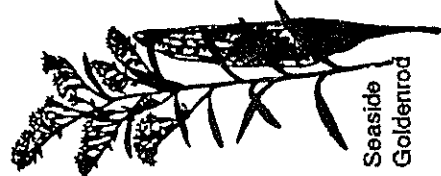
#1 The trail begins on the south side of Island Avenue just above the intersection with Duryea Drive. A number of perennial field flowers are present. They include goldenrods and asters. The Conservation Commission has also planted a number of Norway Spruce seedlings in this area.

#2 The grove of trees you next enter is made up mostly of hickories with their deeply grooved bark. The nuts are an important wildlife food for deer, squirrels, and a number of birds that will pick at them. There are Viburnum bushes on the right. They have white flowers in the spring and berries in the fall. There are Autumn Olive on the left, which is an invasive.

Stops 3 and 4 are on a side trail marked by white blazes.

#3 The trail overlooks a section of salt marsh. This marsh is landlocked by roads. Large culverts placed under the road by the Association on both Island Avenue South and Bridge Street permit better flow of water from Mumford Cove. The marsh is healthy with a lush growth of marsh grasses; and its mud flats teem with fiddler crabs, grass shrimp, and other creatures, all a part of the food chain so necessary to larger creatures such as herons, egrets, and waterfowl that are regularly found here.

#4 At this same location, notice the bedrock facing the marsh with its smooth face rounded by wave action when the coast was up to this point perhaps a thousand or more years ago. Called country gneiss, this is an extremely hard rock, very slow to break down and often exposed as sand, gravel, and softer rocks broken up by the elements.



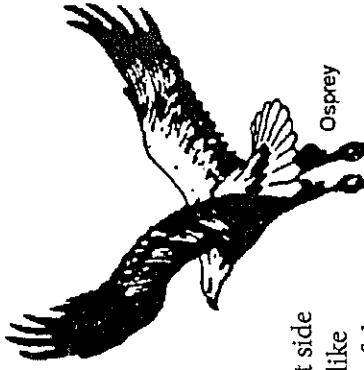
Seaside
Goldenrod

RETURN TO THE MAIN TRAIL (BLUE BLAZES), CROSS ISLAND AVENUE, AND CONTINUE INTO THE WOODS ON THE TRAIL ACROSS THE ROAD.

#5 The trail now takes you into a typical lowland forest. Oak and hickory dominate this woods with red maple also quite common. The understory shrubs are a mixture of sweet pepperbush, highbush blueberry, and sassafras. The spikes of white flowers on the pepperbush are very fragrant. Bloomtime is July. Although there are a large number of blueberry bushes, shade prevents them from producing many berries. Also present are Norway Spruce.

#6 The large boulders you shortly come upon are glacial in origin, left behind as the ice sheet melted some 10,000 years ago. The boulders are little changed from their original shape due to their hardness.

#7 The rise on the left of the path provides a nice overview of the salt marsh. This section of the marsh is fed directly from Mumford Cove. The thin grass dominating the marsh is salt meadow grass (spartina patens). The thicker bladed, taller grass near the water edges is salt marsh cordgrass (spartina alterniflora). In late summer and fall, watch for such wildflowers as sea lavender and salt marsh aster which look like miniature daisies. The large pole structure in the marsh is an osprey platform to encourage nesting of these rare birds of prey. Watch for them from April to September.



#8 Two very large oaks appear on the left side of the trail. These are black oaks, and unlike most trees of the area, they are survivors of the 1938 hurricane. The broad low branches indicate that the land was significantly more open (less competition from other trees) when these trees were young. The second of the two trees has a woodpecker hole where the common flicker nests. These trees are between 100 and 140 years old.

#9 Not too far past the oak, the trail goes left to the remains of a huge tree on the forest floor. This is the trunk of an American chestnut. These trees dominated our woodlands of the 1800s, but the introduction of a blight in 1904 caused the large trees to be virtually wiped out. Sprouts from the rootstocks often can be found growing, but these die before they get very big.

#10 On the left side of the path, you will shortly pass a large maple. The trunk has many lichens growing on it. These plants are half algae and half fungus and are found growing on trees and rocks. They do not injure the tree, using the trunk

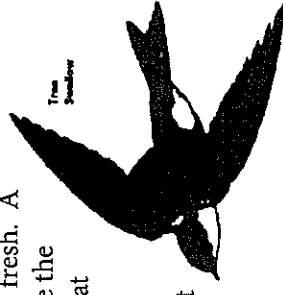


only for support. The fungi part of the plant stores water, and the algae part makes the food. The birdhouses in the marsh are for tree swallows. Some are also used by house wrens, and most activity in them is from April to July.

#11 The old well on the right is one of the several that were part of the original water system for Groton Long Point in the 1920s. As the population grew and the water use increased, brackish water entered the system. The city water supply was then begun.

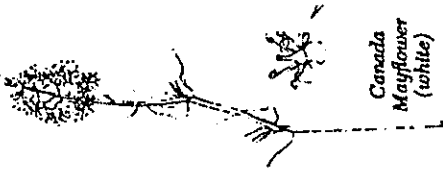
#12 You will now pass through a nice stand of highbush blueberries. A favorite wildlife food, they are always attractive to the eye as well. The red outer stems and buds of winter, the pretty white hanging bell-like flowers of spring, the delicious berries of summer, and the red leaves of autumn add something new to see each season.

#13 The trail is now at the upper part of the marsh. The major visible area is salt, but the upper part across from you is fresh. A fresh water stream enters the marsh here. Notice the cat tail and plumes of the invasive phragmites that are present. The wall through the marsh was an old land boundary. You will cross this wall at two locations on the way to the end of the trail at Mumford Cove.



#14 Grassy Opening: This open area creates an "edge" habitat of brush and trees that is sought by many forms of wildlife. The area was used as the Groton Long Point dump in the 1920s; but through the efforts of the Conservation Commission, it has been restored to an attractive habitat for many birds and animals. The sunlit area allows many wildflowers to grow, among them mullein, with its soft rabbit ear-like leaves; thistles; nightshade, with purple shooting star-like flowers; pokeberry, with large purple berries for birds (not people); and blackberries.

#15 Entering the woods again, note the small leaves that make up the ground cover in so much of the area from May to September. This is the Canada Mayflower or false lily-of-the-valley. The small white flowers of May give way to red berries in the fall, which are eaten by mice, chipmunks, and a number of birds. The stone wall crossing the path is part of the same one viewed in the marsh earlier.



#16 You now come to a large stand of cinnamon ferns.

These are among our tallest ferns, reaching 6 feet in ideal conditions. The name comes from the brown spike of spores that appear in the spring resembling a cinnamon stick. The spike dies down in summer, but

the lush, green leaves remain until fall when they turn yellow and die down. Visit here in late April and see the hundreds of fiddleheads emerging.



#17 The trees in this area are good spots to look for the nests of gray squirrels. They can be distinguished from bird nests by the presence of large amounts of leaves. Squirrels raise their young in these nests but usually abandon the nests in winter. They are easiest to see in the fall and winter when leaves are off the tree.

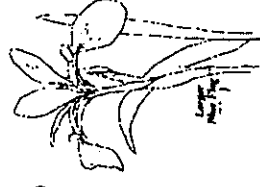
#18 Insects abound in the dead trees throughout the woods; these in turn are eaten by woodpeckers who also put holes in the trees for nesting. The holes are then used by wrens, chickadees, titmice, and crested flycatchers as well as mammals such as mice and squirrels. Even when the trees fall, they will still continue to provide food and cover for many.

#19 The area you are now walking through is lined with a crawling vine called dewberry. It is a member of the blackberry family with edible blackberry-like fruit. The leaves are semi-evergreen, turning a wine red color in winter.



#20 The large rock outcrop on the right is a mixture of pink granite and gneiss. Notice the lichens growing on it.

#21 The bridge crosses over a small fresh water stream that empties into the marsh we noted in stop #13. In this very wet area, the dominant tree is red maple. Poison ivy is common on the edges. Note the white berries of the ivy in fall and winter. Spring finds skunk cabbage present, while summer presents a fine show of blue flag iris. The best show of all comes in August with the flowering of beautiful stands of marsh or rose mallow. The huge pink hibiscus-like flowers are quite spectacular. In the fall the large seed pods are easily seen on both sides of the bridge.

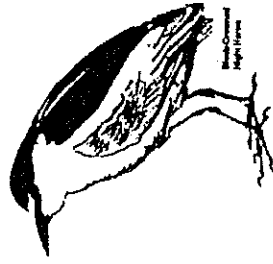


#22 After crossing the bridge, the trail goes uphill into a drier upland habitat. Oaks again dominate, but on the left side, look for a stand of sassafras trees with their thickly grooved trunks. Seedlings also abound here with their one, two, or three lobed leaves. Pick a leaf and smell the lemony scent. Tea is made from the bark of the roots.

#23 The old skeleton of a red cedar is on the right just before a stone wall. Cedars this size point to the fact that this was once an open field. As other trees came in and faster growing oaks shaded the cedar, it died. The stone wall is again the same boundary encountered before.

#24 If you walk slowly and quietly through this next area watching the bushes, you may see both great blue and black-crowned night herons roosting. The birds will fly out, often making harsh rasping calls as they go. The great blue herons are most common in fall, winter, and spring, and the night herons in summer.

#25 Much of the thick vine cover through the area you are walking is wild grape. As the grapes ripen in the late summer and fall, the wonderful fragrance of the fruit is evident. They taste pretty good too, although they are a bit tart for many taste buds. Also notice the 150 year old four-branched cherry tree.



#26 The trail ends at this overlook of Mumford Cove. See the bird listings for what may be present offshore. Notice the stunted red oak on the right, a victim of wind and salt spray. Also on the right is a nice stand of black gum trees, also called tupelo or pepperidge trees. The tall bushes in front of the overlook are groundsel. Fall finds white flowers, small on the male but very cottony and showy on the female. The lower bushes in front of these bordering the marsh grass are marsh elder.

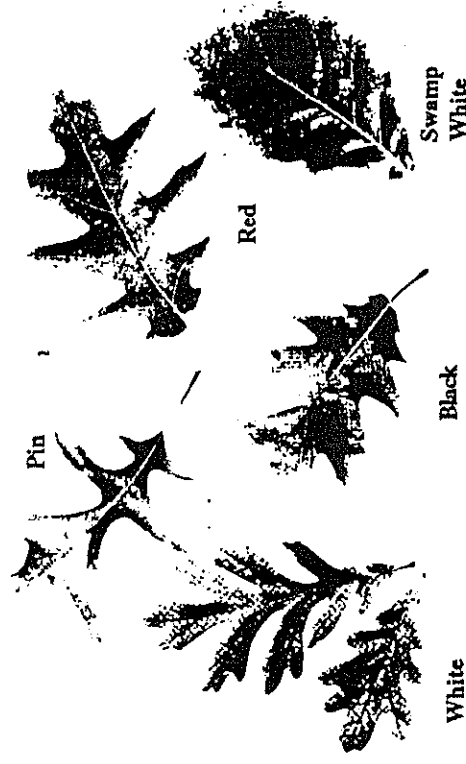
#27 At the edge of the marsh, notice fleshy stemmed plants called glass wort or sea pickle (*Salicornia*). They are green in summer and red in fall.

The Groton Long Point Conservation Commission hopes you have enjoyed the walk and have learned a little more about the natural history of the area. Please use the trail as often as you like. It is especially interesting, as well as challenging, to walk the trail during each of the seasons, noting the changes in the individual species you have previously identified. Think about all you have seen-- the beauty of the living, the value of the decomposing, and the regeneration of life from season to season.



Left: example of bark, twig, leaf, and flower of a sassafras tree

As you return along the trail, see if you can find examples of the 5 species of oaks that grow here. The leaves are illustrated below.



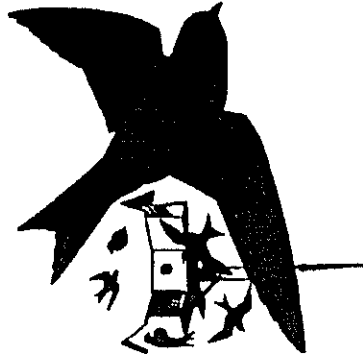
In addition to the trail, here are some other good spots on Groton Long Point to observe wildlife activity.

NORTH STREET MARSH: A small marsh on North Street that was all but wiped out by phragmites that choked out the native vegetation and rendered the area unsuitable for wildlife. Cutting down of phragmites and enlarging the culverts here for better water flow have brought this marsh back as a viable area for wildlife.

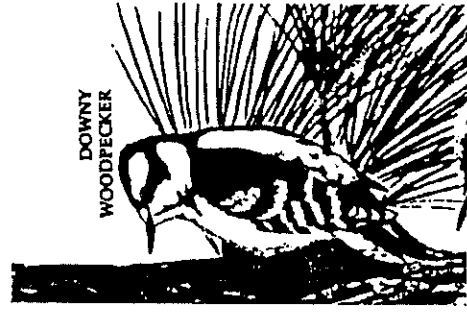
MARSH OVERVIEW BOTH SIDES OF ISLAND AVENUE: There are two fine salt marshes on either side of the road. Mud flats at low tide attract numerous herons, egrets, ibis, and others. Note the tree swallow houses on the edges. The large "apartment" bird houses are for purple martins, perhaps nature's best mosquito controllers.

JOE DEVINE RIVIERA: At the end of Atlantic Avenue is the conservation zoned Joe Devine Riviera. This sand spit and salt marsh area at the end of Mumford Cove is a superb spot from which to view the cove mudflats for bird life. The Commission has planted several species of salt hardy plants here such as black pine, rugosa rose, bayberry, and beach plum.

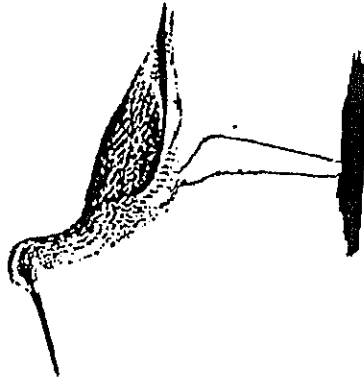
Purple Martin
House



Black-capped
Chickadee



DOWNY
WOODPECKER

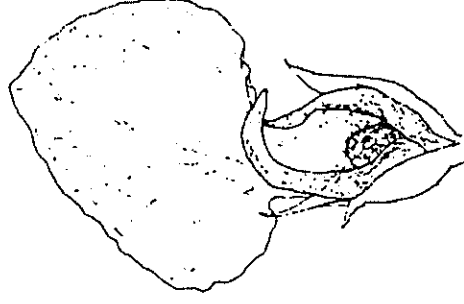


Greater Yellowlegs



Swamp
Rose Mallow

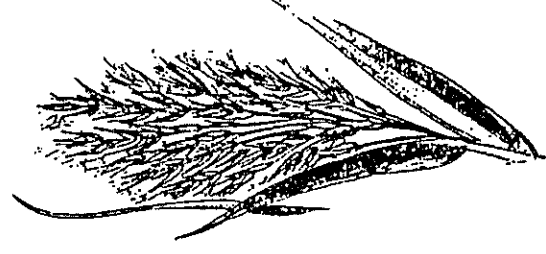
Marsh or Rose Mallow



Skunk Cabbage



Pokeberry



Phragmites

BIRDS TO BE SEEN ALONG THE TRAIL FROM APRIL TO OCTOBER

Mourning Dove	House Wren	Red-wing Blackbird
Red-bellied	Carolina Wren	Baltimore Oriole
Woodpecker	Mockingbird	Common Grackle
Common Flicker	Gray Catbird	Brown-headed
Hairy Woodpecker	Brown Thrasher	Cowbird
Downy Woodpecker	Robin	Scarlet Tanager
Crested Flycatcher	Wood Thrush	Rose-breasted
Tree Swallow	Veery	Grosbeak
Blue Jay	Starling	Cardinal
Common Crow	White-eyed Vireo	House Finch
Black-capped	Red-eyed Vireo	American Goldfinch
Chickadee	Ovenbird	Rufous-sided Towhee
Tufted Titmouse	Yellowthroat	Song Sparrow
White-breasted	American Redstart	
Nuthatch	House Sparrow	

BIRDS TO WATCH FOR IN THE MARSHES FROM APRIL TO OCTOBER

Great Blue Heron	Canada Goose	Ring-billed Gull
Great Egret	Mallard	Least Tern
Snowy Egret	Black Duck	Belted Kingfisher
Little Blue Heron	Osprey	Eastern Kingbird
Green Heron	Killdeer	Barn Swallow
Black-crowned Night Heron	Greater yellowlegs	Salt Marsh Sparrow
Glossy Ibis	Wilson's Snipe	
Mute Swan	Least Sandpiper	
	Semipalmated Plover	

BIRDS OF THE MUMFORD COVE AREA FROM MAY TO OCTOBER

Double-crested	Lesser Yellowlegs	Semipalmated
Cormorant	Red Knot	Sandpiper
American	Savannah Sparrow	Great Black-backed
Oystercatcher	White-rumped	Gull
Piping Plover	Sandpiper	Herring Gull
Black-bellied Plover	Dunlin	Laughing Gull
Ruddy Turnstone	Short-billed	Common Tern
Willet	Dowitcher	

The above birds are fairly regular from year to year. A number of additional species could certainly be found, especially during migration times.