

# Birding Along the Charles River in the Winter of Covid-19

**Editor's Note:** This article will have a Conservator website version that will amplify descriptions in this article including maps and many e-bird references.

There are seven places along the Charles River in Newton (one is across the river in Needham) where you may walk on level, paved paths, and enjoy the river, birds, and whatever surprises turn up. Birding in the time of Covid-19, however, involves some planning ahead. Wear a mask; keep your distance; and do not share optics with people not in your “bubble.” Choose to look at birds in places and at times that are not filled with throngs of people near you on narrow paths.

Useful maps for the places described in this article can be found on the Newton Conservators' web site <https://newtonconservators.org/> and may be downloaded and printed. Google maps, in satellite mode, can also be helpful.

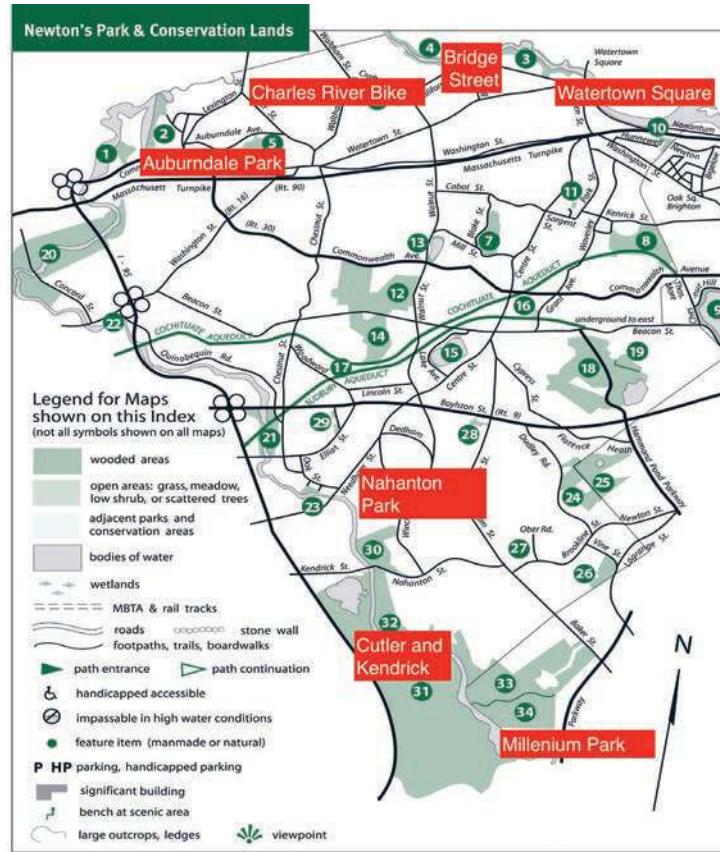
**Watertown Square to Millennium Park:** The span of locations in this article goes from Watertown Square along the Charles River to Millennium Park in West Roxbury. The images in this article give a sample of birds one can expect



Common Goldeneye

to see along the Charles River in the winter. The online version of this article will contain “hot web links” that will give additional background information.

**Watertown Square to Bridge Street:** One can walk both sides of the river from Galen Street at Watertown Square to Bridge Street. You might choose to walk one side for part of this distance, and return on the other side of the



river, eliminating parking two cars, and, more importantly, not boxing yourself into carpooling, another unwise action in Covid-19 time. There is parking along California Street in Newton or off Pleasant Street in Waltham.

The Watertown Dam usually attracts some Herring Gulls and perhaps a Ring-bill or Great Black-backed Gull. From the footbridge just upstream from the dam, one often sees mallards, cormorants, and herons. As you proceed upriver, there are two viewing platforms that jut out into the water, one on each side of this stretch of river.

**Charles River Bike Path:** You may access more such reports

by googling “eBird,” going to “explore” on the drop-down menu obtained by clicking on the little bars in the upper right of the screen and scrolling down to “explore Hotspots;” the correct name of this hotspot is “Charles River Bike Path, Waltham.” Click on “view details” and scroll down to see a report with an appropriate date. Then

click on that date to see the checklist of species seen.



Great Blue Heron

**Bridge Street to Elm Street:** A second stretch of the river goes from Bridge Street to Elm Street. You have to walk on one

side of the river for part of this distance, and switch sides of the river a few times to keep going as there are not duplicate paths here.



*Hairy Woodpecker*



*Yellow-rumped Warbler*

bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-rumped Warblers, hawks, and various small woodland birds of the Massachusetts' winter.

Abutting the Forest Grove area is the Flowed Meadow area of Auburndale. This fourth area is merely another option for walking and looking at what is around you with some care. Parking is available at the end of West Pine Street in Auburndale.

**Nahanton Park:** A fifth place for birding, and one of the best in Newton throughout the year, is Nahanton Park off Winchester Street. One can drive in from Winchester



*White-throated Sparrow*

Street and park or go around the right turn onto Nahanton Street and turn to the right, just before the bridge across the river and then park near the nature center. There are nice walking trails here. There are lower and upper community garden plots, which often harbor wintering birds that dine on seeds and insects, if available, in these garden patches. Birds you might see here include Carolina Wren, Eastern Towhee, and White-throated Sparrow.

**Auburndale Park:** We now consider the area along the river at Forest Grove in the Auburndale village of Newton. One can park around the circle at the end of Forest Grove Road, a continuation of Woerd Avenue. In the Forest Grove and Purgatory Cove area, you are in a more wooded environment. You are more likely to see three species of woodpecker here, including Hairy, Downy and Red-

**Cutler Park and Kendrick Pond:** Across the river on Kendrick Street in Needham are Cutler Park and Kendrick Pond. There are longer trails here than in the previously described areas. A selection of birds you can expect to find here includes Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Gadwall, Mallards, American Black Duck, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Mourning Dove, Great Blue Heron, Red-bellied Woodpecker, American Crow, Tufted Titmouse, Golden-crowned Kinglet, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, and the American Robin.

**Millenium Park:** The final area is Millennium Park, sometimes crowded with a lot of people and dogs, especially on weekends. There are various trails to walk here, one of which can be taken back downriver all the way to Nahanton Park. The grassy hillsides are good for sparrow species such as Savannah Sparrow and Swamp Sparrow. The lower trails by the river and out to the ponds are good for woodland



*Golden-crowned Kinglet*

species. One may encounter Wood Ducks and a Cooper's Hawk, in these locations. The Charles River may produce more duck species for you.

There are many other open places in Newton in which you may walk and look around at the birds and winter life. The Conservators' website and booklet mentioned above have trail maps which can be used in the same fashion in these spots. eBird reports are available for many of these, and you might like to submit an eBird report of your own. It is free and contributes to a growing accumulation of citizen science data, useful for tracking population changes and climate change. Such activities are also good for your physical and mental health.

As a help in identifying non-avian species, there is a free app for mobile phones, "iNaturalist." One can take photos with the app and then have them identified on the spot. One may also pull an old photo up into the app and get an ID. A good plant app is Picture This (<https://picturethisai.com/>), which has a free trial period. The premium subscription is \$29.99 for a year. There is a lot of fascinating life out there. Get out for a walk in the natural world; make some acquaintances; exercise, and refresh your spirit.

**Note:** Sources and tables for this article can be found below. ♦

✍️ Pete Gilmore

## Birding links for Birding along the Charles River

### NEWTON CONSERVATOR MAPS FROM WALKING TRAILS IN NEWTON'S PARK & CONSERVATION LANDS

WATERTOWN SQUARE TO BRIDGE STREET

<https://newtonconservators.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/4charlesmoody.pdf>

CHARLES RIVER BIKE PATH

<https://newtonconservators.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/3charlesgalen.pdf>

BRIDGE STREET TO ELM STREET

<https://newtonconservators.org/property/charles-path-bridge-street/>

GALEN STREET AT WATERTOWN SQUARE TO BRIDGE STREET

<https://newtonconservators.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/4charlesmoody.pdf>

AUBURNDALE PARK

<https://newtonconservators.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/2auburndale.pdf>

NAHANTON PARK

<https://newtonconservators.org/property/nahanton-park/>

CUTLER PARK AND KENDRICK POND

<https://newtonconservators.org/property/cutler-park/>

MILLENNIUM PARK

<https://newtonconservators.org/property/millennium-park/>

### E-BIRD LINKS

E-bird links Watertown Square to Bridge: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S27644364> and from January 20, 2019: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S63595854>

Charles river bike path

<https://newtonconservators.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/3charlesgalen.pdf>

Forest Grove in the Auburndale village of Newton

Check out Jason Forbes' ebird reports of February 28, 2020: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S65237139> and January 10, 2020: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S63232065>.

Flowed Meadow area of Auburndale

James Meigs' report of February 14, 2020: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S64473449>

Nahanton Park

<https://ebird.org/checklist/S64654170> or the report, on March 12, 2020, of Joan Lebel: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S65728272>.

Cutler Park and Kendrick

Daniel Levenson on January 5, 2020: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S63056475>.

Millenium Park

A report by Marshall Iliff on March 27, 2020 can be found at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S66270784>.

### OTHER USEFUL LINKS

INaturalist

<https://www.inaturalist.org>

A good plant app is "PictureThis"

<https://www.picturethisai.com/>