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## New England Snowy Owl Weekend Birding Trip

### WEEKEND(2 night) TRIP

#### OVERVIEW

The Snowy Owl (*Bubo scandiacus*) is a member of the true owl family, and is native to the Arctic regions of North American and Eurasia. It is a big, almost all white owl, and sits at the top of many birders' wish list, not just in America and Canada but for birders from all over the world. It is one of the few birds that will get even non-birders to go outside in the cold and have a look – it is that special!

Snowy Owl really are fascinating creatures! For instance:

- fans of the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling will remember that the character Hedwig was a female Snowy Owl
- the Snowy Owl is the avian symbol of Quebec and French-Canadians
- unlike most owls, Snowy Owls are diurnal, and almost exclusively so
- a single Snowy Owl can eat more than 1,600 lemmings in a single year!
- Snowy Owls are North America's heaviest owl, typically weighing about 4 to 6 pounds
- they often hang out at airports, sitting on poles looking around for food
- the feet of Snowy Owls are completely covered in feathers, helping with insulation but looking a bit like fluffy slippers!

One of the best places to spot this powerful and regal bird is the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Essex county in Massachusetts. Not only will we see the enigmatic Snowy Owl, we will also see many other species of birds, including Common Eider, White-winged Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Purple Sandpiper, Rough-legged Buzzard, Northern Shrike and many others. We will also see some beautiful habitats (great photo opportunities) and many even some mammals. This birding trip to the famous Parker River National Wildlife Refuge can be arranged for any Friday to Sunday between November and March.

#### DAILY SUMMARY

DAY 1 (Friday)	Boston to Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
DAY 2 (Saturday)	Parker River National Wildlife Refuge
DAY 3 (Sunday)	Parker River National Wildlife Refuge to Boston

## DETAILED DAILY ITINERARY

### DAY 1 (Friday): Boston to Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

This Nature Travel Birding Tour begins on the Friday morning in Boston, Massachusetts. Boston is one of the oldest municipalities in the United States, founded in 1630 by settlers from England. It was the scene of several key events of the American Revolution, such as the Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, the Battle of Bunker Hill, and the Siege of Boston. Upon gaining U.S. independence from Great Britain, it continued to be an important port and manufacturing hub as well as a center for education and culture. Today, Boston is a thriving port city and an international center of higher education, including law, medicine, engineering, and business. The city is considered to be a world leader in innovation and entrepreneurship, with nearly 2,000 startups.

From Boston, we will make our way north towards Newburyport and Plum Island, the site of famous Parker River National Wildlife Refuge. En route we will keep our eyes open for any raptors or large flocks of geese that may hold some unusual species.

After a quick lunch and an assessment of the afternoon weather, we will begin searching for Snowy Owls in the Great Marsh on the leeward side of Plum Island. The abundance of Snowy Owls varies each year, but this remains one of the best places to see them in all of New England.

The 4,662 acres (18.87 km<sup>2</sup>) Parker River National Wildlife Refuge was established in 1942 primarily to provide feeding, resting, and nesting habitats for migratory birds. Located along the Atlantic Flyway, the refuge is of vital stopover significance to waterfowl, shorebirds, and songbirds during migratory periods. The refuge includes the mouth of the Parker River, which drains the mainland on the other side of Plum Island Sound. The refuge also includes the southern three-quarters of Plum Island, an 8-mile (13 km) long barrier island. The southern tip of the island, however, is divided between Sandy Point State Reservation and privately owned Cross Farm.

Trails and observation stations are scattered throughout the refuge. Included in the refuge is Plum Island Sound and all the smaller islands within it, and the mouth of the Plum Island River on the Plum Island Sound side only. The marsh in and around the winding channels of the rivers is known as Great Marsh, which has a much greater area than the refuge.

The refuge consists of a range of diverse habitats including sandy beach and dune, shrub/thicket, bog, swamp, freshwater marsh, saltwater marsh and associated creek, river, mudflat, and newly created salt pans. These and other refuge habitats support varied resident and migratory wildlife including more than 300 species of birds and additionally, species of mammals, reptiles, amphibians, insects, and plants.

We will have dinner at a local restaurant, and lodging in nearby Newburyport.

### DAY 2 (Saturday): Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

An early start will allow us to slowly work our way down the reserve's main road. Stopping regularly to survey the variety of different habitats, we can expect to see a number of different species.

On the beach and the oceanfront side of the island, many duck, alcid, and gull species are possible, while open fields and pine groves harbor sparrows, longspurs, larks, and of course, Snowy Owls. Wintering waterfowl are also plentiful in the more sheltered pools and creeks, and raptors can show up at any time. Birds we will almost certainly see include Canada Goose, American Black Duck, Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Mallard, Common Goldeneye, Bufflehead, Northern Harrier, American Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, American Crow, Common Starling and American Tree Sparrow.

After lunch, we will continue to bird this super-rich area until the end of the day. We will keep our eyes peeled for anything out of the ordinary that could pop up. You just never know...

We will once again enjoy dinner and overnight in nearby Newburyport.

### **DAY 3 (Sunday): Parker River National Wildlife Refuge to Boston**

Another early start will allow us to visit areas that, because of time constraints, we were unable to visit yesterday.

Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (and nearby Sandy Point State Reservation) have a number of boardwalks and trails, and even visiting the same place on consecutive days could yield new species. Also, because of the notoriously fickle New England winter weather, Sunday is a perfect time to visit areas that we might have missed due to weather.

Also, if a rare bird has been sighted in the area (not unusual) we can choose to pursue that as well, or see if Harlequin Ducks are present in nearby Rockport.

The tour ends after a closing lunch and a return drive to Boston.

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#### **EXCLUSIONS:**

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