



## Globally Important Bird Areas



### *Northeastern Coastal Maine, including Naval Computer and Telecommunications Station Cutler*

**Ornithological Highlights:** thousands of nesting and wintering seabirds are concentrated here, in addition to thousands of shorebirds, particularly during migration.

**Location:** area from Great Wass Island up the coast to Cutler Bay

- *Atlantic Northern Forest* (NABCI Bird Conservation Region #14)
- *Spruce-Hardwood Forest* (PIF Physiographic Area #28)

**Size:** linearly this section is about 20-25 miles but incorporates several deep inlets

**Ownership:** A mix of state and private lands, in addition to U.S. territorial waters. Great Wass Island is owned by The Nature Conservancy; U.S. Navy

**Site description:** This site extends between Cutler Harbor to the east and Great Wass Island to the west and includes Little Machias Bay, Machias Bay, Englishman's Bay, Little Kennebec Bay, and Eastern Bay. Portions of the towns of Jonesport, Beals, Jonesboro, Machias, Machiasport, Trescott, and Cutler are included. The site as thus defined includes many seabird nesting islands, extensive mudflats, dense stunted spruce cover (similar to that found below the alpine zone), large areas of alder barrens and bogs, and miles of rocky intertidal habitat. The area is adjacent to the area including Machias Seal Island and its surrounding waters.

NCTS Cutler comprises 3,000 acres on Sprague Neck Peninsula. Habitats include rock-bound shoreline cliffs, tidal pools, spruce forest, offshore islands, and 2,200 acres of grassland in the communication tower area. Sprague Neck Bar is designated an Ecological Reserve Area for its significance to tens of thousands of migrating shorebirds.

The ocean off this section of the coast is very cold throughout the year and the many upwells bring nutrients to the surface which are absorbed by phytoplankton, the base of the food chain. Because of the cold water in the outer portion of the bay, pelagic birds as well as whales are often found nearshore.

**Birds:** This area supports over 70% of the nesting Razorbill in Maine, the only state in which it breeds. In 1997 Old Mann Island had over 100 pairs, Pulpit Rock 10-12 pairs, and Freeman Rock 50 pairs. There are several hundred pairs of Black Guillemot in the area, in addition to more than 1,000 pairs of Common Eider and perhaps as many as 1,000 Leach's Storm-Petrel on the islands. Up to 50,000 Black-legged Kittiwakes winter off the coast. Probably in excess of 30,000 shorebirds use the area at some point during the year. The site is one of the most significant in the U.S. for fall migrating Whimbrel (400 to 700 birds) and White-rumped Sandpiper. Other shorebirds found in significant numbers Semipalmated Sandpiper (12,000-25,000), Semipalmated Plover (1,500-2,500), Black-bellied Plover (800-1,200), Short-billed Dowitcher (1,200-1,500), yellowlegs spp. (700-1,000), and Purple Sandpiper (2,000-3,500).

Short-eared Owl breeds, and the density of nesting Merlin is the highest in the eastern U.S. Bicknell's Thrush may also breed. The headlands along Culter east of Little Machias Bay, the Roque Island Archipelago, the Cross Island group and the Head Harbor Island group of islands support good numbers of nesting Blackpoll Warbler, a species which typically nests at high elevations in Maine. In winter, Harlequin Duck and Barrow's Goldeneye are present, and national high counts for American Black Duck and Purple Sandpiper have been recorded in a Christmas Bird Count circle, which covers part of the area.

**Conservation issues:** Most of these shorebird species have shown sharp declines over the last 15 years. Counts in the 1980s for these species were as follows: Semipalmated Sandpiper, 20,000-30,000; Semipalmated Plover, 2,500-3,500; Black-bellied Plover, 1,500-2,500; and Short-billed Dowitcher, 2,000-3,500.

**Visitor information:** The area is of interest throughout the year. Fall migration and winter are good times to visit.

**References:**

Pierson, E.C., J.E. Pierson, and P.D. Vickery. 1996. A birder's guide to Maine. Down East Books, Camden, ME