

EXCERPT FROM *WHERE TO FIND BIRDS IN NEW YORK STATE*

The following is an exact excerpt from *Where To Find Birds In New York State* by Susan Roney Drennan. There are 500 such site descriptions and 106 maps in this long-awaited book, which was sponsored by The Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Inc. It is available from: Syracuse University Press

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El Dorado Beach Preserve (Map 6.3)

Rating: Spring***, Summer***, Autumn****, Winter*

Through the combined efforts of member clubs of the Federation of New York State Bird Clubs, Inc., especially the North Country Bird Club of Watertown, and the Nature Conservancy, this unique shore-bird migratory stopover area was purchased in 1969, and thus saved from residential development. The preserve encompasses 250 acres, most of which is a marsh and woods buffer zone for the more than 3500 feet of rocky peninsula shoreline so attractive to transient shorebirds.

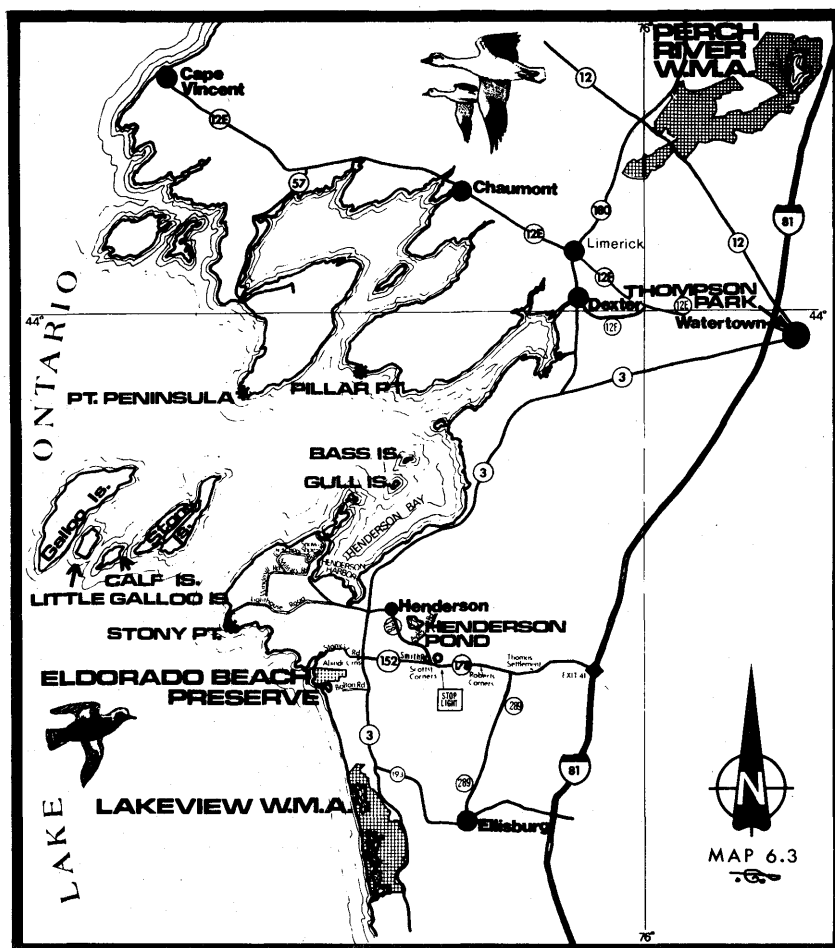
There is only one practical entrance to El Dorado and that is from the north. In the past birders have tried—and regretted attempting to enter on the south end of the preserve. Access to the Bolton Road entrance from the south is by a rough private road and through a gate that is often locked. Directions here are, therefore, to the north entrance. From I-81, take Exit 41 (Adams). After exiting get on NY 178 headed west toward Henderson. Pass through Thomas Settlement and Roberts Corners. At Scotts Corners, approximately 7 miles, NY 178 turns north. Instead of following this route north, head due west toward Alexander Corners on Smith Road. Just after a stoplight Smith turns into Stony Creek Road at Alexander Corners and is very rough until the intersection of it and NY 3. At the intersection of NY 3 and Stony Creek Road, continue west on Stony Creek Road. You are now on a narrow black-top road that traverses grassy pastures and cedar groves. Follow it 1.3 miles to an unmarked dirt road (Grandjean Road) that forks to the left. Bear left on it and drive 0.9 mile, always bearing left, to a gateway. Pass through and continue to

bear left on this grassy two-track road for 0.2 mile and then park. Do not turn right where a sign says "Private Road," and do not inquire at the cottages for directions. In the vicinity of the parking area is a blue-and-orange sign announcing El Dorado Shores. The birder who exercises forethought will have remembered boots and raincoat or windbreaker. The short, low peninsula is often subjected to strong winds and precipitation.

There are two schools of thought on just how to bird El Dorado. Some prefer to walk the path from the parking lot to the beach, turn south (left), bird down the beach, and return to the parking lot by the old dirt road. However, I take another approach, as do the following directions.

Walk south on the dirt road ahead of you and turn west at its end toward Blind Point, which is identifiable by a thicket of red cedar trees surrounded by weedy vines. This is nearly the southernmost boundary of the preserve. Turn north and bird up the stretch of shoreline facing you. Work all of the wave-cut benches and notches along the beach face. These low-lying formations contain various detritus, much of which is thickly interlaced with a dense, slimy layer of algal vegetation and shallow pools, where surface and subsurface insects and larvae abound and into which shorebirds probe. This alliance of freshwater plants, without roots, stems, or even leaves, thrives in this zone. The rich plant and insect life in these pools is the source of the area's attraction to migrating shorebirds. Bird up to and past a collection of glacially deposited boulders and north beyond the rocky point that marks the end of the major shorebirding section of the preserve.

If one considers a bit of the biology basic to shorebirds, it becomes immediately apparent when the birding is prime at El Dorado. The majority of species in the Charadriidae and the Scolopacidae families breed in the Arctic, with the relatively short breeding cycle rarely exceeding six or seven weeks (from incubation through fledging). Egg laying occurs immediately after the spring thaw and the shortness of the season appears to preclude double clutching or clutch replacement in almost all species of these families. The distance covered on migration by these species is quite commonly from the northern Arctic to southern South America. In most species the adults leave the breeding grounds before the young, thereby insuring that the food source remaining will be utilized by the young to build up pre-migratory deposits of fat. Additionally, richer food, found south of



the Arctic, is required by the adult birds for their annual molt.

Consequently, by the middle of July, adult Semipalmated Plovers, flocking Killdeer, Ruddy Turnstones, some Common Snipes, Spotted Sandpipers, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, White-rumped, Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, Short-billed Dowitchers, and Stilt Sandpipers may be seen at El Dorado. Numbers of these adults build up, and by mid-August a few Pectoral and Baird's Sandpipers may appear.

In the last half of August almost all adult-plumaged birds have disappeared. Black-bellied Plovers in every conceivable plumage variation, usually in small groups or singles, will be visible from late August until the first freeze. Occasional Red Knots and Western Sandpipers may be observed at this time. American Golden Plovers are often found from the beginning of September through mid-October, and are almost without exception immature birds. Whimbrels and Solitary Sandpipers are rare migrants here and may occur singly July 20 through September 10. Dunlins and Sanderlings arrive in late August and early September. The Upland Sandpiper is an occasional visitor, usually found away from the shoreline. All three phalarope species occur here but never in large numbers. The sequence in which they can be expected is: Wilson's, July 15 through August; Northern, mid-August through early October; and Reds, rarely but regularly in October and November. Extremely rare occurrences of Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Marbled Godwit, and Hudsonian Godwit have been recorded in this shorebirders' heaven.

Once the really cold weather sets in and the ground and mud pools are frozen, all shorebirds depart. The time to observe the greatest numbers and variety is in the last week of August or the first week of September, in northwest winds, just after a front has passed through. Hot, windless, summer-like days are generally not as rewarding as brisk days with energetic wave action.

Although this preserve has earned its fame as a special shorebird area, it contains 250 acres and its shoreline is less than one mile in length. Encircling the beach face is a dense border of shrubs and vines edged with clumps of jewelweed, yellow-gold slender-stalked plumes of hybrid goldenrods, and various other grasses and weed species. The heads of several species are filled with seeds in late summer and fall, and white-footed and deer mice fiercely compete with several sparrow and finch species for the profusion of seeds released in autumn.

Behind the hedgerow a narrow ledge parallels the shore and rises about four feet above the water. This ledge, varying in width from eight to thirty feet, was formed by repeated dissipation of waves and backwash along the backshore. Sediment, sand, and vegetation are constantly shifting along this raised platform, which can sometimes be a wonderful place to find probing birds.