

BIRDING CRUGER ISLAND

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Cruger Island is a sixty acre bedrock promontory in the Hudson River located in the Town of Red Hook in northwestern Dutchess County. The island is owned by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. It is part of both the Tivoli Bays Wildlife Management Area and the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve. The island itself and the rest of the wildlife management area, which includes Tivoli South Bay, Tivoli North Bay, and the forested uplands above it, are open to hunting during the legal season. Permission is not needed to visit the site.

The great lure of Cruger Island for the birder is the ecological diversity of the area, with tidal freshwater wetlands surrounding the island's woodland habitat. Sheltered coves on the leeward side of the island support a low marsh community characterized by spatterdock and pickerelweed, while adjacent shallows support submerged aquatic plant beds. Across the railroad tracks from the island and to the north is a three hundred acre tidal cattail marsh, Tivoli North Bay, where Marsh Wren, Least Bittern and Virginia Rail nest. In the autumn, tremendous flocks of Red-winged Blackbird, Common Grackle and Brown-headed Cowbird pour out of the sky and into the marsh to roost for the night. Just southeast of the island is Tivoli South Bay, a shallow cove where waterfowl, wading birds, and, at low tide, migrant shorebirds can be found.

Cruger Island lies on the east side of the Hudson River a few miles north of the Kingston-Rhinecliff Bridge (Fig. 1). Traveling north on NY Route 9G past the turnoff (NY 199) for the bridge, look for County Road 103 (Annandale Road) on the left two miles north of NY 199. Turn left on County Road 103, then immediately bear right at the village green in Annandale-on-Hudson. Travel north about a mile across the Bard College campus. When Annandale Road rounds a hard curve to the right, turn left. Drive down this rough dirt road, known locally as Cruger Island causeway, past the access gates and leave your car in the small parking area on the right.

The causeway from this point to the island is impassable to cars. It is also flooded twice a day at high tide, so a visit to the island should be

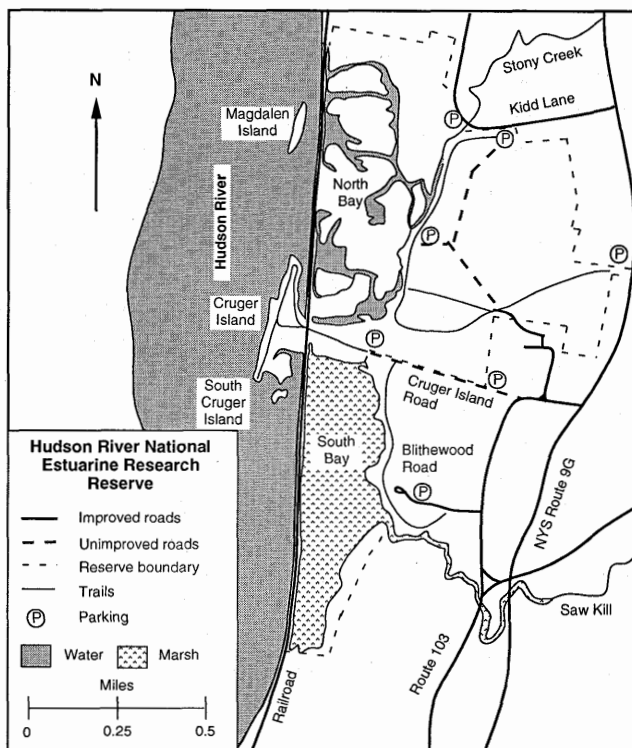


Figure 1. Map of Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve.

scheduled for the few hours surrounding dead low tide. The Education Coordinator at the Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve (c/o Bard College Field Station, Annandale, NY 12504) can provide you with tide charts for the area or help you coordinate your visit. At high tide, about two feet of water cover the causeway, which may be waded; at low tide the puddles remain on the roadway. At the western end of the causeway you will need to cross railroad tracks to get onto the island. This unsignaled crossing requires caution. The high speed passenger trains traveling on this line are quiet and can be on you within seconds after first hearing them.

The causeway is excellent birding, especially in early spring and again in late summer through early fall. The shrub and tree swamp community it passes through abounds with songbirds in season. Both Sora and Yellow Rail have been reported on the island. Osprey also frequent the numerous dead snags along the causeway during the spring and fall.

An informal network of trails rambles over the island's rocky bluffs and ridges through mixed deciduous forest. These trails are especially productive for forest dwelling neotropical migrants during the spring and fall. The northern and southern ends of the island are especially good sites for seeing congregations of waterfowl during autumn migration. From the northern overlook, an observer also commands outstanding views of the Catskill Mountains.

A visitor to the area should also consider canoeing Tivoli North Bay. This extensive cattail marsh is cut by numerous tidal channels, and birds abound. Least and American Bitterns, Great Blue and Green Herons, Snowy and Great Egrets, Willow Flycatcher, Marsh Wren, and Swamp Sparrow are just a few of the species that can be found. Canoe access is via an informal launch on the Hudson in the Village of Tivoli, or at the Stony Creek canoe launch via the wildlife management area's Kidd Lane entrance. A free brochure is available from the Research Reserve's office that includes a map identifying access points and parking, hiking trails, scenic overlooks, canoe launches and other facilities.

Hudson River National Estuarine Research Reserve, Bard College Field Station, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York 12504