



A HISTORY &  
SELF-GUIDING  
TOUR OF  
**SWAN ISLAND**

*'An Island in Time'*



☀ Wildlife

☀ Camping

☀ History

☀ Education

☀ Hiking

☀ Scenery

**Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife**

**Wildlife Division**

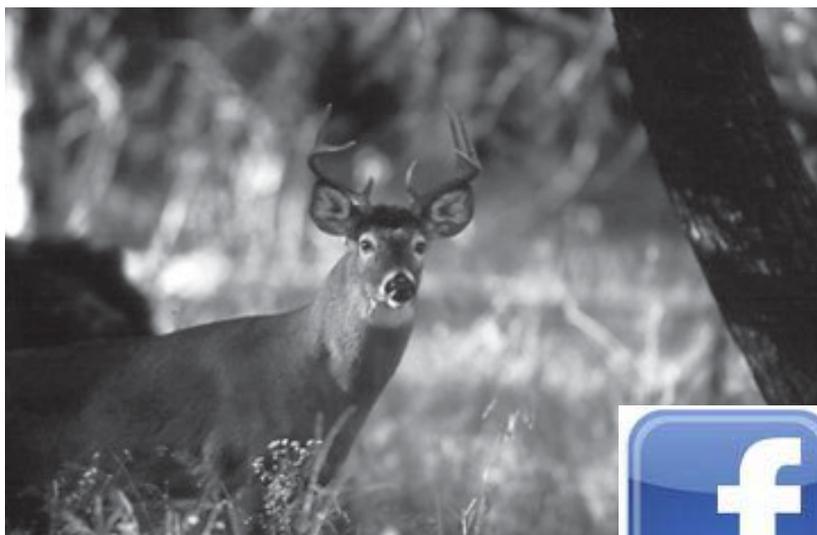
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife wishes to extend its appreciation to Swan Island staff, whose efforts make your visit to the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area an enjoyable and educational event.

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Dick Bernier, Lisa Kane, Mark Latti and other MDIFW staff.

Further appreciation is expressed to all Maine sportsmen and the Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Program, for financial support of wildlife management programs on the Island. Without these funds, the wildlife observed here could not be maintained.

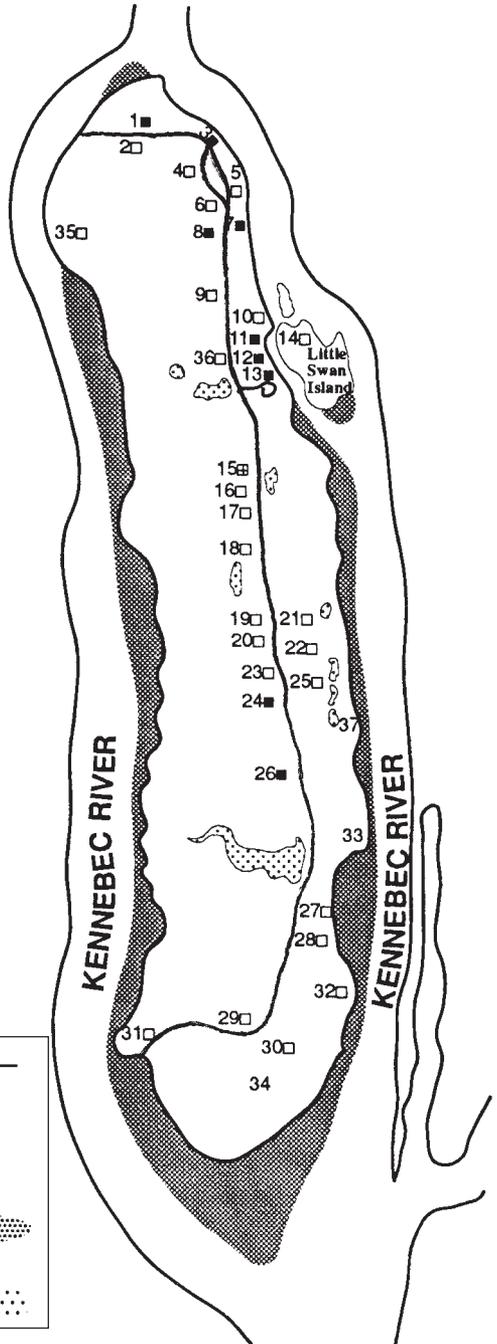
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Revised - March 2012

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Building Site	□
Building	■
Wild Rice	▨
Freshwater Ponds	⋯

The Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area, owned and managed by the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife, is comprised of two islands, a mainland point, and several hundred acres of adjoining freshwater tidal flats.

It lies within Sagadahoc County, in the Kennebec River at the head of Merrymeeting Bay and totals about 1,755 acres. Swan Island is approximately 4 miles long and varies between  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile wide. Little Swan Island is nestled on the east side of Swan Island, directly across from the campground, and is separated from the larger island by Little River. A small rocky island just north of Little Swan Island, called Spaulding's Rock, is not included in the Management Area. Green Point Farm is located on Green Point in Dresden at the confluence of the Eastern and Kennebec Rivers, and was at one time owned by Steve Powell.

The islands in the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area and the surrounding towns share a rich and colorful history. In 1995, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission formally nominated Swan Island to the National Historic Register as a Historic District, which was then formally adopted in 1996 by the U.S. Department of Interior.

## Brief History

A branch of the Abenaki Indians, the Kennebec tribe, inhabited the Merrymeeting Bay area long before the first European-American settlers arrived in the area. In fact, the chiefs of the Kennebec used Little Swan Island as a stronghold, and the remains of a stone fortress could still be found there as late as 1897. An Indian village also existed near the southern end of Swan Island for many years. Merrymeeting Bay derives its name from the Indian gatherings that the early explorers observed in the area.

Exactly how Swan Island received its name is debatable. Even the earliest records reference it by this name. The Indians called the island "*Swango*" (Island of Eagles). Some say the name was simply shortened to Swan. Another legend contends that the bay was once the stopping place of many swans and that this is the origin of the Island's name. The real story is probably lost forever in the memories of those early explorers who first reached the island. An attempt in 1718 by the Plymouth proprietors to change the name to Barden Island soon failed.

Little Swan Island does not share such a stable name. It was first termed Small Island, then in 1718, Calf Island. Eventually the name Little Swan Island became most popular.



The first recorded visit of European-American explorers to Swan Island came in 1607 when members of the Popham Colony stopped at the island. A second visit occurred in 1614 when Captain John Smith visited the Kennebec Indians on the Island.

The next record of European-American settlers in connection with Swan Island occurred in 1667 when Christopher Lawson bought the island from the Indian Chief Abbagadasett. Lawson built a house and lived on Swan Island. In 1668, Lawson used Swan Island as collateral for a loan from wealthy Boston merchant Humphry Davy. Four years later, in 1672, Lawson defaulted on the loan and transferred title of Swan Island to Davy. The Indian, or Frontier Wars, occurred during

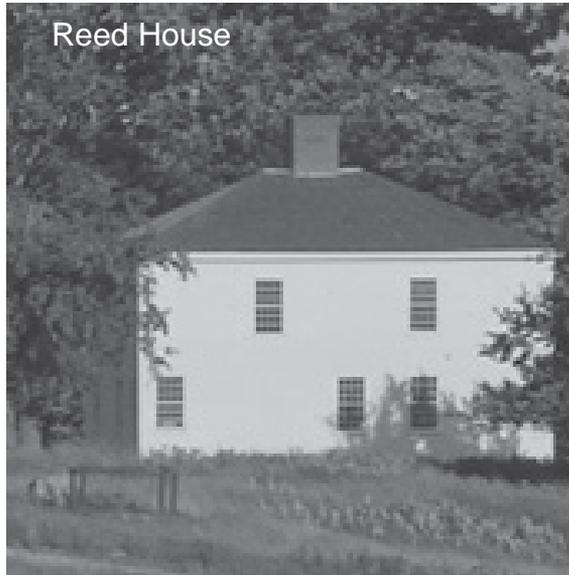


1676-1759, severely affecting the settlement of Swan Island and the surrounding region. The next record of colonists actually living on Swan Island is in 1730, when a Thomas Percy homesteaded there. No further mention of the Percy family is recorded. In 1750, the only family living on the island was the Whidden family.

On September 8, 1750, Indians attacked the house of Captain James Whidden. The Whiddens escaped by hiding in the cellar. However their two sons, daughter (Abigail Noble) and her husband (Lazarus Noble), along with their seven children and two servants, were captured. The Indians took the captives up the Kennebec River to Quebec, Canada, where they sold them as slaves to the French. The adults fetched \$29 each, while the children went for next to nothing.

The youngest Noble child (Frances) was adopted by a young French couple, and was baptized as Eleanor in a Catholic church and given a convent education. Later, government agents found the girl, and despite her desire to remain with her foster parents, she was returned to Swan Island at age 13. Upon her return, she found her mother died and her father in poverty. Frances later became a teacher. Other members of the family also returned to Swan Island.

Despite the Indian problems, Swan Island continued to attract colonists. Between 1758 and 1763, Dr. Sylvester Gardiner built the Dumaresq or “salt box” house. This house was a wedding present for his newly married daughter (Rebecca) and her husband (Philip Dumaresq). In 1775, Benedict Arnold’s expedition journeyed up the Kennebec River on their way to attack Quebec. It is reported that Benedict Arnold, Aaron Burr and General Henry Dearborn stayed a night in the Dumaresq house. According to legend, while on the island, Aaron Burr met an Indian princess, Jacataqua, who accompanied him to Canada and later to New York. When Burr shot Alexander Hamilton in a very controversial duel, Jacataqua became so upset that she threw herself from Hell’s Gate into the East River, NY.



As the danger of Indian attacks subsided, an increasing number of colonists settled on Swan Island. The 1766 Census recorded at least 18 residents on Swan Island. Around 1800, the Tubbs-Reed House was built by Major Samuel Tubbs, a Revolutionary war veteran. Mr. Tubbs later sold the house to the Reed family.

On June 24, 1847, Swan Island separated from the town of Dresden, of which it had been a part, and became incorporated as the Town of Perkins. The town was named after Col. Thomas Perkins, Jr., a wealthy Boston china merchant who married Jane Frances Rebecca Dumaresq (the granddaughter of Philip and Rebecca Dumaresq). Introduced to the island by his wife in the 1820s, Perkins is credited with having been instrumental in facilitating the establishment of the township. Thomas and Jane were summer residents on the island until his death in 1854. The 1860 Census recorded 95 residents on Swan Island. A schoolhouse was built just south of the Curtis Cemetery in 1853. The next year, 15 students ranging in

age from 4 to 20 years enrolled. The building was occasionally used for religious services and town meetings. A road, the Perkins Highway, was developed in 1879 to link the south end of the island with the ferry landing in the north. The course of the present road generally follows the Perkins Highway.

Originally, the island's occupants looked to farming, fishing, lumbering, shipbuilding, and ice cutting to provide a livelihood. At one time, three large ice-houses were active there (Deering's, Consumer's and Underwood's). During this same prosperous era, at least 7 ocean-going vessels were built on the island. However, by the early 1900s, a definite change had occurred. Modern refrigeration rapidly brought an end to the ice cutting. At about the same time, iron ships became popular, and the Island lost its shipbuilding business. Pollution in the Kennebec had resulted in a loss of fishing income. Much of the island had been converted to field, or so heavily cut that lumbering dwindled as a source of income; and many Island residents were forced to leave in search of other jobs. By July 1, 1918, the island population had decreased to the point where insufficient numbers of men were available to fill the town offices, and the Town of Perkins became Perkins Township.

Farming remained the one major source of income on Swan Island, but as the effects of the Great Depression were felt, the farmers, too, began experiencing difficult times. Many younger residents left the island seeking better jobs. The older people remaining could no longer make a living from farming, and many of the farmsteads were given up in lieu of taxes.



Termination of Swan Island as an active community came in 1936 when the Richmond-Swan Island-Dresden ferry service closed down. People began leaving the island rapidly after this occurrence.

The Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife had long been interested in purchasing land in the Merrymeeting Bay area because of its waterfowl management potential. As more and more of its residents left, Swan Island became a potential site for such an acquisition. The Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, through the use of Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration funding, began buying the farms on the Island in the early 1940s; and by the early 1950s the only remaining piece of private land was the cemetery, which was subsequently willed to the Department in 1988.

Swan Island soon became Swan Island Game Management Area. One of the early biologists working and living there was Stephen E. Powell. When Powell left the Island, he became responsible for all the Wildlife Management Areas in the state. At this time, he donated a strip of land in the Kennebec River adjacent to the Swan Island Game Management Area. This area, known as the "Middle Ground", is a very valuable feeding area for migrating ducks and geese. After Steve Powell's death in 1971, the name of the area was changed, in his memory, to Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area.

When Swan Island first became a Wildlife Management Area, there were initial plans to use it primarily as an experimental site for various wildlife management activities. There is still one large fenced enclosure on the island, which was used in testing various types of deer repellents. The experimental plans for the island were gradually dropped as the University of Maine at Orono became better equipped to handle such work. Today, management on the Island is directed to benefit migrating waterfowl, grassland birds and a diverse array of other wildlife. Monies derived from an excise tax on firearms and ammunition, (Pittman-Robertson Act), fund this management.

With 5 to 7 foot freshwater tides, nesting bald eagles, numerous white-tailed deer, wild turkeys, and 3,000 to 4,000 visitors each year, Swan Island is truly unique. Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area (WMA) provides a sanctuary for migrating waterfowl, turkeys, and the resident white-tailed deer. It is also the only WMA in the state where camping is allowed and information and education programs are provided for visitors. The value of the historical sites here further enhances the uniqueness of this area.



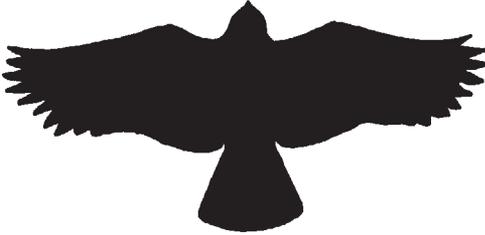
**Dick Bernier**

# Identifying Raptors in Flight

## Buteos

BROAD WINGS AND BROAD ROUNDED TAILS; OFTEN SEEN SOARING IN WIDE CIRCLES HIGH IN THE AIR.

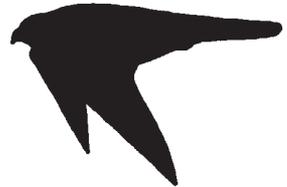
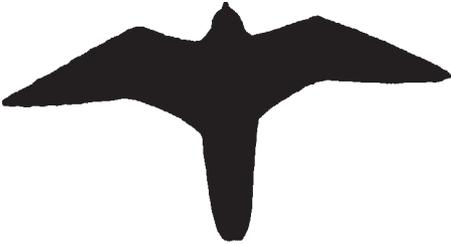
Examples: Red-tailed Hawk, Broad-winged Hawk



## Falcons

STREAMLINED-LONG POINTED WINGS; LONGISH COMPRESSED TAPERED TAILS; STRONG ROWING WING BEATS; LOSE SOME OF THEIR POINTED WING AND TAPERED TAIL LOOK WHEN NOT IN DIRECT FLIGHT.

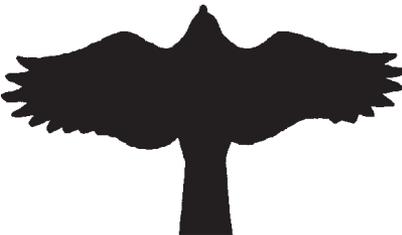
Examples: Peregrine Falcon, Kestrel



## Accipiters

SHORT, WIDE, ROUNDED WINGS; LONG TAILS; FLAP, FLAP, FLAP-SAIL FLIGHT.

Examples: Goshawk, Sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper's hawk



## SELF GUIDING TOUR

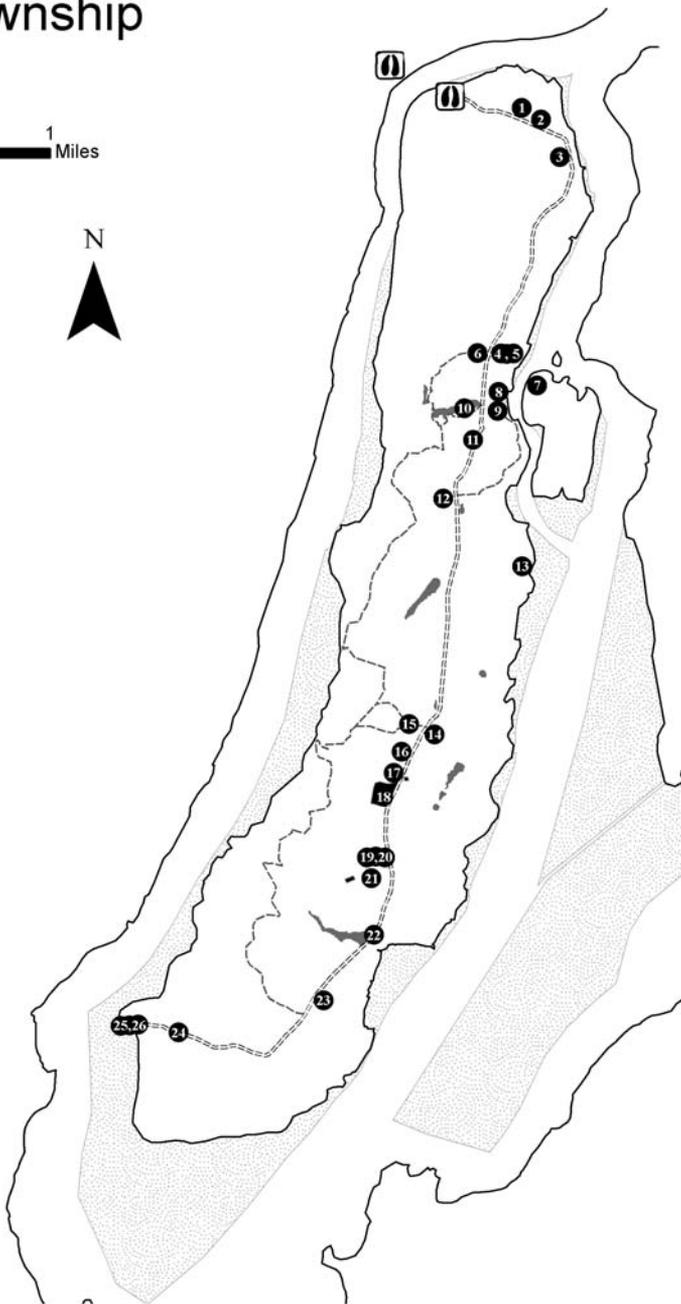
# Swan Island Perkins Township Maine

0 0.5 1 Miles



### Legend

-  Landings
-  Perkins Hwy
-  Nature Trails
-  tidal flats
-  ponds
-  deer enclosure
-  Tour Stops



## Introduction

This self-guided tour is organized to run from the northern end of Swan Island along the gravel road to the southern tip. Each major feature discussed is represented at the site by a numbered metal sign, which corresponds to the numbered location on the Self-Guiding Tour map. Unfortunately, the houses are not open to the public due to lack of staffing and supervision for visitors.

**1. WELL** There are many hand-dug wells on the Island. For your safety, the wells have been secured by capping and/or enclosed with fencing.

**2. TUBBS-REED HOUSE** This house was built just after 1800 by Major Samuel Tubbs (1739-1810) of Berkley, Massachusetts. Tubbs was reportedly commissioned as Major in the Massachusetts militia in 1776, and as a reward for his service during the American Revolution was apparently granted land at the head of Swan Island. Tubbs' son, Samuel, Jr., probably lived in the house until the 1830s when Captain David Reed purchased the house and married Drusilla Tallman of Swan Island. The house was restored in 1968 with federal money (Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (BOR) funds) and since that time has been maintained by the State and Friends of Swan Island (FOSI).



The square house is of the Federal period in architecture, with several interesting rounded corners inside. There is a large fireplace with a Dutch oven and extended hearth. Stenciling may still be observed on the upstairs floor. Several antiques from the Town of Perkins, including a bed and spinning wheel, are stored in the house.

**3. PRIEST-BLEN HOUSE** This house serves as the administrative headquarters and residence for Management Area staff and dates around 1930. The other buildings are workshops and storage areas that support the maintenance activities on the Island. In 1987, Central Maine Power Company donated electrical service to this house as well as to other buildings on the island. Photo circa 1930s.



**4. CAMPGROUND** The campground was built in 1966 with help from a legislative grant. Ten Adirondack shelters hold up to 6 people each, providing a full capacity of 60 overnight campers. Water is provided for all campers. The bathroom facility was completed in 2006 and provides modern conveniences for Island visitors.

**5. WHITE OAK** Acorns of the white oak are much less bitter than those of red oak. The Indians ground these acorns to make crude flour. Note that the leaves of white oak are more evenly rounded and smoothly lobed than those of the more common red oak. This is about the northern edge of the range of the white oak in Maine



**6. NATURE TRAILS** The Maine Conservation Corps (MCC) began construction of the nature trail system in 1985. It now consists of 3 separate trails. The Beaver Pond Trail is approximately ½ mile long and encompasses a variety of habitat types, including a managed field and man made pond. The West Side Trail is approximately 3 miles long and runs through the wooded portion of the western interior side of the Island. The East Side Trail is a short loop that originates at the campground, follows the thoroughfare between the Island and Little Swan Island, and winds up at the Curtis Cemetery.

**7. LITTLE SWAN ISLAND** This Island is located just off the east-shore of Swan Island, across from the campground. Just less than 30 acres in size, Little Swan Island is heavily wooded. There are no standing buildings on Little Swan Island. Once headquarters of the Kennebec Indian chief, this island is part of the WMA. No active management occurs on the island at this time, allowing continued preservation of potential archaeological sites for future work.

The small island located just off the north tip of Little Swan Island is Spaulding's Rock. This Rock is named for an English lady, Ann Spaulding, who came to Swan Island to marry a colonist. Upon her arrival she found the man of her dreams had "jumped the gun" and married someone else. As a result, Ann Spaulding chose to live alone on Spaulding's Rock.

**8. GARDINER-DUMARESQ HOUSE** The Gardiner-Dumaresq House is often called the "salt box" because of its architectural design. Dr. Sylvester Gardiner built the house between 1758 and 1763 as a summer residence for his daughter Rebecca (b.1745) and her husband Philip Dumaresq (1737-1800). It is not known

how much time these Boston residents spent on the island, but after the American Revolution, Philip (a loyalist) was sent into exile in the West Indies. According to Robert Hallowell Gardiner, Rebecca and Philip's son, James Dumaresq (b.1772) exchanged some land bequeathed to him in Pittston for the Swan Island farm that his grandfather



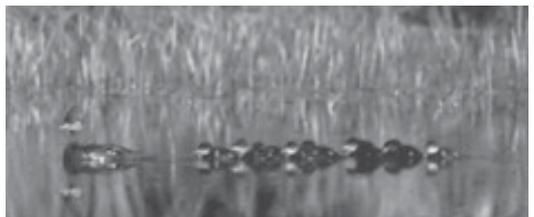
had left to his uncle John Sylvester Gardiner. Although the land was described as being "very good", James apparently did little farming, preferring instead to hunt and visit his cousin Robert Hallowell upriver at the Oaklands estate in Gardiner. Returning to Swan Island after one such visit in the autumn of 1826, James' boat struck a "flaw" and he drowned. After James' death, his son Philip Dumaresq and sister Jane Frances Rebecca Perkins appear to have used the property at Swan Island exclusively as a summer residence. In 1855, Philip's wife Margaretta Deblois, daughter Frances, and a friend drowned while swimming in Little River. Philip (a ship captain), was subsequently lost overboard and drowned in Long Island Sound, NY on June 25, 1861. Dr. E.C. Hebbard of Boston purchased the Gardiner-Dumaresq property in 1900. The State of Maine purchased the property from Ida M. Hebbard in the 1940s. It was restored in 1968 with federal money (BOR funds) and has been maintained by the State and Friends of Swan Island (FOSI) since that time.

The brown boathouse at the river's edge is estimated to be over 100 years old, and is used for wildlife and conservation education programming and teacher workshops during the open season.

**9. ROBINSON-POWELL HOUSE** This house was built sometime during the 1880s. James Alvin Robinson (b.1862) appears in the 1880 Census of Perkins as a farmer. The 1893 Census lists Robinson as being a fisherman. In 1910 he was a 48-year-old carpenter/boat builder.

Summer employees occasionally live in this house. There is a phone here in case of emergencies. Stephen E. Powell, the original biologist on Swan Island, resided here with his wife for many years.

**10. MAN MADE POND** This is one of 8 man made ponds on the island. If you look closely you will see several wooden boxes on trees, several feet above the water. These are wood duck nesting



boxes. Other waterfowl species which may use these boxes include common goldeneyes and hooded mergansers.

The wood duck approached extinction in the early 1930s. As a result of restrictive hunting regulations and the installation of thousands of nesting boxes statewide by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife and other private organizations, the wood duck is now one of the most abundant ducks in Maine. The male wood duck is one of the most beautiful birds in the world, and its feathers are very valuable for fly tying. It is a favorite among hunters and wildlife watchers for its taste and exquisiteness.

**11. BLACK BIRCH** An extract from the inner bark of this species is used to make birch beer. Green twigs can be chewed, taste like wintergreen, and have been called "Indian toothbrush".

**12. CURTIS CEMETERY** Traditionally, Maine families had separate burial areas. Thus it was on Swan Island until Ben Curtis suggested putting all the graves in one spot. All but one family moved their graves (see *Call Cemetery*). The Curtis Cemetery was the only privately owned land left on the island until 1988, when it was willed to the Department. Descendants of families who once lived on Swan Island retain burial rights to the Curtis Cemetery. Headstones date from 1802 to 1968.



**13. CALL CEMETERY** The 1766 Census claims that the Call family owned property on Swan Island at the turn of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Census records from 1850 indicate there was a population of 84 people at the time, and makes a reference to a Peleg Call, listed as a brick-maker, and a George Call, listed as a carpenter. In 1900, the Census lists the population at 95 and makes reference to a L.R. Call, listed as a merchant. There are no headstones visible that would indicate these 3 individuals were buried on the Island. Several headstones exist from the Call family. Those headstones date from 1822-1864.

**14. GRASSLAND BIRD MANAGEMENT** Historically, most of northeastern North America was forested. Natural, permanent grasslands were uncommon. By the 1880s grasslands were widespread as land was cleared for pastures and hayfields. Grassland birds undoubtedly benefited from this by providing habitat for

the grasshopper sparrow, savannah sparrow, vesper sparrow, upland sandpiper, eastern meadowlark, eastern bluebird, and bobolink. However, early 20<sup>th</sup> century agriculture, technology, increases in human populations and movement of farms to the Midwest and west caused a decline in the quantity and quality of grasslands for wildlife. Today, maintaining grasslands is a common wildlife management tool to provide habitat for many declining bird species. Traditionally all fields were mowed once or twice each summer.



This helped the clover and timothy to grow well and provided Canada geese and Wild Turkeys with preferred low foraging grasses. Today, mowing continues, but is done in such a way as to maintain a variety of grassland types and heights to best optimize use by grassland birds, waterfowl and turkeys. All Island fields are mowed on a rotating basis every 1-3 years.



**15. WILDLIFE VIEWING TOWER** This fire tower was originally erected in 1931 on Frye Mountain WMA, (elevation 1140') in Montville, Waldo County, Maine. The tower was built on-site by Maine Forest Service as part of their forest fire suppression and prevention work and was staffed until 1991. It sat idle and unprotected until 2002, when it was removed from Frye Mountain in a coordinated effort between Maine Forest Service and Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife. Using funding from State Wildlife Grant

Funds, the tower was restored, dedicated to photographer Bill Silliker, Jr., and placed on Swan Island in 2005.

**16. CORN CRIB** Notice the cement legs, which kept the corn up away from the moisture in the ground. The metal at the top of each leg was to keep mice and rats out of the corn. The crib is screened with air slats to help dry the corn, which was husked, dried, and stored as cattle feed in the winter.

**17. LILLY-WADE HOUSE** This house was built sometime in the 1880s and was sold to the State in the early 1940s. William Lilly appears in the 1860 "Valuation of Real and Personal Property in the Town of Perkins" as farming 20 acres of

land and owning one cow. In the 1860 Census, Lilly is listed as a 38-year-old house joiner. Joseph Wade, a river fisherman, is thought to have lived in the house during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The State and the Swan Island Project of the Richmond School District currently maintain the house.

**18. EXPERIMENTAL DEER EXCLOSURE** When Swan Island first became a Wildlife Management Area in the middle 1940s, this wire enclosure was built for experiments with various types of deer repellents. As you pass by the fenced 4 acre plot, please notice the number and variety of trees and shrubs growing inside.



When you get to the end of the fence, compare what you see inside with what is growing outside the fence. This will give you some idea of what deer eat and the effects of having too many deer in one area.

Deer numbers in the more settled portions of the State rapidly decreased during colonial times as a result of very

intensive farming, timber harvesting and uncontrolled hunting. Deer population levels in these areas remained very low until extensive farmland abandonment after 1880 created ideal deer habitat. In addition, a closed deer hunting season was established in Cumberland, Knox, Lincoln, Waldo, York, Sagadahoc, Androscoggin, and Kennebec counties in the 1890s. Deer became more abundant by the turn of the century, and deer seasons were established in all previously closed counties by 1903.

Although Sagadahoc County was again opened to deer hunting, Swan Island was apparently never reopened to the legal harvesting of deer. Legislative action in 1929 (P.L. Chapter 77) resulted in the lawful declaration of Swan Island as a Game Preserve, making it unlawful to hunt, chase, trap, kill, or pursue any wild animals or birds on either Swan Island or Little Swan Island, known collectively as Perkins Township.

During the early 1900s, human habitation on Swan Island decreased due to a combination of social and economic factors. This resulted in an assortment of



reverting farm and mixed growth forest, which provided ideal habitat for deer. Favorable habitat conditions, coupled with the prohibition of hunting on the area, resulted in a substantial increase in deer. The latter habitat changes were similar to that which occurred throughout much of the central and coastal portions of the State, and were responsible for the upswing in the overall deer numbers in these areas.



Initial deer management and research efforts on Swan Island included: animal repellent studies, limited forest cuttings, trapping and removing surplus deer in an effort to control damage to crops planted primarily for goose management. Records indicate that from 1947 through 1957, 364 deer were trapped, tagged, and relocated. However, this deer removal had no significant long-term impact on the size of the island deer population, and the habitat continues to decrease in quality. Deer swim across and walk over on river ice. Trapping after 1957 was limited to a few animals for research at the University of Maine at Orono.

In an effort to control the deer population, the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife proposed an experimental 3 day hunting season on Swan Island in the early 1950s. However, overwhelming public sentiment against the proposal at a public hearing in Richmond defeated the proposal.

Very high deer population levels continued to be a common occurrence in the area through the 1960s and 1970s (200-300 animals). With the arrival of the coyote to Maine, the reduction of winter feeding in the early 1980s and the lack of winter browse, deer numbers on the island have decreased and appear to have stabilized for the time being.

Average winters in this portion of Maine enable deer on the island to do limited ground pawing for acorns, etc.; however, prolonged periods of deep snow and/or crusty conditions eliminate this means of food gathering. Continuous over-utilization of winter browse has resulted in little or no woody material available as an alternate food source. Local game wardens and biologists report that many deer will cross the frozen river daily to feed on the mainland. Domestic dogs and coyotes often kill deer along the treacherous shore ice, which rarely stays snow covered in winter due to flooding at each high tide. Why deer return and attempt to winter on the Island is not clearly understood. In all likelihood it is in response to the availability of sheltered conditions, which are not present on the adjacent mainland.

Legislative action in 1969 repealed the public law, which constituted the game preserve section relating to Swan Island. This placed all Department owned refuges under the classification of Wildlife Management Areas and granted the commissioner the power to regulate and control seasons and bag limits on these areas. The Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area (Swan Island) is currently the only Wildlife Management Area where all public hunting is prohibited.

As we have seen, the deer on Swan Island have not been subjected to any form of controlled harvests for approximately 100 years. The results of this protection of the deer population are typical of areas regulated for prolonged periods as game sanctuaries. Populations expand beyond the carrying capacity of their habitat, and the majority of the browse producing plants (food) are completely destroyed or severely stunted. On Swan Island, even the less palatable foods (i.e., white pine and alder) show extremely over-browsed conditions. Timber cutting conducted to stimulate browse production (see *Selectively Harvested Area*) accomplished little, since sprout and seedling growth are quickly consumed and not given enough time to become established.

Future management of Swan Island may include additional timber harvests and a return to farming practices to increase food availability for both deer and waterfowl. The Department may also consider annual hunting seasons as a method to help maintain deer numbers at a level in harmony with existing habitat and conditions.

**19. MAXWELL-TARR HOUSE** This house was built sometime around 1850. The property appears on the 1852 map of the Town of Perkins as belonging to E.C. Hatch who, in the 1860 "Valuation of Real and Personal Property in the Town of Perkins", is listed as owning 44 acres of land. A ship captain, John Maxwell, appears



to have moved onto the property from Bowdoinham sometime during the 1870s. The 1878 Census lists him as owning 49 acres, with a total value of land and buildings at \$775.00. When the Tarrs resided here during the 1920s, the farm associated with this property was one of the last active farms on the island. There are no plans to restore this building further, due to a lack of funds and the deteriorated condition of the structure. Game Warden Higgins also used this house as his residence when the Island was first acquired by the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife.

**20. BALD EAGLE NEST SITE** The large oak tree located behind the Maxwell-Tarr house once contained an intact and active nest. It was over 20 years old and had been the most active nest on the island. In 1985, a new nest was constructed about ½ mile north on the east shore, and in 1989 another new nest was built on the northern tip of Little Swan Island.



Nest sites change as new pairs of eagles move into the territory. Recent active nest sites include one on the northern tip of Little Swan Island; one north of the landing near the Tubbs-Reed house) and another built in 2008 along the southeast shore of Swan Island.

The old nest that was once in this oak tree had an interesting history. In 1975, the eagles produced an egg which was presumed to be infertile due to pesticide contamination. Fertile eggs from Wisconsin were brought to Maine by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and one 'clean' egg was switched with that of the egg in this nest. This new egg hatched, and the young eaglet was raised by the adults and banded by biologists. The adult eagles returned to the nest in 1976-78 but did not lay any eggs. An eaglet, bred in captivity, was placed in the nest in 1979 and was successfully raised. In 1980, 1981, and 1984 two eaglets were successfully raised in the nest. Eagles become mature at 5 or 6 years of age. While immature eagles are a brownish-black color with a few white streaks; they eventually gain the white head, neck, and tail, which marks them as adults. At this time, they select mates and build a nest.

Over the years, a pair of bald eagles may establish several nests. Each spring a pair of eagles return to either the same nest or one of the alternate nest sites. A new layer of material is added to the nest each time it is used! At the time the nest came down in a hurricane, it was over 30 years old, 7 feet deep and was estimated to have weighed over 3,000 pounds.



*A record 4 eaglets fledged from this Swan Island nest in 2011!*

You may be wondering why the eagles on Swan Island, and throughout the state, has such trouble reproducing. Chemical contaminants, loss of habitat and lack of direct protection of the eagle population were all contributing causes. The chemicals include pesticides (DDT) and others such as mercury, lead, and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which were detected in high levels in the unhatched eggs. A by-product of DDT, known as DDE, caused the eggshells to become brittle and within a span of 15 years —

between the end of World War II and the 1960s — the population of bald eagles plummeted. These chemical contaminants dramatically increase in concentration as they travel through the food chain in each successively larger predator. Consequently, bald eagles receive large doses of the pesticides from feeding upon fish. A drastic decline in bald eagle reproduction occurred because of this.

Looking at the bright side, the status of the bald eagle in Maine has significantly improved as a result of banning DDT, reduction of river pollution, and protection and management of eagle habitats and nesting areas.

Today, bald eagle nest sites across Maine are designated as “Essential Habitats”, and are subject to protection standards under the recently updated Maine’s Endangered Species Act (2007). We are encouraged by a steady long-term trend of bald eagle population growth. This recovery was acknowledged by downgrades from a status of Endangered to Threatened across the lower 48 states in 1995; and removal from the Threatened List in 2007. The Maine legislature similarly reclassified bald eagles to a Threatened Species under State law in 1996; and in 2009 eagles were removed entirely from the Maine Endangered Species List. Numbers of breeding pairs of eagles increased to a high of over 600 here in 2011 compared to 56 in 1980, while total productivity increased from 40 to close to 500 eaglets.

**21. GRAVEL PIT** The gravel from this pit provides the material needed to maintain the road, an integral part of the overall island maintenance program.

**22. TROUT POND** This pond is the deepest on the Island, and is periodically stocked with brown trout by IF&W’s Hatchery Division. It is a designated “Kids Water”, open only to fishing for kids under 16 under the General Law.



**23. MIDDLE GROUND** The strip of green freshwater tidal flat extending down the center of the river is called the “middle ground”. At low tide, it amounts to about 20 acres of very productive feeding area for ducks, geese, and a variety of shorebirds.

Steve Powell owned the middle ground, but in the early 1950s, when he left the island to become head of the Wildlife Management Areas in the State, he donated the middle ground to the Wildlife Management Area.

Green Point Farm adjoins the middle ground to the north. This 432 acre parcel of land lies at the confluence of the Eastern and Kennebec Rivers in Dresden. Green Point was sold to the State (in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy) by Steve Powell’s nephew, Robert Gleason, in 1999, becoming the most recent addition to the nearby Merrymeeting Bay Wildlife Management Area.

# Identifying Animal Tracks

 <p>CHIPMUNK</p>	 <p>COYOTE</p>
 <p>GRAY SQUIRREL</p>	 <p>RUFFED GROUSE</p>
 <p>MOOSE</p>	 <p>WHITETAIL DEER</p>
 <p>PORCUPINE</p>	 <p>RACCOON</p>
 <p>RED SQUIRREL</p>	 <p>WOODCHUCK</p>
 <p>SKUNK</p>	 <p>TURKEY</p>

**24. WHIDDEN HOUSE HISTORY** In 1750, a house near this end of the Island belonged to the Whidden family. Mr. & Mrs. Whidden, their daughter and her husband (Mr. & Mrs. Noble), seven children, and two servants lived here. Read their story in the *Brief History* section in the front of this booklet.

**25. SWEET FERN** The leaves of this plant may be boiled to make tea, put in a small bag (sachet) to scent clothes, or crushed and rubbed on poison ivy to speed the healing. It is also a favorite deer food.

**26. THEOBALD POINT** This is the end of the road, you've travelled about 4 miles; and are standing at Theobald Point. If you look south, down the Kennebec River, you will see the power lines from the now decommissioned Maine Yankee Atomic Power plant in Wiscasset crossing the river to Bowdoinham. Directly across the river is a former skeet range and hunting camp.

You are overlooking a portion of Merrymeeting Bay, which contains approximately 9,000 acres and is fed by 6 different rivers – the Kennebec, Androscoggin, Eastern, Cathance, Abbagadasset, and Muddy. The name of the Bay may originate from the confluence of rivers as a meeting and harvesting area by the Abenaki. With the river inflows and twice daily tidal turnover of nutrients, the Bay is one of the richest and most productive estuarine habitats on the east coast. Most of the light green vegetation in the water is wild rice, a favorite food of ducks and geese. Wild rice is one of only 2 cereal crops native to North America. (The other is maize, or corn.) The darker green vegetation is mostly bulrush. The wild rice grows throughout the summer until it is well above the water even at high tide. It ripens in September and provides food for many waterfowl and other bird species.

**WE HOPE YOU ENJOYED THE TOUR AND COME BACK AGAIN!**





## FIELD NOTES

**Reservations are not required for those using a personal canoe/kayak to access the island.**

Please put admission fee into Iron Rangers at island dock or campground.  
To make Swan Island camping or ferry reservations, call 207-547-5322  
Monday-Friday; or email [Swan.Island@Maine.gov](mailto:Swan.Island@Maine.gov)

*[www.maine.gov/swanisland](http://www.maine.gov/swanisland)*



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