

TRAIL GUIDE  
FOR THE  
DOUG RAYNER REFUGE AT NOCKUM HILL  
2009

This guide is written for the general use of the Barrington Land Conservation Trust and the Barrington Conservation Commission as an aid for nature tour leaders.

#### GENERAL OVERVIEW

The (Doug) Rayner Refuge is a 70-plus acre town-owned promontory in Barrington, RI, which extends into the Barrington River, immediately to the northwest of Hundred Acre Cove. The upland and its surrounding marshes have been identified by both the EPA and RIDEM as a highly significant natural area in Rhode Island. Numerous scientific studies have focused on this area, especially the nesting bird and diamondback terrapin populations. \*(See [www.blct.org](http://www.blct.org))

The Town of Barrington has recognized these values and has taken significant actions to protect the area; it has been zoned "wildlife refuge", and has been designated as a conservation easement, held by the Barrington Land Conservation Trust. In addition, the Council has placed ordinances on the refuge that prohibit horses, dogs, vehicles (including bicycles), and a special restriction on the speed of motorboats in the northern reaches of the Cove to 5 m.p.h. A management plan was written in 1994, which sets out the objectives of the refuge and their implementation. The principal management objective is to protect the diamondback terrapin population while also maintaining wildlife habitat diversity. Other objectives include educational, scientific and passive recreational use. The plan allows the 35 acres currently leased for agriculture to continue to be farmed; the lease, which expires in 2011, will be renegotiated by the Town Council, subject to approval of the Management Committee. This committee, whose responsibility is to carry out the tenets of the management plan, is comprised of members of the Land Trust, the Conservation Commission, a representative of town government, and members at large. Volunteers from the committee actively participate in the fieldwork that controls vegetative growth, with help from DPW.

#### HISTORY

Nockum Hill has figured prominently in Barrington's history; it is the site of one of the first Baptist meetinghouses in the New World, and the first shots of King Philip's War were fired nearby. Since that time, it has been used for various forms of agriculture. In the 1930's it hosted a tearoom and later, a fried chicken restaurant. Plans for the site included use as a warehouse by Cherry & Webb, a former department store, but the Town purchased the land in the 1960's. The Town removed much of the topsoil and created a pistol range for target practice for local police departments. The central area was the site for an aborted effort to compost sewer sludge in the 1970's. A building from that project remained at the end of the asphalt roadway, until its removal in the 1990's.

#### TRAIL GUIDE

Parking is at the area of the white gate on George Street, near the tall boulder at the turn of the road. (No parking should take place on the interior roads of the refuge.) Here there is a sign, naming the refuge for E. Douglas Rayner, a distinguished naturalist and native of Barrington who knew the area well and played a significant role in its

protection.

Along the asphalt road agricultural fields can be seen to the left and right; they are currently leased to Four Town Farm. They follow BMP (best management practices), minimizing use of pesticides and herbicides.

At end of the asphalt, on the left is the site of a previous sludge disposal site. WHIP (Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program) grants enabled stewards of the BLCT to transform the site into a field of warm weather grasses and wildflowers. Volunteers also built, erected, and maintain bluebird boxes in the field; tree swallows often nest there during the spring and summer seasons.

Several trails on the left, one before the wildflower field and several after it, enter abandoned orchard and shrub communities, both which attract songbirds and warblers. These trails lead to a long NE/SW trail, through a deciduous forest, bordering the Hundred Acre Cove marshes. There is a short trail extension that bends back to the northeast, and down hill to a short boardwalk, from which there is a good view of the upper marsh.

The border trail passes a sandy area on the right, then an evergreen forest, planted in the 1980's by a Boy Scout troop. At the end of the peninsula, on the left, a trail descends to the marsh, which leads around the point to a sandy beach. In early summer horseshoe crabs mate and lay eggs on the beach. The view is of Hundred Acre Cove on the left, bisected by a long marshy peninsula, called "The Tongue". Historically, this cove was a cedar swamp, and some tree stumps may still be found. To the right is the Barrington River, which flows southerly from the Runnins River; on the several small islands in the river snowy and common egrets, green and great blue herons, and common terns may often be viewed in summer. On the water mute swans, great-crested cormorants and mallard ducks are common. Ospreys that nest on the islands can be seen from the point, sometimes carrying fish to their nests. Barn swallows, song sparrows, and the occasional belted kingfisher can be seen here, as well. An interesting variety of marsh grasses can be seen in summer (cord grass, spike grass, and marsh hay), as well as high tide bush and beach plants (beach pea, sea blite, and saltwort).

Trails on the west end of the beach return to the upland; some of this sandy area is a nesting area for diamondback terrapins, an endangered species in Rhode Island. Man-made wire/wooden board structures found here are used seasonally by terrapin researchers sponsored by the Land Trust. In summer it is possible to see a nesting terrapin. Broken white shells on the sand are the result of eggs, dug up from terrapin nests and eaten by raccoons and skunks.

In this area there is also a small pistol range, still in use by the Barrington Police. Caution signs are posted when it is in use.

To the north of this sandy area are extensive fields of native warm weather grasses (largely little bluestem and switch grass) and wildflowers; these plantings were also enabled by WHIP grants. Several times bluebirds have been successful in hatching eggs and fledging young in the nest boxes here, but most of the nest boxes are used by tree swallows, house wrens and house sparrows. Other birds likely to be seen here in summer are chipping sparrows, goldfinches, and crested flycatchers. Hawks can sometimes be seen flying overhead - Cooper's, Sharp-shins, Red-tails and Northern Harriers.

There is a great variety of wildflowers, some native and some introduced, but most can tolerate dry, windy conditions. Most common are coreopsis, common daisy, black-eyed susan, and goldenrod. Animals that may be seen are rabbits, woodchucks,

squirrels, mice, voles, toads, and, more rarely, minks, deer, coyotes and foxes.

Two dirt roads lead back the white gate, one on either side of the large farm field. At the south end of the farm field is a large patch of milkweed where monarch butterflies can often be seen in summer; their eggs, laid on the plants, mature into brightly-colored caterpillars, pale green chrysalises, then fully developed butterflies - which migrate to Mexico for the winter. The shrub communities adjacent to the roads attract yellow warblers, yellowthroats, catbirds, mockingbirds, and cardinals. During the growing season, red-winged black birds and mourning doves are often seen on the fields; killdeer nest there, and a careful spotter might find several fledglings on the ground. Canada geese occur year-round. Either dirt road can be followed to return to the parking area at the white gate.

#### LATIN NAMES FOR FLORA AND FAUNA MENTIONED IN GUIDE

Diamondback terrapin - *Malaclemys terrapin*  
Bluebird - *Sialia sialis*  
Tree Swallow - *Tachycineta bicolor*  
Snowy Egret - *Egretta thula*  
Great Egret - *Ardea alba*  
Green Heron - *Butorides virescens*  
Great Blue Heron - *Ardea herodias*  
Common Tern - *Sterna hirundo*  
Mute Swan - *Cygnus olor*  
Double-crested Cormorant - *Phalacrocorax auritus*  
Mallard - *Anas platyrhynchos*  
Osprey - *Pandion haliaetus*  
Barn Swallow - *Hirundo rustica*  
Song Sparrow - *Melospiza melodia*  
Belted Kingfisher - *Ceryle torquata*  
Cord Grass - *Spartina alterniflora*  
Spike Grass - *Distichlis spicata*  
Marsh Hay - *Spartina patens*  
High Tide Bush - *Iva frutescens*  
Beach Pea - *Lathyrus japonicus*  
Sea Blite - *Suaeda* spp.  
Glasswort - *Salicornia* spp.  
Raccoon - *Procyon lotor*  
Eastern Spotted Skunk - *Spilogale putorius*  
Little Bluestem - *Schizachrium scoparium*  
Switch Grass - *Panicum virgatum*  
House Wren - *Troglodytes aedon*  
House (English) Sparrow - *Passer domesticus*  
Chipping Sparrow - *Spidella passerina*  
Goldfinch - *Carduelis tristis*  
Great-crested Flycatcher - *Myiarchus crinitus*  
Cooper's Hawk - *Accipiter cooperii*  
Sharp-shinned Hawk - *Accipiter striatus*  
Red-tailed Hawk - *Buteo jamaicensis*

Northern Harrier - *Circus cyaneus*  
Coreopsis - *Coreopsis lanceolata*  
Common Daisy - *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*  
Black-eyed Susan - *Rudbeckia scrotina*  
Goldenrod - *Solidago* spp.  
Eastern Cottontail Rabbit - *Sylvilagus floridanus*  
Woodchuck - *Marmota monax*  
Eastern Gray Squirrel - *Sciurus carolinensis*  
Vole - *Microtus* spp.  
Mink - *Mustela vison*  
White-tailed Deer - *Odocoileus virginianus*  
Coyote - *Canis latrans*  
Red Fox - *Vulpes vulpes*  
Monarch Butterfly - *Danaus plexippus*  
Yellow Warbler - *Dendroica petechia*  
Common Yellowthroat - *Geothlypis trichas*  
Catbird - *Dumetella carolinensis*  
Cardinal - *Cardinalis cardinalis*  
Mockingbird - *Mimus polyglottos*  
Red-winged Blackbird - *Agelaius phoeniceus*  
Mourning Dove - *Zenaidura macroura*  
Killdeer - *Charadrius vociferous*  
Canada Goose - *Branta Canadensis*  
Starling - *Sturnus vulgaris*

GUIDE PREPARED BY THE BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVATION TRUST [www.blct.org](http://www.blct.org)