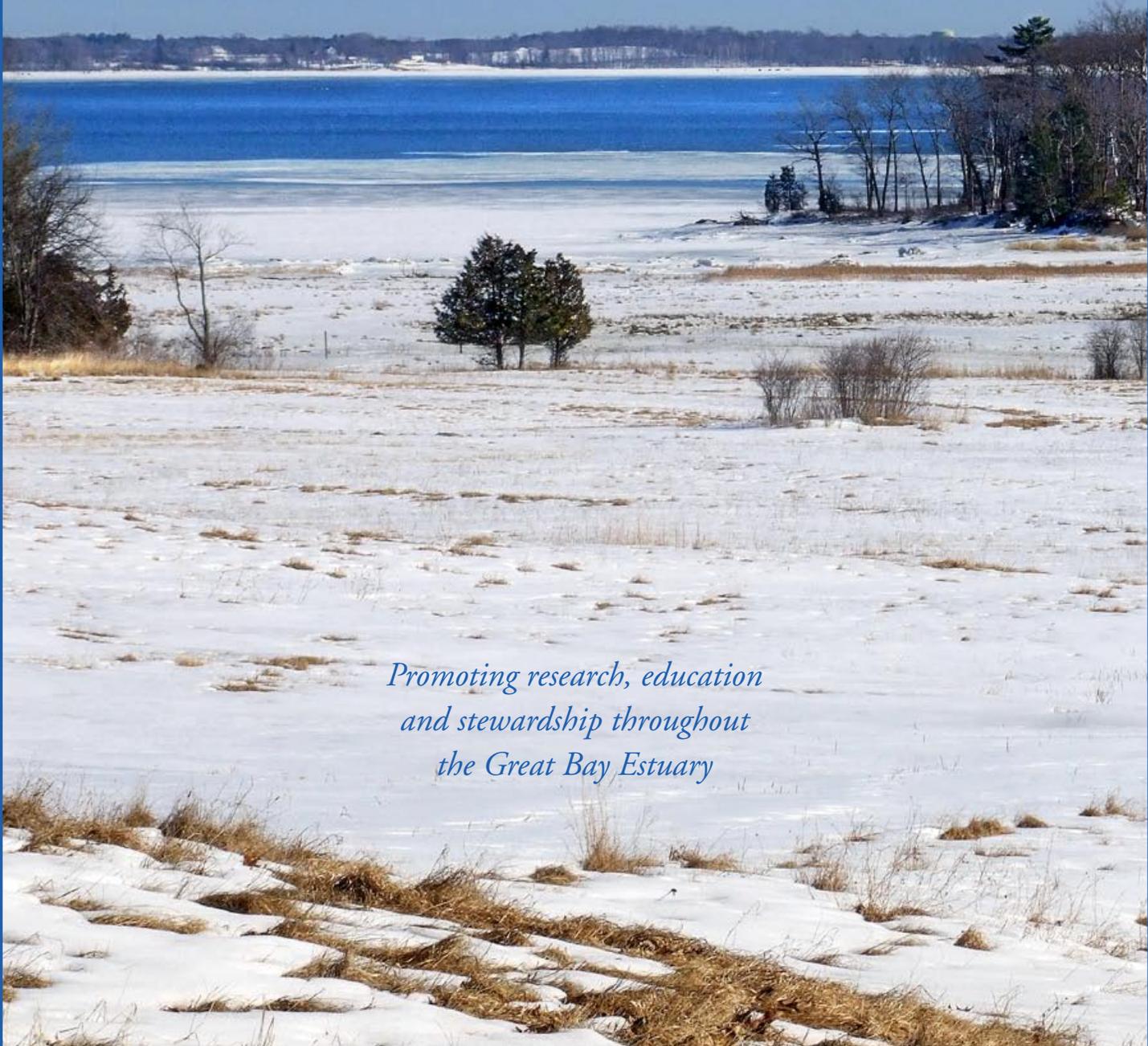


Great Bay MATTERS

Winter 2013

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*Promoting research, education
and stewardship throughout
the Great Bay Estuary*

Building a Community of Stewards



Everyone wakes up each day and needs to take care of something; children, a pet, parents, your health, your home. We are better at taking good care of these things when we are not in crisis mode;

when we take the time to plan, be proactive, and analyze options before we act. We are also usually better at taking care of things when we seek the advice of experts, when we listen to those we trust, and when we take and give support for the sake of that which we are caring for. To do this sincerely, we need to get some value out of this relationship. To care for something is to value it and trust that our efforts are worthwhile.

When I think about the stewardship of Great Bay, I think about all of you. You receive this publication because you value Great Bay. Your membership with the Great Bay Stewards and support of the Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve are testimony that you want to help us steward this amazing resource. As individuals there are so many small ways to take good care of the Bay; we can stop using fertilizer on our lawns to help limit nutrient inputs, we can use rain barrels and rain gardens to slow storm water flows, we can plant native species to attract wildlife, pull invasive weeds in our yard, put conservation easements on our land, or even grow mussels from our docks. But, as

with the other important things we take care of in this lifetime, we can do better if we work collectively, think long term, explore creative ideas, and listen to each other. Together as Great Bay Stewards we need to actively participate in the community dialogue that is happening around Great Bay's health. To be effective advocates for water quality, wildlife habitat and outdoor recreation we need to get better at articulating the value of natural systems and understanding how those values fit into the overarching goals of our community and the interests of people who do not yet see themselves as stewards of Great Bay.

It is a new year, and a good time to commit or recommit ourselves to things that matter. Here at the Reserve, our staff is going to try to better understand the estuary and better understand how to create a culture of stewardship of Great Bay from toddlers all the way through elected officials. We know the first step is to illuminate the personal connection to Great Bay and the services it provides to all of us every day. For some this will come from a kayak tour, and for others it will come when the marshes surrounding their home protect them from a storm. This year, please take a friend fishing in the Bay or bring a child to our Discovery Center. Help us connect Seacoast residents to Great Bay, help them fall in love with the Bay, and help us build the community of stewards.

Cory Riley
Reserve Manager, GBNERR



GREAT BAY
NATIONAL
ESTUARINE
RESEARCH
RESERVE

Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GBNERR) is an estuary comprised of 7,300 acres of tidal waters and 2,935 acres of coastal land. Acquired through land purchases and conservation easements, GBNERR was designated on October 3, 1989 to be preserved for the purposes of education, research, and resource protection.

GreatBay MATTERS

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Winter Birding

Winter in New England evokes many images – skiing on snow covered mountains, ice skating on frozen ponds, over-wintering birds. Wait, over-wintering birds? Winter offers a unique opportunity to see several species of birds that are not here during the warmer seasons. These birds are primarily Arctic breeders that migrate south to over-winter in the northern United States. Beginning in mid-to-late fall, these birds begin arriving from their northern breeding areas and by mid-spring they are gone, returning north to prepare for the coming breeding season.

The official New Hampshire State Bird List cites 399 birds as present in the state during some part of the year. Some, like the American Robin and the Bald Eagle, are here year round, while others, like the Osprey and the Piping Plover, spend their breeding season with us then migrate south for the winter. But, did you know that New Hampshire is actually the winter habitat to several species of birds?

Great Bay is one of New Hampshire's hotspots for waterfowl. Many of the species of duck that reside in the state overwinter on the Bay as large sections of it remain open and free of ice throughout the winter. These species include common species like the Mallard and the American Black Duck, both of which are regularly seen on many of the state's waters ways and are important species for hunters, and several species which are rarely, if ever, seen in or near Great Bay during the breeding season.

For example, the bufflehead is a common resident of the Great Bay area during winter months and is rarely seen during the summer. The bufflehead breeds near freshwater lakes in the Arctic, nesting in tree cavities, and over-winters in shallow, saltwater bays,



Snowy owls have been showing up in areas around Great Bay in recent years.

much like Great Bay. Male Buffleheads have a unique black-and-white pattern on their heads making them easy to spot from shore. These ducks often disappear under the water for several minutes to feed then reappear near their previous location. To find these ducks, search the open waters of Great and Little Bay. Scammell Bridge in Dover is a great place to find these ducks along with many of the other species mentioned.

Snowy owls have been making the news of late. Winter 2011 saw reports of snowy owls taking in the sights along the Hampton Beach boardwalk. These large white owls breed in the Arctic, taking advantage of the long summer days to hunt for lemmings and other small mammals to feed their young. During the winter, they migrate south, some as far as Oklahoma, to find food and warmer temperatures. These birds have been seen around the seacoast and Great Bay areas of New Hampshire during past winters, most often in the coastal marshes.

Winter in New England is a good time to see larger birds like owls and ducks. However, many song bird species over-winter in New Hampshire too, utilizing the free food provided by humans via bird feeders to augment their diets during the leaner winter months. Dark-eyed Juncos begin arriv-

ing in the Great Bay area during mid-to-late October. These little grey and white birds, nicknamed snowbirds within their winter range, breed in the conifer forests of Canada and the Rocky and Appalachian Mountains, and then over-winter throughout the United States and southern Canada. These little seed-eating birds are a very common sight on the ground under bird feeders. While watching for the Dark-eyed Juncos under your feeder, keep an eye out for American Tree Sparrows and Evening Grosbeaks, two other bird species that frequent backyard feeders within the Great Bay area during the winter months.

Winter birding can be a great way to get out during the colder months without having to dedicate a whole day or extensive funds. Grab your binoculars and head to the Bay for a walk along the trails that run through the conservation lands surrounding Great Bay. Even if you don't see the winter only birds, you'll still have a chance to enjoy the area during a season you may not think to do so. And, if you have bird feeders, you may be able to see some winter birds without braving the elements; just remember; there are bears around Great Bay too –so don't forget to take down your feeders in the spring.

By Kellee Duckworth:
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