

Frances A. Crane Wildlife Management Area, North Falmouth and Hatchville

The name “Crane Wildlife Area” conjures up a momentary vision of large, spectacular, endangered birds. If you see the entire name the vision fades, but this state-owned property, north of Route 151, has lots to offer to make up for the absence of cranes. Originally acquired to provide protected land for hunting, this 1,700 acre area also protects habitats and groundwater and provides a substantial green area for outdoor recreation.

Hunters have played a significant role in the preservation of open space in Massachusetts, having recognized early-on the threats that development posed to wildlife. Hunting is allowed at Crane, but most of the people who go there take advantage of the open space to pursue other interests—hiking, riding mountain bikes, flying model airplanes, or watching birds.

Crane is a varied area, partly because of the lay of the land, and partly because of the state’s management techniques. The eastern section, on the flat land of the outwash plain, is managed for grassland and game birds, so some areas of trees and shrubs are cut or plowed, and fields are planted with food plants for the native and farm-raised game birds that are hunted there. This area, behind the ball fields and the movie theater north of Route 151, is well-known to many.

The section west of the railroad tracks is less visited. Today the most frequent visitors are mountain-bike riders who take particular pleasure in the steep hills. This section, unlike the flat land to the east, is on the glacial moraine, and is rocky, hilly, and all wooded. It is a great place for a hike, in any season, but in winter it has one very unusual feature: views through the trees across Buzzards Bay. Three hilltops here rise above 200 feet, not very high by mountain standards, but they are the highest hills on the Cape accessible to the public. (The highest point—at 306 feet—is Pine Hill, to the north on the MMR). This line of hills was created by the ice sheet that built Cape Cod. Rocks, sand and gravel were deposited at the melting edge of the ice, and then pushed into higher hills when the ice re-advanced. The rocky nature of the land is visible everywhere; in some areas large rocks lie thickly jumbled together, in others the monoliths are more scattered.

The western part of Crane was once divided into long, narrow wood lots that ran eastward from the farms near the bay. The small, young trees indicate that wood was cut repeatedly and until recently. Many of the oaks and maples have the characteristic multiple trunks that develop after sprouts grow from cut stumps. These are dry woods, with the typical huckleberry/wintergreen ground cover of land that was not plowed. Occasional deep kettle holes support thickets of plants that like more moisture.

Hunters can be expected at Crane during the deer season (usually two weeks beginning the Monday after Thanksgiving) and the upland game bird season (mid-October through Thanksgiving); be aware of the possibility and wear orange if you venture to this area during hunting seasons. If hunting is not your thing it is useful to know that hunting is not allowed here or anywhere in Massachusetts on Sunday.

For the western section of Crane, park on the north side of Route 151 just east of the north-bound on-ramp to Route 28, or on the wide shoulder on the south side a few hundred yards to the east. Access to the eastern section is provided by several parking areas on the north side of Route 151, and an unpaved road next to the ball field leads back into the open fields.

Trail maps of the eastern and western portions of Crane may be downloaded from The 300 Committee’s website at www.300committee.org. While you are the website check out some of the other maps available, and also note the nature calendar which details happenings in the natural world.