

# Mass Audubon Quests

## Daniel Webster Owl Quest

Marshfield

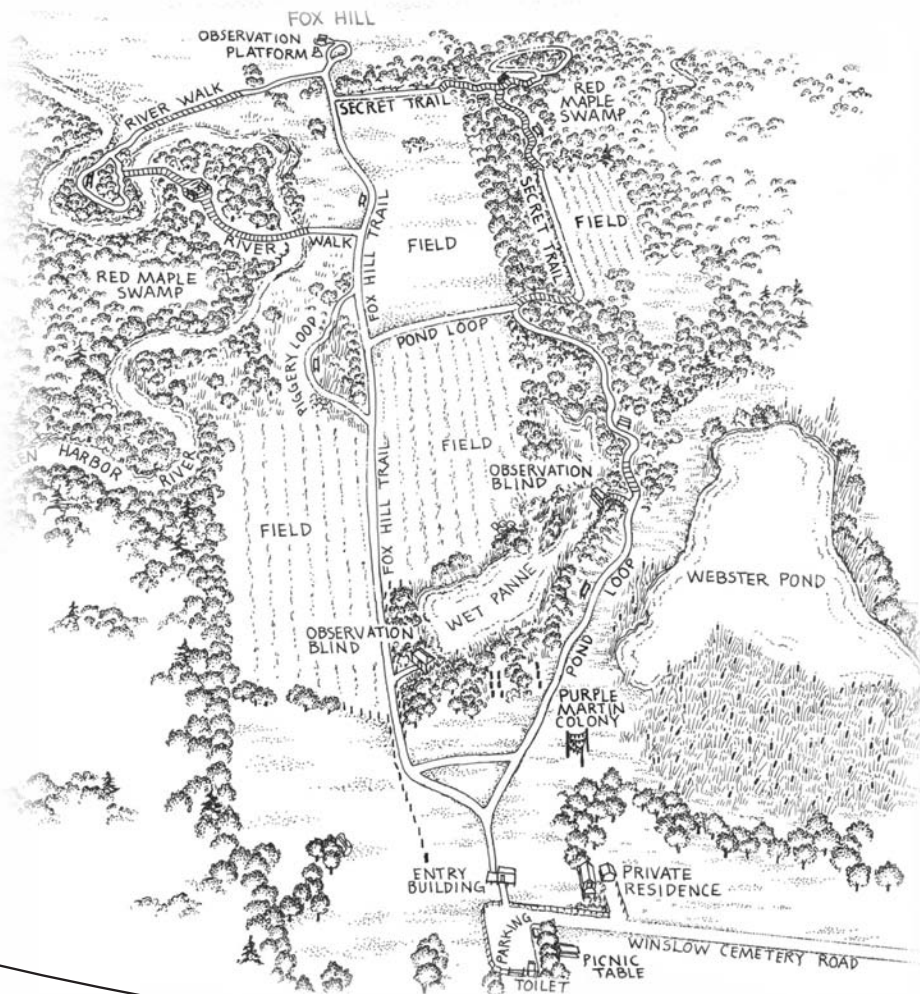
Welcome to the Daniel Webster Quest,  
At night at Daniel Webster,  
When all around is quiet,  
Wide-eyed owls take to the wing,  
And break the eerie silence.

They rise above the grasses,  
Searching for mice and voles,  
Then disappear into the woods;  
Can you find out where they go?



*Daniel Webster Quest Stamp*

Date \_\_\_\_\_



Mass Audubon  
*Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts*

*This Quest is best done in spring, summer, or fall.  
This Quest was created by John Galluzzo.*

Fall 2008

# Starting Point

The ramp outside the entry building.

Before us stands a grassland,  
A habitat made by man;  
But here's something to think about –  
Digest it if you can.

This land was once under water,  
Flooded by the Green Harbor River,  
But Marshfield's farmers needed dry land,  
And more than just a sliver.

And so they drained the land  
To the fishermen's dismay;  
They created what's known as a polder\*,  
So they could gather their hay.

As we hit the trail we slope downwards,  
Heading below the level of the sea;  
We'll always keep our feet dry, though,  
And the open air will keep our spirits free.

We'll start off to the right,  
Toward a trio of poles;  
They're home to some special birds,  
That require special nest holes.

Centuries ago Native Americans learned  
That purple martins are good to have around;  
They eat every bug they can find,  
From the sky down to the ground.

So they built them some homes,  
Hollowing out gourds and hanging  
them all around;  
The martins moved in, leaving their  
holes in the trees  
And ate every bug in the village that  
could be found.

Over time, some memory was lost,  
Some martin traditions disappeared for good;  
Now they only live in gourds,  
Hung by people in the neighborhood.

We pass the martins on the right,  
Overlooking Webster Pond and its  
shiny surface;  
We're now heading up the Pond Loop Trail,  
For really only one purpose.

This sanctuary is a home to many species,  
From hawks to harriers and more,  
But we have nocturnal friends here,  
Owls by the score.

To find them we stay on this trail,  
Bypassing the entrance to the blind,  
The wet panne is an interesting sight,  
But we'll save that for another time.

We've reached some low brushy habitat  
Where kinglets like to eat;  
Taking a left on the trail,  
We'll tell you something neat.

This section has a secret name,  
Known only to a few;  
We're ready to pass the secret on,  
To no one else but you.

One summer's day, here beneath the trees,  
Together a group of friends came;  
Here, two of them were married  
Giving the Bridal Trail its secret name.

But look, down below,  
At the holes as you go;  
Short-tailed weasels like it here, too,  
But they're so quiet you'd never know.

We emerge from the woods  
And back out onto the grass;  
Tree swallows may be in the field,  
A deer or two may pass.

We take another right into the woods,  
To a very owly place;  
All throughout the winter,  
This is the saw-whet owl's space.

We catch and band them here at night,  
Sometimes three hundred in a season,  
They come from as far as Montana,  
Presence of food being their reason.

But they're not here now,  
Especially not in the daylight,  
So onto the boardwalk we go,  
To see some other sights.

We find a hidden grassy field  
And walk along its edge in the shade;  
Tree swallows dive and dart,  
And the occasional red fox makes his raid.

At the end of the trail,  
We find a final boardwalk ahead;  
We're now in a red maple swamp,  
A land of the living dead.

The trees here are twisted,  
Blown sideways by wind and storm;  
But those that still stand,  
Take on a new form.

They reset their roots  
And again compete for sunlight;  
They grow at new angles,  
Some acute, some obtuse, some right.

Here we find a bench,  
Where we sit and enjoy the sights;  
The trees themselves are spooky,  
But it gets even weirder at night.

When the sun sets and the light disappears,  
The creatures of the night come out to feed;  
The coyotes, the raccoons, and even the owls  
Start searching for what they need.

The screech owl is the most common,  
With a name that befits its call;  
Its soft, descending whinny  
Sends chills through us all.

But the great horned owl is here,  
With his familiar hooting call, too;  
At some times he gives us a screech,  
Then at others, its "hoo-HOO--hoo-hoo."

The barred owl asks a question,  
As the night starts to fall,  
"Who cooks for you,  
Who cooks for you all?"

Long-eared owls are skittish,  
Never staying in one spot;  
But they love Daniel Webster,  
Though they hate being caught.

Short-eared owls hide in the grass by day,  
Then head for the fields to hunt voles;  
You won't find them lurking in the trees,  
That's just not their role.

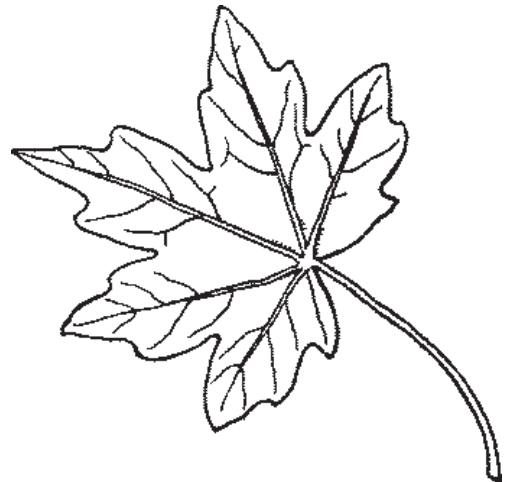
To see an owl by day is a treat,  
One that rarely comes around;  
But at least now you know  
Where they can be found.

Stand behind the bench and reach underneath,  
There your treasure lies in wait;  
Leave us your mark, and take one of ours,  
Isn't questing great?

So welcome to Daniel Webster,  
The best spot for owls to be;  
A sanctuary where they can live,  
A place where they can be free.

\* Polder – "A polder is a low-lying tract of land enclosed by embankments known as dikes, that forms an artificial hydrological entity, meaning it has no connection with outside water other than through man operated devices." – [www.wikipedia.org/polder](http://www.wikipedia.org/polder)

There will be an Owl fact sheet in the container.  
If they are gone by the time you finish the quest,  
ask for one at the North River Wildlife Sanctuary.





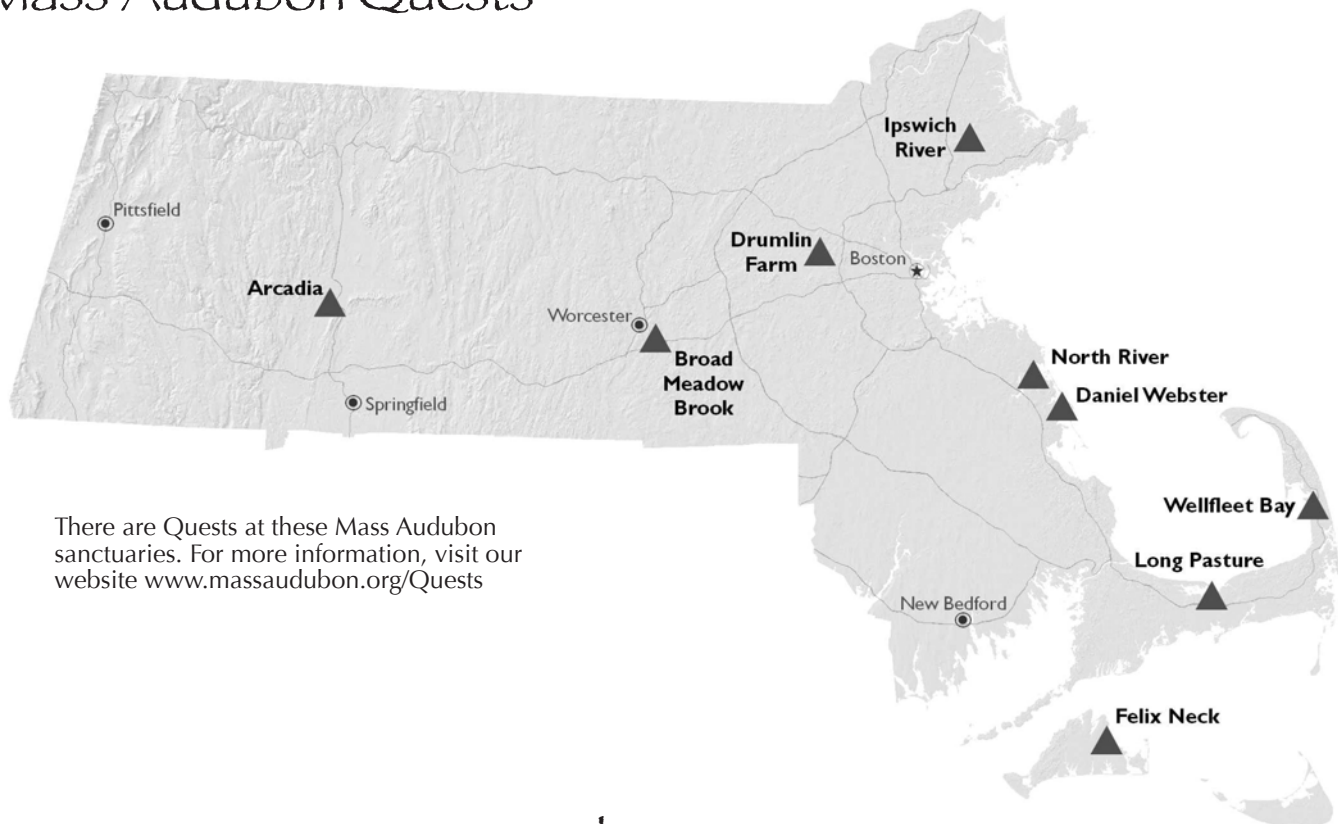
## Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary

Winslow Cemetery Road  
Marshfield, MA 02050  
phone: 781-837-9400  
email: southshore@massaudubon.org

Trail Hours:  
Open every day, dawn to dusk

The Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary protects 507 acres of open space, most of which is comprised of cultural grasslands. These grasses are important for several reasons, supporting a diverse array of avian species. Bobolinks nest here in the summer, raising their young in the fields, but in the winter it's the hawks and owls that benefit from the wide expanses of grass. Mouse and meadow vole populations grow at exponential rates throughout the spring, summer and fall. In winter, when the grasses die back, the small mammals become exposed, and easy prey for the hunters. At that time of year it's not unusual to see northern harriers, red-tailed hawks, rough-legged hawks and, after sundown, short-eared, barred, saw-whet, great horned and long-eared owls searching for food. In the darkness, one can expect to hear the "who cooks for you?" call of the barred owl, or the whinny of the eastern screech owl.

## Mass Audubon Quests



There are Quests at these Mass Audubon sanctuaries. For more information, visit our website [www.massaudubon.org/Quests](http://www.massaudubon.org/Quests)

**Mass Audubon** works to protect the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Together with more than 100,000 members, we care for 33,000 acres of conservation land, provide educational programs for 200,000 children and adults annually, and advocate for sound environmental policies at the local, state, and federal levels. Mass Audubon's mission and actions have expanded since our beginning in 1896 when our founders set out to stop the slaughter of birds for use on women's fashions. Today we are the largest conservation organization in New England. Our statewide network of 48 wildlife sanctuaries welcomes visitors of all ages and serves as the base for our conservation, education, and advocacy work. To support these important efforts, call 800-AUDUBON (283-8266) or visit [www.massaudubon.org](http://www.massaudubon.org).



## About Questing

Questing was born out of a 150-year old tradition in the region surrounding Dartmoor National Park in southwest England. "Letterboxing," as this tradition is called, is a popular past time, with thousands of boxes hidden in both natural and cultural locations. Vital Communities, a regional non-profit organization based in Vermont, built on this tradition in the United States by developing the Valley Quest program. In the early 1990s, Vital Communities was concerned about the future of the Upper Valley region of New Hampshire and Vermont, and was hoping to develop a program that would foster sense of place, strengthen relationships between schools and communities, and build bridges across the generations. The result was Valley Quest, with "Valley" referring to the place and "Quest" referring to a treasure hunt—made by children and adults working together—leading to the community's special places. Over time, the Valley Quest program has grown. More than 2,000 children, adults, families, scouts, students and historical society members have contributed to the creation of the 200+ Quests found in the Valley Quest books; and communities across the country are beginning to replicate Valley Quest's success.

Quest is a trade name of the Valley Quest program, and is used with permission. For more information, visit [www.valleyquest.org](http://www.valleyquest.org)