

Welcome to Clay Head!

Located in the northeast end of Block Island, **Clay Head Preserve** encompasses some of the most spectacular scenery on the eastern seaboard. The 190-acre area is privately owned by the Lapham family, who protected Clay Head with conservation easements and opened the space up to the public to enjoy. Clay Head is beautiful in all seasons, but is a particular delight in the fall and spring, as it is one of the best places to observe migratory songbirds in North America.

This trail guide will lead you on a short out-and-back walk to the beach along the southern edge of the Preserve. If you have the time, explore further north along the bluff trail, which runs north-south along the edge of the clay bluff, or if you're brave, venture into the "maze" for a rambling hike through beautiful shrubland. These intertwining trails are unmarked and are perfect for hours of wandering.



1 The trail begins at the parking lot at the end of Clay Head Road. Take a look at the changing kiosk display on your left for information about current neat plant and animal sightings on the trail!

2 The first section of trail leads you through dense shrubs and then opens up to an area shaded by a higher canopy. This vegetation is important for wildlife. Keep an eye (and an ear) out for birds all around you.

Birds You Might See on the Trail



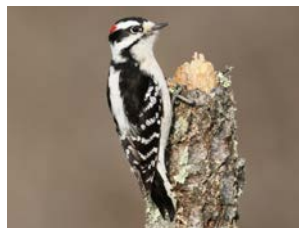
Eastern Towhee (male)



Carolina Wren



Yellow Warbler



Downy Woodpecker

Photos: Cornell Bird Lab

3 After passing through the brush, the trail opens up onto a large meadow that's dotted with large trees — mostly sycamore maples and black cherries. Some of these trees were planted as shade trees for livestock back when this area was farmed.



4 At the end of the field, take a moment to enjoy the view east out over Clayhead Swamp and out to the Atlantic Ocean and the Block Island Wind Farm beyond.

5 As you begin to descend down the hill, take a look to your left at the plants growing on the bank where you'll see wild grape vines growing. Check out the twirly tendrils they send out to curl around other plants and structures to support their leaves.



Wild Grape

6

The trail will then lead you to a small stream that feeds into Clayhead Swamp. On the sides of the stream there is jewel weed growing — a natural poison ivy repellent. If you’re on the trail and accidentally step into poison ivy, you can take some of the jewel weed leaves and rub them on the affected area, which may help to remove some of the oils. You’re also going to want to give yourself a good scrub when you get home, though!



Jewel Weed

7

Speaking of poison ivy, the remainder of the trail is lined with the plant, so take care to keep your hands and feet on the trail while you’re walking through! Remember the saying: “leaves of three, leave it be”.

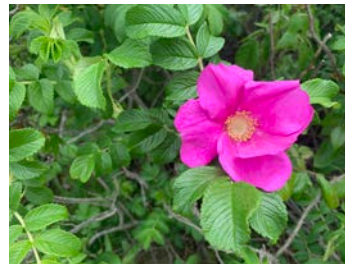


Poison Ivy



8

As you continue down the trail, you’ll notice is composition changes from a well-worn dirt path to a sandy one as you approach the beach. Along the sides of the trail you’ll notice abundant rosa rugosa, bayberry and other beach-loving plants.



Rosa Rugosa

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If you’d like, continue following the trail as it takes you up a few hills along the bluff’s edge. To extend your hike, keep heading north along this relatively straight and easy-to-follow trail that will take you all the way up to the northern end of Clay Head, and to Sachem Pond and the North Light beyond.

If you’re feeling adventurous, take one of the trails on your left and wander through Clay Head’s “maze”. There are no maps of these interior trails, so take your time wandering through and if you get lost, follow the sound of the ocean back to the main bluff trail.

Why is Clay Head such an important place for migrating birds?

Clay Head’s abundant shrubs, which produce millions of berries each fall, and its many ponds and wetlands, which are often ringed by these shrubs, make Clay Head the perfect place for birds migrating south in the fall to rest and refuel before continuing their arduous journey. Block Island, and Clay Head specifically, is known globally as one of the best places to observe migratory songbirds.

Researchers from across the country have studied migratory songbirds in Clay Head for decades. Elise Lapham, who, with her family, protected Clay Head, started the Block Island Banding Station in Clay Head in 1967. Today, the station is run by Kim Gaffett, The Nature Conservancy’s OVF Naturalist, and is the third longest-running data set on migratory songbirds on the East Coast.



A yellow-rumped warbler, one of the most commonly seen migratory birds in Clay Head in the fall.

Trail guide brought to you by:

