

Spring out of Winter: Nature notes from Rhode Island



Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge in Middletown; photo credit: Sean Carlson

The bitterness brought an upside, greeted the attendant at the Norman Bird Sanctuary in Middletown: Fewer people on the trails meant more peace for the birds. But, besides an errant rustle underfoot or chirp overhead, the birds seemed to have sought other sanctuaries. As the temperature eked up to 24 degrees, I wandered in solitude.

Relatively new to Rhode Island, I've found a winter of weekend walks has teased the vastness within the smallest state. At Sachuest Point, within sight of the Norman Bird Sanctuary, my daughters tottered in snowsuits to watch waves break against the stone shore. At John H. Chafee Nature Preserve, white-tailed deer blocked a powdered path toward the arc of Rome Point at sunset. Submerged tree trunks and marsh grasses at Trustom Pond and Ninigret National Wildlife Refuges reinforced the risks and reality of rising seas, even if tinged with ice.

As I kept balance on slick patches of packed snow one recent morning in North Kingstown's Ryan Park, the day warmed past freezing and birdsong peppered the hum of Route 4. No hint of buds on the

branches yet, but the air felt lighter. Along the trails, chickadees warned that I had broken their peace.