

Observe iconic American birds in Boston's garden cemetery



Serenity, history, urban escape



Year-round

Passing through the gates of Mt Auburn is like stepping into a peaceful world, far removed from the busy urban streets beyond. No surprise there, perhaps – after all, it is a cemetery – but perhaps more striking is how lush and lovely the place is. In spring, the many trees and flowers burst into bloom; in summer the grounds are richly green. Come autumn, the changing leaves bring vibrant colour to contrast with the grey headstones. Winter has its own beauty, especially when snow cloaks the rolling terrain.

And all year round there are birds. Ever-present robins, flitting across the ground and perching on headstones; bold blue jays pecking energetically at seeds while a red-tailed



hawk fixes alert eyes on potential prey. Here, bright red flashes as a cardinal flits from tree to tree; there, brilliant yellow as a goldfinch trills and twitters on a branch. As if in answer, a black-capped chickadee emits the distinctive call – chick-a-dee-dee-dee – that gives it its name.

Wild turkeys stride between graves, while at Willow Pond, a great blue heron wades in the shallows, nabbing fish with quick dips of its beak. On the opposite shore, painted turtles bask in the sunshine, slipping smoothly into the water when startled. Mt Auburn may be a place of final rest, but it's equally full of life.

A different kind of cemetery

The idea of a cemetery as a beautiful, tranquil place designed to both honour



USA



Right: A wild turkey in Brookline, just outside Boston

Below: An American robin contemplates mortality in a Boston cemetery



Q&A

What makes Mt Auburn special?

It's an oasis of green in an urban area and therefore a welcome stop for migratory birds to rest and refuel. The diverse horticultural collections and natural features attract both migrants and year-round residents.

Do you have a favourite season?

Late winter to early spring is a wonderful time, before the crowds of birders show up. There are still the winter resident birds, but also some early harbingers of spring. The best part is there are no leaves on the trees yet, so the birds are easy to spot.

Any crowd favourites?

The resident red-tailed hawks always delight visitors. They're large enough to see without binoculars and are often spotted perched artfully atop monuments.

What's your number-one tip?

Check the crowd-sourced 'Bird Sightings' board at the front gate for recent reports of birds and locations.

Jessica Bussmann, Mt Auburn
director of education & visitor services



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the dead and inspire the living through nature and art was revolutionary when Mt Auburn was established in 1831. The different sections of the cemetery reflect nearly two centuries of landscape architecture, burial traditions and memorial art, a rich heritage that has earned Mt Auburn the designation of National Historic Landmark.

In between watching the many-coloured birds, check out the graves of prominent Americans buried here, including – to name just a few – artist Winslow Homer, author Bernard Malamud, architect Charles Bulfinch, reformer Dorothea Dix and poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.

Migrants & residents

Mt Auburn is particularly renowned as a birdwatching destination during the spring migration, which takes places roughly between mid-April and mid-May. During the peak migration it's possible to see

Right: The iconic northern cardinal is the state bird of seven US states

Far right: An aerial view of Halibut Point State Park, north of Boston

as many as 100 bird species in the cemetery. Come in the early morning, and chances are you'll be treated to a chorus of birdsong from dozens of different species of warblers.

However, while the migration is famous, there are excellent reasons to visit in any season. Many classic American birds are present throughout much or all of the year; others come and go. The beauty of Mt Auburn is that no matter what month it is, there's plenty of wonderful winged life to be seen amid the testaments to human lives once lived.



Don't Miss

→ Basking in the sounds of the cemetery's abundant songbirds

→ Climbing the Washington Tower for a bird's-eye view of Boston

→ Looking for raptors perched in trees above the graves

Find Your Joy

Getting there

Located in Cambridge, just across the Charles River from central Boston, the cemetery is reachable

from Harvard Sq by bus 71 toward Watertown Sq, or the 73 toward Waverley. Get off along Mt Auburn St, at Brattle St, and walk in the direction of travel to the main entrance. Drivers can park on most cemetery roads.

Accessibility

You can spot a variety of bird species from Mt Auburn's extensive

network of wheelchair-accessible paved roads and paths (though note that the terrain can be hilly in places).

When to go

Mt Auburn is a noted stopover for northbound spring migrants, making mid-April to mid-May the busiest season for birders. However, many species can be seen year-round,

including cardinals, blue jays, chickadees, goldfinches and red-tailed hawks.

Further information

- Free to visitors.
- Open year-round.
- No specialist facilities.
- Restaurant, supermarket and hotels nearby.
- www.mountauburn.org

Other Historic Massachusetts Sites

Halibut Point State Park, Rockport

Jutting into the Atlantic at the northern tip of Cape Ann, rugged Halibut Point was the site of a granite quarry until the industry collapsed in 1929. It's now a birding hot-spot, especially so between late autumn and early spring (roughly November to April) when large numbers of cormorants, loons, grebes, ducks, gannets and other seabirds feed in the productive waters just offshore.

Don't miss

Descending to the rocky shore for water-level birding.

Daniel Webster Wildlife Sanctuary, Marshfield

Midway between Boston and Cape Cod, this Mass Audubon Society preserve was once the property of English settler William Thomas, and later of the 19th-century lawyer-statesperson Daniel Webster. Its wetlands, grasslands and woodlands attract many year-round and seasonal species, including shorebirds, songbirds, raptors and wild turkeys. There are 3.6 miles (5.7km) of trails and two observation blinds.

Don't miss

Watching for northern harriers from Fox Hill observation deck.

