

THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

For the Birds

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There are some places that people just shouldn't go. This notion came to mind as we read about [one man's quest to assert public access on Cartwright Island](#), a low sliver of sand at the southern extremis of Gardiner's Island.

Whether Cartwright is part of the 3,300-acre private island or under town — or more likely state — jurisdiction is not really the question. Indeed, a proper title search of the 1630s documents in which the then Isle of Wight, or Manchonake, was granted to Lion Gardiner by the Earl of Stirling, would take far more rigorous study than an amateur armchair analysis.

It should be noted that the original deed to the island is weather-beaten by age and missing portions of the text. Nevertheless, it predates the establishment of East Hampton Town and town trustee authority, so assumptions about public access based on later grants from the crown, such as the 1686 Dongan Patent, do not necessarily apply.

Even if it were determined that Cartwright, which in some years does not exist at all, particularly after hard winter storms, is not part of Gardiner's Island, it is clear that because of its fragility and importance as a bird nesting and fledging place, it should remain off-limits to the public.

There is a kind of avaricious quality to human nature; we feel we must leave our mark everywhere. A sand-spit island easily accessible by boat or kayak is tempting to explore. But it is important to realize that places like this are important to species other than our own. New York State includes Cartwright Island on its inventory of Gardiner's Island's near-uniquely pristine coastal habitats, describing it as "an extremely rare ecosystem."

Roseate terns, which are listed as nationally endangered, have been observed nesting intermittently there. The threatened least terns, now making a halting comeback, also use Gardiner's Island's sand spits to hatch their young. The state notes that terns are highly vulnerable to human disturbance during the breeding season, which runs from about May 1 to Aug. 15 — right when curious, if unthinking, boaters would most want to picnic, or let their children, or almost unimaginably their dogs, run wild there.

But it is not just the terns for which Cartwright is important. Double-breasted cormorants spread their wings to dry on Cartwright Island. Black skimmers hunt there at dawn, their huge lower bills slicing through the water to scoop up spearing.

Just because we can doesn't always mean we should. Cartwright is the kind of place that should be left to the birds.

About the Author

Editorial

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