

GEORGES RIVER SHOREBIRD QUEST

created by the 4th grade students working with Ms. Davenport and Ms. Ford
at the Lura Libby Elementary School

Background: This is a walking Quest. Bring a bird guide, binoculars, and water bottle.

Directions to Start: Take U.S. Rte 1 to Thomaston, Maine. Turn onto Wadsworth St. by the Prison Showroom. Park in the lower end of the parking lot behind the Prison Showroom. From the parking lot you will see a path leading up to a large field. (The former site of the Maine State Prison.) Follow the path all the way to the end where there are five granite stones. Now you are ready to start the Quest. Read your clues carefully and use the map! Have fun!

Terrain: Easy

(Starting Point) Muscongus Bay is home to many different fowl.
From the Herring Gull, the Eagle, and even the Great Horned Owl.

Follow the clues below and then read every letter.

The shorebirds who live here
Want you to know them better.

Dear Questers,

Hello, I am the Osprey. I am one of the largest predators in North America. I am able to switch one of my curved toes around to grab my prey better. You can tell if I am a girl if it looks like I have a brown feather necklace on. Look up in the sky and see if you see me. I like to hang out in this area. One last fact, I am a large raptor who often gets confused with the Bald Eagle. Oh, look! Here he is now!

Hi Questers, I am the Bald Eagle and I also live along the St. George River. My nest is in a high pine tree, not too far from where you are standing. People call me a "Kleptoparasite" because I steal the Ospreys' and other birds' food. Ben Franklin didn't want me to be the National Bird because he thought Bald Eagles were lazy. Most of my Eagle friends migrate to the St. George River in the winter from the frozen northern lakes of Maine. You will see me along this river a lot in the winter, but some of my buddies stay year round. Keep your eyes open as you are walking on this Quest. You may see us gliding by.



Sincerely,

Bald Eagle



Osprey

**2. Start where there are 5 granite stones.
Shaped like a star, white as bones.**

**Walk along the gravel path
you'll see the St. George River,
a long birdbath.**

**Pass a black pipe it's on your right,
shaped like a candy cane
it's in your sight.**

**Stop at the flagpole just down the lane.
Read your next clue and don't get caught in the rain.**

**You will learn about shorebirds throughout this Quest.
So listen carefully while you take a rest.**

Greetings Questers,

I am the Mallard Duck. Did you know that I can fly up to 60 mph? Male Mallards will often try to mate with other duck species. In the winter, we Mallards often migrate to islands around Maine to get away from predators. Even though I prefer fresh water, you will see me floating along the St. George River. I have a friend called the Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Holy smokes! Here he comes now.

Hi everyone! I am the Sharp-tailed Sparrow. I live in salt marshes all along the coast. I love living along the St. George. I have perched feet. However, I don't often perch out in the open. I have a broad orange triangle on my face. I prefer running along the short shore grasses. I only fly short flights before I dive back for cover in the grass. I may be a hard bird for you to find.

Keep a look out for us both. We love living along the St. George estuary.



From,

Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow



Mallard Duck

**2. You're at a large flag pole looking over the St. George River.
Its beautiful site makes people quiver.**

Now follow the path, a graveyard is on your right.

All the stones you see might give you a fright.

Dear Humans,

I am the Snowy Egret. In the 1800's I was harshly hunted for my beautiful feathers. My feathers were in high demand for hats. I was almost killed off! You can tell me from other Egrets by my lovely golden slippers (yellow feet). There is a large colony of me at the mouth of the St. George River. I am a fast hunter. If I see movement, I am able to run and grab my prey with my long beak. Now I would like to introduce you to my friend, the Great Blue Heron.

Hello everyone, I am the Great Blue Heron. I am the largest heron in North America. You know, I am a bird that moves often. I am known to kill my surroundings by over fertilizing. I "poop" A LOT! This over fertilization often kills the tree I am nesting in. It causes me to move to another tree to build my nest where the whole cycle starts again. I am a dangerous bird. If you find me wounded leave me alone and get help. I love shiny things and will often peck peoples' eyes out! Now you have learned a lot about me and my friend the Snowy Egret. Enjoy your walk!



From,

Snowy Egret



Great Blue Heron

**3. Stop at the 4 granite stones on the right of the path.
Counting all these stones, it feels like math!**

**There is more to tell you about the seabirds you'll see.
Read and learn, see how much smarter you'll be!**

Hello Bird Lover,

I am the Greater Yellowlegs. I am a wading bird with beautiful yellow legs. I am super at running after fish or other fast moving aquatic prey. Look along the shores edge and see if you see me stirring up the water with my bill. I have a musical whistle, which is not common for shore birds. Sadly, I am not a graceful flyer. My flight is often described as a weak fluttering, almost moth like. I share the river with the Belted King Fisher. Let him tell you a bit about himself.

Greetings, friends, I would like to introduce myself! The Belted King Fisher is my name. I migrate to Maine, sometimes as far as Mexico. I have to be careful because I have a lot of

predators. I am eaten by raccoons, foxes, and raptors. I often escape from flying predators by diving in the water. I am a great diver! Humans often help me. When they dig roads or gravel pits they create banks that I can dig holes into and make my nest. It really expands my breeding areas. Thanks for reading about me and my friend the Greater Yellowlegs. Enjoy your walk along the beautiful St. George River.



Yours truly,

Greater Yellow Legs



Belted King Fisher

**4. When leaving this spot see an old guard tower ahead.
Part of the prison it was, or so it's been said.**

**Pass this structure and turn down the path on the right.
Go across the parking lot to the crosswalk in sight.**

**Carefully cross Wadsworth Street,
Turn right on the sidewalk,
You may hear a bird tweet.**

**Walk down the hill on a bridge, tracks below.
A train you may see and its horn sure will blow.**

**Cross the street and once you do be very careful
Walk on to the bridge!
It's green not white,
don't be "dareful".**

**You are at the bridge now stop and look around.
The St. George River is what you have found.**

**Look in front, look behind, the river does flow.
South to Muscongus Bay, it does go.
Observe more seabirds, we hope you see,
Here's another letter, please read carefully.**

Dear Travelers,

I'm the Bufflehead duck and my friend here is the Cormorant. We have some cool facts to share with you.

I, the Bufflehead Duck, am a visitor of the St. George River. Maine is just my resting spot. I actually nest in the Arctic. I lay eggs more slowly than any other duck. I am the

smallest duck in North America and dive for my food. Unlike other diving ducks, I take off without running along the water surface. We often stay with the same mate for several years. My buddy, the Cormorant is a very interesting bird too. Hear what he has to say.

Please do not be scared of me, dear travelers. I am the Cormorant and have been called the "Dracula bird" because of the way I dry my wings! I am able to dive 20 feet underwater. That is cool, right? I usually dive for fish and I can stay underwater for 5 to 6 minutes. I don't live on the St. George River, I just visit here to eat. My nesting spots are found on one of the many islands out in the bay. My nest is found on the ground. It is made of old bones, sticks, and, yes, sometimes pieces of garbage. That is why it is important to keep the garbage off the beach so that I don't use it in my nest. That can be dangerous for my babies.

We hope you liked learning about us. Have a great walk!



From,

Bufflehead Duck



Cormorant

**5. Turn to face Water St. and exit the bridge.
Be careful not to fall off the ridge!**

**On Water St., take a right
Look for a canvas shop sign,
Its small but in your sight!**

**Walk by the pole 18 with light #10,
Do not to walk around the bend.**

**Look for two trees with mowed grass nearby
Walk down a slope,
A granite bench you will spy!**

**Now sit a spell and listen to
Some birds' letters written just for you!**

Dear Ornithologists,

I am so glad you made it safely here from the bridge! Sit on the bench and let me tell you some things about myself. I am the Short-billed Dowitcher. I actually have nerves in my beak to sense my prey. My babies are able to get their own food in just one day. We look

like sewing machines when we eat. We walk slowly with our beak going up and down. Now meet my friend the Semipalmated Sandpiper.

Hi all, let me tell you about myself. I am probably the most abundant shorebird. I eat insects and crustaceans among the mudflats of the St. George River. I migrate to Maine from South America with thousands of other Semipalmated Sandpipers. Did you know that my name Semipalmated refers to my toes? It means that my toes are half webbed. This helps me to walk on mudflats without sinking.

We hope you had a nice rest. Enjoy the view and see if you can see us along the shore.



From,

Short-billed Dowitcher



Semipalmated Sandpiper

**6. Walk back up to the fake sidewalk,
Stroll past a colorful fake peacock.**

**March past the red building where sails were once made.
Look for a culvert under the street that is paved.**

**You'll see two yellow birds on a gray tank.
Look beyond to see the St. George River bank.**

**Some shorebirds have more to tell.
Read carefully and listen well.**

Dear Friends of the River,

Keeeee-yerr! kik kik kik!!!! You may already know me. I'm a Common Tern. I am related to a Swallow because we both have a forked tail. In fact, I am sometimes called the Sea Swallow. I skim across the water to get a drink while I'm flying. Did you know that I have a special nasal gland that allows me to drink salt water right out of the river? I don't even bother looking for fresh water. I plunge into the water to catch small fish. Well, you have learned a lot about me so keep walking and enjoy the rest of your questing!



Best wishes,

Common Tern

**7. Continue up Water. St.
Go past the “Romable Classic” mailbox,
It’s really neat.**

**Look for a flagpole with a fake seagull.
Stop at the Public Landing sign.
It’s green, not dull.**

**Turn right onto the road and run down the hill.
You’ll see Weymouth Cross.
Now stop and be still.**

**More birds are yearning to share and talk.
If you don’t stop talking, they’ll surely squawk!**

Dear Fatigued Walkers,

Hello! Why don’t you relax and view the St. George River below? I’m the Herring Gull and with me is my cousin, the Laughing Gull, but enough about that. Let’s talk about me!

Did you know that I can capture my prey while I briskly walk or swim? Another amazing fact about me is that I am one of the most studied species of birds. You can find me almost anywhere, even McDonald’s! My eyelids are yellow in the summer time. No eye shadow for me! Now I am going to tell you one of my most interesting features, I, like the Common Tern, have a special gland that allows me to drink salt water. Enough bragging! I should let my cousin, the Laughing Gull, have a turn.

Hello everyone, Haha, ha, ha, ha! I hope you are enjoying your Quest. Meet me, the Laughing Gull! I like to steal food from larger birds, but have also been known to even feed on insects and earthworms in farmers’ fields. I nest out by the islands and I get help from my mate when it comes to sitting on our eggs. We both incubate them. I often make my cousin, the Herring Gull, angry. I am known to eat Herring Gull eggs! They are really, really tasty. I also love squid. Hope you enjoy my chuckling!



Sincerely,

Laughing Gull



Herring Gull

**8. Look for the “Museum in the Streets,”
Walk in between #22 and #23
Tiptoe on your feet!**

**Straight ahead you'll see some stairs.
Walk down 20 steps and you'll be there!!!**

**Turn left and walk on the crushed stone path
Trot to the chain fence.
Don't go too far or you'll take a bath!**

**Look ahead into the watershed.
Its home to some seabirds, people have said!**

**Some more birds want to share their letter!
Learn more facts, the sooner the better!**

Dear Bird Observers,

Salutations! Would you like to learn about the Common Loon? Let me tell you some trivia about myself. I breed on fresh water lakes, but you will see me here on the St. George. I am able to dive up to 200 feet below the water's surface to catch fish. I have heavy bones that help me dive. My eyes can focus in air and water, too. People love my eerie yodeling call. Sometimes I give my babies a ride on my back to keep them safe from predators. I change my feather colors in the winter and summer. Would you like to meet my friend, the Black Bellied Plover?

Hi, everyone! I bet you are excited about being near the end of your journey. I am the Black-bellied Plover. I am the largest Plover in North America. To make my nest, I scrape the ground and line the nest with lichen, pebbles, twigs, and leaves. I have a strong direct flight with a powerful rapid wing beat. I am the only American plover that has a hind toe on my foot. However, it is so small that is difficult to see. I winter on the St. George River and breed in northwestern Alaska and Arctic Canada. You will not see me here year round, so don't look for me in the summer!

We both hope you have enjoyed learning about the variety of shore birds along the beautiful St. George River.

Yours truly,



Black-bellied Plover



Common Loon

**9. Now the end of the Quest is near!
Can you find a birdhouse without any fear?**

**Inside the birdhouse, you'll find a notebook and stamp.
It's wrapped in plastic so it won't get damp!**

**Turn your back to the water and look to your right.
Follow the fence, now hold on tight!**

**Look for rusty hinges on a black wooden box.
Please do not climb on the rocks.**

**You'll see an evergreen bush called a yew.
Its bark is peeling and it's old, not new.**

**Go ahead and look in its branches for a house.
It's build for birds but not for a mouse.**

**Congratulations! You found our box for the Quest!
Write and stamp...You can now rest!**

GEORGES RIVER SHOREBIRD QUEST MAP

