

Sherwood Island Diary

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1996

January 9

Yesterday was the great blizzard of 1996 with about two feet of snow and winds from the northeast that were as high as 45 MPH. Sherwood Island State Park was unplowed today but Burying Hill Beach, which is run by the town of Westport, was open. The parking lot there is just across a small channel from the eastern extremity of Sherwood Island to which it is, therefore, more or less equivalent. I spent about 30 minutes there. The tide was high and the channel was open. There were many Canada Geese, Mallards and Black Ducks in the channel because the Mill Pond was entirely frozen and this was the nearest open water save for the Sound. I had hoped that the extraordinary "northeaster" might bring in some really unusual species such as Eiders and Alcids but this was perhaps an unrealistic hope since the storm was basically from the south with the northeast element being rotational. In the event, I did find a pair (male and female) of Barrow's Goldeneye, presumably the same twosome that had been in the identical spot last winter and I also enjoyed watching six Sanderling cavorting at the tideline. Of course, I couldn't do any walking since only the parking lot had been cleared, so I recorded only the individuals that could be observed from a single location.

January 16

Today was cold and windy and a foot of snow still remained from the "Great Blizzard". I went out despite the unpromising conditions because there have been many Saw Whet Owls and a Great Gray Owl seen in Hammonasset State Park recently and Bob Winkler and I thought perhaps some such owls might also visit Sherwood Island. We couldn't find any and I recorded a measly 29 species in three hours of birding. I did manage to see two interesting birds. A female Towhee at the Allen Preserve and a hybrid Mallard-Pintail, a male that had a "pin tail" and the white stripe on the neck of a Pintail but was otherwise a perfect male Mallard. I hadn't heard of this particular hybrid before but I suppose Mallards hybridize occasionally with virtually all common surface-feeding ducks.

January 21

Most of the snow is now gone, having been washed away by heavy rains and warm temperatures two days ago. I ran into Bob Winkler today and he was very keen on finding owls. Since our last visit, he had located several evergreens with pellets under them. Today, we were finally lucky. We found the pellets and bones that he had staked out and there was nothing in these particular trees. But at one point we heard some excited Crows and when we found them, we came upon the source of their apprehensive interest, a fine **Barred Owl** conspicuously sitting in a bare deciduous tree. This was a new Sherwood Island species for

both of us. We also had a Thrasher at the Allen Preserve where we had seen one on the Christmas Count one month ago. Neither of us has previously had Thrasher in January here. So it was an excellent day, even though I spent only two hours and recorded a mere 29 species.

January 23

It was overcast today but the Sound was rather smooth and most of the waterbirds could be identified. Most interesting were six Brant that flew by. Red-throated Loons seemed quite numerous for the date and I counted 18. The Mill Pond is now about half open and the number of Canvasback has increased to 52. I didn't make much effort to find them, but land birds seemed very scarce save for Crows. At one point, I heard a group of the latter that sounded as though they had found a large owl but they dispersed before I could get there.

January 26

Today was uninteresting. I had only 33 species, the best of which was Turkey Vulture.

February 10

32 Unmemorable species.

February 29

I've been in California for twelve days and during that time the weather here has apparently been very mild as was the case yesterday, my first day back. Alas, I should have gone out yesterday rather than today. For there was a remarkable change in weather overnight and this morning was frigid with very strong, icy winds. It was definitely not the day to be birding at Sherwood Island but I was so eager to get out that I neglected the unfavorable weather. It really was much too windy to expect much, particularly on the water. But I did find two each of the year's first Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles and I also saw the female Towhee that has been attempting to overwinter in the Allen Preserve. Eleven Killdeer were also new for the year and 130 was quite a respectable count of Canvasback.

March 11

The weather has been very cold and there has been yet another significant snowfall since I was last out. More than 70 inches of snow has fallen in Central Park, New York City, this winter. The previous record seasonal snowfall was 63 inches in 1947. The Mill Pond was still mostly frozen today and there was a bit of residual snow although the temperature was above freezing. I didn't expect much in the way of new arrivals so I was very pleasantly surprised when I flushed three Woodcocks from the field adjacent to the old barn. I also

found a pair of Gadwall, a Hairy Woodpecker and a Meadowlark, all of which were new for the year. Still looking for the first Robin, however, and the numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds (5) and Grackles (3) are not exactly impressive.

March 13

Today was absolutely glorious. There was a gentle southerly breeze. The temperature was in the forties and the skies were clear. Yesterday had been almost the same. I thought that there would probably be some interesting birds around and I was quite thorough, spending a full four hours. But the birds were a bit disappointing. I had a total of 42 species including only a fine male Harrier and a single male Cowbird as the only new species arrivals. I certainly expected Snipe and Robin and searched hard for them without success. Nor was I able to repeat the good luck I had the other day with Woodcock. Tomorrow is predicted to be even nicer than today with temperatures perhaps in the sixties. I think I'll give it another try.

March 14

The recent favorable weather continued last night and today and even though there were only two new species for the year this morning (Kingfisher and Robin), there were many new arrivals. The most conspicuous was the bulk of the park's breeding population of Red-winged Blackbirds. Yesterday's count of five was augmented to about 75 noisy individuals this morning. Also of interest was the large number (ca. 35) of Fish Crows. This was the first occasion that I have ever considered them more numerous than Common Crows here. Other noteworthy findings included relatively high numbers of Horned Grebes (55) and Gadwall (4).

March 18

Today was rather ordinary but the Sound was remarkably smooth and if I were going to see unusual swimming birds, this should have been the day. The best I could muster were respectable, albeit unspectacular counts of 35 each for Horned Grebe and Red-throated Loon. More noteworthy perhaps, was a flock of 100 Brant far out above the Sound. Also logged in the year's first Pintail, a single drake, and the first Green-winged Teal, two drakes and a duck.

March 21

Today's first spring visit was ordinary. I added Snipe, Flicker and Horned Lark to the year's list and I counted 50 Red-throated Loons on the Sound.

March 25

This morning was fun! The weather, clear and warm with a gentle southerly breeze, could not have been more favorable. And the birds responded. Even though I arrived later in the morning than usual and examined only the western half of the park, I still managed to find 49 species, the highest total this year. The most interesting was a beautiful male Pine Warbler flitting from trees to ground in the center of the park adjacent to the entry road. This was the earliest record for any warbler that I have ever had at Sherwood Island. The Pine Warbler is rare in Connecticut before April. Three Phoebes were also hawking insects in the same area. Other new species for the year included a Double-crested Cormorant, two Great Egrets and two Bonaparte's Gulls.

A curiosity was the lack of Red-winged Blackbirds of which I only had two. Of course, they may have been preferably located in the eastern section of the park, but they were absent from some of their usual favorite haunts, whereas Cowbirds (35) and Grackles (25) were present in reasonable numbers for this date.

March 26

I don't know how I happened to decide to go to the park today. It was cooler and much more breezy than yesterday and certainly it was obvious that the Sound would be too rough to see much on it. That proved to be the case and it was also true that there weren't a great many birds around. But what was around made my going well worthwhile. I stopped at the overlook to the Mill Pond on the entry road to check on the group of surface-feeding ducks. Most were Blacks but the Baldpates and the pair of Gadwall that have been around were there and there was a pair of smaller ducks. Green-winged Teal, a male and a female. **The male was a splendid Eurasian Teal!** Its horizontal white stripe was obtrusively conspicuous and it lacked the crescent of the American representative. This is the first time I have seen the bird in the United States since I was a child. Of course, since then its specific stature has been erased and it is now considered merely a subspecies. But it is very easy to identify and remains a rare and exciting find, a new one for Sherwood Island. The females are indistinguishable so it is possible that there may have been two.

There were other interesting birds even though I found only 41 species despite covering the park quite comprehensively. A flock of four Pectoral Sandpipers that landed on the central oval represented one of the earliest state records. And a beautiful male Bluebird in the West Woods led me to hope it will breed there again this year after having missed last year. I also got my first Swamp Sparrow of the year.

Animals appeared too. A pair of deer in the pines behind the dormitory was so tame that I was afraid they might not get out of my way. My first woodchuck of the year was not nearly so emaciated in appearance as they usually seem at this time of the year.

March 30

Five inches of snow fell yesterday only to have almost completely melted away by this morning which was fine and clear with a southeast breeze. Except for a respectable 60 Red-throated Loons, there were very low numbers of birds and of species (38) at the park. Particularly astonishing to me is the status of Red-winged Blackbirds of which I had only one today despite covering the entire park save the eastern extremity. It seems as though the breeding population has not yet settled in although the species has been around for the entire month.

March 31

Today was a bit better than yesterday though not as good as the fine weather might have promised. There was an interesting migration of ducks including three Ring-necked in the pond and 50 Greater Scaup as well as 75 Bufflehead on the Sound. I also recorded four Greater Yellowlegs, the first I've seen this year although Charlie Barnard had some last week. The peculiar lack of Red-winged Blackbirds continued.

April 3

The past two days have been very windy and quite rainy. There was no rain today and the clouds gradually gave way to sunshine. However, a strong, gusting westerly wind presaged an ornithologically uninteresting day and so it was. A male Blue-winged Teal on the Mill Pond was new for the year and that was about all there was. The peculiar situation with blackbirds persist. Today the Grackles were missing; I only found one. And there were only ten Red-winged Blackbirds at most, although I covered the entire park. Five Goldeneye and two Canvasbacks begin to seem late. Some of the Horned Grebes were in spring plumage, the first I've noticed this year.

April 6

Today was rather good despite chilly rather breezy weather. I totaled 50 species for the first time this year. Daily totals have been rather low this year although the total for the year is virtually identical (86) to what it has been on this date the past two years (85, 87). The most unusual of today's birds was a Red-necked Grebe swimming amidst the flock of Buffleheads off the Mill Beach. If I see Red-necked Grebe in the spring, it's always around this date. The lingering Goldeneye and Canvasbacks are all females or immatures. There was a pair of Bluebirds in the West Woods today making me hopeful that they will nest again there this year. I know that Bob Winkler is planning to install several nesting boxes there.

Other new birds for the year that I saw today included three Tree Swallows, five Savannah Sparrows and a Fox Sparrow. The great Red-winged Blackbird mystery persists. I recorded only two.

April 12

Since I was at the park last week, there have been two snow storms, each resulting in an accumulation of several inches. What an amazing year! However, yesterday was warm and windy, and today was the warmest of the year so none of the snow remained. It seemed certain that today would be an interesting one and it did not disappoint. The statistics were 54 species including five that were new for the year. The most exciting of these was a **Short-eared owl** that I flushed from the patch of tall dense grass between the model plane flying field and the central ditch. The bird wheeled and circled for several minutes allowing me an excellent study. I see this species almost once a year and it seems always to be in the same general area.

Other new species included a Kestrel, two Snowy Egrets, two Creepers and three Hermit Thrushes. I noticed the Common Loons in breeding plumage for the first time and studied a male Goldfinch that was in the midst of acquiring bright yellow feathers. The two Snowy Egrets that I saw were in some sort of sexual display. One was feeding alone when the second flew in and they began to jump at and strike at each other. Significant contact was established although harm was not done. Then they seemed to fly off together and finally to separate. Both were replete with nuptial plumes. Do both sexes exhibit these? My guess is that these were two males in conflict rather than a male and female in courtship. Hancock and Elliott's *The Herons of the World* failed to provide me with a definitive answer to this question.

April 15

Today was very nice even though it was quite cool with a northerly wind. It was exceptionally clear so that details could be made out on Long Island as well as the intervening Sound. Birds were flying over the Sound towards the north including a flock of Brant. There were still lots of Red-throated Loons and Horned Grebes, the latter now all in breeding plumage as are the Common but not the Red-throated Loons. A Barn Swallow, a Rough-winged Swallow, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet and two Pipits were all new for the year. I had 58 species, the high for the year thus far and fairly respectable for the date, though by no means spectacular.

April 18

This morning was not a good one for birds because there were strong northwest winds, because, although it is supposed to warm up markedly this afternoon, it was still cool, and finally, because two male Harriers seemed to be everywhere in the park during the entire time I was there. I only managed to find 46 species, just one of which, Sharp-shinned Hawk, was new for the year. I did have a nice look at what we used to call "Prairie Horned Lark" when I was a child. It's eyeline is white not yellow and it is pale overall. Today was the first day that the Double-crested Cormorants were actually on their Mill Pond Islet haunts and they looked very handsome in the spring. The eleven that I saw were all glossy adults.

Even when there are few birds around, there is always something of interest to be seen. Today I watched an extraordinary spectacle at the junction of the salt marsh and the Mill Pond just west of the maintenance shacks. An adult Herring Gull was attempting to swallow a wriggling animal of about two feet which I suppose was an eel but could have been a snake. Most of the struggle occurred on the ground although occasionally the bird would fly around a bit. After a while, it appeared that the gull had swallowed the entire animal yet I noticed no obvious swelling in the region of the gullet. Then the gull seemed to disgorge a no longer wriggling part of its prey, perhaps eight inches worth. Then it picked this portion up again and tried once more to get it down. I was curious as to whether the prey was an eel or a snake so I finally managed to get to the edge of the marsh but I was unable to find any remains.

April 19

Relatively warm weather began yesterday afternoon, continued all day today, and is expected to persist for two more days at least. So it is not surprising that this morning was much better than yesterday with many more species and migrating individuals. Most noticeable was an influx of Flickers, up to twenty-five from four. I totaled 58 species of which eleven Glossy Ibises, a Cooper's Hawk and a Chipping Sparrow were new for the year. Harriers seem particularly common this year. Today's was a large female, in contrast with the two small males that I saw yesterday. One of the Ruby-crowned Kinglets today not only sang his full song repeatedly (quite uncommon behavior during migration here), but also flashed his red crown.

April 20

The weather was perfect this morning. An early fog was dissipated by a warm gentle southwesterly breeze. But the birds were down from yesterday. I had 52 species. The only new one was a fine male Yellow Warbler which is **one day earlier than the earliest date reported in Zeranski and Baptist**. Also of interest were two Pine Warblers and a flock of 75 Bonaparte's Gulls, most of which were in breeding plumage.

April 21

The weather could not have been better and the day could scarcely have been less interesting ornithologically. No new species amongst the 50 that I recorded although a pair of Thrashers represented a spring arrival. Not only was the species total disappointing, but the number of individuals was also low.

April 22

Today was another perfect late April day, one that just had to contain the first real wave of spring Passerine migrants. But it didn't. There were no new land birds at all, neither species nor individuals. But I did get some new birds for the year. They were single examples of

Little Blue Heron, Osprey, Black-bellied Plover and Lesser Yellowlegs. It was the kind of day during which I felt quite certain I should see Swift, Gnatcatcher, Solitary Vireo and Black and White and Palm Warblers, to name a few, so I was quite disappointed even though the park was just splendid.

When I first arrived, the Sound was as smooth as I've ever seen it and I think that so favorable was the visibility, that I could have identified an alcid swimming off the north shore of Long Island. Of course, there weren't any and there wasn't much to be seen save for good numbers of Red-throated Loons and Old Squaw.

April 23

The wonderful spring weather, like late May rather than late April, continued today although it is supposed to become considerably cooler tonight. The ground is already awash with flowers, the pussy willows have been out for several days and there is already considerable foliage in the park. Land birds have been rather tardy in their arrival despite the precocious weather of the past week and each day I become more expectant and then more disappointed. Today, really for the first time during this period, there was a noticeable influx of land birds. This was not reflected in the total species count of only 50 but that figure could have been improved had I spent more time and gotten to the eastern end of the park. While a Black & White Warbler and a Catbird were the only new species, there were more Jays, Ruby-crowned Kinglets, Hermit Thrushes and White-throated Sparrows than on previous days. Plenty of late April birds have yet to make their appearance, however.

I found a tick in my hair, the first of the year.

April 25

Yesterday was very cool with strong northwest winds. This morning the winds became calm and then shifted to the west and then southwest. It was a good morning with 62 species, by far the best of the year, including Merlin, Marsh Wren and White-eyed vireo as the three new ones. Several days ago, most of the Mallards and Black Ducks seemed to disappear, actually, I suppose to sit (females) and whatever males do during the actual rearing season. The number of permanent Red-winged Blackbirds continues to seem low, although fly overs can make the count seem more robust than it really is.

My name for the Merlin is "Destination Bird". I don't think I've ever seen one in the air that didn't seem to be zooming in a very specific direction. It's the species' best field mark.

April 26

There was a rather strong southerly wind this morning that rendered the Sound too choppy for detection of floating sea birds. The day's total of 57 species is, thus, misleadingly low. It was pretty good although Pine Warbler was the only representative of the family which is

certainly late this year. Not late were a male Indigo Bunting and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow, each at least two weeks earlier than I had ever seen them here. Other species that were new for the year were Gnatcatcher and Cedar Waxwing. A flock of 40 Brant flying north over the Sound was also noteworthy. There was a small flight of Ruby-crowned Kinglets and White-throated Sparrows compared to yesterday.

April 28

Yesterday was cold with very strong winds from the northwest. This morning was still cool and the winds remained strong although now coming from due west. There were as few birds as I could imagine on April 28 (and don't forget that this is a leap year so it's really April 29!). I got 47 species of which one, two Least Sandpipers in the east marsh, was new.

April 30

I didn't go out yesterday because of the bad weather and today was even worse. There was a dense, misting fog with a cold east wind and visibility was awful. Moreover, I was unable to wear my spectacles. Yet it was clearly some sort of a flight day, especially for White-throated Sparrows of which I had 150. Even though the birds were quiet and hard to see, I did manage to add six species to the list for the year. They were Spotted Sandpiper, House Wren, Myrtle and Palm Warblers, Ovenbird and Yellowthroat. I enter May with 120 species, one more than I finished April with in 1994 and 1995. Of course, I had superb May flights in each of those years. We shall see.

May 1

Some general comments about the park as I begin May.

There is a great deal of standing water from recent rains.

Most species of trees are already in leaf. However, the majority of trees in the park are varieties of oak and they are still bare. There is quite a difference in the time of appearance of leaves of maple as opposed to oak. The former have had leaf or leaf buds for at least five days. The first deciduous trees to acquire foliage are the Weeping Willows which have had buds for more than one week.

The first goslings appeared today, a group of five. May 1 or May 2 is the usual time when I first see them.

Having concluded my May introductory remarks, I shall get to the day itself which was a superb way to begin this exciting month. A few statistics are: 71 species of which 30 were non-passerine, 41 passerine including seven warblers, and six were new for the year. They were single examples of Common and Least Tern, Solitary Vireo, Prairie and Nashville Warblers and Orchard Oriole. Other observations of interest included five female Hooded

Mergansers, ten Snipe and a male Indigo Bunting in the same tree as last week and presumably the same individual. There were still many (ca. 75) White-throated Sparrows.

The weather was delightful after yesterday's fog and mist. It was clear, a little cool, and a bit breezy with the winds from the west southwest. I didn't get past the middle ditch in the eastern section of the park which makes the high species total even more remarkable.

May 2

The weather today was pretty much the same as yesterday but the birdlife was entirely different. The wave of land birds that I had noticed for the past two days was gone. Only two White-throated Sparrows compared with 75 and 150 on the past two days. The total was 58 species of which 26 were non-passerine and 32 were passerine including only three warblers. A singing Field Sparrow was the only species that was new for the year. I covered the entire park today.

May 5

The past two days were cold and rainy. I did go to the park for a few minutes yesterday but the conditions were too miserable to continue and there seemed to be nothing around. Today was clear and warm despite a gusty breeze from the northwest. It was Sunday and there were quite a large number of noisy people in rather unlikely places. There weren't many birds around. The totals were 60 species including 28 non-passerines, 32 passerines including two warblers. I did add four species to the list for the year. They were: Green Heron, Solitary Sandpiper, Wood Thrush and Seaside Sparrow.

There were extraordinarily few gulls. Only 10 Herring, one Black-backed.

Red-throated Loons are lingering later than usual this year. There were 14 today and **about five of them were in breeding plumage**. This is the spring I have ever seen any in breeding plumage. In the past, they have always left earlier before changing.

May 6

The weather was miserable today. It was cold, foggy and rainy with wind from the east. The humidity was 100% and my spectacles were almost useless. I recorded 59 species of which 25 were non-passerine, 34 passerine including five warblers. Three species, Parula Warbler, Northern Oriole and White-crowned Sparrow, were new for the year. The latter was rather a surprise since its presence almost always signifies a wave day which this definitely was not. The first six days of May have disappointingly unexciting, however, in examining my records from previous years, I note that activity almost never really heats up before May 9. Somehow, this always surprises me and I feel disappointed. In any event, it is clearly not the moment to abandon ship!

May 7

The morning was cool, clear and dry with moderate westerly winds. But it was again a bit disappointing although a very late Red-necked Grebe off the point helped ease the pain. The totals were 63 species, 27 non-passerine, 36 passerine including four warblers. I manage always on these May days, no matter how bad they seem to be, to record a few species that are new for the year. Today there were three. A Clapper Rail in the first (most westerly) ditch of the east marsh, a Kingbird and a Crested Flycatcher. It seems surprising to me that I already have 137 species this year and I am still awaiting a decent flight.

May 8

I was foolish to go out this morning. It was cold and raining with winds from the northeast. It did clear up during the morning, however, there were few birds. The totals were 61 species, 27 non-passerine, 34 passerine, three warblers. One species, Warbling Vireo, was new. I didn't even see a Barn Swallow.

The oaks all have budding leaves now so if there is finally a wave of warblers, I will have to work hard to see them in the foliage. It's much easier if there is a flight before the leaves have all appeared.

May 9

Despite more rather unfavorable weather, today made me feel as though I see some light at the end of the tunnel. There was a definite influx of May birds. Again the weather was gloomy and cold although the winds had shifted from the northeast to the southeast. As usual this May, the humidity was close to 100%. The totals were 65 species, 27 non-passerine, 38 passerine, seven warblers. These numbers aren't impressive but there were six new species: a Swift, a Veery, two Black-throated Blue Warblers, two Chestnut-sided Warblers, a Redstart and two Bobolinks. Also of interest were a pair of Clapper Rails that I flushed from the east marsh and a lingering Red-throated Loon.

The new warblers make me hope that perhaps today was the vanguard of a wave that will perhaps swell tomorrow and peak the day after which is a Saturday and some sort of formally special birding day that is supposed to represent a migratory census. Bob Winkler will join me that day so I shall at least learn what it's called. He has been working hard at his writing lately and has had to forego most of his usually vigorous Sherwood Island May activity. He hasn't missed much and with some luck he may be out on one of the few good days of this May. It will be interesting to read this prediction on Saturday night.

May 10

It is the "North American Migration Count" that Bob Winkler and I will be doing at Sherwood Island tomorrow so I went there late this afternoon to scout around. The reason I went in the afternoon is that it rained all morning. It cleared in the afternoon and became

quite warm with a gentle southerly wind. If it keeps this way overnight there will surely be lots of birds tomorrow but the weather prediction is for east winds and rain. I didn't cover the eastern half of the park at all this afternoon so the list of 61 species is not really reflective of everything that might have been present. Clearly, however, there were not many land birds although I added Rose-breasted Grosbeak to the list. The other new species was a Dunlin in breeding plumage with a dozen Black-bellied Plover in the marsh bordering the Mill Pond where there were also two adult Little Blue Herons.

The Sound was exceptionally placid and visibility, while a bit hazy, was still pretty good since the sky was clear. I found nine Common Loons, nine Red-throateds with one in full breeding plumage and, most excitingly, two Red-necked Grebes in splendid breeding plumage that were not too far off the point and afforded me excellent telescopic views. They could easily have been distinguished with binoculars alone. The good viewing conditions allowed me to identify a flock of 150 White-winged Scoters flying midway between Connecticut and Long Island.

May 11

This was North American Migration Count day and Bob Winkler and I were at Sherwood Island from 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM. The night had been partly cloudy with a southwest breeze and that was more or less the weather for the entire day. I had an extraordinary total of 112 species (my previous record of 5/15/94 was 103) of which 42 were non-passerine and 70 were passerine including 17 warbler species. Bob Winkler had two species, Gnatcatcher and Wood Duck, that I missed. I record 18 species that were new for the year including American Bittern, Tricolored Heron, Semipalmated Sandpiper, Dowitcher, Laughing Gull, Wood Pewee, Least Flycatcher, Red-breasted Nuthatch, Swainson's Thrush, Yellow-throated and Red-eyed Vireos, Blue-winged, Magnolia, Black-throated Green, Wilson's and Canada Warblers, Northern Waterthrush and Scarlet Tanager. Other findings of note were a flock of 35 Glossy Ibis, 30 Catbirds and 25 Yellowthroats. There were no real rarities although American Bittern and Tricolored Heron are always nice to see.

The contrast with yesterday (61 species including only two warblers and no Yellowthroats) was awesome and illustrated the concept of a May "wave" more dramatically than I have ever experienced. Unfortunately however, the glassy surface of the Sound that prevailed yesterday was not present today. It was rather choppy and there was a distant haze. Not surprisingly, therefore, I failed to see the two Red-necked Grebes that I had so enjoyed yesterday, nor for that matter, did I see the Harrier, White-winged Scoters and Dunlin.

An interesting mammal observation: at 8:00 AM, we saw a coyote walking through the conifer grove in the center of the park. This is the first time I have seen them in such an accessible location.

May 14

Shortly after I left the park the other day, an angry thunderstorm developed. It turned into a heavy rain that lasted all night. The storm was cleared on May 12 by powerful northwest

winds that continued through May 13. These winds were accompanied by unseasonably low temperatures, in the high 30s and low 40s. This morning the winds were still from the northwest but not nearly so strong as they had been. It was cool and clear. I expected to find nothing under these unfavorable conditions. The results were 76 species of which 28 were non-passerine and 48 were passerine including nine warblers. Willow Flycatcher was the only species that was new for the year.

I had occasion today to study closely a handsome Great-crested Flycatcher that was allowing me better looks than I usually get of it. I decided to spend some time looking at it so that I might be able to distinguish other *Myiarchus* flycatchers in Arizona this summer and possibly here in late fall when Ash-throated Flycatcher is said to be a remote possibility. This bird seemed a typical Great Crested in the intensity of its rufous tail, yellow belly and gray head. I was surprised to notice that it had a conspicuous white throat below which its chest was the same fairly dark gray as the head. When I began looking into field guides, I found that at least one, Bruun and Singer, consider the white throat which this bird certainly possessed, a crucial mark for the Ash-throated Flycatcher which I do not think this bird was. Other guides suggest that the entire gray configuration of the head and breast is lighter gray than that of the Great Crested and that the Ash-throated appears generally paler. Neither Peterson's guide, nor that published by the National Geographic Society mention the rather conspicuous white throat for either species.

May 15

The wind shifted to the southwest last night and, although the temperature did not rise much, the migration was a bit more active. The totals were 90 species of which 35 were non-passerine, 55 passerine including 12 warblers. The four new species were King Rail, 18 Semipalmated Plovers, a Ruby-throated Hummingbird and two Blackburnian Warblers. I flushed the King Rail from the south edge of the west marsh near the new drainage pools between the marsh and the beach. The bird was the most richly rufous rail I have ever seen and was quite attractive reminding me in its coloration of a Dowitcher in breeding plumage. The contrast with the Clapper rail that I had earlier watched walking in the most westerly (first) ditch of the east marsh was striking. That bird presented a washed out gray appearance with no rufous at all.

May 18

The last two days were cold and rainy with mainly northerly winds. Today was supposed to be better and tomorrow is predicted to be very hot as a southerly flow that was to start today becomes fully in place. It sounded as though today might be the late wave day. Bob Winkler joined me and we hoped we might even challenge last Saturday's extraordinary species record. It turned out to be a complete flop, at least in the morning when we were out. It was still quite chilly and went from overcast to rain. The totals were 70 species of which 29 were non-passerine, 41 passerine including seven warblers. There were three new species including a male Purple Martin, about eight Bank Swallows and a Blackpoll Warbler.

May 20

Yesterday was Sunday and we had a late afternoon date in Long Island with Manny and Micky Levine. When I awoke in the morning it was still raining but by noon the rain and fog had disappeared and it became very warm (89o) and breezy. I took a walk around the neighborhood and it was obvious that the invasion of the warm front was accompanied by a major movement of passerine birds. I couldn't go to Sherwood Island because of our social engagement and when we got to Manny's, he told us that the flight on Long Island during the day was amongst the best he had ever experienced in the spring and that he had 24 species of warblers. Bob Winkler was in Kent and also noted a brisk migration. It thus seems possible that I may have missed the best day of the spring at Sherwood Island. It was almost certainly the second, and last major flight day for this peculiar spring.

I hoped that the flight would continue through today, Monday, and I started out at 6:00 AM. Alas, there was certainly no landfall of warblers. But I did have 90 species and some were very interesting. There were 38 non-passerines and 52 passerines including 11 warblers. The four new species were single examples of Cattle Egret, Willet, Olive-sided Flycatcher and Mourning Warbler. The Olive-sided Flycatcher was new for the park. It was perched at the top of the most conspicuous dead tree near the conifers in the very center of the park. It kept sallying forth and then returning to the same lookout post perched in a slightly different direction so that it afforded looks from every angle. The tufts on the back were concealed by the wing and were visible only when the bird preened itself or was about to land. I think I heard it once but I was much surprised at how musical and unflycatcher-like the "hick-three-beers" sounded.

I also had a fine look at the male Mourning Warbler at Grove Point. I seem to have good luck with this bird as I do record it virtually every year.

I flushed a Woodcock from the wet field adjacent to "Woodcock Woods" which is a frequent haunt for it in March but is now more appropriate for a rail. This sighting is later by seven weeks than my previous latest spring sighting for Woodcock. It certainly makes me wonder whether it might breed in the park.

Today I glimpsed briefly a small snake not far from the viewing deck at the edge of Woodcock Woods. This is the first time I have ever seen a snake in the park!

May 21

Yesterday the temperature eventually reached 96 and today was just as bad. There were still plenty of birds around. The total was 77 species of which 32 were non-passerines and 45 were passerines including five warblers. There were no new species but there were many birds flying over including at least 45 Jays. A beautiful male Ruby-throated Hummingbird nearly redeemed the enervating weather. I feel "birded out."

July 31

Easterly winds and intermittent rain compelled me to go to the park for the first time in two months this morning. I stayed away from the landbird areas yet still managed to log in 52 species. Most unexpected was a Woodcock that I almost stepped on in the far eastern section of the park where I have never seen one before at any season. Perhaps they bred in the park this year as I also had one in late May albeit in its usual haunts. Seven species of heron included an adult Little Blue and a Cattle Egret. In addition to Woodcock, the nine shorebird species included the noisiest Willet I have ever encountered. Thirty Great Black-backed Gulls was a high number.

Two groups of newly fledged Mallards indicated that second broods are probably quite common. Successful breeding was also suggested by the presence of immature examples of Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Marsh Wren.

August 2

Little evidence of migration and nothing of particular interest.

August 14

Low tide today was early in the morning so I was not surprised to see an Oystercatcher on one of the peninsulas that is tidally exposed off the Mill Beach. Otherwise the day was unremarkable save perhaps for two Northern Waterthrushes which seem to be the first migrating Fall warblers at Sherwood Island.

Yesterday was interesting at Sherwood Island, although, unfortunately, I missed the excitement. There was something of a "Northeaster" during the morning with heavy rain and winds gusting to 20. I knew it would be good for shorebirds but the GE repairman was supposed to come between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM and Maddy wanted me at home. He was going to call before he came so there was a possibility he might do so as early as 9:30. I said I would stay home but the conditions were so perfect for a good shorebird flight that I decided at 8:30 to go for just a few minutes. I got there at 8:50 and stayed until 9:05. The big parking lot was full of rain puddles and the area between the bathhouses was also flooded so conditions were highly favorable. I didn't see much, though, a Pectoral Sandpiper and a few Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers. I left at 9:05 so that I would get home by 9:30 notwithstanding the rush hour traffic. At 9:20, Charlie Barnard arrived at the parking lot and immediately found a noisy and conspicuous Avocet! The bird stayed for five minutes, flew west, and has not been seen by anyone since. Thanks a lot, GE!

August 20

I spent three and a half hours at the park today but it was unremarkable and the time was spent mainly showing Charlie Barnard my usual itinerary. The flock of Monk Parakeets from near Compo Beach flew up all at once over the Mill Beach and were about fifty-

strong, I think the most I'd ever seen there. Also fine looks at both peep and at Pectoral Sandpipers in one of the Mosquito ponds.

August 24

A "cold front" supposedly passed through last night and there certainly were some thunderstorms so it seemed a promising time for an early wave. This morning the sky was very overcast but there was no wind at all and the humidity was obviously still very high. I covered the Mill Beach and the eastern half of the park but at 9:00 a brief heavy downpour convinced me to call it a day. Perhaps I should have stayed on the parking lot but there was no accompanying wind of any sort, much less from the east. In the event, the day was noteworthy for a single Buff-breasted Sandpiper that was on the east parking lot when I first arrived. As a matter of fact, I had my best day of the year for shorebirds with ten species. Turnstone was the only other one that was new for the year.

I also had my first Savannah Sparrow of the autumn.

August 27

There was nothing special about the weather today. It was warm, clear, humid and windless. There were some interesting birds. I had a Green-winged and two Blue-winged Teal, perhaps my earliest Fall records for both, certainly for the latter. There was a fine Harrier, immature or female, and best of all, I flushed an immature Sora from the wet meadow adjacent to the model airplane field. I believe this is only my second park record for this species.

August 28

I thought today might be good for shorebirds because there was a cool northeast breeze and overcast skies. It turned out to be a pretty good migration day though without many shorebirds. The highlight was an immature Bald Eagle, the earliest I've seen in the Fall here. Another bird that was new for the year was a very finely and cleanly streaked, otherwise nondescript warbler with wing bars that I decided was a Cape May. I confess that it is hard for me to identify this bird with certainty in the Fall. It was one of six species of warblers, the only one of which was common being Redstart of which there were six. Another interesting find was a Clapper Rail that I flushed in the East Marsh. I had a total of 63 species, the highest count this Fall so far.

I saw an alabaster doe with dark eyes at the far eastern end of the east marsh near Burying Hill Beach. She was with two fawns, one the usual spotted brown, the other the exact same color as her mother.

August 30

By weather and tidal criteria today couldn't have been better, particularly for a Passerine wave. It was clear and cool with a northwest breeze. Ebb tide was at 7:00 AM so the flats were exposed at the quietest time of the day. Yet for all these favorable signs, the only reason I even entered the 53 species I managed to dig out in three and one-half hours, is because of my training to be systematic.

There are two hurricanes in the South Atlantic that could cause some havoc next week. That might be interesting.

September 4

It's tough birding at this time of the year. The foliage is really too thick to locate the source of the non-diagnostic chips that characterize this season. There were some land birds around today that I couldn't locate.

There were some interesting birds for which I had to work very hard. There were nine Marsh Wrens, more than I had ever recorded in the park before so I guess this is the peak period of their migration.

There was a Bittern that I flushed twice from the east marsh.

There was an immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron that I studied carefully in Sherwood Marsh. I had never recorded one before, perhaps because I assumed it to be indistinguishable from the immature Black-crowned Night. Not the case at all! This bird was immediately distinguishable. It was a much slimmer bird with a longer neck, considerably longer legs, a remarkably short bill and very discrete triangular spots that were much more attractive than those of a Black-crown.

Sherwood Island is a veritable everglades for herons. I had eight species including Cattle Egret but missing Little Blue. I counted forty Great Egrets, which I believe is another high for the park.

Hawk flight just beginning. Saw a Sharp-shin carrying prey, a Marsh Wren, I believe. Five Ospreys, a Harrier, and a falcon, almost certainly a Merlin, that put up a good fraction of the park's Starling population.

September 6

Except for a record high 12 Marsh Wrens, this morning was a complete bust with only 47 species recorded.

September 11

An extremely forgettable day with 58 species.

September 15

If the eleventh was forgettable, today with only 48 species despite complete coverage was even moreso. The weather seemed quite favorable as there was a bit of a cold snap last night and yesterday some hawks were obvious over my house. Yet today, 18 Ospreys were the only raptors and the only other species that had increased in numbers was Yellowthroat of which I had 15.

September 16

Today I confined myself to the western section of the park, concentrating mainly on land birds. Despite the mild southwest breeze, there was a minor flight that included a few warblers, a Red-eyed Vireo and two Pewees. I also counted four Hummingbirds foraging in the jewel weed. Still, not much of a day. I'm forever amazed at the relative paucity of birds, and particularly in species, in September as compared to May.

September 19

This was bound to be a good day and it was. The past two days had been rainy with easterly winds. On each of those days, I checked the shorebird areas and found a flock of 16 Pectoral Sandpipers and nothing else. When I heard the weather forecast for today, I was certain that it would be the major Broad-wing day in southwest Connecticut. The winds were too strong to be successful with land birds, but there were plenty flying overhead. I estimated about 300 Broad-wings in the three or four kettles I noticed against the high, cloudless sky. Other birds that were new for the year were a Black-billed Cuckoo that flew over my head and landed in a cottonwood tree, and a Lincoln's Sparrow that hopped into my field of vision as I was examining a female Indigo Bunting. Other species of note included two White-throated Sparrows, five Pipits and a Gnatcatcher, all new for the Fall. Other raptors included two Turkey Vultures, five Harriers, 25 Osprey, four Sharpies and 20 Kestrels. I was only able to see three species of warblers, Yellowthroat, Redstart and Palm but there were plenty of nondescript chips that I couldn't locate in the swaying foliage. Inability to find land birds limited the total species count to 63 but that figure undervalues the strength of today's flight.

This afternoon, I set up my telescope atop the little hill in the Temple Israel Cemetery down the block from my house and counted raptors from 2:00 to 3:30. There were 1,700 Broad-wings, 23 Sharpies, 16 Kestrels, three Ospreys, a Turkey Vulture and a magnificent adult Bald Eagle, the first I have recorded near the house. Clearly, this was a superb flight day for raptors.

September 20

The weather continued to be very favorable. The northwest breeze was much less gusty today and, in principle, it seemed like it might be perfect for a large migration of land birds. Alas, no. The day was not so interesting as yesterday. The major redeeming feature was an immature Bald Eagle. Other raptors included seven Sharpies, two Cooper's, four Harriers, 13 Kestrels and eight Ospreys. Incredibly, not a single Broad-wing!

September 24

After a few days of unpromising weather, this morning seemed perfect. A cold front with rather gentle northwest winds came through last night and persisted this morning. There were certainly plenty of signs of migration with new arrivals for the autumn including Baldpate, Phoebe, both kinglets and Towhee. But numbers were quite low, there were only six warbler species and raptors were surprisingly poor comprising six Kestrels, four Ospreys and an astonishingly low two Sharpies. Where has that little Accipiter gone? The species total was 64, a high for this Fall which is a good criterion for how poor it has been. I guess there's still time.

September 25

A ton of weather has passed through in the past day. After I left the park yesterday, the wind shifted from the northwest to the southwest and brought with it a heavy rain that lasted all night. Then, this morning the wind suddenly shifted to the northwest again and cleared out the rain. One might think that some interesting birds might result but more were blown out than in and the only new arrival this morning was my first Winter Wren of the year.

September 26

Today was yet another seemingly perfect one without a great many birds. I spent a full four and one-half hours in the park since the weather was delightful and the effort resulted in 60 species of which none were new for the year and only one, Swainson's Thrush, for the Fall. It 's still early. Hope springs eternal!

September 27

I don't know why I went out this morning except perhaps because I won't be able to go the next two days and I didn't want to miss too many consecutive September days. In the event, the wind was from the south and the skies were overcast. I recorded 54 species, the most interesting one being White-eyed Vireo. I'm a little surprised that the immature Little Blue Heron in the west marsh is still around.

September 30

Yet another day that seemed perfect if judged by the weather, yet was ornithologically quite dead. The sole redeeming feature was an immature Bald Eagle, my third at the park this fall.

October 1

Today was pleasant but the weather was not particularly promising for a flight and the birding was rather dull save for one exception, a kind of birthday bird for me. It was a grungy male Redhead, my first Fall record here, that was a bit mottled on the breast rather than black. It did have a good red head, a conspicuous yellow eye and a black-tipped blue bill with a conspicuous white line separating the black from the blue. Apparently, at least according to Zeranski and Baptist, this is an exceptionally early date for this rather rare bird. They list the first autumn arrival as October 10. This bird was swimming and sleeping amongst a group of Black Ducks and a Green-winged Teal.

October 4

There was frost this morning, the winds were gusty from the north, the sky was clear and there had to be birds around. The only question was how good it was going to be and the answer was pretty good but by no means spectacular. I recorded 65 species including eight warblers. There were quite a few new Fall arrivals but no new birds for the year and no particularly interesting species. 15 Phoebes was as many as I've ever had in the park. This was the kind of day when Peregrine and Vesper Sparrow would not have been surprising but neither was about and the total number of raptor individuals was an anemic six.

October 5

Today's weather was very much like yesterday save that the wind was not gusting. It seemed ideal and I hoped that yesterday's flight might be enhanced but it wasn't. There were more Towhees and White-throated Sparrows and I did find the first Creeper and the first White-crowned Sparrow of this autumn but the species total was only 56 and a lone Osprey was the only raptor. The decrease in Sharp-shinned Hawk over the past several years is very striking.

October 11

The latest cold snap was ushered in last night and this morning by a gusty northwest wind. The park was beautiful but the birds were again a bit disappointing with nothing at all remarkable despite what seemed like very promising conditions. This has not been a very interesting Fall for birds at Sherwood Island.

October 14

This morning was warm with a gusty west wind. It was uninteresting ornithologically.

October 15

The fact that this morning was the best migration this Fall for warblers says something about how bad it has been. The temperature was 20 degrees lower today than yesterday and the wind and sky were perfect. I had a total of 63 species including Fox Sparrow, an individual that was part of a nice sparrow wave that comprised mostly Song and Savannah. I totalled seven warbler species including 40 Myrtle, three Palm, three Yellowthroats, and single Black-throated Green, Blacko-throated Blue, Magnolia and Redstart. But the most interesting was not even a species. I studied closely a member of the **western race** (“Audubon’s”) of the **Myrtle Warbler**. This individual had a bright yellow throat and the yellow on its side was much more conspicuous than the usual Myrtle. I don’t recall having seen this subspecies in the east before and little is said about it in either Bull’s *Birds of the New York Area* or Zeranski and Baptist’s *Birds of Connecticut*. This is certainly the first record for Sherwood Island State Park.

October 17

Today was warm and pleasant with a variable slight breeze. It was ornithologically unremarkable. I had 54 species, the most interesting of which were a Clapper Rail and a lingering Spotted Sandpiper.

October 20

Today was the “Big Sit” day during which observers are supposed to stay within a circle of 17 feet in diameter and record as many species as possible. Bob Winkler and Frank Mantlik started at 8:00 AM and I joined them an hour later. Our spot was on the grassy surface separating the Mill Pond from the East Beach and most of the day’s species were recorded from that spot including a Coot in the Mill Pond and two Forster’s Terns over the Sound. At noon we left that spot, Frank having recorded 50 species there, and took a walk from the east parking lot to the eastern extremity of the park. There was a Snow Goose next to the east bath houses, my first of the year. Thus, I got three new birds for the year even though my coverage was very restricted and omitted all the good land bird areas.

There was a “northeaster” yesterday which was one of the worst in recent memory and the park was officially closed due to downed power lines although “Doc” sanctioned our entrance through the back way. We anticipated the possibility of seeing something very unusual and we actually expected to see Gannets but nothing spectacular materialized although the day was pretty good and I’m certainly not complaining about adding three new birds at this late stage of the year.

October 22

There was nothing noteworthy about the weather today, but, considering that it is getting rather late in the Fall, the 64 species total was rather high. The only new bird for the year was a Lapland Longspur on the east parking lot. Although there were plenty of birds around, there wasn't anything particularly interesting. The lingering Spotted Sandpiper was still in the far eastern marsh and there was still a Marsh Wren which, I hope or suppose, might stay for the Christmas Count.

October 24

After some rain last night, this morning was beautiful although the northwest wind was rather gusty. Most of the birds from two days ago seem to have been blown away and I was able to record only 47 species. A Vesper Sparrow was new for the year. It was in a weedy area in the middle of the east parking lot in the same general area where I flushed a Lapland Longspur during my last visit. The parking lot is usually quite productive at this time of the year.

October 29

Today was exceptionally nice, clear and cool with a northwest breeze. I birded with Dick Gershon, with whom I had first birded in Westport about 40 years ago. The best bird of the day was a Red-eyed Vireo for which Zeranski and Baptist list October 25 as the latest Fall record. I also recorded two new species for the year, Purple Finch and Siskin, both of which were flyovers.

November 1

This was a gloomy and cold morning that really seemed like winter. This was reflected in the total list of only 41 species. Arrivals included a second Snow Goose, groups of Buffleheads and Hooded Mergansers and Horned Larks. Lingers included a Forster's Tern and two Marsh Wrens.

November 20

It's been almost three weeks since I've been in the park. I was in Munich buying books for part of that period. Yesterday, the New York Times published an article suggesting that the dumping of some sort of old mansion in the park was a done deal. A classmate of Governor Rowland at Villanova is a member of some sort of Historical Society that wants to preserve this white elephant whose present owner wants to build something liveable and was happy to donate the old house to the state if they would get rid of it. Even the birds were depressed and left the park. I only had 38 species, the best of which was a Catbird. The two immature Snow Geese have been joined by a beautiful adult. All three are white morphs.

December 3

This morning was delightful, clear, cool but not cold, and relatively calm. The Sound was quite placid and virtually all species expected on it during winter were already present. I tallied 51 species for the day including one, Snow Bunting, that was new for the year. A Red-necked Grebe was diving off the point. This species has become more regular during the past few years. One of the Common Loons was calling, unusual anytime for these non-breeding birds, but particularly so during the colder months of the year. This bird was in winter plumage as they all are at this time. A Turnstone was unexpected. There was also a flock of about 50 Dunlin-sized shorebirds that I saw flying over the Sound on two occasions, both times in unfavorable light at a great distance.

December 10

I was particularly scrupulous in covering the eastern section of the park today since I had been rather neglecting it recently. I'm beginning to scout around for interesting Christmas Count possibilities. The Count is on the 22nd this year, twelve days away. The Sound was rather turbulent today which meant that I missed some of the species that I had last time out but it was still an interesting day. There were three lingerers that we haven't had on the Sherwood Island part of the count, namely single examples of Catbird, Marsh Wren and Sharp-tailed Sparrow. Catbird is always found elsewhere on the Count but the other two are usually missed and it would be nice if they would stay around.

December 18

The Count this year is on December 22 so today I did some advance scouting. The weather has been warm and very wet and there was a great deal of standing water in the park. Supposedly, the 21st will bring the first really frigid temperatures so perhaps today's are quite irrelevant. In any event, they were not very exciting. The best amongs 44 species was the Catbird that has been hanging around Grove point. A Ring-necked Duck was also an unusual December species for the park, however, both of these will be recorded elsewhere on the Count and I didn't see anything which would be unlikely to be recorded elsewhere i. e. Horned Lark, Pipit, SnowBunting, Red-necked Grebe etc.

December 22

Today, Bob Winkler and I did the Christmas Count at Sherwood Island from seven to three. A cold west wind made the Sound too choppy to see much and we missed common birds including both loons and White-winged Scoters. The best finds among the 44 species observed in the park and environs were single examples of Snipe, Marsh Wren and Catbird. The latter two species were in the same spot that I had observed them earlier in December.

December 24

Frank Mantlik called me yesterday and told me that someone claimed to have seen a drake Barrow's Goldeneye at Burying Hill Beach on the day of the census. Frank asked me to see if I could verify that it was there so that he could list it for the count. Of course, I had looked hard for it unsuccessfully during the Count. This morning, which was warm and windy, I drove to Burying Hill Beach, just across a narrow channel from Sherwood Island. I took out my telescope and focused on the closest group of ducks and the first one that came into view was the bird. He was quite near a group of Common Goldeneyes so I couldn't even hazard a guess that the female nearest to him might be a second Barrow's but it's certainly possible. So this rare species that visits this particular spot every winter, or at least the last several, is at last recorded for our Christmas Count.