

## **Sherwood Island Diary**

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**1997**

**January 17**

Today marked the end of this winter's coldest period yet, a spell of three days during which the temperature dipped to ten degrees or lower. Until then the season had been relatively mild with little snow. I haven't been birding in the park since the Christmas Count a month ago so this morning marked the beginning of the 1997 list. And it was pretty good despite fairly brisk winds that rendered the Sound a bit choppy. Most of the pond was frozen but the larger marsh channels were open and there was no snow on the ground. Some of the interesting birds among the day's 41 species were a Gadwall, a Turkey Vulture and a beautiful male Harrier, three adult Red-tailed Hawks frolicking in flight, two Red-breasted Nuthatches which were rather scarce last year, a Fox Sparrow at Doc's feeder and a flock of 75 Snow Buntings. I've had better first days, e. g. in 1994 when I found Short-eared Owl and Redpolls, but I've also had worse.

**January 29**

Today was cold, clear and fairly windy. I found no interesting birds and only recorded 34 species in three hours.

**January 31**

This morning was almost windless and the Sound was placid, yet there were few birds to be seen on or over it. Why? Well, the visibility could have been better. There was some fog and mist yet I could see well enough to know that there wasn't much around! The tide was also out and I sometimes get the feeling that there are more sea ducks present at high tide.

The day wasn't altogether bad. There was an immature Snow Goose amongst the Canadas and a female or juvenile Harrier, in contrast to the beautiful male I saw last week. Mourning Dove, White-breasted Nuthatch and Creeper were the day's other new birds amongst the 39 species. I remember my frustration in missing Creeper during the big year of 1994.

**February 4**

This morning seemed much colder than indicated by the temperature of 30<sup>0</sup>. There was a bone-chilling east wind that caused me to limit my itinerary to the west half of the park and my time to only two hours. Therefore, the species total of 25 is meaningless. The only

reason, I am choosing to record the results are because a drake Ring-necked Duck was new for the year and the number of Canvasback increased to 38.

### February 7

Another rather dull morning despite conditions that seemed quite favorable. The number of Canvasback is up to 65 and I found the year's first Red-winged Blackbird, a very early loud male. I believe this is the first day I have failed to find Mallard in the park, particularly surprising since I recorded 80 Black Ducks, 25 Baldpates and two Gadwall.

### February 10

I varied my itinerary in a significant way this morning and I shall probably do so again. I started out at the Longshore Country Club, continued at Compo Beach and then came to Sherwood Island via the Mill Beach. Longshore affords a good vantage point for examining an inlet that represents the outlet of the Norwalk River. This looks like a good area for shorebirds and ducks. Today it had a pair of Gadwall, some Buffleheads and a few Red-breasted Mergansers. In addition, the club property runs along Gray's Creek which meanders through a salt marsh that renders the old heron rookery still relatively inaccessible. The western end of Compo beach provides a good observation point for the channel between it and the Norwalk islands. This body of water is visible, but very distant, from the point at Sherwood Island. This morning, I found an extraordinary flock of 500 Goldeneye that I couldn't have seen from the park. I was rather tired today when I finally did reach the park so I only covered its eastern half which explains the low species total that contains virtually no land birds. I added Great Cormorant to the year's list.

### February 20

The past several days have been warm and wet. Last night, very high winds accompanied a northerly front. This morning was still quite breezy and, although not nearly so mild as yesterday, still above normal. I expected numbers of Red-winged Blackbirds but there were none. In fact, there really wasn't much around. I had 38 species including a Sharp-shinned Hawk and a Catbird near the stone barn. This is the first February Catbird I've had in the park. I imagine it was the same individual that hung around Grove Point and the Allen Preserve in December.

### February 22

The past two days have seen record high temperatures of about 70° for New York City and well above 60 even for the coast. A major avian influx was therefore not unexpected and today did not disappoint. Red-winged Blackbirds arrived *en masse* and there were five Grackles, a Meadowlark, five House Finches, a Flicker and a Common Loon, as well. I found 47 species and the weather was so pleasant that I expected even more, such as Snipe

and Woodcock which I have previously seen on an extremely warm February day but searched for today without success.

### **February 27**

Today was another exceptionally warm one but, at least while I was out, there was an exceedingly dense fog which made observation of the Sound impossible and thus kept the total species list a misleadingly low 39. The highlight of the morning was flushing three Woodcock in the vicinity of Woodcock Woods. One of them flew in there and I preferred to let it be so I did not go into the woods *per se*, thus missing the opportunity for a record high count of this great bird. I was quite sure they would be around since I have seen them in February here before, although never more than a single individual. Other species new for the year included Pheasant, Marsh Wren, Cedar Waxwing and Robin. The Marsh Wren is likely the same individual that we recorded for the Christmas Count. Bob Winkler tells me he has had it several times since then in the first ditch to the eastern side of the entry road and this is where it was today.

The year's list is already 67 species, the most I've ever had on this date and indicative of an early spring. The two species that I expected and haven't yet seen are Snipe and Cowbird, each of which would not be surprising on a warm February day like this one.

### **February 28**

The skies cleared and the temperature dropped somewhat as a consequence of a cold front that moved through last night. I went to the park because I wanted to record February Snipes and Cowbirds. I didn't follow my usual itinerary. For one, I stopped at the Longshore Country Club, the back of which abuts the mouth of the Saugatuck River as it empties into the Sound. I found 42 Baldpate here, but the area, which includes Gray's Creek, looks very promising for shorebirds at low tide during the warmer months.

When I got to the park, I omitted the western half save for the Mill Pond and thus missed out on landbirds and Woodcock that I probably would have gotten. I concentrated on the eastern section including the part adjacent to Burying Hill Beach that I have recently neglected. I found the male Barrow's Goldeneye here but was not surprised since it has been recorded on and off since December 22. I think this is at least the fourth successive year during which it has wintered in the same spot. I tramped through all the favored areas without putting up a Snipe but I did spot three Cowbirds amongst a flock of several hundred Starlings. Also noteworthy was a rather high count (35) of Red-throated Loons.

### **March 18**

In general, March until today has been chilly, windy, rainy and generally unpleasant so I haven't been birding. Today was quite pleasant and I recorded a very respectable 54 species including four new species for the year: 10 Green-winged Teal, four Snipe, a Hairy

Woodpecker and a Swamp Sparrow. There were plenty of birds around but nothing particularly exciting.

### March 21

Today's highlight was a Short-eared Owl flying east over the east marsh. It settled briefly on a low branch of a cottonwood and then took off to the east circling high in the sky before disappearing. This seemed to be a migrating bird that spent little, if any, time in the park. I also saw a flock of 20 Scaup on the Sound, also a first for the year. Otherwise, my first spring outing was not noteworthy.

### March 25

There were some interesting birds today. The new ones were single examples of Great and Snowy Egrets, Greater Yellowlegs and Phoebe. Nothing surprising there although the Snowy Egret was a few days earlier than usual. What was surprising was a total of 57 Killdeer on the oval grassy field in the center of the park. This is the highest count I have ever had here or anywhere else. And also on the oval was a flock of 30 Snow Buntings, almost all in breeding plumage. This is my first spring record here and the first time I can recall seeing the species in full breeding plumage.

### March 27

This was an extremely interesting morning although the brisk southwest wind rendered the Sound too choppy for satisfactory observation, and although I only spent two and one-half hours birding. The oval contained an incredible **70 Killdeers**. A fine **drake shoveler** was in the Mill Pond near the entry overlook. At the other end of the Mill Pond, or rather in the marshes that border it on the southwest, were five Green-winged and a pair of Blue-winged Teal, the latter earlier than I usually see them here and the drake allowing an excellent look and particularly handsome. And most unexpected, in the west marsh behind the maintenance buildings, I flushed **by far the earliest Clapper Rail** I have ever seen here.

### March 28

Yesterday afternoon after I had completed my visit, the temperature climbed well into the sixties and the warm weather continued today with a gentle southeast breeze. I couldn't resist going out but there was no great influx compared to yesterday. Two Tree Swallows near the swallow house, of all places, represented the only new species for the year although a Fox Sparrow was the first in migration. The drake Shoveler was still present but all except one of the Killdeers had departed. I had 52 species in three hours despite omitting the eastern half of the park from today's itinerary.

### **April 3**

There was a surprising “northeaster” snowstorm with very high winds on 1 April that presumably interrupted the spring migration. However, this morning really displayed the phenomenon of migration at its most awesome and not because of the three new species, Black-crowned Night Heron, Kestrel and Pipit, that I added to the year list. There were interesting numbers for three species. The meadow just west of the oval contained 100 Robins, more than I’ve ever seen actually foraging, as opposed to flying over the park. It reminded me of the way I used to see them on the grassy fields of Van Cortlandt Park in the 1940s. More interesting was the staggering number of 280 Killdeer, 200 of which were on the central oval. I commented the other day on what I considered a huge flight of them, namely 70, so the reader (what reader?) can imagine how surprised I was by today’s congregation. But the best was the Woodcock total of nine. It started with two at Grove Point, both of which I flushed from the edge of the little woods. Then I flushed three between the stone barn and the superintendent’s house. I had never had Woodcock in either of these locations. Two of the birds settled back down only a few yards away and I was able to study them on the ground at close range and at my leisure. I’ve never had this opportunity with the species. One of these birds remained absolutely stationary, but the other walked slowly and exhibited rhythmic expansion and reduction of its breast, a peculiar body movement that I’ve not seen performed by any bird before. Of the remaining four Woodcock, three were in “Woodcock Woods” and the other in the adjacent field. This latter individual was in an area of very high dense grass and when I came upon it, its flying egress was almost blocked by the stubborn vegetation and it was but a few feet from me, temporarily seemingly suspended at eye-level.

If this sounds as though I found the day interesting, then I have successfully expressed myself.

### **April 4**

Flushed with yesterday’s success, and emboldened by the warm, beautiful weather, I pretended to be unaware of a very brisk northwest breeze and hopefully went to the park this morning. I searched diligently for Woodcocks without finding a single one and the number of Killdeer was one half of what it was yesterday. None-the-less, I managed, with single examples, to add three species to the year’s list, Double-crested Cormorant, Hermit Thrush and Field Sparrow. But the bird of the day for beauty was a male Harrier. They are so much more scarce than females and immatures that one forgets what a wonderful sight they present.

### **April 7**

This was a wonderful warm, clear Spring morning with a brisk and gusting wind from the southwest. There were plenty of birds around and I found a total of 59 species, unusually high for early April. Five of the species were new for the year and three single examples of these, the always uncommon Yellow-Crowned Night Heron, the Rough-winged Swallow, and the Gnatcatcher represented my earliest records at the park. The other new birds were

four Ruby-crowned Kinglets, and at least one, and probably two, Pine Warblers, seen and heard. The water was exceptionally high and the Mill Pond contained Mallard, Black, Baldpate, Gadwall, Green-winged Teal, Bufflehead and two mergansers.

### **April 10**

There has been a cold snap since my last visit and the temperature actually started out below freezing this morning. There was also an almost gale force wind out of the northwest making it uncomfortably cold despite clear and sunny skies. Why did I go out considering the unpromising conditions? I don't know except that I always enjoy myself there, even in the absence of birds. Of course, there weren't any new passerine migrants but I did add Osprey to the year list on the basis of seeing two of them, each with a fish. A drake shoveler was in the same place and may have been the same individual that I saw two weeks ago. Twenty Green-winged Teal was more than I have seen there at one time in several years although in the past they have been much commoner.

### **April 11**

Foolishly, I decided to go out this morning although the conditions were qualitatively similar to those that prevailed yesterday, albeit, somewhat ameliorated. There were no new birds around and I had the good sense to quit after two hours which meant omitting the eastern half of the park.

### **April 15**

The weather report made this morning seem perfect. But when I got to the park, I found that the absence of winds elsewhere had little to do with what was going on there. A cold wind was whipping in from the Sound which was exceedingly choppy. I heard single examples of three species (Barn Swallow, Towhee and Chipping Sparrow) that were new for the year and it was interesting to watch the Tree Swallows and House Finches squabbling over ownership rights for the Martin house, but, by and large, the day was a disappointment. The drake Shoveler is still around.

### **April 16**

This morning was ideal for birding. There was just the barest trace of a southeast breeze and, for the first time this year, the Sound was perfectly calm. This resulted in some seemingly high counts such as 55 Red-throated Loons. They probably have been there all along but were easily seen in the distance today because of the fine conditions. There wasn't much of a passerine flight but there were plenty of nonpasserine birds and they made up more than half of the 64 species, this year's highest total. The two species that were new for the year were a Virginia Rail flushed from the East Marsh and a Thrasher. The Shoveler was still in the usual place and there were two Blue-winged Teal in the channel between the

park and Burying Hill Beach. The immature Snow Goose has matured and is now a handsome, near adult bird.

I reached 100 species for the year today, a few days earlier than usual.

I saw a Red Squirrel today, rather unusual for the park.

### **April 17**

It's supposed to get cold and rainy starting this afternoon and lasting several days so I decided to get my last licks for a while in this morning. It was already overcast with a slight easterly wind that brought in lots of Ring-billed Gulls. Save for a few Bonaparte's Gulls migrating up the coast and two Clapper Rails in the West Marsh, there was little of interest.

### **April 21**

I anticipated that at this time of the year the birdlife would have changed significantly during the four-day interval that I have been away from the park. I was wrong. Aside from a Merlin that shot through, the park contained no birds that were not here last week. The weather has been unfavorabale during the entire period with rain and northeasterly winds until today when a moderate north west breeze cleared out the clouds.

### **April 22**

The weather was perfect last night and this morning, clear and with a gentle southeast breeze. Surely I would find the resident Barn Swallows and House Wrens in place along the late April influx of early warblers and Solitary Vireo. Alas, save for six Snipe, there was no movement whatever. Favorable weather is again expected tonight and tomorrow before a northeaster that is forecast for the day after tomorrow. So, in principle, tomorrow morning should certainly bring the pre-May wave. We shall see.

I ran into "Doc" this morning and he told me that several Turkeys were around as they have been at this time during the past two or three years. I've yet to see them here and he tells me that the best time is fairly early in the morning. I'll keep a careful eye.

### **April 23**

So much for predictions! For the second seemingly favorable late April day in a row, I have failed to add a single species to the year's total. Considering the lack of wind, calm Sound, pleasant weather and late April date, today's 48 species total after three solid hours of birding probably qualifies today as one of the worst I've ever had here. There's always something that keeps one coming back, some redeeming trifle, and today it was a group of five Blue-winged Teal in the West Marsh, three females and two fine drakes that allowed the best looks I've ever had of the species. I noticed that the females had a tiny white spot at

the base of the bill at the same place but much less conspicuous as in female Scaups. I also noticed that each male had a light striped down the back of his gray crown. In one, this was very conspicuous, in the other, barely noticeable.

Rabbits are commoner this year than they have ever been. I saw four separate individuals today.

### **April 25**

Yesterday there was a mild "northeaster" with most of the activity occurring to the south. This morning wind shifted to the southwest although the temperature remained rather low. Despite these interesting weather considerations, I failed to obtain a new species for the third consecutive late April visit and my list was virtually identical to that of two days ago. Not a single individual of a passerine species has arrived newly in the park for these three visits over a period of four days. Quite extraordinary for this time of the year. There will be a monster wave in the near future unless a great extinction of birds has occurred without warning.

### **May 5**

I've been away in England where I bought a large paper copy of Redouté's Roses with the plates in two states for Mr. S. When one misses nine days here at this time of the year, one certainly notes big changes and today probably seemed better to me than it really was because of my absence. First of all, however, I must note that the park is quite overrun with rabbits this year. I noted two broods of goslings, one quite recent, the other perhaps five days old. I also saw a Red-throated Loon in breeding plumage, a rare sight here save in the early autumn. Most, of course, were still in winter plumage whereas the vast majority of Commons are in breeding plumage by this time.

I had 71 species including 13 that were new for the year, this despite a disappointing dearth of land birds. The best finds were two Willets and a Martin. Other new species included Green and Little Blue Herons, Spotted and Least Sandpipers, Lesser Yellowlegs, Veery, Yellow, Yellow-rumped and Prairie Warblers, Yellowthroat and Orchard Oriole.

### **May 6**

A strange day weatherwise. When I arrived at the park at 7:00, the skies were very overcast, there was no wind and the tide was low. Rain was obviously imminent, but I had the feeling that I might flush something interesting from the East Marsh and I was right. I flushed a fine adult Sora, the black face and foreneck, as well as the yellow bill, all very clear. I also watched an interesting display by the two Willets. They circled high above the marsh and one of them, the male I suppose, fluttered his wings while constantly uttering the call that gives the species its name. Shortly after I arrived, a voluminous downpour began and I went home. The rain stopped in about three hours and some, but not all of the clouds were blown away by a strong southerly wind so I went back to explore the landbird areas.

My time was again cut short by rain although I did get in two hours. This time there was a ferocious thunderstorm which was followed by northwest winds and clearing. Those winds do not bode well for tomorrow but one can usually find something interesting any day at this time of the year. Today, I had 64 species including seven new ones including the Sora. The others were Glossy Ibis, House Wren, Parula and Black-throated Green Warblers, Northern Oriole and Bobolink.

### **May 7**

The cold northwest wind was very strong this morning and I think I was lucky to total even 62 species. Aside from a strong swallow migration that included 150 Barns and eight Cliffs, there were almost no migrants around. The swallows were all flying west along the shore, exactly as they do in the autumn. In addition to Cliff Swallow, I added the following to the year's list: Common Tern, Swift, Bank Swallow, Ovenbird and Sharp-tailed Sparrow. I still haven't quite compensated for the nine-day hiatus but I'm definitely getting there.

In addition to the numerous rabbits now overrunning the park, there was a fine-looking skunk near the central evergreen area this morning.

### **May 8**

This morning exhibited pretty much the same unfavorable weather parameters as yesterday and there was certainly no wave of land birds. But I did find 70 species including five new ones. The bird of the day was a beautiful male Least Bittern that I flushed from the East Marsh for my fourth Sherwood Island record. I have the feeling that tramping this swamp at 7:00 A.M. is definitely worthwhile as it has already yielded Sora and Least Bittern this Spring. Both species are very hard to get here. The other new species were Least Tern, Wood Thrush, Black and White and Chestnut-sided Warbler. So far, this seems to be a "late" May.

### **May 9**

It rained almost all of last night and this morning was miserable. There was a cold southerly breeze, the sky was completely overcast, and the atmosphere was so humid that it was difficult to use binoculars because they became clouded so quickly. It's getting monotonous to write, but again there was virtually no land bird migration. I had 63 species. And, yet again, I managed, on a poor day, to have some interesting ornithological experiences and to add five birds to the list for the year. One of these, Turkey, was a new Sherwood Island species for me. It was a fine female that I watched feeding in the woods between "Doc's" house and the stone barn. An addition to my Sherwood Island list at this stage ordinarily signifies a red letter event. However, Turkeys have been seen here in the Spring since 1995 and Doc told me last month that three were around so seeing one was not exactly a surprise.

I watched a Seaside Sparrow singing in the East Marsh from about 20 feet, the best study I've ever had of this rather elusive bird. The song was new to me and interesting. It consisted of a short, slightly buzzy trill in two pitches. This was followed by a weird buzz that seemed to come from a different place and could only be heard when I was this close to the bird. When I heard the song from farther away, I could not detect this last buzz. I have the impression that Seaside Sparrows have become more common here in the past two years and may now breed.

Tomorrow is the North American Migration Count. Last year it was on the 11th and Bob Winkler and I recorded 114 species here, our highest single-day total. This year I'll be lucky to get 70. Even if there is a wave, my experience here suggests that its peak doesn't occur until the second day, the first representing a sort of "prewave" i. e. an obvious influx of birds and species compared to the previous day but considerably fewer in numbers and species than will be found the following day. If tomorrow were such a "prewave" day, I could get 75-90 species. We shall see.

I don't know where I came up with the blather in the preceding paragraph. Last year, I was out May 5-11 every day and until the eleventh, I was recording below 65 species daily. On 10 May, I had 61 species, on the eleventh, the next day, 112. So it's entirely within the realm of possibility that I could have a huge day tomorrow, in spite of the paucity of migrating land birds up to, and including, today.

### **May 10**

Again no land bird flight! So the list for this year's North American Migration Count at Sherwood Island was 77 instead of 114. Bob did not come today and he did not miss much although he has had bad luck with the one interesting bird that I did find. It was a Red-necked Grebe in breeding plumage off the east end of the park. Other species that were new for the year included Cattle Egret, Laughing Gull, Black-bellied Plover, Warbling Vireo and Palm Warbler. The only reason I had more species than I had the past few visits was the amount of time spent. Today I started at 6:00 and continued for five full hours which is a lot when one is beating a dead horse. But I keep getting a few new species on each of these bad days and I suspect I may end up rather well, like the slow growing boy who ends up taller than his early growing friends. After all, the usual migrants, flycatchers, vireos, warblers, finches and others will certainly come through, perhaps all on the same day and I shall add a huge amount despite already having a pretty good total. But this is certainly a late Spring.

### **May 11**

A rather strong wind from the west northwest more or less precluded the possibility that today would yield the long awaited wave of landbirds. I only stayed out for three hours and did manage to find 75 species, rather respectable all things considered. Four were new, namely, a flock of 40 Brant, three Kingbirds, a fine male Scarlet Tanager and two White-crowned Sparrows. The latter were singing which they do rather rarely on passage through the park. The song resembles somewhat that of the Black-throated Blue Warbler. I learned

it in 1991 when I was doing my Sabbatical in Chicago where it was abundant in migration right outside of my apartment house in a tiny verdant area.

One of the Red-throated Loons was in fine breeding plumage, the others were still in winter colors.

A pair of Mute Swans nesting near Allen's Clamhouse fledged seven cygnets with which they were proudly exploring the Mill Pond.

### **May 12**

Conditions were perfect today and I was not surprised by the first real wave of land birds. For the most part, these were early May species. For example, there were 40 Catbirds and 30 Yellowthroats. I had a total of 90 species including 10 warblers. I added 11 species to the year's list including Semipalmated Plover, Dowitcher, Crested Flycatcher, Pewee, Solitary Vireo, Nashville Warbler, Magnolia Warbler, Canada Warbler, Redstart, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, and Lincoln's Sparrow of which there were at least four, a rather high figure for this supposedly uncommon bird. I've had that many here before, however. It was fun to find the park full of land birds yet there was a surprising absence of Black-throated Blues and Greens which one expects to find in the first wave. The Pewee was the one species not expected in this first wave. As always happens on days like this, there were some astonishing misses such as Clapper Rail, Downy Woodpecker and Yellow-rumped Warbler to name just a few. There were no species of raptor and only four of herons. A cold front with rain is expected tomorrow afternoon but I anticipate that tomorrow morning will be interesting.

### **May 13**

I was wrong. It wasn't interesting. Most of the birds had left and I only had 70 species including, however, three, Red-eyed Vireo and Black-throated Blue and Blackburnian Warblers, that were new for the year. I really didn't give it too much of an effort and perhaps I am getting a bit burned out. It's supposed to rain tonight so perhaps I will take tomorrow off and return refreshed on May 15.

### **May 15**

Today would have been a complete bust save for a brief glimpse at a single bird. While crossing the parklike area just west of the entry road and south of Doc's house, I noticed a brilliant spot of crimson high in a deciduous tree. I got it in my binoculars and it proved to be the back of a woodpecker's head. Its contrast with the inky black, unbarred upper back made me immediately realize that I was seeing my first Red-headed Woodpecker here in twelve years. It was quite hidden from view so I changed my position and, as I was doing so, it flew into an adjacent tree. I had a view only of the dorsum, but the huge white wing patches coalescing with the white lower back and rump were unmistakable. I spent considerable time trying to relocate it without success.

I saw only three cygnets today and I fear the other four have suffered a cruel fate. It's possible that they were hidden and I shall follow the family with interest.

### **May 17**

I didn't go out yesterday because strong northwest winds suggested that the day would be poor for birds. Today, the wind was directly out of the west but was still strong. I should have stayed home! I had an unrespectable 63 species, none new for the year, and I quit after only two and one-half hours in the belief that to continue would be to whip a dead horse.

### **May 18**

I was only out for two hours, six to eight, this Sunday morning. We are to fetch Abby at the airport later today and I just wanted to make certain that I did not entirely miss a major wave day. I am convinced that one is yet to occur despite the fact that it is already late in the month. If there isn't a late flight, this will certainly rank as one of the worst Spring migrations in my experience. I did find Black-poll and Wilson's Warbler to add to the year's list but there were few birds around. I haven't seen the immature Snow Goose in several visits so it may be gone. I didn't see the Willets today but I didn't go to the section of the East Marsh where I often see them.

### **May 19**

When I awoke at five-thirty this morning, I found heavy rain and thunder. The prediction was for clearing later in the day with the arrival of a mass of very warm southern air so I decided to go out in the afternoon rather than the early morning. The rain stopped around nine although the skies remained overcast. At ten, I got a call from Frank Mantlik who told me there was a major flight. I hustled out to the park and spent three and one-half hours in the central portion, the land bird area, omitting the entire eastern half as well as the West Woods and Mill Pond. There was a nice flight of warblers, mainly Magnolias and Redstart. I had fourteen species of warblers, the highest day total of the season. I added three new birds to the year's list: Least Flycatcher, Swainson's Thrush and Mourning Warbler, which I heard. But the most exciting experience was that I discovered the nest of a Turkey containing three surprisingly small white eggs spotted with brown. The nest was composed of a few sticks on the ground in the bushy area with the bare trees just north of the central conifer grove. I frightened the female off the nest and as soon as I realized what I had done, I departed the area so as not to interfere with her brooding. There must have been more eggs at one time so perhaps some of the chicks are already hatched or perhaps some eggs were lost to a predator. Who could have imagined when I first visited this park in 1944 that I would someday find the nest of a Turkey there?

### **May 23**

Since my last visit, cool northwest winds have been pretty much the rule and this morning was no exception. I did find some interesting birds, however. I flushed a Great-horned Owl from the central evergreens into a nearby deciduous tree where it alit and eyed me from quite a visible perch. I watched as a Blue Jay and Thrasher approached and abused it, particularly the Jay, which was very persistent. The presence of these birds, which were dwarfed by their target, allowed me, for the first time, to appreciate fully the immensity of this species of owl. I observed the extraordinary ability of the owl to rotate its head so that it actually faced backward. While this maneuver is only a 180 degree rotation, it is quite different from rotating 180 degrees with the eyes facing forward, or at least it is very different for us. I spent a few minutes watching the owl and then quietly left, hoping that it might again roost in comfort. I realized that this did not occur about fifteen minutes later when I heard the frantic crow calls that only a Great-horned Owl elicits. I hope the owl stays around because the park is really overrun with rabbits this year.

Other observations of interest included finding only three cygnets suggesting that the other four did meet a sad fate; a flock of 20 Brant flying up the coast; a Harrier flying low over the middle of the Sound; nice looks at two Clapper Rails which almost certainly breed here; two Ospreys over the Mill Pond; could they be breeding? a Willet, consistent with their breeding since one or two has been around for a couple of weeks; 100 Black-bellied Plovers scattered over the mud of the Mill Pond at low tide; a flock of 30 Bonaparte's Gulls; two Willow Flycatchers, the first of the season and species #170 of the year; and a late White-throated Sparrow.

I failed to find a Chickadee for the first time I can remember. I also did not record Chipping Sparrow. Other land birds that seem less common than usual this year are Warbling Vireo and both Orioles although these species are all present and presumably breeding.

### **May 27**

This may well have been my last day out this Spring. As usual for this year, the winds were unfavorable. I found 68 species, none new for the year. Funds for the park were cut this year and Doc was unable to keep all the grass mowed. I think this is responsible for the continued presence of Bobolinks which I suspect are nesting here for the first time in my memory. The pair of Willets in the East Marsh is still present and I feel reasonably certain they are also nesting. Finally, walking in the marshes during the very early morning has allowed me to convince myself that Clapper Rails are nesters as well as migrants in this park.

All in all, this was the least interesting Spring of the last four.

### **August 27**

Three months without a visit to the park is the longest period of absence in many years. During part of that period I went on a superb birding trip to Sulawesi, Halmahera and Bali

where, among other things, I learned that keen birders never use spectacles. So I have been attempting to accustom myself to contact lenses and today was the first where I have used them for birding. It's not easy to decide whether they were useful because there were practically no birds (47 species, none remarkable). But I was wearing them on August 24 when I spotted an Olive-sided Flycatcher on the GTE grounds during my Sunday morning walk so I think they will work out. I also bought a more comfortable shoulder strap for my telescope and I was able to carry the telescope and tripod for the entire morning.

### **August 29**

Today was better than the previous visit with 59 species including a Whimbrel, a Hummingbird and three Gnatcatchers. The jury is still out on whether the contact lenses make things better or worse. The one on the right kept slipping off my lens today and I could never count on the vision in that eye. A total of 75 migrating Swifts was by far my highest count for the park.

### **September 4**

There was really not much around today despite a dramatic cold front that began late yesterday and yielded a temperature below 50 and brisk northwest winds. In fact, that briskness may have been the reason that I only recorded 51 species, none of particular interest.

### **September 5**

Despite perfect migration weather, there was nothing of particular ornithological interest amongst today's 55 species.

### **September 9**

Today was muggy and overcast and, save for a few Ospreys overhead, there were very few migrants. I did, however, see and here a Purple Finch flying over.

### **September 15**

Another poor day for migrants even though weather conditions seemed quite favorable. I only stayed out for two hours during which I recorded 43 species.

### **September 22**

A cold front with brisk northwest winds passed through yesterday, a Sunday during which I did not visit the park. This morning was still cool and there were a few migrants enabling

me to record 56 species, none of particular interest. This year continues to be ornithologically dull at Sherwood Island.

### **September 24**

Another cold front moved through last night and this morning was still chilly with just a faint northerly breeze and some cirrus clouds. It seemed a perfect Fall migration day and there were some new arrivals such as Green-winged Teal, Towhee and White-throated Sparrow. Overall though, the day was disappointing with only 50 species and almost no raptors.

### **September 26**

Today was pleasant enough but there were no weather indications that it might be special for migrating birds and it wasn't. I did see a Pied-billed Grebe in the East Marsh, the first for the year. The species count was an anemic 47.

### **October 2**

This was the first cold day of the Fall and there was even a trace of frost. The gentle northwest breeze made for perfect migration conditions and there were, indeed, quite a few birds around. I was out for only two hours yet managed a respectable (particularly for this year) 58 species, including Winter Wren which was new for the year. In addition, there were both kinglets, creeper, pipits, a few warblers, towhees and juncos, all expected but nice to find. I also saw several deer and a coyote, the latter adjacent to the main drainage ditch just east of the airplane field, quite a central location for a large predatory animal.

### **October 3**

The wind shifted to the southwest at about ten this morning after an earlier calm period. There were a reasonable number of migrants, 62 species including two vireos, eight warblers and six sparrows but nothing of particular interest.

### **October 7**

This morning was quite warm but there was a trace of a breeze from the northwest and there were plenty of migrating birds that comprised 62 species. Most of these were sparrows, particularly Song, Savanna and White-throated. As usual this Fall, there was nothing that was particularly noteworthy save for a rather high count, 30, of Yellowthroats.

### **October 9**

Another warm day with plenty of expected birds. Among the 59 species were two Clapper Rails (one seen) and eight White-crowned Sparrows, quite a high count for the park. Most of the Yellowthroats were gone.

### **October 11**

The wind turned northwest last night and weather conditions this morning were very promising. I had 58 species and, although none were unexpected, I did record three all-time high counts for Crow (200), Sharp-tailed Sparrow (8) and Swamp Sparrow (40). I also found a Common Egret with a black bill which I had never seen. The bill of the immature is supposed to be duller than the adult but still yellow.

### **October 17**

This morning was seemingly perfect. A brisk, clear, cool late October day with a northerly breeze. There were plenty of sparrows around though not quite so many as the last time out. The eight Sharp-tailed were still there. Frank Mantlik tells me that at least some of them are the newly split form of *nelsoni*, supposedly a migrant here rather than a breeder. Three Red-throated Loons were the first of the season and one still had its red throat, not unusual for the early Fall birds. I also had two Pied-billed Grebes in the East Marsh.

### **October 21**

This morning was another perfect late October day, exactly as the last time I visited the park. I had 53 species but only the briefest glimpses at the two most interesting, namely Merlin and Redstart. My contact lenses seem to have made me lose my former caution in identifying birds and these two species are rather soft. Otherwise, there was not a great deal of interest.

### **October 24**

I had only 47 species this morning despite covering the park quite comprehensively. Many of the birds are gone, including the eight Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Three Buffleheads were today's most interesting find since they represented the first of the season.

### **October 30**

What a glorious late October day! The ducks are arriving, Buffleheads, Red-breasted and Hooded Mergansers. No egrets today. The first Snipe of the season and a late Pectoral Sandpiper. A total of 50 species, about average for the date.

### **November 5**

This was a beautiful early November morning! I had 44 species including the season's first Snow Buntings and the year's first Horned Larks. I saw a Pied-billed Grebe in the East Marsh where one or two have been around virtually all Fall. There was a late Catbird although the term "late" may be misleading since one spent the entire winter two years ago.

### **November 11**

I found two new birds for the year this morning. The first was a Lapland Longspur that was with the flock of Snow Buntings, now numbering at least 75. The second was a male Peregrine in superb adult plumage that came right over the model airplane field and then circled the east parking lot affording me wonderful looks the entire time. I also recorded the season's first Tree Sparrows. Although the total list of 42 was not impressive, the morning was, thus, not without interest.

### **November 13**

This morning seemed like Winter since the temperature fell below freezing for the first time and there was lots of frost and a little ice. The cold weather made single examples of Great Egret, Snipe and Yellowthroat seem later lingerers than they really were. Also of interest was a juvenile Red-tailed Hawk that I surprised on the ground as it was beginning to tear apart a squirrel that it must just have caught.

### **November 15**

Yesterday there was a northeaster with lots of sleet and a bit of snow. The cold persisted this morning and there was a dusting of snow and lots of slush throughout the park although the water was all open. Even though the tide had not yet peaked, the marshes were almost entirely submerged by the unusually high level of water generated by yesterday's storm and a full moon. The birds were disappointing. A total of 10 Common Loons was high for the park. I recorded 45 species. I included the Mill Beach and Grove Point in the itinerary for the first time this fall and found several common species (Red-bellied Woodpecker, Titmouse, Mockingbird, House Sparrow, Cardinal) that elude me not infrequently in the park proper.

### **November 18**

The unusually cold weather for mid November continues and today the pond was even partially frozen. It was, however, a glorious day. I recorded 49 species, none of which were remarkable.

## **November 20**

Today was pleasant and cool. There was a considerable westerly breeze that rendered the Sound rather choppy and thus unsatisfactory for visualization of sea birds. Amongst today's 45 species was a single female Canvasback, the first of its kind for this season.

## **December 9**

I've been to London since I last visited the park and, in my absence, Charlie Barnard had a Long-eared Owl in the evergreens situated in rows in the middle of the park. I ran into him this morning and he showed me the tree, unfortunately without the owl. However, as we were crossing the entry road to go down to the bridge leading to private property, we heard an unfamiliar call that vaguely reminded me of the harsh call note of the White-throated Sparrow. The sound was coming from some conifers abutting the western fringe of the East Marsh. Upon investigation, Charlie got a good look, and I a rather unsatisfactory one, of a Red Crossbill at the top of one of the conifers. Suddenly, it flew off with six others, uttering the unfamiliar, but (I hope) memorable call. This was a new bird for my Sherwood Island (and Connecticut) list but it wasn't quite the surprise one might think because there has been quite an irruption of winter finches this year. I believe I heard this call at the same place earlier in the season and perhaps the birds will stay for the Christmas Count that is only twelve days from now.

We also had four Sanderlings, a second new bird for the year here.

## **December 17**

Today was a survey of what might be expected on the Christmas Count which is just four days away. I covered only the western one-half of the park but I did so rather carefully. I recorded 40 species, amongst which a single Pipit was the only one that will likely not be seen elsewhere on the Count. There were 20 Canvasbacks packed into one of the few open areas of the pond. The prediction is for warm weather for the next few days so the water should all be open for the census. There was no sign of the crossbills today. A Field Sparrow was probably the first I've recorded in the park in December but it is a fairly common Count bird from other sections.

## **December 21**

Today was the Christmas Count which I carried out at Sherwood Island with Fred Purnell from 6:45 to 2:00. The temperature was about freezing and there was a northwest wind of about 15 MPH that made for considerable turbulence on the Sound. There were very few birds, 46 species of which only Dunlin and Snow Bunting were slightly unexpected. I suppose it's only fitting that the worst year of the recent past at the park should end with the worst Christmas Count. Wait 'til next year! Except that I will be away at the peak of spring migration.