

Sherwood Island Diary

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2001

18 March

This winter has been cold and snowy and there has not yet been even the faintest trace of Spring. There was a two-inch cover of snow this morning and, despite an absence of wind, the park seemed considerably colder than the ambient temperature of 32°. About one-third of the Mill Pond was frozen. Walking through the snow was enervating and I managed only the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the western half of the park, and was only out for about two hours. The Sound was quite calm so that I saw many water birds and was able to record 43 species despite a truncated itinerary and a rather shorter time than usual. There was little evidence of returning birds or migrants. A few Robins, Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles, and that was it. But there were plenty of sea ducks including good numbers of Common Goldeneye (150) and Old Squaw (100).

12 March

This morning was about as good as it gets during early March. It began with quite a strong and chilly northwest breeze but the wind abated and the temperature rose. I recorded a very solid 52 species including 13 that I hadn't seen four days ago. The temperature dipped below freezing during each of those four days and there was a moderate snowfall during one of them. Yet there were several interesting early migrants. The new species were:

One Common Loon; Nine quite tame Snow Geese including seven adults in front of the Pavilion; six Green-winged Teal in the east marsh; 12 Hooded Mergansers on the Mill Pond; one Turkey Vulture; one Red-tailed Hawk; a Snipe on the airplane field; a Woodcock in the West Woods, the first time I've seen one there; three Monk Parakeets; five Rock Doves; Two Fox Sparrows at different locations; two Tree Sparrows; and a nervous flock of 150 Snow Buntings around the refurbished east parking lot. So far at least, the considerable changes in the park, including a gratuitous cutting of much important brush in the central section where I found the Turkey nest some years ago, has not had an obvious deleterious effect. Such an effect may become manifest during the Passerine migration, however.

As the (presumed) female Osprey was incubating this morning, a migrating Osprey appeared overhead and was immediately escorted from the property by the resident (presumed) male.

15 March

This morning was another interesting one. The weather wasn't particularly favorable, overcast with a northwest breeze that roiled the Sound. Amongst the 47 species, five were new: a drake Ring-necked Duck; an immature Merlin that allowed quite close approach in an isolated small sapling on the east parking lot; a Kingfisher; 30 Cowbirds among a large flock of Starlings; and 10 Juncos. But the new birds don't tell the whole story. I found no fewer than four Woodcock, and four Snipe. It isn't often that I get both of these species on the same day and I'm not certain that I've ever had a "multiple double". One of the Woodcocks was in the far eastern section of the park, an unusual locale, the other three were on various fringes of "Woodcock Woods". The Snipe were all in the eastern fields, three near the airplane field, the other further east.

20 March

This was the first pleasant, relatively windless day since my last visit and I had rather high expectations. However, the splendid total of 54 species is a bit misleading and the morning was actually not particularly interesting. Most of the birds were those I had seen previously including Snipe, Woodcock (one in Woodcock Woods), Green-winged Teal and Fox Sparrow. The three new species, single examples each of Osprey, Greater Yellowlegs and Flicker, were not exactly surprises. None-the-less, had my previous days not been so good, this morning would have seemed very productive, indeed.

24 March

This morning was kind of wild, starting out clear with a gentle breeze, and ending up overcast with a slight drizzle and very heavy winds. The birds continued to be interesting, particularly the ducks on the Mill Pond. They included good numbers of Baldpate (40) and Gadwall (15) as well as two new species for the year, four drake Shovellers with nary a female, and a single fine drake Eurasian Wigeon, only my third record for the park. The other new species for the year was Bonaparte's Gull of which three flew eastward over the Sound.

During construction of the new east parking lot, the workers created several large mounds of dirt between the northern border of the lot and the adjacent meadow separating it from the east marsh. Today a pair of Kingfishers was noisily examining one of these mounds as a possible site for a nesting hole. I shall keep an eye on this.

28 March

Since my last visit, there was another cold spell with a significant snowfall and scattered remnants persisted this morning as did ice at the periphery of the Mill Pond. Despite the migration of some good birds, there has yet to be a morning this year that felt like spring.

Today was no different. There were three new species: a Great Egret; a female Harrier; and a group of six Meadowlarks on the overgrown meadow adjacent to the airplane field. The presence of early March birds persisted. There was a Woodcock near Woodcock Woods and a Fox Sparrow at the east end. The Eurasian Wigeon was still on the Mill Pond as were 18 Gadwall, my record high count for the park.

29 March

I went to the park on a second consecutive morning because there was a shift of the wind to ESE and I hoped that perhaps I might see some Gannets. That didn't materialize and the birds were quite similar to those I saw yesterday. I added three species to the list for the year, namely 75 Brant flying east over the Sound, five White-winged Scoters and a single Savanna Sparrow. Also noteworthy were 20 Bonaparte's Gulls amongst many Herring and Ring-billed Gulls that were apparently feeding on major school of fish.

31 March

Yesterday was a real northeaster with very heavy winds and rain so I wondered what might have been blown into the park area and remained during last night's and this morning's variable winds. I hoped for a Gannet and I found one way out in the middle of the Sound near a fishing boat which had attracted a flock of Herring Gulls. The Gannet was an adult and appeared to land on the water as I watched, or at least suddenly disappeared from view. I had also hoped to find some shorebirds at the rain pools. After all, some years ago at the end of March one day, I had both a Lesser Yellowlegs and a Reeve. Nothing like that today, however, although there were some nice rain pools despite the extensive new drainage system on the east parking lot. It will be interesting to see how these landscape changes play out on the shorebird migration after easterly winds in August.

My itinerary was shortened today and omitted the western half of the park though I did get to the Mill Beach. Of interest was the large number of Baldpate, 60, on the Mill Pond as well as two drake Shovellers which had been there last visit as well. In addition to the Gannet, I also added a Field Sparrow to the year's list.

The grebes and the Common Loon were all in alternate plumage. The Red-throated Loons remained in basic plumage as usual. I've never seen them here in spring in breeding plumage. In fact, the only time I've seen them in breeding plumage are the early fall arrivals (October) here.

3 April

Persistent northwest winds continue to delay the advent of spring. This morning felt, yet again, more like winter than spring. However, the birds continued to be interesting. The

new ones for today were: two Double-crested Cormorants flying over land; three Tree Swallows; and a Thrasher. Also of interest was the continued presence of good numbers of Baldpates, Gadwall and the single Eurasian Wigeon. There was another Fox Sparrow which is commoner this year than ever.

I flushed a sparrow in the east marsh that I am reasonably certain was a sharp-tailed. However, I saw it only in flight and the date would have been Connecticut's earliest spring record so I can't really be certain.

I had an interesting experience in the glade in the middle of Woodcock Woods. I was "pishing" for land birds about five feet from the area of very dense brush. I did this for several minutes and brought up several White-throated Sparrows which I examined at my leisure. I then advanced one step towards the brush and a Woodcock flushed from directly under my feet where it had apparently been motionless during my entire observation period.

5 April

As I was finishing my visit to the park this morning, the temperature was rapidly rising and I could finally feel the first trace of spring. There will be a predicted warm front in the next few days but it supposedly will be accompanied by rain until the ninth. In the event, PH will be visiting for the next three days so I shall not be able to get out again until the ninth anyway.

The birds were pretty good but certainly not great today. I did record 52 species including six new ones for the year: single examples of Snowy Egret, Kestrel, Creeper, Hermit Thrush and Swamp Sparrow and two Phoebes. The number of Green-winged Teal increased to 12, still a far cry from the 40 odd that could be seen at this time of the year. Yet it must be admitted that this is the best year in quite a while for surface-feeding ducks. Save, of course, for Pintail which seems to have vanished completely.

9 April

Today was the first spring-like day with the temperature rising to 70 in the afternoon and with clear skies...on the mainland. Unfortunately, the park was infested with dense fog that precluded any visibility over the pond and the Sound. There were good numbers of land birds but it was difficult to make them out. Amongst the paltry 40 species that I was able to record, only two, a Ruby-crowned Kinglet that I heard, and a male Towhee that I glimpsed, were new for the year. But there was clearly an influx of Flickers (6) and Hermit Thrushes (10) including one that was actually foraging in the east marsh! The fog may well have cleared after I left but the rest of the week is expected to be cold and foggy. The weather has been remarkably unfavorable so far this spring.

Last night, severe thunderstorms and a strong northeast wind followed the high temperatures of the late afternoon. This morning started off cloudy and then cleared out with variable, usually mild winds. I thought perhaps some shorebirds or good sea birds might have been blown in so I visited the park. I have a slight cold so I restricted my time to two hours, all of which was spent in the western half of the park. Despite this truncated itinerary and short time, I recorded my largest species list, 56, of the year. By far the most interesting find was a pair, a drake and hen, of Pintail. This does seem to be a good year for surface-feeding ducks of which I have pretty much all save Blue-winged Teal which I shall likely get later into the spring. Other new species for the day were two Barn Swallows flying over the beach and a Cedar Waxwing which I heard flying over. Also a surprise to me were three female Goldeneye which usually depart before April.

13 April

I only spent an hour and fifteen minutes at the park this morning because I had other responsibilities and couldn't await the dispersion of the fog. I went only to the Mill Beach and the eastern half of the park where I hoped to find some good marsh birds but didn't. Three Rough-winged Swallows flying north over the eastern extremity of the park were earlier than usual and the only finding of interest.

20 April

In the week that I have not been to the park, the weather has been unfavorable with gusty northwest winds and temperatures as low as freezing. Three days ago, on 17 April, I came to the stone barn in the late afternoon for a meeting of the Friends of Sherwood Island. Two Wild Turkey hens were strolling tamely around the surrounding area. This morning was uninteresting save for one bird, an immature Peregrine that I first saw harassing a Red-bellied Woodpecker in flight. It landed in a cottonwood near the bridge over the drainage ditch just east of the east parking lot and allowed me an extremely close approach. In plumage, it resembled closely a female or immature Merlin save that the mustachial mark was much wider and the form was considerably larger and much more robust. It was indifferent to cautious harassment by a pair of comparably sized Fish Crows and eventually flew when I shouted from almost directly below it.

23 April

Spring has arrived! Leaf buds are showing on the cottonwoods and birches and Diamond-backed Terrapins are basking in the east marsh. Yesterday, the winds shifted to the south and the temperature reached 80. The favorable winds and benign temperatures persisted overnight and this morning. I considered a major wave as a distinct possibility. I'm not sure exactly for what I hoped, but it must have been a great deal because I felt a bit disappointed after recording a highly respectable 63 species including single examples of five that were new for the year, namely Willet, Catbird, Black & White and Yellow-

rumped Warblers and Chipping Sparrow. A good species sampling of ducks persisted including three Gadwall, two Baldpate, three Green-winged Teal, two Buffleheads, three female Hooded and 11 Red-breasted Mergansers. The Catbird and Willet were on the early side.

The perfect weather conditions are expected to continue and I'm already excited about tomorrow. Again, I don't know exactly for what I should wish which is probably the wrong attitude. I worked the marshes very hard today without much luck so I perhaps I can wish for and find a rail or a bittern of some sort tomorrow.

24 April

A gentle southerly breeze with a mild temperature following yesterday's favorable weather suggested to me that perhaps I might break my April park species day list of 65. It was not to be and I came up at 57 considerably short of yesterday's 63. Yet the day seemed more interesting. First of all, there was a superb Tricolored Heron in the main drainage ditch just east of the east parking lot. What an extraordinarily long bill this handsome bird possesses! It resembles that I see pictured for the Agami. The Tricolored Heron is always a good find in the park and this is a rather early date. The early date part also applies to the fine singing male Orchard Oriole in full adult plumage. My earliest previous record was almost one week later. House Wren, the other new species for the year was no surprise but it was the 100th species.

A curious sight was a group of 21 exclusively female Red-winged Blackbirds feeding on the ground. I've never seen such sexual exclusivity among hens of this species. Also of interest was a Bonaparte's Gull in partial alternate plumage (head almost all black save for the front and a white eye-ring) that was perched on a rock in the north extension of the Mill Pond that is visible from the overlook. I was so surprised to see the bird in that location that I had a hunch it might be a Black-headed and waited a full ten minutes for it to fly so I could exclude that possibility.

26 April

When I awoke and went out on the porch this morning, I felt no wind and heard a Warbling Vireo. This convinced me to go to the park despite northwest winds all yesterday and last night and a promise of their dissipation only later today. When I got to the park, I relearned a lesson I have been taught many times. Bird life and weather conditions around the house do not necessarily reflect those in the park. Amongst the 55 species that I recorded were none that were new for the year, the first such lack of success for 2001. Indeed, the only evidence for migration was a substantial (40) number of Blue Jays, most of which were flying to the northeast.

27 April

Despite a favorable slight southerly breeze, this morning was ornithologically almost identical to yesterday. I did, however, have a stroke of good fortune. The tide was out at the Mill Beach at 8:30 and there was little commercial activity or noise and no fisher people nor clambers. These are the best possible circumstances for finding Oystercatcher on the exposed mud flat but one also needs luck and I had it this morning. A sole Oystercatcher was feeding at the distant edge of the flat.

I also had the year's first Yellow Warbler, surprisingly a female, at Grove Point. Actually, I had heard one outside my house three days earlier.

I continue to be disappointed at the lack of marsh birds. Conditions have been favorable in the east marsh. Cars have been prohibited from entering the east parking lot so there has been no flying of model airplanes and I have invariably been the first person to visit this part of the park. Moreover, there has been no work on the parking lot so the general area has been quiet. I have worked the marsh very thoroughly in my Wellingtons on each visit but have so far come up entirely empty handed. I don't know how long the park administrator will keep the lot closed but surely not much longer so I hope my luck changes before then while the chances of finding something interesting are enhanced by the lack of human activity.

30 April

After two days of northerly winds, a southerly breeze began last night and persisted this morning with warming temperature. The conditions were perfect and promise to continue to be so for the next several days. Therefore, not surprisingly, I recorded the highest April list I have ever had for the park, 67 species. I found five new species, the most significant of which was Little Blue Heron of which two adults flew over the southern marsh abutting the West Woods. The other new birds were a migrating flock of 15 Common Terns, single silent examples of Solitary and Warbling Vireos, and two beautiful singing Black-throated Green Warblers. Other evidence of migration included eight Yellow-rumped and six Yellow Warblers and 40 White-throated Sparrows. There were at least four Willets. Tomorrow is predicted to be even warmer than today and I am hoping to get the gamut of early May birds. My record total count for 1 May is 71 and I think there is a possibility that I shall exceed it. But optimism is usually a bad policy at Sherwood Island! I finished the month of April with a year list of 107, the highest for the past several years. However, I have been more active this year than in the past few.

1 May

Conditions this morning were again ideal but there was no record count although the total of 67 species (six new for the year) was good and a count of 75 White-throated Sparrows indicated a brisk migration. Unfortunately, the best warbler area, the central wooded

portion of the park, was ruined by the din of a logging operation and a chip making machine. Not only was yet more habitat being gratuitously destroyed, but the noise made it impossible to hear any warblers if, indeed, any were around to be heard. Until that point the morning had appeared to be more exceptional than it appeared.

The most interesting bird was a Bittern flushed from the little marsh in the Allen Preserve at the end of Grove Point Road. I've always felt that that marsh could be quite productive but this is the first time it has actually been so. Another less impressive surprise was a Dowitcher in the east marsh. I don't usually see them until the later part of May. Other new species included three Least Sandipers, a Hairy Woodpecker, two Veerys and two Northern Orioles.

The Ospreys appear to be well into incubation and Tree Swallows seem to have occupied the Martin house. I met another birder there who lived in the neighboring mainland and told me that many warblers were around his house beginning yesterday. Sherwood Island always seems to lag behind the mainland in the spring land bird migration but I do suspect that warblers should be showing later this week since the present fine conditions are predicted to persist for another couple of days.

Still no rails, wrens nor sharp-tails in the east marsh. Clapper Rails are usually present by this time. I was also surprised that there are as yet no Yellowthroats. Six Thrashers was a nice count today.

2 May

Splendid conditions continue. The temperature is predicted to reach 90 this afternoon and tomorrow. This morning I had 73 species, a record high for this date in the park. Yet there did not seem to be much of a flight! There were fewer White-throated Sparrows than yesterday and five species of warblers was not exactly a major influx. Amongst the six species that were new for the year were two Clapper Rails. I flushed the first from the dense reedy area on the southwestern margin of the east marsh. I found the second in the main ditch east of the east parking lot and managed not to scare it. I studied it at my leisure at about 18 feet, just far enough to allow binocular focus. It didn't have even a rufous margin to a single feather and was entirely of an inconspicuous gray brown color save for the red, but not striking bill and the dull black striped flanks. Very different from the richly colored King Rails that I see here occasionally yet equally different from the California Clapper Rail which apparently resembles closely the eastern King Rail. It's been quite a few years since I have had such a superb look at a rail. Other new birds included a Crested Flycatcher, Wood Thrush, Ovenbird, Chestnut-sided Warbler and two Yellowthroats. However, the most spectacular sighting was two Tricolored Herons in the marsh just west of the West Woods. I saw them early in the morning from the bridge at the Mill Beach. Later, I saw one, presumably one of the two again, in the east marsh where I noticed the fantastic white plumed crest which is rarely shown in illustrations but is depicted in Hancock and Elliott's book on herons.

My itinerary is getting very complicated. I try to get to Grove Point before 7:30 because at 8:00 a group of workmen begin hammering on an addition that is being built to a house there and the resulting clamor precludes hearing any birds and probably scares the resident birds. When I get to the park proper, I usually start in the east marsh in the hope of seeing shy marsh birds. But because of the logging and wood reduction activities that completely disrupt the wooded central portion during weekdays, I changed my schedule and visited that part early today to get there before the loggers. In the event, they failed to show today anyway but there still weren't many singing warblers! I got to the east marsh at 10:15 and found, to my surprise, that model airplanes were being flown. This was surprising because the east lot is blocked by barricades yet the airplane fliers found a way to get their cars by the barricades. So this was the first day when I wasn't the initial visitor to the eastern section of the park and when there was noise while I was looking for marsh birds. Of course the really ironic point to this tale is that I saw two Clapper Rails today whereas I had failed to see any on my previous visits where the circumstances for seeing one seemed so much more favorable. So noise may not scare birds and if hearing them isn't a major consideration, as it isn't in the east marsh, then this is probably the area in which I should compromise. It is so difficult to juggle the man made disturbances when looking for birds!

3 May

Weatherwise and ornithologically, this morning was very similar to yesterday. Conditions were highly favorable and the list total was again 73 of which only three, a Marsh Wren, a Parula Warbler, and two Magnolia Warblers, were new. How could one complain, however, with such a respectable total for the date and with two each of Oystercatcher and of Tricolored Heron? I got to the Mill Beach early but at high tide and found the Oystercatchers on a distant protruding rock. So low tide is not a necessary prerequisite for locating them there. The Tricolored Herons were again in the marsh just west of the West Woods and this time I examined both closely and noted that each contained the spectacular white nuchal plumes.

One of the Red-throated Loons was very close to the Mill Beach and afforded me the best look that I've ever had at an individual in alternate plumage. In fact, the only ones I've seen previously in this plumage were the first autumn arrivals in early October. In the past, even individuals lingering into May have remained in basic plumage. However that may be, individuals of this species in breeding plumage are very lovely to look at.

I saw the first Mallard chicks and the first goslings of the spring. The latter are, if anything, a day or two later than usual.

I would have guessed that this spectacular run of weather would have included the first real wave that comes perhaps between the sixth and eighth of a hypothetical idealized year. Indeed, I was surprised that today was so similar to yesterday. But I suppose the birds do sense something other than the immediate weather conditions. The date does

seem to make a difference. That having been said, however, this has been the best early May I can remember. And there's apparently more to come!

4 May

Yet another day of highly favorable conditions! This may be the last such day for a while as a cold front is predicted for tonight with northerly winds for tomorrow and perhaps the next day. For the third successive morning, I recorded 73 species yet there seemed to be fewer birds around, perhaps because the count of White-throated Sparrows diminished to 15. Four species were new including two Black-bellied Plovers, a Red-eyed Vireo, a Redstart and three Sharp-tailed Sparrows. I studied these closely and they had a buffy chest with fine but very distinct streaking in the buffy area and much thicker streaking on the gray sides. I presume they were "Saltmarsh" Sharp-tailed Sparrows.

The marshy area between the West Woods and the Mill Pond harbored two individuals each of Tricolored and Little Blue Herons this morning. I had a momentary sensation of being in the everglades!

7 May

The preceding two days were very cool with strong northwest winds. It remained cool this morning but the winds shifted to easterly. I didn't anticipate many birds but one hesitates to miss too many successive days in May. I was pleasantly surprised early in the morning at Grove Point where there was something of a warbler flight that comprised eight species including a Blackpoll and a Nashville, both new for the year. But the park itself was almost devoid of birds although a Pine Warbler was new for the year as were two Least Terns flying over the Mill Pond. There was a good deal of noise due to various machinery and a large group of school children were getting a nature study session in the eastern part of the park so I omitted most of this section from my itinerary and spent less time and effort than usual. Therefore, the species total of 61 is misleadingly low but probably not by much.

8 May

Yesterday was no fluke. Today was just as bad and there were no excuses. There were some Passerine birds in the early morning at Grove Point and it was then steadily downhill. The park was about as bereft of birds as one could imagine on 8 May. And this in the face of seemingly excellent conditions for migration. Gently west southwesterly winds, a moderating, although still low temperature, and a full moon on the preceding night. My itinerary was complete today and I managed to fit myself between the noise of the mowers and that of the school children. I examined the eastern section of the park before the western part this morning and that was lucky, for, just as I was

finishing at about 9:15, three buses of children debarked for their nature study at the edge of the east marsh which I had just vacated.

I saw three Clapper Rails today. Two were in the first drainage ditch whence I flushed one and spied the other far up the channel. Then I heard another in the west marsh not far from the equipment compound and flushed it when I went to try and find it. I did manage three new species for the day: a Scarlet Tanager heard at Grove Point; a Bobolink heard in the far eastern section of the park; and a White-crowned Sparrow in the picnic table area west of the Pavillion. The latter is an unusual species to see on a non-wave day.

9 May

Another highly favorable day yet lacking birds! I recorded 68 species including two, a Spotted Sandpiper and a Seaside Sparrow, that were new. I found the latter in the far east marsh, an area that I risk life and limb in order to reach, usually for little payoff. Today, however, I had a leisurely study of this singing Seaside Sparrow at about 15 yards. The song was barely audible, even at that close range so it clearly does not carry. It seemed to me a two-phased buzzy bubble with elements that reminded me of a Towhee, a Marsh Wren, and an empidonax flycatcher. It's only the second time I've heard Seaside Sparrow in the park. As has been the experience of others, I've never heard a Sharp-tailed Sparrow, even though it is a fairly regular breeder in the park. Apparently, either it sings very little, or its song is barely audible. I had one of these today, not singing of course, so this was one of the rare occasions when I found the two salt marsh sparrows on the same day.

On each of the past three days, I have watched two Yellow-rumped and one Blackpoll Warbler interacting in the same budding crabapple tree at Grove Point. This indicates that these migrants have remained stationary during those three days and strikes me as quite extraordinary. I suppose it will be a good sign when these individuals leave this tree.

10 May

Today was warm, clear, and virtually windless. It exhibited the same pattern as the previous three days. Grove Point seemed pretty good for land birds and things went downhill from there with the park virtually bereft of land birds save for one important exception. An early Yellow-bellied Flycatcher near the stone barn. This bird was entirely lemon yellow underneath, by far the most conspicuous yellow underparts I have ever seen on an Empidonax flycatcher. I saw no olive breast band and the throat was washed yellow but not so bright as the entire breast and belly. Two Semipalmated Plovers represented the other new species amongst the total of 67. A gobbling cock Turkey near the stone barn was the first one I had ever actually heard.

I had another nice leisurely study at perhaps 30 feet of a pair of Clapper Rails in the main drainage ditch just east of the airplane field. One of the bird had just the faintest trace of rufous on a few belly feathers.

I flushed a marsh sparrow, Seaside or Sharp-tailed from the same area where I saw and heard the Seaside yesterday, but failed to see it adequately or to hear it.

11 May

Finally, after all this perfect weather, an old fashioned wave day! It was obvious from the beginning at Grove Point where I had 10 warbler species and White-crowned Sparrow. Today it did not go downhill. The park was also full of Passerine birds. The total for the day was 87 including 13 species of warblers. There were eight new species for the year including two Green Herons, a Solitary Sandpiper, two Pewees, two Swainson's Thrushes, four Black-throated Blue Warblers, two Wilson's Warblers (heard), a Canada Warbler (heard) and two Lincoln's Sparrows. For the third time, I frightened a Clapper rail from under a specific clump of marsh grass in the main drainage ditch just east of the airplane field and I suspect there may be a nest in the clump. I didn't want to spend the time to inspect it lest I scare the bird off permanently.

There was a strange looking and behaving female surface-feeding duck swimming and waddling near the first drainage ditch in the east marsh. It had an entirely dark gray bill and was slender so my first thought was that it was a female pintail. Yet it had a blue speculum, inconspicuous when swimming but visible when it walked and it had a conspicuous white anterior edge to the speculum. The bill renders Mallard unlikely yet the speculum rules out Pintail. Perhaps it is a hybrid. I did not record it on the list.

I suspect it will be difficult to add new birds from now on. There are a few common ones that I have missed (for example, Swift) but by and large the missing ones are now quite tough. Will today be the only major flight day. Not necessarily since a few years ago (1995), I had four days consecutively with over 90 species.

12 May

The weather this morning was the same as it has been for the past several days but a cold front with northerly winds is predicted for later today. I was certainly curious as to whether the wave would continue ahead of the front. It didn't although some of yesterday's birds remained today. The only new one was a single Willow Flycatcher, right on schedule. But I did record a respectable 78 species and there were birds at both Grove Point and the park, although many fewer Passerine individuals and species than yesterday.

The Red-throated Loon that I saw today was in basic plumage so the status of the plumage is variable in May.

I did not find the Clapper Rail in the specific clump of marsh grass that I had designated as a possible nesting site so perhaps I was wrong. However, it might conceivably have remained hidden in the clump since I was loathe to inspect it physically or step on it.

15 May

Right after my last visit, a cold front passed through and clear skies with gusty northerly winds have persisted since then. Such conditions bode poorly for spring waves and I didn't expect anything this morning but was reluctant to stay away too long in the middle of May. My lack of expectations was fulfilled! I recorded 61 species including two new ones, a Blackburnian Warbler that I heard at Grove Point and a Northern Waterthrush. There were a few warblers around but the combination of already thick foliage and strong winds made them difficult to hear and virtually impossible to see. The nicest event for me was a leisurely study at about 40 feet of a pair of pheasants on the field between the west marsh and the west beach. I have never fully appreciated what a spectacular looking bird the cock pheasant is. The one today displayed magnificent vermilion wattles, fine ear tufts, a splendid lilac sheen to the feathers of the upper breast, a wonderful iridescent head that exhibited green or purple depending on the light, and fine soft plumes of a delicate bluish gray on the back.

The northerly winds are expected to remain for at least the next day or two and probably longer so there may not be a specific third wave of late birds.

17 May

This morning was overcast and cool and more of the same is predicted for the next several days. There was virtually no wind. I recorded 70 species, none of which were new for the year but there were several observations of interest.

As I was walking in the woods across the road from the Superintendent's house, I heard a nearby plopping sound and was astonished, upon turning, to see an immature Red-tailed Hawk on the grassy ground under a tree about 15 yards away. Although the bird was looking around as if unconcerned, there seemed to be some thrashing in the grass next to it. When I approached, the bird flew to a nearby tree carrying a squirrel. I watched it perched in the tree. By this time, the squirrel was no longer moving but the bird still did not seem to notice its prey in its talons but continued to look about as though surveying the surroundings for additional prey. If one looked at the bird without noticing what its talons held, one would never imagine that it was holding prey. I have occasionally been struck by exactly this depiction in the paintings of Fuertes and perhaps others and have wondered why the artist did not realize that if a raptor was clutching prey it would certainly look at its prey and tear it apart. Doubtless it does. Yet there is apparently a period when it clutches the prey with seemingly little notice. I found, during this

observation, that the presence of fairly large prey conveys the substantial size of the raptor which I, at least, often underestimate.

I found three Oystercatchers off the Mill Beach. It was nearly high tide and the birds were far away on the last remnant of a Compo Beach peninsula containing beach grass. This is the largest number of Oystercatchers I have ever recorded for the area and they seem to be much easier to find this spring than ever before.

The same may be said for Little Blue Heron of which I saw three adults together in the Mill Pond. I have some old records of higher fall numbers but these were immature birds and, in retrospect were almost certainly Snowy Egrets.

I was struck today by the fecundity of the Canada Goose. I came upon a creche containing 38 chicks of three different ages attended by six adults.

I watched a Great Egret foraging from the jetty at the eastern end of the park. In five minutes the bird caught and swallowed three small fish.

I had an excellent study of a Chestnut-sided Warbler and realized for the first time what a striking bird it is. It's too bad I didn't recognize this when I was a child in Westport and it was an abundant breeder.

I found a White-crowned Sparrow at Grove Point again even though it was not a migration wave day.

I found the Seaside Sparrow exactly where it had been last week. Seeing it requires that it move into a visible perch at the time I happen to be there. This time I did not hear it sing.

18 May

This morning was raw and overcast with a gusty southeast breeze. I should probably have skipped it and saved a vestige of my little remaining enthusiasm for a few days later. But I am afraid that I will miss something if I stay away on dates that represent potential wave days. In the event, I recorded 67 species including a Northern Waterthrush which was new for the year. I found at least three Sharp-tailed Sparrows in the east marsh and had good observations of two. They were quite different, one much more heavily streaked than the other, and I think individual variation makes splitting of this species a treacherous proposition.

Clapper Rails were particularly conspicuous today. I heard three different individuals in the west marsh and purposely flushed one of these to verify what I had found the other day: that it is possible to hear a rail, go to the location of the sound, and actually flush the bird. Three is a high count for the west marsh. Usually the east marsh is a better

location. Today I found one there, walking about 20 feet from me, and I had a fine leisurely study.

20 May

This morning was not promising with a gusty northeast breeze. Worse northeasterly weather is predicted for the next three days so I decided today might be my last day with any chance for a land bird wave. No such luck! I recorded only 58 species with as many non Passerines as Passerines. The only new species was a Laughing Gull. Of interest was an incredible Black-backed Gull actually incubating eggs on a mound of branches practically adjacent to the east bath house. Stacy, a park ranger, told me she had been sitting for more than a week and that the park Superintendent had verified the presence of eggs. The male was standing guard perhaps 10 feet from the incubating female.

Stacy also showed me a rabbit's nest containing three newly birthed young with eyes not yet open, perhaps three feet from the door of the stone barn. A park ranger had ringed the nest of fur with stanchions to prevent trampling by park personnel.

It has become apparent that the 149 species I have now recorded for the year is just about the final spring total. I was quite active this spring and it was interesting to compare these results with those of 1994-1996 when I was at least as active. This year I recorded about 20% fewer species than in those years and the difference was virtually completely in passerine birds. This may be a general phenomenon or it may be related to the changes in the park, particularly the removal of much of the brush. I should find out relatively soon whether this spring has been poor throughout the state or just at the park. I am quite disappointed, particularly since the migration started out with promise in the early days of May.

24 May

The last three days have been characterized by occasionally strong rain and gusting easterly winds. This gloomy and drizzly morning was no exception. I went to the park because I felt there might be some interesting shore birds and because I wondered where the free water would settle. I went only to the Mill Beach, the west end of the park including the west woods and the marsh around the airplane field. Thus, I thought I was concentrating on shore birds at the expense of land birds. As it turned out, there were more land birds than usual in the west woods and perhaps I would have been wise to examine the central, wooded portion of the park, but I didn't.

I didn't see anything unusual. The best observation was of three Oystercatchers foraging on a private beach between the Mill Beach and the park. I also had two Dowitchers in the east marsh where there was also a fine singing male Bobolink. As for the standing water, it did not form the puddles for which I had hoped but instead found its way into the various drainage catchments that have recently been constructed. There were a few

Black-bellied Plovers on the airplane field but otherwise the grassy areas were not productive.

29 May

Friday -Monday, May 25-May 28 was the Memorial day Weekend and the Monday on which it was commemorated. I usually do not visit the park during the holiday period because I anticipate a crowd. I doubt there was much of a crowd this year because unpleasant easterly rainy weather dominated the period. I should have gone to the park but I couldn't face the idea of slogging around in the rain and I had more or less exhausted myself with my enthusiasm the first three weeks of May. So I used the holiday and fatigue as an excuse to stay home. Each day at home, I took a morning walk for the newspaper despite the light rain and I noticed obvious warbler flights on the 25th, 26th, and 27th so it seems clear that I missed out at the park this year not because there was no late wave, but because I had overextended myself early and had too little energy in reserve.

I could tell during yesterday's walk for the newspaper that the wave had subsided and there was certainly no great number of land birds in the park today. There were, however, some interesting birds including three that were new: a male Wood Duck that flew over the west marsh and Mill Pond; two Glossy Ibises on the central oval. They have been conspicuous by their absence for the past few years; and an Alder Flycatcher near the west marsh platform. This is my second record for the park and, like the first (18 May, 1990), is inferred rather than positively felt. I heard an Empidonax whose song had the same buzzy quality as a Willow Flycatcher but had no explosive nature at all, had a slight warbling aspect and seemed almost muted in contrast to the far carrying song of the Willow Flycatcher which I heard simultaneously at some distance. I had only a brief look at the bird but I did think that I saw an eyering.

There was a flock of 22 Brant off the Mill Beach.

There were two Tree Swallows flying around the Martin house where they have been breeding and one of these birds was in immature (brown) plumage suggesting that they have already fledged.

There must have been a shoal of fish off the sandbars at low tide because there were large numbers of gulls, terns and herons fishing in the shallows or resting on the sandbars. The number of Common Terns (150) was particularly impressive. I was astonished that the five Laughing Gulls I found in the group were all in basic plumage. I had never encountered them in basic plumage this late in the spring.

I had four Sharp-tailed Sparrows which I suspect are breeding. I'm quite certain the same applies to the single Marsh Wren that I've heard in the same corner of the west marsh virtually every visit; the two or more pairs of Willets that seem to occupy both marshes and the two or more pairs of Clapper Rails also inhabiting each marsh.

9 June

Low tide was in the early morning today so I went to the park mainly to see if I could find any shorebirds which I didn't. I examined only the Mill Beach, the adjacent western section of the park and its eastern half. I omitted the central section of the park which is the best part for land birds. Amongst the interesting findings were: a Cattle Egret, my first for the year; four Glossy Ibises; ten Killdeer indicating that breeding and fledging had occurred; eight Brant on the mudflats; five Laughing Gulls, all still in basic plumage; a freshly fledged Brown Thrasher that could not yet fly; and two Sharp-tailed Sparrows which really fit the picture of the "Salt Marsh" species in that they had heavily streaked breasts with very little ochre on the breast and throat. This is the species that is supposed to breed here but I often see individuals with buffy, barely streaked breasts. Not today, however.

6 September

Almost the first species that I saw after a three-month absence from the park was one that was not on the park list, the first new Sherwood Island bird I've recorded since the Piping Plover in May 1999. I started out at the Mill Beach at low tide and, at the outer periphery of the mud flat, three Skimmers were alternatively dozing and preening. It was an exciting moment although the species is regularly seen at Milford Point and its presence here should not have been completely unanticipated. Indeed, in the past when I concentrated on the Sherwood Island list, this was a species that I consciously sought. Eventually, however, I gave up on it and more or less dismissed it from consideration. This was the only interesting find amongst the 53 species I recorded. My personal Sherwood Island list now stands at 272.

I was pleasantly surprised by the appearance of the park today. Last year's new plantings on the east parking lot have taken hold and the area will be interesting if different from what it was. The new drainage ditches support considerable vegetation and should be good for fall migrants. There have been no new depredations of brush and the areas that have been spared, that is the eastern and western fringes of the park, have been totally untouched and are now so overgrown that my usual paths are barely passable. So there is considerable area of dense foliage. The casualty remains the central part of the park which, while quite attractive and "park-like", remains seriously denuded. I particularly miss the dead tree there which not infrequently harbored an Olive-sided Flycatcher in late spring. It has been cut down.

10 September

This was a warm, muggy and humid morning with few birds. I didn't go to the Mill Beach or Grove Point Road. Of the 46 unremarkable species that I found, Bank Swallow (2) and Palm Warbler (1) were new for the year.

11 September

Last night there were thunderstorms followed by a nice breeze from the northwest that cleared the skies, lowered the humidity and ushered in a minor cold front. The birds were more interesting as might be expected. Amongst 52 species, three including three Sharp-shinned Hawks, a Whimbrel near the Clam House on the Mill Pond, and ten Swifts, were new. There were also a few raptors (2, Osprey, 1 Harrier, 3 Sharp-shinned Hawks, 1 Red-tailed Hawk and 9 Kestrels) and a nice flight (15) of Palm Warblers.

The park was beautiful and, as usual, I had it virtually to myself. Therefore, I was surprised to be addressed by a woman who commented on how peaceful it seemed. Then she asked me if I had heard what had happened in New York. It was my first realization that the World Trade Center had been destroyed by two hijacked planes in an extraordinary act of terrorism. When I arrived home, I had messages from Maddy and from both children. According to my son, there may have been more fatalities today than on any other single day in US history. He came up with this thought based on the fact that 50,000 people are said to work at the Trade Center. Whatever the casualties, this is a day one will certainly remember.

15 September

Today is my son's 31st birthday and I am thinking a lot about the future for him and his sister after the terrorist incident. According to many experts, it would have been easier to smuggle in and employ a crude atomic bomb than to pull off the simultaneous hijacking of four planes as was done. It's tough to feel optimistic under the circumstances.

Yesterday there was a major weather change, a very heavy rain followed by northwest winds. This morning was quite cool with a few cirrus clouds and a moderate breeze from the northwest. It seemed a perfect day for some serious fall migrants and it did, indeed, turn out to be interesting.

The list of 61 species, while more than respectable for a date before September 20th, is misleading because there were many warbler-like chips from high in the still heavily leafed trees that I could neither locate nor identify. That having been said I did find four species that were new for the year. There was an immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron in the far east marsh that was standing with an adult and an immature Black-crowned Night-Heron. I noticed the longer neck and dark bill of the suspect bird and then managed to flush the group when it showed its contrasting dark primaries, very

different from the accompanying immature Black-crowned Night-Heron. This is a superb field mark that deserves to be more emphasized in the guides. An immature Bald Eagle quite low over the east marsh was another nice find. It made me recollect that most of the eagles that I've seen at Sherwood Island fly quite low. A Red-breasted Nuthatch that I first heard, then saw, was a welcome find. I haven't had them here since 1997. The fourth new species was Lesser Yellowlegs of which I saw five amongst a flock of 20 Greater Yellowlegs. I examined these birds from the bridge behind the Mill Beach. The tide was higher than usual and the closest island to the bridge offered a good resting spot. Amongst the yellowlegs was, of all things, a Clapper Rail. I suppose I shouldn't be surprised by this since the tiny island is basically a part of the salt marsh that rings the Mill Pond.

17 September

There has been no change in the weather save perhaps a very gradual shift of the breeze away from the northwest. So I was not surprised that today's list included only 46 species none of which were new for the year. Despite the favorable date, I only found two raptors, one of the resident Red-tails and a migrating Osprey. There were two findings of some interest. A Black Skimmer was resting on the island just north of the Mill Bridge, the same place I had an unexpected Clapper Rail on the last visit. And there was a sparrow with a stiff tail in the east marsh that I identified as a Seaside because I failed to find any ochre in the face. I was looking directly into the sun so it's possible that the bird may have been a sharp-tail but I don't think so.

22 September

The weather has been poor for migrants since my last visit with southerly winds and much rain. This morning was very foggy and what little wind there was, was from the southwest. I cut short my usual itinerary by omitting the western half of the park so I only spent two hours in the field. I saw a Clapper Rail in the same spot as I did the other day on the island just north of the Mill Bridge. There was nothing else of interest.

23 September

It was clear this morning and what little wind there was came from the north. But there was certainly no cold front nor much of a migration. I recorded 51 species. Five Pipits were new for the year and a Lincoln's Sparrow was a nice find. Two Ospreys and a single resident Red-tail constituted the entire raptor count, an outrageously low total.

I had a nice study of an immature Little Blue Heron and I can't imagine how I could ever have had difficulty distinguishing it from a Snowy Egret. This bird had its legs and feet entirely apple green with no contrast whatsoever and no difference between the anterior and posterior limb surfaces. It had a conspicuously black-tipped, flesh-colored bill and it

was more stately and much less graceful than a Snowy Egret. If there is any doubt, then it is the egret.

26 September

This morning seemed perfect for a major wave day. A cool and brisk west wind had finally lowered the temperature and cleared out the sultry, humid and southerly weather that had dominated the month. Today felt like the first day of fall and it was, for example, the first possible day for the (inland) broadwing migration. I imagined that there would be plenty of passerines and certainly a bucket full of raptors. I was disappointed in both regards. There was certainly no flight of passerines. As for raptors, I had 10 Osprey, five Kestrels, three Sharpies, two Red-tails (probably resident birds) and a single Cooper's Hawk, the first for the year. By no means a banner count of raptors but at least a few were going over and the very high ceiling of the cloudless sky may have prevented me from seeing many more.

I recorded only 47 species, the only other one worthy of note being a Sora that I flushed from the east marsh just northwest of the airplane field. Soras are not easily found in the park and this was my first for the year.

Not much else might have been migrating, however, Monarch butterflies were streaming down the shoreline.

27 September

A cloudy morning, a low ceiling, southwest winds, and not many birds. An immature male Rose-breasted Grosbeak at Grove Point was new for the year and definitely the highlight amongst 47 species. There was, however, a minor influx of Catbirds (20) and Yellowthroats (10). The stream of Monarch butterflies was no longer apparent.

28 September

This morning certainly seemed perfect with the faintest northwest breeze and scattered cumulus clouds providing an optimal ceiling for seeing raptors. There were only three raptors (two Ospreys and a Sharpie), however, although it may be difficult to glean from the list, there was a minor flight of land birds today. Nothing new for the year amongst the 56 species but there were 50 Chickadees, 10 White-throats, five each of Red-eyed Vireo, Black and White and Magnolia Warblers, and the fall's first Ruby-crowned Kinglet (1), Creeper (3) and Yellow-rumped Warbler (3). I was unable to identify a significant number of warblers moving quietly through the tops of the highest oaks. There was a great deal of noisy mowing which made it especially difficult to detect potentially interesting calls.

29 September

This morning I was definitely a glutton for punishment as a northeast wind that gusted to 25 MPH pretty much excluded finding any land birds. I did hope for a Peregrine, however, but was disappointed. I shortened my itinerary, including the Mill Beach, Grove Point, the eastern half of the park and the west woods but omitting the central area and the western edge near the maintenance buildings. I recorded 48 species including a Sora that I flushed from pretty much the same location as I had flushed one on the 26th so it could conceivably have been the same bird. I also saw a loon flying directly overhead that I am quite certain was an early Red-throated.

2 October

The preceding two days were dominated by rain and high northeast winds. Last night that weather was cleared by a gentle northwest breeze and this morning was perfect although the cloudless sky made for a high ceiling. There was a nice flight that yielded 60 species that included some raptors, jays, nuthatches of both species, kinglets, overflying Red-winged Blackbirds, Towhees and a significant influx of sparrows including a single Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed. There were no surprises and the most interesting observation was that of a peculiar (?moulting) male pheasant that was exceedingly pale brown with faded head coloring and that failed to fly despite being surprised by me at a few feet.

3 October

Today was quite similar to yesterday. Although I found 63 species, the volume of migrants seemed the same or less perhaps due to the scarcity of raptors of which I saw only single examples of Osprey, Sharp-shinned and Cooper's. The latter was in the west woods where I had seen it some days ago and may well be the same individual. The most interesting observation was a group of eight Sharp-tailed Sparrows on the edge of the east marsh just north of the air field. They were surprisingly easy to observe. They exhibited pronounced streaking associated with ochre breast coloring but little streaking elsewhere and the facial coloring was not pronounced. The observation that the ochre coloring on the breast was at least as strong as that on the face suggests that these were probably what is now considered Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.s

I stayed out longer than usual because I met a birder-photographer-fisherman named A. J. Hand who let me join him on a small motorized boat he was using to navigate the east marsh which was easy to do because the tide was high. I've always wondered whether this would be a particularly effective way to see rails but today we saw nothing that we couldn't have seen from the edge.

5 October

The warm weather pattern continued this morning and there were fewer species (52) and a diminished volume of birds. A cold front is forecast for the seventh, the day of PH's wedding. I hope to get to the island on the eighth. The two most interesting birds today were, first, a single immature White-crowned Sparrow in a new bushy area recently planted near the entrance booths; and second, an fine adult Peregrine, probably a male since it was the same size or slightly slighter than a crow that momentarily hassled it as it glided and flapped over the Mill Pond allowing quite a nice look. It was the only raptor of the day as has been the case with this species on several occasions here in the past. It seems to like to migrate when other raptors don't.

8 October

A major shift in the weather encompassing brisk northwest winds and a dramatic fall in temperature began on the evening of the sixth and has continued since then. One might certainly have imagined that it would be accompanied by a huge volume of birds but that does not seem to be the case. I heard from Manny Levine that yesterday, PH's wedding day, was somewhat disappointing at Jones Beach, and today followed suit at Sherwood Island. Aside from a large number (180) of overflying Blue Jays, there was not much movement of passerines. I did count seven species of raptor but the volume was not impressive: Harrier, 1; Osprey, 1; Red-tailed Hawk 1(resident); Sharp-shinned Hawk, 5; Cooper's Hawk, 1; Kestrel, 2 and Merlin 1(a cloacal view so I wouldn't stake my life on the identification). Perhaps the most unexpected bird of the day was a female Pintail that flew over the east marsh. The day's total was 60 species, none of which were new for the year. It is possible that the very considerable wind has been deleterious. It's supposed to abate tonight with even colder temperatures so perhaps tomorrow will be more exciting.

9 October

There was a bit of frost this morning and virtually no wind. Although the total species count of 61 was not remarkable, there was a substantial flight with good numbers of sparrows and Yellow-rumped Warblers. By far the bird of the day was a **Chat** in the heavy brush near the first pond just north of the nature center. This is only my second record for the park. Also of interest was an early drake Ring-necked Duck. I don't think I've ever had one here in the fall and I certainly haven't had one this early. They are not common in the park although I usually see a few in March.

Two Kestrels and single Red-tail and Harrier were today's disappointing raptor total.

11 October

There has been a substantial warming accompanied by southwest breezes since my last visit and that pattern continued today and is expected for the next few as well. There were still plenty of birds passing through, however, and amongst the 61 species, I heard a Siskin and heard and briefly glimpsed a Winter Wren, both new for the year. But the bird of the day was an adult Sora that I watched foraging in the only visible ditch in the Allen Preserve. I've been checking this ditch for years thinking that it was a perfect one in which to watch rails but this is the first time I've actually seen one there.

16 October

A minor cold front passed through last night but the breeze was from the east this morning and the morning was ornithologically quite average. However, two of the 52 species were new for the year, namely a Pectoral Sandpiper among the Killdeer on the central oval and a Vesper Sparrow near the dunes adjacent to the new west bathhouse. Most of the birding was done with A. J. Hand whom I ran into as he was photographing sparrows near the nature center. I didn't get to the far eastern section of the park. The tide was exceptionally high.

18 October

Another cold front came through yesterday and was continued this morning with rather brisk northwest winds. The day was average for birds. I counted 58 species the most interesting of which were a rather late House Wren and a Lincoln's Sparrow. I met Charlie Barnard and A. J. Hand in the middle of the park and our conviviality may have reduced the species total by a few.

Today was quite similar to yesterday. There was considerable movement, particularly amongst sparrows including three White-crowned and a Lincoln's. The House Wren was still there. I ran into A. J. Hand and his wife (?) Ellen and he told me that they had seen the Chat a few minutes earlier in the same general area where he and I had independently first seen it on 9 October. I spent 20 minutes looking unsuccessfully for the bird and then curtailed my itinerary by excluding the entire eastern section of the park. The total of 58 species is thus, again, misleadingly low.

26 October

During the past week, the weather has been warm with a mild southerly flow. Late yesterday it changed becoming cooler with a brisk westerly wind which continued this morning. It was obviously not going to be much of a day for passerines but I hoped there might be some birds flying overhead. I ran into A. J. Hand and Charlie Barnard and we

dawdled so much that it didn't seem feasible, nor perhaps worthwhile to examine the eastern section of the park which I therefore bypassed for the second straight visit.

I heard the call of a Purple Finch at the Allen Preserve and found it exposed on a bare limb. A fine male and the first I had seen closely for many years. I also heard a second bird. Two immature Brant (no white on the head) were foraging with the biggest group of Canada Geese and I had a Merlin migrating over the west marsh. A. J. saw a late male Wilson's Warbler, however, I failed to find it. A. J. told me that he saw the Chat again on 24 October so it has lingered for at least two weeks.

30 October

Since my last visit, the weather has been cool with northerly winds and so it continued today although with a slight warming. Most of the birds have left and most of the leaves have fallen. Amongst the 46 species I recorded this morning, a flyover Bluebird that I heard without seeing was the only new species. Most interesting bird was a rather late immature Little Blue Heron which was the only white heron I could find. I found a female Purple Finch where I saw the male a few days ago.

2 November

There has been a southerly warming tendency since my last visit and it was in the sixties this morning. There were no real highlights among the paltry total of 43 species. Twenty-one Brant, mostly swimming just off the beach, a high count of 75 Mourning Doves were as close to noteworthy as it got.

27 November

I received an unpleasant shock today after having gone more than three weeks without visiting the park. The brush in the far eastern section, the largest remaining undisturbed part of the park, has been almost completely cleared. That leaves only the far western section just south of the maintenance area as an undisturbed brushy area. The park is essentially destroyed as a land trap for passerine migrants. This had nothing to do with the major changes supervised by the state such as construction of new toilet facilities. No, this came about because someone local likes a "neat" park and finds unregulated plant growth an eyesore. If ever there were an argument for permanent under funding of parks this is it because this would not have happened had superfluous labor not been available.

I didn't see anything noteworthy amongst the 44 species that I recorded today. I did, however, meet a woman of my age with an English accent who said she saw a Snowy Owl yesterday perching on or near the new east bathhouse and being mobbed by Crows. It wasn't there today.

12 December

This morning was blustery and unpleasant. I decided to go to the park in preparation for the Christmas Count on the 16th but shortened my itinerary to include only the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the eastern section of the park. The Sound was too turbulent to see anything on it and the only bird of interest amongst the 34 species was a Snipe that I flushed at the junction of the airfield and the east marsh. I hope I record it for the Count.

16 December

I did the Sherwood Island portion of the Westport Christmas Count with Fred Purnell this morning. The weather was virtually perfect with only a slight variable breeze and some distant clouds and haziness. We started at 7:00 AM and continued to 1:00 PM. We recorded 48 species amongst which the most interesting were a Double-Crested Cormorant, a Great Egret, a Snipe and a Pipit. We were accompanied for part of the morning by Eric Vitti, the ten-year old son of a neighbor of Fred's. Eric's mother would not let him leave at 7:00 AM with Fred as she thought it was too early! Instead, she drove Eric to the park to meet us at 9:30. That was certainly an unfamiliar scenario from my experience.