

## **Sherwood Island Diary**

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**2004**

### **1 March**

This morning was the first that was spring-like this year although there has been a gradual warming during the past week after a very cold winter. I have not been out for several months, in part because of the cold but mainly because my "spinal stenosis" has caused marked diminution in my stamina when walking. I will likely not be able to cover the entire park in a single trip again nor will I be able to tramp through the marsh and the areas of thick underbrush where the walking is difficult. This morning I covered the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the western half of the park. I ran into Penny Solum who told me that there had been few birds in the park during the past winter.

Red-winged Blackbirds and Grackles are invariably the earliest arrivals in the park and both were present today. I also flushed a Woodcock, another usually early arrival, in the brushy area just south of the maintenance facility. Other birds of interest were two Red-breasted Nuthatches, apparently they have been common this year, and a Creeper. The total list was 40 species.

### **3 March**

This morning was quite warm, a bit hazy and very breezy so little could be seen on the Sound. Amongst the 41 species were 20 Brant, seven Green-winged Teal, two Cedar Waxwings and four Robins. The Green-winged Teal were more than a week earlier than my previous earliest record. I didn't find any Woodcock and there was nothing else worthy of note.

### **14 March**

This morning was raw and overcast with a bit of an easterly breeze but still the nicest day since my last visit. I arrived during low tide and the distant rocks in the Sound were exposed with five Cormorants upon them. I've always assumed that these distant cormorants on the Sound during winter were Greats rather than Double-crested which have yet to arrive. In addition, there was an Osprey standing on the nesting platform, my earliest arrival date for the species: two fine drake Shovelers in the Mill Pond; at least 50 Cowbirds in a mixed flock of themselves, Starlings and Red-winged Blackbirds; and nice counts of Horned Grebes (60, still in winter plumage) and Killdeer (55). The total species count was 43 and I again failed to examine the eastern half of the park which is presently off limits to cars. Noticed three seals on a single distant tidally exposed rock to the east

## **15 March**

When I awoke this morning and fetched the newspaper from the driveway, the sky was clear without a trace of wind. The surface of the pond was utterly smooth. When I arrived at the Mill Beach, however, there were major gusts of wind out of the west and northwest and the Sound was far too turbulent to pick out swimming birds. I realized that this was not to be the ideal outing I had originally anticipated and decided that I would examine the eastern rather than the western half of the park. That part of the park has been closed to automobiles so far this year and is quite undisturbed. It has received little attention from the park personnel during the past year because of financial cutbacks so it is quite overgrown. However, I was pleasantly surprised that many of the trails I had hacked out last year and the year before had been maintained and walking was feasible although very tiring for me in my present state of "spinal stenosis". Amongst the day's new birds, two, a Fox Sparrow and two Carolina Wrens, were at Grove Point, the third, a Savannah Sparrow, was in the overgrown meadow adjacent to the airplane flying field. The day's tally was only 37 because I omitted the western section of the park which always has most of the land birds.

## **20 March**

Since my last visit there has been off and on northerly wind with snow and intermittent thawing. This morning there was just a slight southwest breeze, a few clouds and quite good visibility so I decided to examine the Sound from the Pavilion Point. I also stopped at the Mill Beach and Grove Point but did virtually no walking because of the snow. I was out for only an hour and recorded 34 species. I found 12 Red-throated Loons, a new species for the year but was disappointed in my fruitless search for Gannet, Red-necked Grebe and other possible uncommon birds on or over the Sound.

## **24 March**

After several days of strong northerly winds and bitter cold, the winds shifted to southwest and the temperature became about normal. I spent two and one-half hours examining the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park and found 44 species amongst which four were new. They were: a single Great Egret; a single Bonaparte's Gull; three Rock Doves; and a Flicker. Although the species count was respectable, I did not have the feeling that many birds were about.

## **8 April**

Since my last visit, the weather has been more or less consistently cold and rainy with northerly winds. This morning seemed a bit better although it was still quite cool with a

fairly strong westnorthwesterly wind. I covered the Mill Beach, Grove Point, the western half of the park and the area around the flying field. Tobey's era of unfriendliness to wild life and birders has been extended to the state patrol. I was approached separately by two officers at the Mill Pond overlook. The first asked me what I was doing, seemed quite interested, and was much impressed with the two male Shovelers that I showed him in the telescope. He explained that because the bridge crossed over the railway at that point, the patrolmen had been advised that it was a special potential target site for terrorists. He was pleasant and allowed me to stay. The second gave no explanations, did not care what I was doing and told me he would give me a ticket unless I left immediately.

The two male Shovelers were by far the most interesting find amongst the 41 species that I managed to record in two and one-half rather painful slow hours of sticking to easily walked areas. There were four species new for the year: a Sharp-shinned Hawk; three Greater Yellowlegs; a Snipe; and a Phoebe. I am now walking so slowly that if I had eyes in the back of my head, I might almost be walking backward. Numerous factors seem to have in common the effect of diminishing my pleasure in this long cherished part of my life.

### **19 April**

The last two days have been characterized by gradual warming and a southerly flow and this trend is expected to culminate in temperatures in the eighties this afternoon. However, this morning started with dense fog which had finally dissipated by the time I completed my walk of two and one-half hours. There were a lot of birds. Most entertaining was a pair of Great-horned Owls being harassed by crows in a bare tree outside of the usual central grove. One of the owls was a young bird of the year. Altogether, I found 11 new birds for the year. The other 10 excluding the owl were: one Double-crested Cormorant; a Great Blue Heron; four Snowy Egrets; one Marsh Wren; four Ruby-Crowned Kinglets; a Hermit Thrush; an unexpected Purple Finch which I heard calling and singing; three Towhees; a Swamp Sparrow; and a Chipping Sparrow.

Some of the white flowered trees are already in bloom.

### **20 April**

This morning was warm and pleasant, even with a modest northerly breeze. I still managed to record 47 species including six new ones: an adult Little Blue Heron; a group of seven Turkey Vultures; a Virginia Rail in the east marsh; a Kingfisher; a Barn Swallow; and a Pine Warbler that exhibited an atypical three or four-syllable series of melodic chips instead of a long one-syllable series.

## 22 April

This morning was warm, foggy and with just a trace of a southeasterly breeze. I enjoyed one of the pleasantest birding days I can remember for this date. I recorded 58 species in the three hours that I examined the Mill Beach, Grove Point, the airfield area and the western half of the park. As has become standard, I omitted the eastern half of the park. Seven species were new for the year: five Turkeys, a cock and three hens in the east parking lot and a cock in the West Woods, all exceedingly tame; a Willet; a House Wren; two Gnatcatchers; two Thrashers; a Black-and-White Warbler; and six Palm Warblers.

There were memorable tableaux. The cock Turkey in the West Woods was calmly feeding amongst leaf litter ten feet below a branch on which was perched a magnificent immature Red-tailed Hawk whose presence seemed to the Turkey of no significance. What a picture it made!

A magnificent adult Great-horned Owl glided silently over me and settled in a tall White Pine separating the central meadows from the central coniferous grove. The bird had not been provoked by Crows and kept a careful eye on me from its relatively open perch. I don't doubt that the young bird of the season that I saw the other day was somewhere in the near vicinity. A. J. told me recently that he had seen a pair of adults on and off throughout the past few months and suspected that they were breeding in the park. The fuzzy gray young that I recorded with an adult would seem to confirm this as the bird seemed too young to fly much of a distance and did not fly while I was observing it.

Today's Pine Warbler was the same individual that I saw my last visit as indicated by its highly atypical segmented song.

I don't believe I've ever seen this many Palm Warblers (six) during spring in the park, although much higher numbers are not unusual in the fall.

## 23 April

A weather front brought rain last night and northeasterly winds this morning with overcast skies. Despite the lack of promising conditions, there were still plenty of birds around. I recorded 54 species in three hours during which I omitted the eastern section of the park. Four species were new for the year: a pair of Lesser Scaup on the Mill Pond; a Catbird at Grove Point; a Wood Thrush heard in the northern section of the park; and a Blue-headed Vireo at Grove Point. I caught a glimpse of a Great-horned Owl as it glided over the evergreen grove into one of the very tall conifers. Two Willets were present this morning and two Gnatcatchers enlivened the walk.

## **24 April**

Another front passed through last night with heavy rain followed by wind from the westnorthwest and a clear, pleasant morning. I found 50 species in two and one-half hours, including three, a Kestrel, two Rough-winged Swallows and a White-eyed Vireo, that were new for the year. There were fewer birds around than had been the case for the past two visits.

## **29 April**

The past several days have been unfavorable with northerly winds and considerable rain. The wind shifted to the south last night and this morning seemed perfect save for the fact that the southerly breeze was quite strong. I expected a lot and I was disappointed despite a respectable species total of 62 in the three hours I was out. There were not a great many birds around and there were only three new ones: a Tree Swallow; two Yellow Warblers; and two Yellow-rumped Warblers.

## **30 April**

Conditions this morning were even better than yesterday because the southwest breeze was only a gentle one. Once more, I expected a good flight and the total of 64 species in three hours was impressive. When I consider that nowadays, due to restrictive conditions imposed by Tobey and the state police I don't stop at the overlook and don't examine the northern section of the park around the stone barn, and due to fatigue usually don't go further east than the flying field, I suspect that I might have recorded as many as 75 species had I followed the itinerary that I regularly used in the past.

A raft of 350 Brant was the most impressive spectacle of the day but I did find eight new birds for the year: a first year Snow Goose on the central oval; a Glossy Ibis there as well; 15 Least Sandpipers in the east marsh north of the flying field; a Warbling Vireo at Grove Point; two each of Northern and Orchard Oriole, one at Grove Point, the other in the park; an Ovenbird; and a Yellowthroat.

## **1 May**

Today is supposed to be the last of the current warm, southerly flow period with a cold front expected tonight. There was just a trace of a southeasterly breeze and the skies were overcast. Although these conditions seemed relatively favorable, there were many fewer birds than the past two days and amongst the mere 54 species that I recorded, just one, an Oystercatcher flying over the Sound, was new for the year. A disappointing start to the month of May!

## 2 May

This morning was foggy, drizzling and with a humidity of 100%. I can't imagine what impelled me to go out. I suppose I hoped for some secretive birds to be out in the conditions of poor visibility. In the event, there were as few birds as one could imagine for a May second. I found 51 species, none new for the year. A good look at a pair of Turkeys, a cock and a hen, was the only rewarding moment.

## 5 May

The past two days were unfavorable, cool with northerly winds and intermittent rain. The wind shifted to southwesterly this morning but another front was approaching with clouds. Rain is expected this evening with clearing overnight.

There weren't many birds around today although it was better than the first or second of May. I found 59 species including four that were new for the year: a Black-crowned Night Heron (they have been inexplicably absent until now); four Black-bellied Plovers; a Veery; and a Redstart. The pair of Lesser Scaup is still on the Mill Pond and I had wonderful looks at a pair of Turkeys, a tom and a hen.

The Mill Pond was almost completely drained when I arrived this morning exposing almost its entire surface as mud.

## 6 May

Last night there was another front with rain that was followed this morning by a clear sky and a moderate west wind. When I began, the wind had a northerly element but it seemed to switch to a southerly touch during my outing. In the event, the birds were quite similar to yesterday, rather sparse but with a few new arrivals. Amongst the 58 species, the four new ones were: a Red-eyed Vireo singing constantly from a leafy tree in which I couldn't see it in the center of the park; a Blackpoll Warbler heard but not seen in a nearby, equally leafy tree; a Field Sparrow seen at the base (southern extremity) of the West Woods; and a White-crowned Sparrow seen at Grove Point. Usually, the presence of a White-crowned Sparrow signifies a significant flight but that was not the case this morning.

First goslings of the year.

Another front with rain is predicted tonight and tomorrow morning.

## 7 May

Another front with rain did indeed pass through last night and very early this morning. However, by the time I started my walk at 8:15, the skies had partially cleared and there was a warm breeze from the south west. Conditions seemed perfect for a significant flight. There were more birds around than my two previous visits as I managed to log in 65 species amongst which two, a male and female Harrier and a singing Parula Warbler were new for the year. I had six species of warblers comprising 11 individuals: Black-and-White, 1; Yellow, 3; Parula, 1; Ovenbird, 1; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 3. Also two Blue-headed Vireos. Overall, the morning was disappointing but I hope might represent the front end of a wave which could be in full swing tomorrow.

First young Killdeer of the year.

## 8 May

Hopes for a wave day evaporated when I awoke to find that the wind had shifted to the northeast and the temperature had fallen more than 12 degrees since yesterday. It was windy, cold, and almost wintery. The total list was 56 species, none new. There were a total of seven warbler individuals comprising one Black-and-White, four Yellows, and two Yellowthroats. It was about as bad as 8 May could be and so far, the entire month has been a big disappointment. The one redeeming thought is that it simply has to get better.

## 9 May

The winds shifted from northeast to southwest last night and when I awoke and opened the door this morning it was still drizzling but there were warblers singing. Progressive warming with southerly winds was predicted and I imagined that this morning would bring the initial phase of a major wave. Alas, Sherwood Island can be such a humbling place. Today's total of warblers: six individuals comprising four Yellows and two Yellowthroats. Unbelievable! I did manage to squeeze out 62 species of which four Common Terns and a Bobolink were new. I can't remember ever having had to wait this far into May for anything resembling a significant flight. And I'm still waiting!!

## 10 May

The lack of land birds continues despite perfect weather, warm and with a southerly flow which is predicted to remain for several days. The species total of 58 was unbelievable for such superb conditions on 10 May. The warbler totals were four species and 13 individuals: Yellow, 7; Yellowthroat, 2; Parula, 3; Blackpoll, 1. There were two birds new for the year. A Kingbird that I heard over the east marsh and a Lincoln's Sparrow near the managers residence. Ordinarily, the presence of Lincoln's Sparrow indicates a

flight day. I am beginning to wonder whether the population of wood warblers may be decreasing severely. The most noteworthy event: I failed to find a Ring-billed Gull (I didn't try very hard!).

Last year, I had 151 species through 10 May, this year 121. Last year, I had 175 after the spring migration.

### 11 May

At last!! **The first major flight day of May.** Last night there was a huge thunderstorm blown out this morning by a breeze from the southwest. The birds were on the move. Here are some criteria for the wave: **13 warbler species** comprising 61 individuals; 56/28 as the ratio of Passerines to non-passerines amongst the **total of 84 species**.. There were 13 new species for the year: an immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron at Grove Point; two Spotted Sandpipers in the East Marsh; single examples, of Willow Flycatcher (heard), Least Flycatcher (seen and heard); Wood Pewee (heard); three Magnolia Warblers; a Chestnut-sided Warbler; three Black-throated Green Warblers; two Black-throated Blue Warblers; a Wilson's Warbler (heard); one Canada Warbler; two Rose-breasted Grosbeaks (heard); and a Scarlet Tanager (heard).

Nothing unusual but a fine wave of much awaited arrivals. As is often the case for high-species days, some very common ones including Common Tern and Fish Crow were missed. I spent 20 minutes trying unsuccessfully to locate a singing Scarlet Tanager in a very leafy tree. I had never realized what a ventriloquist this bird is. Unfortunately, most of the foliage has developed and seeing birds in the trees is much more difficult than it was just a few days ago. The current southerly heat spell is expected to continue for several days and I'm hopeful that the birds will continue to stream through during the entire period.

I continue to see a pair of Turkeys, a hen and a magnificent cock who seems to be in a constant state of display (bird priapism?) with his immense tail impressively fanned and his bare skin about the head and neck brilliantly colored red and blue.

### 12 May

Despite persistence of perfect weather, warm with a gentle southerly flow, yesterday's flight had largely subsided by today. Here are the facts: 68 species with a 40/28 passerine to non-passerine ratio; eight species of warblers comprising 32 individuals. I had one new bird for the year, a Nashville Warbler that I heard but failed to locate.

I did have one unusual experience. I heard a bird vocalization which I had definitely never heard before. The bird was in the area of picnic tables and exotic trees north of the west beach, a habitat where I have never recorded any land birds of interest. The bird moved from tree to tree quickly and was gone or stopped vocalizing after just two or



three minutes. I use the word "vocalization" because neither call nor song seems appropriate. The vocalization consisted of four explosive notes, each of a different pitch. The first syllable was long and reminded me somewhat of the whipping call sometimes emitted by a Wood Thrush. The remaining syllables were much shorter but also explosive. This explosive bursting quality of the vocalization reminded me of White-eyed Vireo or Empidonax flycatchers but there was none of the buzzy or burry quality associated with those. The thought that this bird might be an exotic came to me quickly. Needless to say, I tried hard to find it but without success.

A single, very agitated Crow led me to a rather good look at an adult Great-horned Owl very high up in a tall white pine.

### **13 May**

After powerful thunderstorms last night, the morning again seemed very favorable although the beach was too foggy to see over the sound. Here are the totals: 70 species with a 46/24 ratio of passerine to non-passerine birds; 11 warbler species comprising 43 individuals. Three species were new for the year: a Green Heron at Grove Point; a Swainson's Thrush in the West Woods; and a Northern Waterthrush at Grove Point.

I watched a male Bobolink singing from a distance of about 30 feet and recognized anew what a stunning bird it is! The same could be said for the handsome adult Green Heron that I observed perched atop a bare tree.

### **14 May**

The weather seems extraordinarily labile and unpredictable this May. This morning was raw and foggy with a substantial northeasterly flow and it was probably foolish to go out. However, I hoped that I might see some marsh birds which have thus far (Clapper Rail, Sharp-tailed Sparrow most conspicuously) been inexplicably absent. No luck and no newly arrived species amongst the day's total of 63. Included were 8 species of warblers comprising 31 individuals. Most of these were concentrated in Woodcock Woods, not usually a good spot for warblers, and they were rather low and, for once, easily seen and studied.

The immature Yellow-crowned Night Heron was again at Grove Point. No field guide emphasizes the black primaries as an excellent field mark in flight to distinguish it from Black-crowned Night. It really looks quite different with its thick black bill and long neck and legs.

## 15 May

Despite another marked change in the weather, the birds this morning were almost the same as those recorded yesterday. A warm and humid southwesterly flow drove out yesterday's northeast element and a dense very early fog quickly dissipated this morning. I have had very good days under these conditions but not today. The 67 species included nine of warblers comprising 36 individuals. There were two new birds for the year, single examples of Semipalmated Plover and Least Tern, both heard flying over the Mill Pond but neither seen. Least Terns have been remarkable for their absence so far this May. This may be part of a general decline of the species about which I keep reading. The most interesting bird of the day was a late female Long-tailed duck off the west beach. This is not the first late record I've had. I once saw a group of six in June.

## 16 May

Yet another dramatic weather change. Tremendous overnight thunderstorms dissipated early this morning, washed away with a moderate westnorthwesterly breeze. The day was unusual. I found single examples of White-crowned and Lincoln's Sparrows, each of which is usually a good criterion for a flight day. Yet there were only six species of warblers comprising 27 individuals. Amongst the 75 species, the ratio of Passerines to non-passerines was 45/30. Three species were new for the year, all found in the east marsh: a Lesser Yellowlegs; a Bank Swallow; and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

An adult Yellow-crowned Night Heron flew over Grove Point.

I saw three Least Terns over the Mill Pond and I counted 21 Glossy Ibises on the airplane field.

## 17 May

Yet another abrupt shift in weather! After clear skies and a southwesterly flow yesterday afternoon and night, the wind shifted to the northeast and brought in fog, overcast skies, and cool temperatures. One might think that migrants would be grounded under these circumstances but there were virtually no migrants today. The grim totals were: 58 species; four species of warblers comprising 16 individuals; no new birds for the year.

An Oystercatcher foraging on the flats off the Mill Beach was the highlight of the day. I also saw four Killdeer of the year which are already quite advanced.

## 18 May

This morning, a dense fog blanketed the southeastern part of Connecticut and I went out a bit later than usual having heard on the weather report that the fog might dissipate. It

began to do so toward the end of my outing. There were very few land birds but there were some shore birds and, amongst the day's 61 species were three that were new for the year: a Clapper Rail heard in the west marsh; 6 Turnstones at the Mill Beach; 11 Dowitchers in the east marsh. There were only three species of warblers including: Yellow, 6; Redstart, 5; and Yellowthroat, 2.

### **19 May**

This morning was virtually a carbon copy of yesterday, warm with fog, overcast, a slight northeasterly breeze and even some rain. I started out later than usual hoping the bad weather would dissipate, but it didn't. The day's totals were: 64 species including five warblers comprising 21 individuals. There was one bird new for the year, a Yellow-throated Vireo that I heard near Woodcock Woods. I thought I might have heard a Gnatcatcher in the West Woods which would have suggested the possibility of breeding but I failed to find it and was not really certain as to the identity of the caller. Some years ago, I recall seeing a late Gnatcatcher in the West Woods but in that case, while it did linger a day or two, it did not seem to be a breeding individual.

### **20 May**

Today I made my visit during the afternoon. Skies were clear with a northeasterly breeze. This was the 16<sup>th</sup> consecutive day that I had visited the park. Only one of those days, 11 May, supported a major migratory movement. Other days have ranged from poor to terrible with this afternoon registering about as bad as possible. Amongst the 54 species were three warbler species, Yellow, Yellowthroat and Redstart, comprising 18 individuals. There were no species that were new for the year. The immature Snow Goose was present which might seem surprising save that one spent the entire summer two years ago.

### **21 May**

Today, I went back to the early morning modus operandi. There were severe thunderstorms last night as the wind shifted to the southwest and the skies were still overcast early during my outing although they gradually cleared. The poor spring continued with 58 species only, including five warblers: Yellow (5); Yellowthroat (6); Redstart (3); Magnolia (3); and Canada (1). I did manage to record one new species for the year, a Crested Flycatcher that I heard not far from the stone barn (which is now "off limits")

## 22 May

The coast was cloaked in dense fog again this morning and it occurred to me that perhaps the reason I have found so few birds in the park this month is because of the frequency of fog which may cause the migrants to proceed a few miles inland. In the event, it was warm, humid and foggy with almost no wind, the small occasional breeze from the southeast. I found 56 species including five warblers: Yellow, 4; Wilson's 1; Yellowthroat, 4; Northern Waterthrush, 1; Redstart, 1. There were no species that were new for the year and nothing remarkable save the general overall paucity of migrating land birds.

## 23 May

This morning was yet another humid, warm and foggy one with virtually no breeze. The fog began to dissipate just as I was finishing. The list was marginally better than it had been for the previous several days. The 66 species included seven warblers: Yellow, 5; Yellowthroat, 5; Redstart, 3; Northern Waterthrush, 2; Magnolia, 3; Canada, 2; Pine, 1. I added one new bird for the year, a Dunlin on the flats off the Mill Beach.

The highlight, if one could dignify it with such a term, was a good view of a Clapper Rail, only the first I've seen and second I've recorded this spring. The bird was walking ahead of me in the main drainage ditch east of the flying field and I managed not to frighten it and was permitted a fine study.

## 24 May

I'll be away for the next 15 days so today was probably my last visit to the park this spring. It was cool, damp and overcast with an unpleasant breeze from the north east. I limited my itinerary to the Mill Beach, the area including salt marsh around the airplane field, and the West Woods and I timed my walk for low tide and hoping for a few shorebirds. For the first time this spring, I wasn't disappointed. The reason was that I found a male **Wilson's Phalarope** spinning around the tidally exposed mud flats in the salt marsh just north of the playing field. The male is quite a dull bird but unmistakable and immediately conspicuous because of its remarkable feeding habits and its needle-like bill. This is my third record for the park, the other two having females, also seen in May. I also added Semipalmated Sandpiper to the list of birds for the year. Although I was only out for an hour and one-half, I still managed to record 54 species and finally got a good look at a male Scarlet Tanager after having been unable to find singing male birds on several earlier visits.

## **21 June**

Since my last visit, I've been to my 50<sup>th</sup> college reunion weekend and on a bird-watching trip to Bulgaria. The Bulgarian trip had too much vehicle time and too little birding time with most of it done just outside the vehicle. So it was rather pleasant to do some real field birding again. I took the same itinerary that I've taken most of this year: Mill Beach, Grove Point, the area around the model airplane field including the salt marsh and most of the western half of the park. I will refer to this itinerary, which omits much of the eastern section of the park as the "standard truncated itinerary".

I recorded 51 species of which only one, a Greater Yellowlegs, was definitely not a local breeder. I was surprised to find a dark female pheasant foraging along the side of the entry oval. It was the first pheasant of the year and they have become increasingly scarce in the park during the past few years despite the fact that some were introduced including a Japanese Pheasant in the late fall of 2002. A singing Pine Warbler, which I failed to locate despite some effort was also something of a surprise although I have suspected them of nesting on occasion in the past. I think today's counts were a good reflection of the local breeding birds.

## **7 July**

This morning was delightful with the park seeming especially beautiful, much of it pristine because of the lack of funds for landscaping work. I carried out the "standard truncated itinerary" and recorded 56 species, highly respectable when one considers that no migrants were noted and the date is about as unfavorable as possible during the warmer part of the year. There were no surprises although a single Laughing Gull was my first for the year. I noted three adult Little Blue Herons, a nice count and, again saw the rather dark female pheasant and heard a Pine Warbler.

## **13 July**

This morning was the continuation of a northeasterly storm that started yesterday evening and dumped around two inches of rain. It was still raining heavily when I got to the park wondering whether it was too early to see any shore birds. I did find 30 Dowitchers as well as both Yellowlegs and Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers which is pretty good for Sherwood Island in early July. Had this storm come a month or six weeks later, it would probably have been associated with a major shorebird influx. There was some migration of Barn, Bank and Rough-winged Swallows.

## **14 July**

I was curious as to whether any of the birds stayed from yesterday so I spent an hour and fifteen minutes this afternoon restricting my itinerary, because of uncomfortably high

humidity, to the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the area around the model airplane field. The shore birds had all disappeared and there were fewer swallows. Two Cedar Waxwings represented an unusual summer bird.

### **21 July**

This morning was quite hot and very humid so I limited myself to one and one-half hours and covered only the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the area around the model airplane flying field. I recorded 43 species including four vociferous Marsh Wrens indicating successful breeding in the salt marsh north of the airplane field where I think I also caught a glimpse of a Sharp-tailed Sparrow, suggesting that it, too, may have summered and bred here. An adult Little Blue Heron was foraging together with an immature, the first of the latter that I've noticed. The decurved bill seems an easier field mark than the leg color.

### **29 July**

Heavy rain fell during the last two days but there was little standing water in the park this morning. I spent almost three hours and logged a respectable 50 species. The tide was high and a good number of shorebirds were concentrated on the island just north of the Mill Bridge. They included 15 Lesser Yellowlegs, 15 Dowitchers and 50 Semipalmated Sandpipers. I had rewarding reasonably good looks at Clapper Rail and Sharp-tailed Sparrow in the marsh just north of the airplane flying field.

### **5 August**

Weather-wise this morning could have been early October, cool with a brisk northwest wind. However, the 44 species that I recorded were not unexpected for the first week in August. By far the most interesting observation was that of an adult Clapper Rail with five downy young in the east marsh just behind the airplane field. I watched the young birds foraging in a drainage ditch for some minutes before the adult appeared. This seems rather late for such young birds. I've see downy young there once before on July 21, 1998.

The park is very overgrown now and I almost stepped on a skunk that was obscured by shrubbery on the trail from the viewing platform to the maintenance area. I was fortunate not to be sprayed, probably because the skunk was as surprised as I was.

### **10 August**

This morning was warm, windless, muggy and enervating and I tired after only a little more than two hours. None of the 45 species that I logged was particularly noteworthy.

The tide was high and common shorebirds, mainly Semipalmated Plovers and Greater Yellowlegs, were concentrated on the island near the bridge at the southern end of the Mill Pond. This seems to be a good spot at high tide.

### **12 August**

There were severe thunderstorms during the late afternoon and evening yesterday and more of the same is forecast for the next several days. There will be a significant rain component from two hurricanes that struck Florida from both west and east this morning. The peculiar weather pattern suggests to me that there may be some interesting shorebirds to be seen in the next few days and I have devised a "shorebird route" for exploring this possibility. The route consists of the Mill Beach and the Mill Pond behind it and the grassy parts of the park including the airplane field and central oval. I covered this route today.

I've recently realized that the little island in the Mill Pond just north of the Mill Bridge is an excellent spot for concentrating shorebirds at high tide. This morning I found 10 species of shorebirds on it comprising about 350 individuals as follows: Black-bellied Plover, 5; Semipalmated Plover, 40; Turnstone, 2; Greater Yellowlegs, 5; Lesser Yellowlegs, 15; Dowitcher, 30; Knot, 1; Pectoral Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 5; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 250. I found an additional 15 Black-bellied Plover, four Killdeer and one Spotted Sandpiper on or near the central oval and airplane field. Knot, which is quite rare in the park, and Pectoral Sandpiper were new for the year.

I also had a Kingfisher, only my second or third of the year.

### **13 August**

The expected torrential rain has yet to appear but is expected late today. This morning I followed the "shorebird route" at high tide and again found the island just north of the Mill Bridge filled with birds today comprising: Black-bellied Plover, 8; Semipalmated Plover, 20; Greater Yellowlegs, 5; Lesser Yellowlegs, 30; Dowitcher, 35; Stilt Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 5; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 300. I also found five Killdeer and an additional 20 Semipalmated Plover on the park fields.

Stilt Sandpiper is a very uncommon bird at Sherwood Island. This individual was in basic plumage and foraging with two Dowitchers. I believe that the total count of 429 shorebirds that I recorded today may be the most I have ever logged at Sherwood Island although the day did not compare with 8/22/94 when I had fewer individuals but 16 species including Hudsonian Godwits and Golden Plover. That day was characterized by heavy rains and easterly winds.

Also of interest were a Kingfisher and two Bobolinks.

## 14 August

Hurricane "Charley" slammed into the west coast of Florida yesterday and its remnants are expected here this evening and tomorrow. This morning was humid, windless and partly overcast and there were fewer shorebirds (eight species, 232 individuals) on the Mill Pond island this morning including: Black-bellied Plover, 6; Semipalmated Plover, 30; Greater Yellowlegs, 12; Lesser Yellowlegs, 12; Dowitcher, 20; Stilt Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 150. This was a Saturday and the park was quite crowded so I was not surprised that I failed to see any shorebirds on the various fields. If the storm behaves as anticipated tomorrow could be quite interesting.

## 15 August

The rain finally came last night but it was not particularly heavy and the winds were light. The morning was overcast and with just a trace of a northerly wind. I decided to do some walking in the park since I suspected there might be a shorebird of special interest, perhaps in an unusual place such as the eastern end of the park. I logged 10 species of shorebirds comprising 339 individuals as follows: Black-bellied Plover, 12; Semipalmated Plover, 60; Killdeer, 25; Greater Yellowlegs, 2; Lesser Yellowlegs, 30; Spotted Sandpiper, 1; Dowitcher, 25; Least Sandpiper, 5; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 175; Western Sandpiper, 4. Of these birds, 9 Black-bellied Plover, 40 Semipalmated Plover, 25 Killdeer, the Spotted Sandpiper, one Dowitcher, one Least Sandpiper, 10 Semipalmated Sandpipers and two Western Sandpipers were in the park, the remainder on the island off the Mill Bridge.

I observed two of the birds I called Western Sandpipers at very close range both standing and flying near the airplane field. These birds had very rusty scapulars but otherwise appeared identical to nearby Semipalmated Sandpipers. The two Western Sandpipers that I saw on the island, in addition to rusty scapulars, were slightly larger than adjacent Semipalmated Sandpipers with noticeably longer bills. Unfortunately, I did not see these birds in flight and they might have been White-rumped although I didn't feel that they possessed particularly long wings.

Other birds of interest were five Chimney Swifts, new for the year in the park, and a Clapper Rail foraging near the shorebirds on the island.

## 16 August

Very heavy rain began last night and continued throughout much of today. It was not accompanied by much wind but there was occasional lightning and thunder which made it impossible for me to get to the Mill Bridge at high tide, 12:06. Instead, I got there at 3:00 when the skies were just beginning to clear. There were 16 Yellowlegs of both species and one Black-bellied Plover on the little island with none of the Semipalmated



Sandpipers, Semipalmated Plovers and Dowitchers which had been present in large numbers at high tide the previous three days. Presumably, their absence was due to my arrival three hours after high tide. I should be able to verify this tomorrow when high tide is at 1:00 and clear weather is anticipated.

Also on the Mill Beach island were two foraging Clapper Rails and a fine adult Forster's Tern in basic plumage. This attractive bird spent its time preening itself and had striking isolated black eye-ear patches, a black bill with just the final half millimeter horn-colored, a pearly gray back, and white primaries with pearly gray spots.

There was much standing water in the park but surprisingly few shorebirds there as well. I ended the day with seven species of shorebirds comprising 47 individuals: Black-bellied Plover, 2; Semipalmated Plover, 2; Killdeer, 5; Greater Yellowlegs, 8; Lesser Yellowlegs, 8; Least Sandpiper, 20; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 2.

### 17 August

Today was clear, windless and humid. I began at the Mill Beach Bridge at 12:30, dead high tide. There were plenty of peep which I studied at my leisure using my telescope at about 40x. The birds were preening and running rapidly. It was difficult to view them during the rare times that they flew while using the telescope. I concluded that there were at least five White-rumped and possibly considerably more. At least one of these had the rusty marginal scalloping on the scapulars and to some extent on the primaries that I noticed the other day. This bird was preening extensively and exposed a great deal of white on its rump during this procedure as did several other individuals without the rusty scalloping. The little island is about 100 yards from the bridge and it is quite impossible for me to be certain of the various peep species. There were also eight Blackbellied Plovers, 25 Semipalmated Plovers, 10 Lesser and two Greater Yellowlegs, 12 Dowitchers, 100 Semipalmated Sandpipers and two Least Sandpipers on the little island.

I proceeded from the Mill Bridge to the airplane field where a plane was being flown. I examined the field to the west of the airplane field and the salt marsh north of it. I flushed a Clapper Rail twice from the marsh (the same bird) and also put up a medium-sized rail that I took to be a Sora. It may be that high tide is a favorable time for flushing rails in the marsh as they have been forced to the margins. I also found a Green Heron, eight Least Sandpipers, two Marsh Wrens and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow in the marsh behind the airfield.

I finally explored the West Woods, the overgrown field between the west marsh and the west beach, and the marsh west of the West Woods. The overgrown field with the two ponds looks great as a habitat but I didn't find anything of particular interest.

## **18August**

The weather was warm, humid and overcast with just a trace of a northeast wind when I went out at high tide today. The island off the Mill Bridge contained nearly 300 shorebirds including: Black-bellied Plover, 10; Semipalmated Plover, 35; Lesser Yellowlegs, 12; Greater Yellowlegs, 2; Dowitcher, 20; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 175; Western Sandpiper, 1; White-rumped Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 3. I also found two Killdeer, five Semipalmated Plovers, 12 Least Sandpipers and a Spotted Sandpiper near or on the airplane field.

The identification of White-rumped and Western is proving a big problem and so far I have not been absolutely certain of either although I think that the rusty-backed birds that seem bigger than Semipalmated Sandpipers are White-rumped and those that appear about the same size as the Semipalmated Sandpipers are Westerns. Today, although I'm quite certain I saw at least one White-rump preening and showing its white rump, I did not see any white-rumped birds in the glimpse I had when the entire flock was put into flight by a canoe whose passengers disembarked on the island.

I stomped the marshes behind the field and flushed about six Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows, probably young of the year, which yielded good looks and showed heavy streaking at the sides of the breast which displayed, no ochre and a relatively pale ochre face pattern. I was struck by how large the eyes of this species appear.

## **19 August**

I did the same shorebird east marsh stomp that I did yesterday, precisely at high tide. I found 10 species of shorebirds comprising 188 individuals with only one Dowitcher and the Semipalmated Sandpiper concentration down to about 100 birds. I found two Marsh Wrens and two Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows and a Green Heron in the marsh. A weather event is needed to change the bird mixture.

## **20 August**

Very humid, stagnant conditions continued today. I did the shorebird-east marsh stomp routine and found eight species of shorebirds comprising 228 individuals and lacking Dowitcher for the first time. I continue to find at least one bird that seems to be a Western Sandpiper. The marsh yielded two Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows. Thunderstorms and a cold front are predicted beginning tomorrow so perhaps the mixture of birds will change.

## **22 August**

The stagnant weather pattern broke yesterday with massive thunderstorms followed by clearing this morning with a slight northwest breeze and much diminished humidity. The shorebird pattern remained pretty much the same with 10 species totaling 219 individuals. There was a very noisy Willet. They seem to disappear after breeding and this is the first I've recorded since July. There were at least three Western Sandpipers. David Donsker told me that they have been especially common on the New Hampshire and Massachusetts coasts this fall.

The marsh walk was again disappointing. It seems that stomping around at high tide is not particularly advantageous since I know that at least Clapper Rails are around and yet I have not seen them on most of the stomps. It's tiresome wading around in water that is almost knee high and I will not make such a point about doing this at high tide although as long as I continue to get to the Mill Bridge then, which is really critical, I'll be more or less obliged to do the marsh when the water is high. I am keen to monitor the rail migration which should be starting now.

## **23 August**

High tide was at 5:45 this clear afternoon. I stomped the marsh at 4:00 and examined the island from the Mill Bridge from 4:40 to 5:30. The total for shorebirds was nine species comprising 178 individuals. I recorded at least five Western Sandpipers and perhaps considerably more. Although I did not enter it on the day's list, I think I also saw one White-rumped. The marsh was again unrewarding.

## **August 25**

This morning, a very beautiful one with gently southeasterly winds, I executed the "Standard Truncated Itinerary which is to say I started at the Mill Beach, thence to Grove Point, to the area around the model airplane field including the marsh stomp behind it, and finally covering most of the western section of the park. The day was not without interest. I flushed a Virginia Rail which actually landed in an area I could see so I was able to examine the bird well. It was a rather dull individual and I couldn't help wondering whether there is not a stage in the maturation of Clapper and King Rails when they look identical to the adult but are only half its size. Such birds, if they existed, could certainly be mistaken for Virginia Rails.

I also added three birds to the list for the year: an adult Broad-winged Hawk; an immature Red-shouldered Hawk; and a female or young Ruby-throated Hummingbird. My total list was 52 species. I arrived at the Mill Beach bridge at 8:30 AM, one hour after dead high tide. The tide was still high and most of the usual birds were still on the island but they were departing in small groups.

## **26 August**

This morning I examined only the Mill Beach and bridge, Grove Point which was full of noisy trucks, and the western section of the park. I didn't do my usual marsh stomping around the airplane field. The weather was nice but there wasn't anything new among the 46 species that I tallied.

## **30 August**

Since my last visit, there has been a stationary, southerly warm and humid weather condition of which today may be the last since thunderstorms and a front are predicted to arrive tonight. This morning, I executed the standard truncated itinerary save that I did it in reverse order, beginning with the marsh around the airfield and ending, one hour before high tide, at the Mill Bridge. There were few birds around although one of the 47 species, an adult female Cooper's Hawk, was new for the year.

## **1 September**

A cooling front from the northwest broke the stagnant weather pattern last night and, as expected, there were a few migrants to be found this morning among the day's rather meager total of 48 species. They included three Kestrels, six Yellowthroats, a Canada Warbler, a Northern Waterthrush and an Ovenbird.

I have never seen the park so overgrown. Save for its most public areas, which have been maintained, it resembles a generic tropical area of brush and rain forest!

## **2 September**

A gentle northeast breeze seemed a promising omen this morning but turned out to be misleading. I found only 44 species, none particularly noteworthy. The Mill Pond was almost entirely drained and the island off the Mill Pond was bereft of shore birds which presumably were widely spread.

## **3 September**

The weather has become very stationary, partly cloudy and warm with variable winds. This morning was the Friday preceding Labor Day weekend so the park will be very crowded for the next three days. Judging from the paucity of birds this morning, just 43 species among which a flock of 60 Tree Swallows was the only indication of movement, I will not miss much should I stay home during the holiday weekend.

## **7 September**

This was another morning of extraordinary ornithological futility. Not a single raptor! Not a single warbler!! The weather has been in a mild easterly flow for the past few days and the 43 species I recorded today were virtually identical to those I saw last Friday before the Labor Day weekend. There has been another hurricane, "Frances" affecting Florida, but, so far at least, it has not yielded any unexpected birds nor has there been any marked southerly migration.

## **10 September**

Yesterday and the day before were characterized by remnants of hurricane "Frances" which made its presence felt mostly in the Bahamas and Florida. Here, it was manifested by very heavy rain but only a slight southerly breeze. I went to the park briefly yesterday during a period of heavy rainfall, thinking there might be an unusual wader from the south. However, despite a large water accumulation, there was nothing of special ornithological note. This morning, strong westerly winds lowered the humidity and dried much of the ground. I thought there might be something of a flight but I couldn't have been more wrong. I managed a meager list of 40 species in three hours and the park seemed almost birdless.

## **11 September**

A northeasterly flow began last night and continued this morning, ushering in a few migratory birds including a Phoebe, five Yellowthroats, four Redstarts, a Magnolia Warbler, a Chestnut-sided Warbler and a female Rose-breasted Grosbeak. There was also an immature Yellow-crowned Night-Heron near the heron trees on the west side of the Mill Pond. But the most interesting amongst the 47 species was a Barred Owl that I flushed from one of the very large conifers in the central portion of the park where it was being harassed by Crows whose alarm calls resembled those that they give for a Red-tailed Hawk. This is only my second record for the park.

Much of my time this morning was spent with Luke Tiller, a good young birder originally from London who has frequently been mentioned to me by Penny Solum.

## **September 13**

The weather was stationary and there were neither migrants nor interesting birds amongst 41 species this morning. Two years ago on this day I found a Yellow Rail. This day couldn't have been further removed.

## **15 September**

The first thing I saw on entering the park was three Kestrels crossing the central oval. Aside from five Yellowthroats, they were virtually the only migratory birds amongst the meager 41 species I managed to record this morning.

## **17 September**

The weather remains humid with any wind being from the southeast. There has not been anything resembling a fall day with a northwesterly flow. Tonight and tomorrow promise to be very wet with the remnants of the latest hurricane, "Ivan" which struck the Gulf coast yesterday. Bird migration remained virtually negligible on this overcast morning and I only stayed out for a little more than two hours omitting the Mill Beach and covering only the area around the airplane field and the western half of the park. A beautiful adult Snow Goose, comfortable amongst the tame local Canada Geese, and two White-throated Sparrows were as close to noteworthy as I got.

## **19 September**

After heavy rainfall yesterday morning, the atmosphere was dehumidified by a very brisk and chilly northerly wind beginning last night and continuing this morning. This was clearly the first fall-like day of the season and I imagined there would be a massive influx of birds. Well, there were more Robins (40) and Flickers (15) than usual, as well as single examples of Phoebe, Pewee, Parula Warbler and Redstart and there were three Sharp-shinned Hawks. But I only recorded a pathetic 39 species and I was certainly disappointed as one often is on very windy days at Sherwood Island. Never-the-less, this seems the dullest year I can remember and I keep asking myself "where are the birds??" Clear skies with northerly breezes are forecast for the next five days during which there should certainly be something of a flight. I keep hoping for a massive one.

## **20 September**

Another cool morning with unfulfilled hopes and expectations! The chilly north wind was not quite so brisk as yesterday and there were a few cumulous clouds to enhance visibility in the high sky. But again there were very few migrating birds. An Osprey, a Harrier, two Sharp-shinned Hawks, three Kestrels, five Yellowthroats and a Palm Warbler were about the only ones among the 41 species that I found in two hours and 15 minutes. I omitted the Mill Beach and Grove Point, examining only the airplane field area and the western section of the park.

## **21 September**

This morning was warmer than the previous two and the wind was a bit less robust and from the northwest rather than directly from the north. There was a definite, albeit rather small influx of migratory birds. These included: an Osprey; two Sharp-shinned Hawks; three Kestrels; a Swift; two Hummingbirds; three Phoebes; a Pewee; two Tree Swallows; my first Winter Wren of the year (heard); a Gnatcatcher; a Ruby-crowned Kinglet; 10 Catbirds; two Palm Warblers; 10 Yellowthroats; a Redstart; a female Scarlet Tanager; a White-throated Sparrow and a Swamp Sparrow. The list of 55 species, while far from impressive, was none-the-less, considerably better than most days this fall.

Today I omitted the Mill Beach and Grove Point from my itinerary but included not only the airplane field and western section of the park, but also the eastern section. The latter has been partially cleared but sufficient brush was left so that it provides excellent, and now accessible habitat. In fact, the park now provides as much unspoiled habitat as it ever has and appears to be at its most favorable as a birding location. This is largely due to the lack of funds required for the kind of deleterious maintenance which Tobey usually prefers.

## **22 September**

This morning was warm and clear with a gentle westerly flow. I repeated yesterday's itinerary, both section of the park but omitting the Mill Beach and Grove Point. I'm calling this new itinerary the "Full Park Itinerary".

I found 50 species, five fewer than yesterday. The only passerine migrant that I didn't record yesterday was a female Towhee. There were a few raptors. I met a young man, Jamie Good, from Redding who told me that a major Broadwing flight was occurring inland. I saw a group of them at the limit of binocular visibility north (inland). I could only make out about 10 but there were probably many more. Other raptors included two Ospreys, five Redtails, five Sharp-shinned, two Cooper's and 10 Kestrels. I also managed to see a Winter Wren today after hearing one yesterday. It seems to me unlikely that there will be a significant passerine flight before the next weather change so I shall probably skip tomorrow.

## **24 September**

The weather remained warm and stagnant this morning with a barely perceptible easterly flow. I followed my new "Full Park Itinerary", was out for more than three hours, and recorded 56 species. These were pretty much the same birds I saw on my last two visits save for a Merlin, new for the year, that I watched harassing a Crow.

Today I saw four Monarch butterflies. They were formerly abundant but these were the first I have seen this year. I don't recall the peak time of their former abundance and will keep an eye out for them as the autumn progresses.

### **26 September**

This morning started out overcast but soon cleared with a modest westnorthwestly breeze. Although I recorded fewer species (46) on the Full Park Itinerary than my last two visits, there were more migrants including at least 350 Jays that kept flying over in groups of 10-75. Other migrants included a Phoebe, three Ruby-crowned Kinglets and my first Golden-crowned of the entire year, two Swainson's Thrushes, eight Palm Warblers, six Yellowthroats, two Towhees and 15 Savannah Sparrows.

On two occasions I caught glimpses of an owl being harassed into flight by crows that I am reasonably certain was a Barred based on size, slightly larger than the harassing Crows, and lack of ear tufts. Also of some interest was a Clapper Rail flushed from the marsh behind the airplane field.

In the past two days, Tobey's crew has transformed the path from the Maintenance Facility to the observation platform and thence to the drainage ponds into what is now a rather wide dirt road. Apparently, he has more funds at his disposal than I had suspected. It remains to be seen whether this completely unnecessary road will be macadamized.

I saw one Monarch today.

### **27 September**

Another warm morning, this one with the gentlest of southeasterly breezes and rather overcast. I found 53 species on the Full Park Itinerary and there was definitely a movement of passerines. But the thick foliage and poor light made it virtually impossible to obtain decent looks at the warblers which, to the best of my ability to identify them, included: two Black-and-Whites, a Pine, two Palms, a Redstart, four Yellowthroats and a Tennessee, the latter, a first for the year and the least certain of the lot. It was a four wren species day that one occasionally gets at this time of the year. There were no migrating raptors assuming the single Red-tail was one of the local individuals and I saw two Monarch butterflies.

### **30 September**

Two days ago, the area was deluged by the remnants of "Hurricane Jeanne", yet another hurricane to hit Florida this year. The rain was forced out by very strong, almost gale-like northerly winds yesterday. These winds abated last night and this morning started



out with only a few clouds and virtually no wind. Later, a significant southwesterly breeze emerged, accompanied by significant clouding.

There were some birds today. By far the most interesting was a **Western Kingbird** going east to west, sapling to sapling just south of the model airplane field. I first noticed it from a considerable distance and hoped to get a really fine look but it spent only about two or three minutes in the park and allowed me only a short look at it perching and flying at reasonable range. This is my second record for the park, the other having been 20 September, 1994.

Other interesting birds included a Merlin, a Snipe, five Phoebes, a Thrasher, 12 Yellowthroats, a Black-and-White, two Palms and a Pine Warbler and a White-crowned Sparrow. The list ran to 60 species, ordinarily about average for the date, but this year the highest total of the fall.

I saw one Monarch butterfly.

### **1 October**

Although I saw fewer species, 53 as opposed to 60, the clearing and gentle west northwesterly breeze brought a bit of an influx of birds amongst which were 25 White-throated and eight Swamp Sparrows. A Solitary Sandpiper at the first pond south of the West Beach was new for the year. The only raptors were single examples of Osprey and Sharp-shinned Hawk. The number of raptors this year has been shockingly low. Speaking of shockingly low, I failed to see a single Monarch butterfly this morning.

### **3 October**

Another front arrived last night and was followed by a considerable breeze from the northwest this morning. The conditions and date seemed ideal for a really major flight yet the results were virtually identical to those obtained two days ago. A definite influx of passerine birds but nothing particularly special. A single Sharp-shinned Hawk was the only raptor and there were no Monarch butterflies.

### **4 October**

There was a gentle southwesterly breeze and a few cumulous clouds this warm morning. I found 61 species and five Monarch butterflies. Although I seem to end most days with a comparable number of species, the distribution changes a bit each time. This morning I recorded 10 Towhees but fewer Yellowthroats than the past few visits. It was yet another four wren day, my third of the season. However, I saw nothing in the least unexpected.

The list for today, column CA, disappeared from the computer on 5 October. It was recovered for me by PH (my son) two weeks later. I had inadvertently "hidden" it.

### **5 October**

There was a major change in the weather overnight. The winds picked up and shifted to become northerly and the temperature dropped. This morning was quite cool and windy. I found 58 species and there was a major influx of White-throated (50) and Song Sparrows. The most interesting species, of which I unfortunately caught only brief glimpses, were Yellow-throated Vireo and Lincoln's Sparrow. It was a four wren day again. I failed to see a single Monarch butterfly.

### **6 October**

The early morning was quite cool but the temperature rose with a mild south westerly breeze. The sustained modest influx of birds continued. Amongst the day's 55 species, the most interesting were a Creeper and a Sapsucker, the latter new for the year. There were four warbler species (Palm, 6; Yellowthroat, 4; Magnolia, 1; Black-throated Green, 1) and three raptor species (Turkey Vulture, 2; Harrier, 1; Red-tail, 1), thus, continuing the dearth of these two groups during migration this fall.

### **8 October**

Since my last visit, there has been a warm southwesterly winds and a gradual temperature elevation. This morning I found 52 species and one Monarch butterfly. Amongst the birds, 15 Yellow-rumped Warblers and eight Juncos were the first of the fall. A female Scarlet Tanager seemed a bit late. I saw almost all the passerine species within a few minutes at the entrance to the park. It seemed as though there was a major flight in progress but, alas, it was all downhill from there.

### **11 October**

The latest weather front passed through yesterday and today was marked by a very strong wind (15-25 mph) from the northwest, ordinarily a bad omen for finding birds even with the favorable wind direction. However, the park was replete with land birds, mostly White-throated (80) and Swamp (30) Sparrows. There were also 12 Phoebes, 30 Yellow-rumped, eight Palm Warblers, and two White-crowned Sparrows amongst the 52 species that I tallied.

### **13 October**

The howling northwest winds that characterized my last visit two days ago continued through yesterday but abated during the night so that they were quite gentle northwesterly breezes with a few cirrus clouds this morning. The weather could thus not have been more favorable and there were plenty of birds. I tallied 57 species including a phenomenal 400 Laughing Gulls. A Lapland Longspur on the meadow just north of the East Beach between the rest station and the pavilion was the first I have found in the park for several years. The new design of the east parking lot with its trees and drainage ditches has eliminated the vast flat partly asphalt, partly grass presence that Longspurs seemed to like. I also found my first Pipit of the year amongst some Killdeer near but not on the central oval. One of my few good looks at a Winter Wren was pleasing.

Tobey and his destructive crew have been very active during the past two days and have cleared all the brush from the western section of the park between the beach and the salt marsh. This was the area that harbored high counts of Goldfinches and Swamp Sparrows for the past couple of weeks.

### **16 October**

Yesterday was rainy, stagnant and warm whereas this morning was marked by a strong west southwesterly wind and partially overcast skies. I found 54 species, the most interesting of which, by far was, a Lesser Black-headed Gull of the *graellsii* race. This bird was standing with two Herring Gulls on the bank of the channel at the eastern end of the park and the three birds allowed me to approach to 15 feet. The Lesser Black-backed was slightly smaller with a smaller bill than the two Herring Gulls and had straw-colored legs and feet and a slaty gray back. It has been several years since I've seen a Lesser Black-backed in the park although A. J. Hand found one two or three years ago in the same spot as today's birds. I have had both the *graellsii* and *fuscus* races here, the latter on only one occasion.

A flock of 50 Brant flying westward over the Sound was also of note.

I also noticed two Monarch butterflies.

### **18 October**

A clear cool morning with a brisk wind from the west found me recording a very respectable 58 species including one, a Meadowlark over the east marsh, that was new for the year. However, the most exciting find was my first really good look at the Barred Owl of which I've caught brief glimpses on two prior occasions this fall. I flushed it from the woods south of the stone barn and bordering on the park road and it settled in a nearby bare deciduous tree and stared down at me approximately 40 feet away. We eyed

each other for a full minute before the bird flew off. The best look I have ever had at this species which, I noticed, has very dark irises.

There was a healthy flight of Yellow-rumped (40), as well a Palm and a Magnolia Warbler and a fine pair (adult and immature) of White-crowned Sparrows.

### **21 October**

Since my last visit, there has been a fairly constant raw northeast wind with overcast skies and occasional rain. This morning was no exception although there was no rain. There has been quite an exodus of birds from the park as reflected in a smaller volume of birds, particularly sparrows. Amongst the 51 species that I logged today, none were particularly noteworthy.

### **23 October**

The northeasterly flow has persisted although today was almost cloudless. There has yet to be a frost but this morning came quite close. The migration is winding down yet there are still some birds around. Amongst the 47 noted today, a Vesper Sparrow at the far eastern extremity, new for the year, was the star. Its eyering looked as though it had been pasted on. A very nice look at a Winter Wren also provided pleasure as did three immature White-crowned Sparrows in the dunes separating the east parking lot from the beach. It was the kind of fall day one might anticipate seeing Gannets but I was unable to find any nor have northerly ducks arrived. I saw only one (Great) Egret and no Catbirds so the summer residents have mostly left.

### **25 October**

This was an overcast morning with just a trace of wind from the northeast. There were a great many birds around. Amongst the 54 species that I found, by far the most exciting was a female Dickcissel amongst a group of House Sparrows in the dunes separating the east beach from the east parking lot just east of the Pavilion. Although the species is not extremely rare in the state, this was the first record for the park and my first for Connecticut. The species is much easier to locate if one is familiar with its call. I had a Vesper Sparrow in the same vicinity and three Catbirds after having thought that they had all departed.

The tide was unusually high such that the Mill Pond was a large lake without most of its usual islands.

## **26 October**

This was a beautiful morning with a moderate northwest breeze and turned out to be the best late October day I've enjoyed in the park. In the dunes and on the meadow between the east parking lot and the beach were a Lapland Longspur, two Vesper Sparrows, and a male Dickcissel, i. e. a different individual than I had in the same area yesterday. Behind the airplane field, I found a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow, the first of the year. I counted three Winter Wrens, two in the West Woods. The total list of 54 species fails to reflect the degree of migration because I failed to see some common birds such as House Sparrow and Mallard.

## **27 October**

The fine October migration continued on this overcast day with a very slight northeasterly flow. I recorded 60 species and I believe this is the latest date at which I have ever reached that mark in the park. One, a group of four Horned Larks flying over, was new for the year. Four Red-throated Loons and a Woodcock were new for the fall. I flushed the latter in the small woodland where the bicycle path meets the internal park road, a locale in which I had not previously found one. I had superb looks at a female Dickcissel in the same general dune area that I had seen a female and a male respectively on the preceding two days.

## **23 November**

My world has changed since my last visit. On 28 October, Maddy suffered a stroke during which she became confused and lost while driving to work. She was hospitalized and returned home on 16 November. While she has retained motor and verbal skills, she has a marked left homonymous hemianopsia, great difficulty reading and inability to perform any kind of reasoning that involves numbers or sequences. Both children came home the week of the stroke and returned to spend this Thanksgiving week with us. I am still loathe to leave Maddy alone so it is their presence that has allowed me to visit the park today.

The fall migration is over and many of the winter birds have arrived. I found 44 species, none of which were particularly unexpected. A single late Catbird was the most noteworthy.

## **19 December**

Maddy died on 11 December. She suffered a second stroke on 9 December, was hospitalized, had a heart attack on the night of 10 December, and died suddenly the next morning in the presence of PH, my son, and myself. She was conscious and responsive to the end and was not in pain. The proximate cause of her death was probably an

arrhythmia. Had she survived, she would almost certainly have needed nursing home care, which she dreaded more than anything else.

Today was the Westport Christmas Count and AJ Hand invited me to participate with him in covering Sherwood Island. I was able to immerse myself in the birding, which thus provided a much needed therapeutic distraction. The birds were not very noteworthy. I recorded 47 species, one of which, four White-winged Scoters, was new for the year. The most interesting observation, however, was of three Great-Horned Owls perching and flying around the tallest pines and firs in the center of the park.

Chris Bosak interviewed me yesterday for an article that appeared today in the Norwalk Hour about the 1946 Westport Christmas Count, which was probably the first from Westport to be published. The article contained a picture of me as well as one of the pages from my original notebook listing the birds I saw that day. The observers were myself, Richard Rogin, Richard Gershon, Richard Novick and Stephen Oresman. All of us were fourteen years old. The total list comprised 48 species plus an additional five seen during Count week.