

## **Sherwood Island Diary**

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**2005**

### **2 January**

I plan to examine the park quite intensively this year but this morning was not an auspicious debut. Despite exhaustive coverage including the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the entire park, I recorded only 33 unremarkable species, certainly the lowest total I've had there in the last 20 years. I failed to find such common birds as Starling and Goldfinch, and this despite weather conditions that were not bad. The water was all open, there was no snow, and the temperature was above freezing. I noticed an accumulation of pellets under the single Juniper quite far east at the edge of the east marsh but could find no owl. I have always imagined that this particular tree might harbor Saw-whet Owls and usually examine it quite closely. This was the first tangible evidence I've ever uncovered that it might actually attract an owl.

The most interesting observation, by far, was of a mangy, scraggly woodchuck that did not seem to realize it should have been hibernating.

### **4 January**

This morning was overcast but almost windless and with good visibility. I found 40 species, the most interesting of which was a Black Scoter flying far out over the Sound. Scoters seem to be around this year as I've seen White-winged on several visits during the winter and counted 15 this morning. Other new birds for the year besides the Black Scoter were: four Common Loons; three Great Cormorants, or at least I suppose they were Greats since they were standing on tidally exposed rocks virtually in the middle of the Sound; one Brant; four Canvasbacks (two males, two females) which were not present during the Christmas Count; 40 Long-tailed Ducks; two Red-tailed Hawks; a Kingfisher; 1,000 Starlings; and two Goldfinches.

### **10 January**

Although this winter has thus far been rather warm, frequent rains have made it feel cooler and have prevented me from getting to the park. This morning was overcast with a strong breeze from the southwest that made the waters of the Sound too turbulent for finding floating sea birds. The wind also made it seem colder than the temperature of 40-45°. The low total of 35 species that I recorded was, therefore, not unexpected. Amongst these were four that were new for the year: an adult and immature Black-crowned Night-Heron; five Pipits; seven Robins; and a Junco. The Pipits were unexpected as they are quite rare here in mid-winter.

## **11 January**

This morning was very overcast with almost no wind until the development of snow and sleet. The weather caused me to limit my visit to the western section of the park and the area around the airplane field. Thus, I omitted the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and most of the eastern section of the park. The lack of wind rendered the Sound glassy and amenable to examination for swimming birds. Thus, despite my truncated itinerary, I found 37 species including both loons, Horned Grebe and several sea ducks. There were also three species that were new for the year: a female Harrier; a Great Horned Owl being harassed by two Crows in an isolated stand of white pines in the middle of one of the meadows in the western half of the park; and a Hairy Woodpecker.

Although Great-horned Owl is now regular in the park and even bred here last year, I still enjoy finding one sitting in a tree and I have definitely learned the language of Crows when they have found a roosting Great-horned as was the case this morning. The cry of the Crows is noticeably more agitated than when they have found a perching Red-tailed Hawk or Barred Owl.

## **2 February**

Since my last visit, there has been bitter cold weather with considerable snow. This morning there was the mildest breeze from the west with clear skies and the temperature about freezing. The Mill Pond was largely frozen except for the part near the Mill Beach. Most of the park was still covered by six inches of snow but the paths had been cleared and I kept to them save that I explored the owl grove. It's just as well that I did since I had a superb look at a Long-eared Owl roosting in the same tree where two of them spent most of the winter two years ago. I also recorded a Great-horned Owl although I didn't see it. I heard Crows giving their Great-horned Owl cries and I heard the owl hoot in response. By the time I got to the tall conifer where the action had occurred, the Crows, and presumably the owl as well, had exited. In addition to Long-eared owl, I also added the following species to the year's list: a fine adult female Cooper's Hawk perched at Grove point; two Black-bellied Plovers; a Killdeer; two Fish Crows and five Savannah Sparrows. I logged a respectable 42 species for the interesting morning.

## **3 February**

There was still sufficient snow on the ground to preclude slogging my way around as much as I like, so I hurried through my itinerary this morning and paid the consequences, seeing nothing of interest. There were no species new for the year amongst the 36 that I managed to find. I failed to turn up any owls. The best observation was a fine female Harrier quartering the east marsh.

## **5 February**

Conditions were absolutely balmy this morning with a temperature that almost reached 50°. The sky was clear and there was a gentle northerly breeze. Despite the delightful weather, birds were in scarce supply and I recorded an anemic 33 species, none new for the year. By far the most interesting was a Great-horned Owl on the nest that A. J. Hand had discovered a few days ago and showed me this morning. The nest was about 40 feet up in the crook of a large pine tree located in the row of evergreens that starts west of the main owl grove and continues further west almost to Woodcock Woods. In order to observe the nest, it was necessary to stand at some distance from the tree so the bird did not seem disturbed by our presence. Occasionally, it would erect its ear tufts which can be quite impressive. It will be interesting to follow the evolution of this family group.

Also of interest was a rather large gray seal with a black tail (? Harbor Seal) flopping around on an exposed rock in the Sound off Burying Hill beach. I see seals on this rock at medium or low tide not infrequently at this time of the year.

## **7 February**

The warm spell continued and there was only scattered snow coverage throughout the park. The Mill Pond was about two-thirds open, there was scarcely any wind and the Sound was glassy smooth. One couldn't ask for better birding conditions. However, the birds remained remarkably scarce. I logged 37 species, one of which, a Cedar Waxwing that I heard only, was new for the year. A protruding ear tuft was all I could make out of the Great-horned Owl on the nest which must have been deeply hunkered down. In the past, I have had Red-winged Blackbirds on warm days in early February but no such luck today. Ornithologically, the morning was remarkably unremarkable.

## **7 March**

In the month since my last visit, I participated in an ornithological tour to the eastern Andes of Ecuador. The weather here during my absence remained cold and snowy and this morning was the first fairly warm day of the year. However, some accumulation of snow still remained. I found only 34 species but six were new for the year. They included a drake Eurasian Wigeon in the north west corner of the Mill Pond; three Red-winged Blackbirds; a Grackle; two Cowbirds; a House Finch; and a flock of 50 Snow Buntings, most of which were in alternate (breeding) plumage. Parenthetically, the first Red-winged Blackbirds around the house arrived on 16 February but I did not record any Grackles until this morning.

The Great-horned Owl was still incubating on the nest.

I received an email from Frank Mantlik while I was away in late February telling me that he had seen a Eurasian Wigeon on the Mill Pond so today's sighting did not come as a surprise.

### **13 March**

Snow and very cold weather have predominated since my last visit and this morning was the first reasonably pleasant one since then although there was still some snow and the Mill Pond was half frozen. The birds were pretty good and I compiled quite a respectable species total of 46. Three of these were new for the year: two Woodcock that I flushed, one at Grove Point, the other at the eastern end of the park in the wooded fringe of the salt marsh; a flock of 50 Dunlin flying over the sound; and two Fox Sparrows at the eastern end of the park. I did not see the Eurasian Wigeon this morning.

I had the opportunity of studying the flock of Snow Buntings at close range and I counted 90 of them, almost double the 50 that I incorrectly estimated during my last visit. At that time, I also incorrectly surmised that most were in alternate plumage. Close observation today revealed that virtually all were still in basic plumage.

The Great-horned Owl appeared still to be incubating on the nest.

### **16 March**

Despite a strong wind from the northwest, this morning was quite satisfying. It yielded 46 species including two, single examples of Turkey Vulture and Red-shouldered Hawk, that were new for the year. Of considerable interest was a count of eight Woodcock, four from "Woodcock Woods", the other four from the far eastern section of the park at the brush and wood border between the east marsh and the meadow. The flock of 90 Snow Buntings was still present as was the male Eurasian Wigeon. The Great-horned Owl still appeared to be incubating.

A large skunk was contentedly feeding on the far east meadow, making no attempt to conceal itself.

### **18 March**

The persistent strong northwesterly breeze again made the day seem wintry. As yet, there has been no really "spring" day. The birds were much the same as they have been during my last two visits and there were no species that were new for the year. The highlight was 10 sightings of Woodcock comprising 8-10 individuals including one which obligingly froze and remained motionless 30 feet from me, allowing me to raise my binoculars and affording me the best look I have ever had at this splendid species, always one of my favorites.

A. J. Hand found egg shell at the base of the tree harboring the Great-horned Owls nest on 16 March and thought that the adult was restive and probably dealing with a hatchling. That same day the bird appeared rather placid to me as it did again this morning.

At least one of the Horned Grebes was in alternate (breeding) plumage today. Most are still in basic plumage.

The Eurasian Wigeon was still present today but I did not find the flock of Snow Buntings.

### **19 March**

Today was similar to my last two visits both in terms of weather conditions and birds save that I found only one Woodcock. I made a concerted effort to find Snipe, assiduously tramping through their favorite spots to no avail. The Eurasian Wigeon was still present and I failed again to find the Snow Buntings which have probably gone. A count of 35 Gadwall was the highest I can remember from the park.

By far the most interesting observation concerned the Great-horned Owl. A small individual, presumably the male, flew about the central grove on several occasions and was harassed by Crows. While this was going on, a birder named Larry Fischer approached me and asked if I knew where the nest was. He told me he was a licensed bird bander and had been told by A. J. Hand that the nest might be on the verge of falling out of the tree. A. J. had allegedly asked him for advice in the event that this happened. He was obviously quite knowledgeable and when I showed him the nest, he immediately drew my attention to two white patches that appeared to protrude from the sitting female and explained that they were relatively recent hatchlings. So A. J. must have been correct in thinking that the eggs hatched on the 16<sup>th</sup>. In the event, I recorded no less than four Great-horned owls for the day.

### **25 March**

This was one of the best birding days that I've ever had in the park!

The signs were not auspicious. It snowed heavily two days ago but by this morning, most of the snow had melted. Skies had been and continued to be overcast. Today there was a moderate northeast wind. There has yet to be a "springlike" day this year and today was no exception.

Nevertheless, I recorded 58 species, equaling (with 29 March, 2002) the highest March total I've ever had. I logged 15 species of ducks, I believe the most I've found in the park on a single day. I had 14 Woodcock sightings, probably comprising 12 individuals, my highest count. Ten species were new for the year: a single female Pintail; 20 Green-

winged Teal; a male Blue-winged Teal; a pair of Common Mergansers; a pair of Ospreys on the platform; a Lesser Black-backed Gull of the *graellsii* subspecies near Burying Hill Beach; seven Snipe; a Flicker; a Creeper; and a Swamp Sparrow. Of these birds, Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Common Merganser, Lesser Black-backed Gull and Creeper are uncommon in the park and can easily be missed during any given year.

The drake Eurasian Wigeon was still present. The Great-horned Owl was standing in the nest with her back to me and I did not want to disturb her by going to the other side of the tree so I did not see the young which are apparently still in the nest.

The Common Loons were already in alternate plumage as were perhaps one-third of the Horned Grebes. The Red-throated Loons were, of course, still in basic plumage.

### **26 March**

This morning was not so spectacular as yesterday but was still pretty good. Although there were no clouds, there was a strong and cold easterly breeze that rendered the Sound too turbulent to see much on its surface. I found 53 species including four that were new for the year: a single Great Egret; 30 Greater Scaup on the Sound; a Greater Yellowlegs; and a Bonaparte's Gull.

The Eurasian Wigeon, Pintail and Blue-winged Teal were still about but the pair of Common Mergansers appear to have left. The Great-horned Owl was sitting on the nest with no obvious signs of the young birds. I recorded ten Woodcock despite the fact that many people were walking dogs on this crisp Saturday.

### **27 March**

The raw easterly winds continued today and there were no new arrivals. Amongst the 47 species that I logged were the Eurasian Wigeon and Blue-winged Teal drakes that have been around, nine Snipe and only one Woodcock. The owl continued to sit seemingly placidly on the nest.

### **30 March**

A large amount of rain fell during the two days since my last visit and clearing only began late yesterday. This morning was the pleasantest weather of the year, clear and relatively mild with a modest southeast breeze. It was the first day this year that did not feel like winter. It didn't exactly feel like spring either, somewhere in between. I was a bit disappointed by the birds of which I expected more new species than the single Double-crested Cormorant that flew directly overhead and the two singing and flying Meadowlarks that were in the overgrown field just northwest of the airplane field. However, these two were the only new ones amongst the 51 species that I found.

I examined the owl's nest through the telescope and saw one rather large white downy chick panting heavily as it sat in front of its parent. The nest can only be seen from one angle so it is possible that there was a second chick that I failed to see.

The Eurasian Wigeon is still about. I found two Woodcock but no Snipe despite numerous accumulations of standing water.

### **5 April**

This morning was something of a disappointment. Since my last visit, there has been massive rainfall amidst strong northeasterly winds. Today was the first clear and reasonably warm day. I expected a large number of new birds after having missed the last five days during this fairly critical period of migration. But I didn't reckon with the very brisk northwesterly breeze that must have been a hindrance to migration. I did find 50 species, however, and that despite omitting the far eastern section of the park from the morning's itinerary. Two were new for the year: two Snowy Egrets and three Phoebes, new, but hardly unexpected.

There were relatively few duck species and individuals, now Woodcock and only one Snipe. The Great-horned Owl was at the nest with at least one white downy young showing.

### **6 April**

The wind shifted to the southeast last night and the migrants responded. I found 63 species by far the highest I've ever had before 12 April. Included were four that were new for the year: three Golden-crowned Kinglets; two Hermit Thrushes; two Palm and two Pine Warblers. Both warbler species were feeding on the ground and afforded particularly splendid looks. There was a substantial influx of Flickers.

I had a very good look at an owlet in front of the adult this morning. Most of the white down of the young bird was replaced by gray feathers and there was clear indication of an orbital frame. A. J. Hand was able to examine two owlets later in the day when the adult apparently vacated the nest.

One of the Ospreys, presumably the female, appears to be restricted to the nest on the platform and is probably incubating.

I had an excellent view of the Lesser Black-backed Gull (*graellsii*) standing on a house on Burying Hill Beach. The legs are the brightest yellow that I've seen on a gull.

## 7 April

The persistence of mild weather dominated by a slight southeasterly flow encouraged me to feel that yesterday's flight might be augmented this morning. However, there were no new species arrivals amongst the 51 species that I logged. I omitted the far eastern section of the park. There was a substantial influx of Great Egrets and there were more Grackles, Cowbirds and Robins than usual.

The adult Great-horned Owl was perched beside the nest today allowing me to examine two restless and rather large gray owlets within it, one of whom was exercising its wings. These young birds may not remain nest-bound for very much longer.

## 9 April

A cold northerly front passed through yesterday and this morning, which was crystal clear with fine visibility, was dominated by strong northerly winds. Not surprisingly, I found only 45 species, none of which were new. The Eurasian Wigeon was still present although most of the Baldpates were absent. The two large gray owl chicks were resting but visible in the nest with the adult sitting next to, but not on the nest. The flock of Long-tailed ducks was still around (I counted 150) and there seemed to be a west east flight of Bonaparte's Gulls (20) over the Sound.

## 10 April

The wind abated overnight and what little there was this morning was from the southeast so I was rather optimistic. The moroso since weather prognosticators have suggested that the next four or five days will be dominated by a cold front beginning tomorrow. I was a bit disappointed. The morning was marginally better than yesterday and there were virtually no land birds. Of the 55 species that I logged, a single Rough-winged Swallow was the only one that was new for the year. Despite visibility that was equally superb to that of yesterday, I was again unable to pick out a Gannet over the Sound.

Only three Baldpate were around this morning and the Eurasian Wigeon was apparently absent. Five Goldeneyes surprised me. They and Canvasbacks are usually the first ducks to depart.

I believe a change has occurred at the nest of the Great-horned Owl. This morning, I did not see the adult and there seemed to be only one quiet gray bundle in it. This may have been one of the two owlets or perhaps it was down that had been shed. The situation may be clarified during my next visit .

### **13 April**

Rather strong northerly winds with cool temperatures have prevailed since my last visit. The early trees are beginning to bloom yet it still feels like winter. Today's list of 49 species could easily have been compiled on March 13<sup>th</sup>. I did manage to add one species, a Gannet, to the list for the year. The bird was flying from east to west. I have been looking for Gannets during the recent clear weather and was particularly pleased to spot an adult far out over the Sound this morning because the day was so disappointing with respect to passerine migrants. There did seem to be a large number of birds-of-prey including four very vociferous adult Red-tails and seven Turkey Vultures. I'm still waiting for my first Sherwood Island Black Vulture although it has been seen there by several other observers.

The adult Great-horned Owl was again absent from the nest which still contained the gray chicks. AJ Hand tells me that the female is now usually to be found in one or the other of the adjacent White Pines but I failed to locate her.

### **14 April**

This morning was again cool and clear with a strong breeze, this time from due east. Again, there were very few land birds. Amongst the 47 species, a single Tree Swallow was the only bird that was new for the year. I have the feeling that the first day with a gentle southwesterly or westerly flow will bring a mass of mid-April migrants. When the wind is from the east it brings the low water temperatures with it and is almost as unfavorable as a due northerly wind.

Today I found the female Great-horned Owl perched adjacent to the nest in which I could see one very large gray chick with dark periorbital discs. The other chick may well have been hidden as it is quite impossible to see this nest in its entirety from the ground.

### **17 April**

Finally, last night the winds shifted and this morning were moderate from the southwest. Although it was still initially quite cool, the sky was clear and a temperature of 70 was forecast for this afternoon. I was optimistic for the arrival of mid April migrants and I was not disappointed. Amongst the morning's 54 species were four that were new for the year: a Bank Swallow; three Ruby-crowned Kinglets, one of which was strikingly raising its ruby crown into a crest; a Thrasher in the far eastern section; and a Chipping Sparrow. There was one large owlet visible in the nest and the female was watching from an adjacent tree where she was pointed out to me by AJ hand who told me that yesterday he had seen two juveniles in the nest. The weather prediction is very favorable for the next several days.

I saw my first Diamond-backed Terrapins for this year

## 18 April

Clear with a gentle southwest breeze and a temperature between 60 and 70. Could there be better weather conditions for a big April surge? It was not to be. There were no new land bird arrivals and amongst the 52 species that I logged, a hen Turkey was the only one that was new for the year.

Both owlets were visible in the nest today and I encountered a flying adult on two occasions but could not find one near the nest.

A group of 80 Brant represented the first substantial flock this year.

## 19 April

Another day that was perfect weather-wise and disappointing bird-wise. I counted 55 species, none of which were new for the year. Amongst the new species that I optimistically and incorrectly anticipated: Barn Swallow; Gnatcatcher; House Wren; Solitary Vireo; Towhee. Tomorrow is another day!

Both Owlets, one of which is now about two-thirds adult size, peered down at me from the nest, as an adult, presumably the mother, carefully monitored my actions from a rather exposed limb in an adjacent pine.

## 22 April

April 20th, when I failed to get out, was the last day of the heat wave, the temperature topping 80°. That evening a cold front from the north came in beginning with a brief shower. Yesterday there was a strong northerly wind which had moderated and shifted to the east by this morning. Leafing is quite noticeable now on Maples but not on Oaks.

Although the tide was medium and rising when I arrived this morning, the Mill Pond was almost completely drained resulting in “heron heaven” conditions. Almost the first birds I saw were an adult Little Blue Heron and an adult Tricolored Heron, both new for the year, and the latter a good find that turns up approximately every other year. These were the only new species amongst the 59 that I logged today and the expected mid-April Passerine arrivals are still noteworthy for their absence. They have arrived elsewhere. Yesterday, I found Gnatcatcher, House Wren and Yellow-rumped Warbler at the Dolce (formerly Prudential and once GTE) Center. I even saw and heard a Yellow-rumped Warbler in my backyard yesterday. But not yet for any of these nor Towhee nor Barn Swallow at Sherwood Island. There will surely be lots of new birds there very shortly. My list for the year here is now 101.

Both juvenile owls were still in the nest this morning and the adult was perched on the same nearby exposed pine limb as on April 19<sup>th</sup>.

### **24 April**

Yesterday, there was an easterly wind with heavy rain. This morning, the wind shifted to southerly and the clouds were blown away by intermittent gusts that occasionally came close to 30 MPH. There seemed rather a dearth of land birds but amongst the 50 species that I logged, a Glossy Ibis, a Barn Swallow, and two Towhees were new for the year.

The two owlets were both perched on a branch adjacent to the nest. This is the first time I have seen them outside of it. They are now about two-thirds the size of an adult female. I failed to find the adult today.

Other sitting birds that I may have failed to mention include Mute Swan (one), Canada Goose (several) and the annual Osprey. There seem to be three Ospreys coexisting amicably. Perhaps the odd man out is a young from last year.

### **25 April**

The peculiar frigid southerly weather system worsened this morning with a temperature of 40 and a very strong and chilly wind from the south west. My coverage was perfunctory, lasting only two hours. I logged 44 species of which one, a House Wren on Grove Point Road, was new for the year. Also noteworthy were a tom Turkey strolling across Grove Point road, and a Tricolored Heron in the main central drainage ditch. The two owlets were both in the nest, but I couldn't locate an adult.

### **26 April**

The fierce southerly wind with low temperature finally abated this morning which was quite warm with a gentle, variable breeze. I hoped for a fairly substantial passerine flight but was somewhat disappointed although two Yellow Warblers and two Willets were new and timely arrivals. I had to work very hard for my 57 species and most of the land bird migrants were represented by only one or two individuals.

The two owlets were sitting about 10 feet below the nest. They appear virtually the size of an adult male and are now barred brown but still without obvious ear tufts. I couldn't locate an adult.

### **28 April**

Yesterday was cold, windy (from the east) and rainy. I got a call from AJ Hand who told me he had just seen a female Boat-tailed Grackle in a puddle on the airplane field. I made a quick visit and failed to see the bird. I spent only a few minutes and did not keep a daylist.

This morning was quite sunny with a brisk northwesterly wind. That wind notwithstanding, there were some new birds around including: an American Bittern that I flushed from the wet meadow adjacent to the plane field; a Clapper Rail that I flushed from the central ditch; a Spotted Sandpiper in the far eastern part of the east marsh; a Gnatcatcher at Grove Point; and two Yellow-rumped Warblers that I heard in the central part of the park. Also worth noting were a group of 14 Glossy Ibises on the plane field and flights of 35 White-throated Sparrows and eight Towhees.

I failed to locate any owls either at the nest or anywhere else. AJ had mentioned to me that they were still present yesterday and I had seen them the day before.

### **1 May**

It was raining this morning and I spent only an hour and twenty minutes in the park. My time was spent exclusively in the eastern section, hoping to find an Upland Sandpiper that Frank Mantlik had seen on the model airplane field yesterday. I did not find it but I did add three birds to the list for the year: two Least Sandpipers; a Solitary Sandpiper; and a Chimney Swift. Because I had only a brief time to spend, and because it was raining rather heavily, I excluded most of my usual itinerary, did not look for land birds and logged only 24 species. First appearance of Killdeer chicks.

### **2 May**

The weather was perfect this morning: warm and clear with a gentle southerly breeze. I logged a very respectable 71 species, 39 passerine, 32 non-passerine. Included were four warblers (4 Yellows, single Black-and-white, Pine and Yellow-rumped. Six species were new for the year: one each of Kingbird; Catbird; Warbling Vireo; Black-and-white Warbler; Orchard and Northern Orioles. I could find no trace of the Great-horned Owl family.

### **3 May**

What a difference a day can make at this time of the year. A cold front with heavy rain passed through last night followed by a strong northwest wind that persisted through the morning. I logged 54 species as opposed to 71 yesterday: 27 passerines, 27 non-passerines. Included was only one species of warbler (4 Yellows). Not a single species was new for the year and there were no notable observations.

#### **4 May**

Weather and bird-wise, this morning was very much like yesterday: cold with a northwest wind and not many birds. I logged 59 species, 33 passerines, 26 non-passerines. Included were four species of warbler including two that were new for the year: an Ovenbird that I heard; and a male Yellowthroat that I saw and heard. The other warblers were four Yellows and a single Yellow-rumped.

#### **5 May**

The same cold northwest wind pattern has continued but there were a few more birds this morning. Amongst the 62 species (33/29, Passerines/Non-Passerines) were only three warbler species: four Yellows; a Pine; and a Yellowthroat. However, I added four birds to the list for the year: a very early Black-billed Cuckoo of which I had a superb study at about 40 feet; a Crested Flycatcher; a Marsh Wren; and two Wood Thrushes. Black-billed Cuckoo is rare in the park at any time but is known generally as a late May migrant.

A fine drake Blue-winged Teal was something of a surprise. Although the tide was high, the Mill Pond was virtually drained of water in the peculiar disconnect that I've described in the past. At least 100 Greater Yellowlegs were foraging about the mud and the Teal was swimming in one of the few water channels at the north end of the pond. A pair of Green-winged Teal was at the south end not far from where the Allen Clam House used to be.

#### **6 May**

This morning was cold, and gloomy with northeast winds and the prediction of a full-fledged "noreaster" for tonight and tomorrow. The park was almost entirely bereft of birds save for a pair of White-crowned Sparrows that were new for the year. I logged only 49 species (25/24 Passerines/ Non-Passerines) with two Yellow Warblers as the only warblers. I did see the first goslings of the year.

I did find the large female Great-horned Owl together with the two juveniles very high in a tall evergreen (not a pine) about 100 yards northeast of the original nest.

#### **8 May**

Yesterday was cold with some rain and gale force northeasterly winds. I didn't go out. This morning was similar but not quite so bad, overcast with northeasterly winds of 15-25 MPH. I paid a token visit to the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park. I was out for two hours and recorded only 47 species, none of which were either

noteworthy or new for the year. There were only two warbler species, two Yellows and a Pine. So far, May has been dominated by cold northerly winds and there has been virtually no migration of land birds at the park. I can't remember a worse first eight days.

### **9 May**

The weather may be beginning to turn around. Although the wind was still from the north this morning, it had abated to 5-10 MPH and the temperature was almost 60° with mostly clear skies. The prediction is for warm weather during the next several days with a shift to winds from the south. If that happens, there should be a major flight because so far, the bird profile resembles that found in late April. Today was only marginally better than the past several days and certainly gave little indication of migration: 61 species (31/30, Passeres/ Non-Passeres, two Yellows, one Pine, one Yellowthroat). I did find one bird new for the year here, a Field Sparrow.

Also of note: fine views of two different Clapper Rails standing and walking in the east marsh.

I found a single young Great-horned Owl in the same spot where I had seen the adult and both young the other day.

### **10 May**

The morning was perfect for a wave day; clear and warm with a gentle southwesterly breeze. And there was a definite, if moderate upsurge in the number of land birds. The total species list was 75 (43/32, Passerine/Non-Passerine). There were nine species of warblers (Black-and-white, 1; Yellow-rumped, 3; Parula, 1; Nashville, 1; Pine, 2; Yellow, 6; Yellowthroat, 3; Ovenbird, 1; Redstart, 1) comprising 19 individuals. There was a significant influx (15) of Catbirds and, in general, there seemed to be more birds around. Seven species were new for the year: one or two Green Herons; a Common Tern; well-seen and heard single examples of Nashville and Parula Warblers; a heard Redstart; a beautiful male Scarlet Tanager, well-seen and heard; and a male Bobolink. The day corresponded with what I used to consider a pre wave day. I define a wave day as at least 80 species and 10 types of warblers. The prediction is for similar weather through the next two mornings so I shouldn't be surprised if one of those days brings this year's first wave. At least I hope so!

I found only an adult Great-horned Owl in the same tree the family seems now to be using. I'm quite certain, however, that one or both young were there too because the adult refused to leave despite constant harassment from a Crow. The tree is a very tall drooping evergreen, perhaps a fir of some sort. The owls are roosting very high up and are difficult to see.

## 11 May

Today was, indeed a wave day, although far from stupendous. The morning started out very foggy, humid, and cool, but the gentle southerly wind from the sound gradually cleared the sky and raised the temperature. The list total was 80, the minimum to qualify for a bona fide wave. But the ratio of Passeres/ Non-Passeres was 53/27 and there were good numbers of some of the land birds including 15 Northern Orioles and 30 Catbirds. There were 11 species of warblers comprising 28 individuals: Black-and-white, 1; Yellow, 8; Parula, 3; Nashville, 2; Black-throated Blue, 1; Magnolia, 1; Pine, 1; Chestnut-sided, 1; Ovenbird, 3; Yellowthroat, 5; Redstart, 2.

Seven species were new for the year: a Red-breasted Nuthatch that I heard; two Veerys; a Blue-headed Vireo; a Red-eyed Vireo that I heard; a Magnolia Warbler; and single examples of Black-throated Blue and Chestnut-sided Warblers that I heard.

The high ratio of Passeres to Non-Passeres was due not only to the flight of land birds but also to my failure to find several Non-Passeres that are around such as the Great-horned Owl, Red-tailed Hawk, Clapper Rail, Spotted Sandpiper, Rock Dove, Monk parakeet etc

## 12 May

What a difference a day can make in May! A northerly weather front was passing through this morning. It had not yet lowered temperatures although the process was beginning with a powerful, gusty northerly wind of 15-25 MPH. The temperature is expected to plummet this evening but the strong wind discouraged migrants and cleared out most of the birds which were here yesterday. This morning I logged only 54 species (29/25 ) including but three warbler species (four each of Yellow and Yellowthroat, one of Redstart) comprising nine individuals. I added one bird to the year list, a beautiful adult Snow Goose feeding with the Canadas.

I found one of the juvenile owls in the hanging fir. I may also have seen the adult but it is very difficult to find the birds in this tree because they are so high and are roosting amongst a conglomeration of thick branching forks.

## 14 May

Yesterday was cool with a northerly breeze. The cool wind shifted overnight and this morning was from the southwest. There were some birds around and I tallied 72 species (45/27) including three that were new for the year: a Wilson's Warbler and a Willow Flycatcher, each of which I heard; and a female Indigo Bunting. There were eight species of warbler (Yellow, 5; Parula, 3; Pine, 1; Magnolia, 1; Wilson's 1; Ovenbird, 2; Yellowthroat, 5; Redstart, 1) comprising 19 individuals.

I saw two Great-horned Owls flying and one, an adult, roosting in the usual hanging fir where it was being harassed by Crows.

Eight Willets seen together flying and calling was a high number.

### 15 May

Last night there was some rain and this morning was foggy, humid and overcast with a southeasterly wind of variable force. There was a bona fide, if not exactly stupenedous wave with 81 species (50/31) of which 12 were warblers (Black-and-white, 1; Magnolia, 3; Yellow-rumped, 1; Pine, 1; Parula, 2; Black-throated Green, 1; Nashville, 1; Yellow, 8; Blackpoll, 1; Canada, 1; Ovenbird, 3; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 33 individuals. These numbers may be misleadingly low as quite a few warblers were flitting high in the trees at Grove Point but were silent and couldn't be identified in the poor light.

I had been following a Mute Swan on a nest in the extension of the Mill Pond just north of the railroad tracks and this morning I didn't see the adult there for the first time. The reason soon became apparent: both adults were swimming in the adjacent part of the Mill Pond and escorting five newly hatched cygnets between them.

### 16 May

This morning was very similar to yesterday save that the wind was from the northeast instead of the southeast. It was overcast with occasional drizzle and rain and the conditions were sufficiently uncongenial that I omitted the far eastern section of the park and spent an hour less than yesterday. I found 70 species (43/27) including 12 warbler species (Yellow, 6; Parula, 3; Pine, 1; Chestnut-sided, 1; Blackpoll, 1; Magnolia, 8; Black-throated Green, 1; Wilson's, 1; Canada, 1; Ovenbird, 1; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 36 individuals. Like yesterday, visibility was too poor to allow me a good opportunity to identify those that were silent and high in the trees. It is more than likely that there were additional species that I missed on both days. I did not add any species to the year list this morning.

I managed to locate an adult Great-horned Owl was in the hanging fir.

### 17 May

The northeasterly weather mode continued but the morning was clear and pleasant and there were plenty of migrating birds. The total list comprised 72 species (45/27) including nine warbler species (Yellow, 8; Parula, 3; Pine, 1; Chestnut-sided, 3; Magnolia, 1; Blackburnian, 1; Prairie, 1; Redstart, 3; Yellowthroat, 8) comprising 29 individuals. There were six species that were new for the year: three Least Terns; a Pewee; a silent Empidonax flycatcher with a bold eye ring (i. e. not a Willow) that I arbitrarily called a

Least; a Prairie Warbler that I heard; a female Blackburnian Warbler; and two Lincoln's Sparrows. I heard the song of one of these for the first time and it is quite unlike any other sparrow, reminding me vaguely of that of a Ruby-crowned Kinglet.

All in all, a surprisingly productive and interesting morning.

### **18 May**

Yet another day in the northeasterly weather mode with plenty of migrating birds. I logged 74 (46/28) species including 10 warblers (Yellow, 8; Parula, 3; Pine, 1; Magnolia, 2; Black-and-white, 1; Black-throated Blue, 1; Wilson's, 1; Ovenbird, 1; Redstart, 3; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 31 individuals. There was one new bird for the year, a beautiful male Bluebird whose song sounded like that of a Northern Oriole with laryngitis, and quite unlike the delicate pleasing warble it gives when flying overhead in the fall.

The two juvenile owls were easily visible in the hanging fir. They are the size of adults but still have black areas around their eyes and some rufous downy feathering.

### **19 May**

Although the weather pattern remained the same as for the past few days, this morning was the best yet for migrating birds. The total list was 84 (50/34) including 12 warbler species (Yellow, 6; Parula, 6; Pine, 1; Magnolia, 4; Black-and-white, 3; Chestnut-sided, 1; Blackburnian, 1; Blackpoll, 2; Yellow-rumped, 1; Wilson's, 4; Redstart, 4; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 43 individuals. There were two new birds for the year: two Semipalmated Plovers and a Semipalmated Sandpiper.

### **21 May**

Yesterday, a new northerly front passed through with low temperatures and very cloudy skies. This morning was clear, with variable, mostly north winds. I found 66 (37/29) species including six warblers (Yellow, 6; Magnolia, 3; Parula, 2; Blackpoll, 3; Yellowthroat, 5; and Redstart, 3) comprising 22 individuals. There was one new bird for the year, three Dowitchers.

### **22 May**

This morning was cool, foggy, and occasionally drizzling with just the slightest easterly breeze. Despite the unpleasant weather, I managed to record 75 (43/32) species of which eight were warblers (Yellow, 5; Parula, 2; Wilson's, 1; Blackpoll, 2; Magnolia, 1; Redstart, 3; Northern Waterthrush, 1; Yellowthroat, 5) comprising 19 individuals. There

were three species that were new for the year: a Lesser Yellowlegs calling and flying over the west marsh; a Pectoral Sandpiper among Black-bellied Plovers on the flying field; and a Northern Waterthrush singing at Grove Point.

### **23 May**

Despite a cold northeast wind, this morning was reasonably birdy and very similar to most of those in the second half of the month which has been unusually chilly. I logged 74 species (43/31) including eight warblers (Yellow, 6; Wilson's, 2; Black-and-white, 1; Blackpoll, 1; Magnolia, 2; Canada, 2; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 26 individuals. There were two birds that were new for the year: a Ruddy Turnstone; and a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. As usual, the latter was a difficult call. It contained almost no streaking, and that which was present was faint. The chest was ochraceous with only the faintest streaks. However, the ochre was considerably less intense than that around the face which was of the strength found in the Salt-marsh Sharp-tails. So, as usual with the Sharp-tails, it ended up as a judgment call.

### **24 May**

It was foolish to go to the park this morning. There was a gusty and cold northeast wind with intermittent drizzle. I thought perhaps there might be a special shorebird but that was not the case. I rushed through my itinerary and had only 59 (33/26) species, just four of which were warblers (Yellow, 5; Parula, 1; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 8) comprising 16 individuals. I did find one of the juvenile Great-horned Owls in the usual hanging fir tree and now showing the beginnings of ear tufts. Also again had a nice study of the Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

There were no birds that were new for the year.

### **27 May**

There was a "noreaster" the past two days with very strong cold winds from the northeast accompanied by intermittent rain. Last night the wind began to come from the west and this morning, the warm and moderate westerly breeze gradually eliminated the clouds. There was a nice surge of migrating birds such that I logged 81 species (50/31) although only one, a female Ruby-throated Hummingbird, was new for the year. There were 10 warbler species (Black-and-white, 1; Yellow, 8; Parula, 2; Magnolia, 8; Black-throated Blue, 1; Blackpoll, 2; Wilson's 4; Canada, 3; Redstart, 10; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 49 individuals. Three Least Flycatchers, all calling, were also noteworthy.

The foliage is now quite heavy and it is exceedingly difficult to see the warblers. Unfortunately, my knowledge of warbler songs has greatly eroded since I rarely encounter large numbers of the family. Today was ideal for some of the rarer ones such

as Bay-breasted, Cape May and Tennessee, but my only chance for these is if I should be lucky enough to get a look at it.

### **28 May**

After a thunderstorm last night, the weather this morning could not have been nicer. There was a cloudless sky and just the trace of a warm southwesterly breeze. Although today is the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend, the park was still almost devoid of visitors. The density of birds was slightly less than yesterday but still quite good. I recorded 74 species (43/31) including nine warblers (Yellow, 8; Chestnut-sided, 2; Blackpoll, 2; Blackburnian, 1; Wilson's, 2; Canada, 1; Northern Waterthrush, 1; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 10) comprising 29 individuals. There were two species that were new for the year: a White-eyed Vireo that I heard and then found easily in the West Woods; and two Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows northeast of the central ditch in the east marsh. These birds had only the faintest trace of ochre on their breasts which were conspicuously streaked as were the sides.

I located the two young owls, perched rather conspicuously in the hanging fir this morning. They are the size of adults but still contain a large amount of light brown soft down in addition to a bit of mature barring. Their ear tufts are visible, albeit small and they no longer have the black periorbital coloration.

### **29 May**

A front from the north passed through last night and this morning there was a powerful wind from the north at 10-20 MPH. This wind effectively ended the spring migration although I still hope to one or two of the notoriously late migrants like Mourning Warbler and Olive-sided Flycatcher. Today I had only 66 species and they were split evenly (33/33) among Passerines and Non-Passerines. There were only two warbler species (Yellow, 3; Yellowthroat, 3) both locally breeding species and comprising just six individuals. I did find the 170<sup>th</sup> species of the year, however, an Oystercatcher on a rocky outcrop visible from the Mill Beach.

### **30 May**

Had this perfect Memorial Day morning been two weeks earlier, it would have been a sensational wave day. A warm southwesterly breeze brought clear skies. But the migration is virtually over and I found only 61 (34/27) species of which four were warblers (Yellow, 6; Canada, 1; Redstart, 1; Yellowthroat, 3) comprising 11 individuals. I did add one bird to the list for the year, a Yellow-billed Cuckoo that I heard near Woodcock Woods. I had a fine look at one of the adult Great-horned Owls in a deciduous tree near the hanging fir. It was being harassed by Crows which enabled me to find it. I didn't see the juveniles.

I haven't mentioned the progress in the Ospreys' nest because it is difficult to see the nest well enough from a distance. There seem usually to be two birds there now and perhaps they are partially grown juveniles but I'm far from certain.

### **31 May**

Although the number of species was the same at 61, there seemed to be more migrants around this morning than yesterday. There were six species of warbler (Yellow, 7; Magnolia, 1; Canada, 1; Wilson's, 1; Redstart, 2; Yellowthroat, 8) comprising 20 individuals. There were no birds that were new for the year.

A beautiful Red Fox loping across the northern edge of the airfield was the wildlife highligh of the day. I was the first visitor in the park this morning and the first person anywhere near the airfield. This was only the second time I had seen a fox in the park.

### **1 June**

This morning was foggy, humid and overcast with a gentle breeze from the east. I found two Piping Plovers flying over the beach and then settling and walking in the grassy area just east of the Pavilion and behind the beach. I was alerted to their presence by an unfamiliar shore bird note. This is only my second park record for Piping Plover which is very local and is seldom seen on beaches where it doesn't breed. These were probably post-breeding individuals. They were fully adult and represented my 172<sup>nd</sup>, and by far my rarest species for the park this year.

I saw both juvenile Great-horned Owls. Initially, they were in a deciduous tree, probably a hickory, where I had a superb study of one of them before it followed the other in flight. It seemed incongruous that these huge owls were flying around and yet still retained a considerable amount of downy feathering.

Overall, I recorded 54 (32/22) species and only three warblers (Yellow, 4; Yellowthroat, 2; Canada, 1) comprising just seven individuals.

### **2 June**

Today, like yesterday, was cool, overcast and foggy with a barely perceptible breeze from the east. I found just 53(29/24, Passerine/Non-Passerine) species and not a single land bird that was a definite passage migrant. The spring migration is finished.

The edge of the salt marsh behind the air field contained at least four Salt-marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows and at least five Marsh Wrens. Two more of the latter were vocalizing in

the west marsh. I suspect both of these species are breeding in nice numbers here this year.

### **6 June**

A beautiful, summer-like morning but with only 48 (29/19) species, none of which were new for the year. A Crested Flycatcher and a Redstart were the only land birds that don't breed in the park. There were at least six Willets which seem to be commoner this year than in the past. There may well be five or six breeding pairs.

### **13 July**

This morning I took Woody Bracey to the park. We found 52 species, none of which was particularly remarkable. Indeed, the most remarkable finding was the absence of wood warblers. We did not record a single one, not even a Yellow or Yellowthroat. Nor did we see or hear either oriole. We did flush a Clapper Rail and we noted several shorebirds including single examples of both yellowlegs and Dowitcher, 10 least and one Spotted Sandpiper as well as eight Killdeer. Willets were conspicuous by their absence. Apparently, they leave very shortly after breeding.

### **6 August**

Today I began examining the island near the Mill Bridge at high tide. I noticed last year that this was an excellent spot for watching large numbers of shorebirds congregating at high tide. I spent about one-half hour there at 1:00 PM (high tide) and found five species (Semipalmated Plover, 30; Greater Yellowlegs, 30; Least Sandpiper, 2; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 85; Spotted Sandpiper, 1) comprising 148 individuals. Also of interest, I noticed an adult and an immature Little Blue Heron.

### **7 August**

Today was virtually a carbon copy of yesterday. Six species of shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 40; Greater Yellowlegs, 15; Lesser Yellowlegs, 5; Least Sandpiper, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 85; Spotted Sandpiper, 1) comprising 147 individuals.

### **8 August**

The weather was almost identical to the past two days and the shorebirds were too save for an augmentation of peep. There were six species of shorebirds (Semipalmated

Plover, 35; Greater Yellowlegs, 25; Lesser Yellowlegs, 1; Least Sandpiper, 4; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 150; Spotted Sandpiper, 1) comprising 216 individuals.

### **9 August**

Continued cloudy, humid weather. There were five species of shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 10; Greater Yellowlegs, 25; Dowitcher, 1; Least Sandpiper, 2; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 180) comprising 218 individuals.

### **10 August**

This afternoon was clear with a mild southeasterly breeze. There were four species of shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 2; Greater Yellowlegs, 25; Least Sandpiper, 5; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 200) comprising 232 individuals.

### **11 August**

Very overcast and humid with just a trace of wind from the southwest. There were five species of Shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 15; Greater Yellowlegs, 25; Least Sandpiper, 5, Semipalmated Sandpiper, 250; Pectoral Sandpiper, 1;) comprising 296 individuals. There were also 50 Laughing Gulls on the sand portion of the island.

### **12 August**

The moon is waxing and, as it grows, the island visible from the Mill Bridge becomes smaller at high tide. This afternoon, the sandy portion of the island was partially inundated and by August 19<sup>th</sup>, the time of the full moon, I'm quite certain the entire sandy portion will be submerged at high tide. There was another increase in the number of Semipalmated Sandpipers today. There were five species of shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 25; Black-bellied Plover, 5; Greater Yellowlegs, 30; Least Sandpiper, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 400) comprising 461 individuals.

### **13 August**

Another very hot and muggy day with the minimal wind from the southwest. There were six species of shorebirds (Semipalmated Plover, 15; Black-bellied Plover, 2; Greater Yellowlegs, 30; Dowitcher, 1; Least Sandpiper, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 400), comprising 449 individuals.

## 15 August

Yesterday was characterized by severe thunderstorms and I did not get to the Mill Bridge nor to Sherwood Island. This morning, which was overcast with a light northwest breeze, I was at the Mill Bridge for high tide and found fewer shorebirds (Black-bellied Plover, 1; Greater Yellowlegs, 25; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 100) than I had been seeing during the past week. These birds were much upset when a dark falcon of medium size swooped in on them and just missed seizing one. The falcon was a bird of the year which I thought at first to be a Merlin. However, it had a very conspicuous face pattern that reminded me of a Hobby, and after some thought and study, I decided it was most probably a Peregrine. There were other shorebirds in the park including: Killdeer, 1; Semipalmated Plover, 1; Lesser Yellowlegs, 2; Pectoral Sandpiper, 8; Spotted Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 20. There were also many (at least 100) Common Terns. Another interesting bird was a boldly streaked Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow with very dull ochre face markings. Barn Swallows were clearly migrating (at least 75) and I totaled 51 species even without investigating the western half of the park, usually the best part for Passerine birds.

I examined only the eastern (including far-eastern) section of the park. The overgrown grassy area just northwest of the model airplane field where I saw the Yellow Rail three years ago has been cut by Tobey who seems to be continuing in his quest to remove all wild vegetation.

## 16 August

This morning was partly cloudy with a gentle northeast breeze. High tide was at 8:45 AM and yielded, on the island near the Mill Bridge: Killdeer, 1; Semipalmated Plover, 1; Black-bellied Plover, 1; Greater Yellowlegs, 30; Least Sandpiper, 1; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 200. I added a Spotted Sandpiper and a few more Least in the park where I omitted the far eastern section but did cover the western half. There were plenty of young birds about including two adult Chipping Sparrows with four spotted juveniles. Two Gnatcatchers were obvious migrants and a pleasant surprise. The total list was 52 species.

## 17 August

High tide was at 9:45 this morning so I examined the airplane field area including the marsh in the park before going to the Mill Bridge. The results were disappointing: five species of shorebirds (Black-bellied Plover, 2; Greater Yellowlegs, 5; Spotted Sandpiper, 1; Least Sandpiper, 2; Semipalmated Sandpiper, 250) comprising 280 individuals. The whole area is still absolutely parched despite a few recent thunderstorms. Unless there is a substantial northeaster with plenty of rain, this fall promises to be a complete bust for other than ordinary shore birds.

## 18 August

This morning was pleasant with a mild northeast wind. High tide was at 10:45 and a full moon is scheduled for tomorrow so the high tide encroached significantly on the sandy shoal in the Mill Pond. The birds on the shoal seem to be diminishing. There were only 120 Semiplumbed Sandpipers there. I covered most of my usual itinerary before high tide, omitting only the far eastern section of the park from the complete itinerary.

Tobay's crew continues to remove virtually all brush even attacking the reeds around the two ponds on the way to the West Woods. My list total was a miserable 41 species but I did find one interesting bird albeit a very unsatisfactory observation. As I was walking in the newly cut down meadow where I had seen the Yellow Rail, I heard the musical, three-syllable whistling warble of an Upland Plover coming from the airplane field east of where I was standing. I scanned the field and saw nothing. I continued west a few steps more and again heard the warble. This time, when I looked east, I found a Snipe-sized shorebird flying east directly into the sun. The call (see my notes from 1994 and 1995) is quite unmistakable.

## 19 August

This morning was a bit cooler than the preceding days and there was a moderate northeast breeze. High tide was at 11:30 but I started out my itinerary at the Mill Bridge at 7:30 so the tide was quite low. There wasn't a single shore bird on the sandy shoal confirming that this is a spot where they congregate specifically at high tide. I recorded 49 species for the day, none particularly noteworthy. A female Wilson's Warbler was the first definite migrating warbler of the season.

## 23 August

For the first time this month, there was a moderate northwest wind to start the day. And there were birds around, a fair number of migrants on what could be considered the first minor flight day of the fall. I recorded 53 species despite noting only one species of shorebird, namely five Killdeer. The park is extraordinarily parched, the fresh-water ponds dried up, the wet meadows not wet. And I was at the Mill Bridge at low tide, just the wrong time to look for congregating shorebirds. But there were five warbler species (Black-and-White, 2; Blue-winged, 1; Canada, 2; Northern Waterthrush, 1; and five Redstart. The Blue-winged was new for the year in the park. The number of individual warblers recorded does not reflect perhaps three times as many flitting in very leafy treetops and not affording me a decent look. Two Pewees and a Least Flycatcher were certainly migrants as were probably a Cooper's Hawk; a Broad-winged Hawk that was new for the year; and a fine adult Peregrine that gave me a very good look as it flew towards the southwest, hugging the shoreline and putting up dozens of gulls from the rocks which they occupy at low tide.

## **25 August**

The northwesterly flow of the past several days continued and with it, a modest flight of birds. My total for the morning was 57 species including a fine look at an Upland Sandpiper on the airplane field and a Virginia Rail, new for the year, that I flushed from the central drainage ditch. There were eight Redstarts, five Black-and-White Warblers, three Gnatcatchers, and, most surprising of all to me, a very early Blue-headed Vireo. Although they nest upstate, this was certainly a migrating bird.

## **26 August**

This morning was a bit warmer and partly cloudy with a variable trace of wind. I found 57 species including two, a Pied-billed Grebe in the east marsh channel and a Cliff Swallow flying over the air field, that were new for the year. In fact, I hadn't seen either of these in the park for some years. The grebe is particularly uncommon in the park. While standing on the Mill Bridge, I twice heard a shore bird whistle that I'm reasonably certain was that of a Whimbrel but I couldn't locate the caller and did not enter it on the formal list.

## **27 August**

This morning was very similar to the past several days. High tide was very early so I arrived at the Mill Bridge at just the right time and there were 50 Semipalmated Sandpipers and 18 Greater Yellowlegs on the shoal. The most interesting bird of the day was an immature Merlin that streaked over the east marsh putting up a cloud of Starlings but not stopping to attack. Years ago, Manny Levine commented to me that he had never seen a Merlin that did not appear to be going to a specific place in a hurry. No lazy soaring migration for them. Indeed, this characteristic is the best field mark of the species. Today's bird was a perfect example.

A count of 125 Mourning Doves was unusually high.

## **29 August**

For the past two days, there has been a stagnant southerly weather system, overcast with very occasional drizzle. These are not promising conditions for fall migration and this morning I was able to find only 47 species and just one individual migrating land bird, a Northern Waterthrush that I heard at Grove Point. I did see two Green Herons, a species that has always seemed inexplicably scarce at Sherwood Island.

## **1 September**

After a spell of weather dominated by southeast winds and the landfall on the Gulf coast of Hurricane Katrina, the most destructive in the history of that region, the winds shifted last night to the west northwest and I had high hopes for a good flight day. There has not been much rain despite the southeasterly weather front so the park is still stone dry. The day was a disappointment although there were migratory land birds, Kingbirds, Bobolinks and Cowbirds flying over. Nothing of note, however, and warblers represented only by two Yellowthroats. The list total was again just 47.

## **4 September**

This was a shockingly bad day considering the favorable west northwest breeze. The species list was only 44. Aside from an Upland Sandpiper that I heard without seeing, and a flock of 25 Chimney Swifts, there was nothing worthy of note.

## **6 September**

Another dreadful day, this one with a total of only 41 species. Every day this fall seems to be clear and warm with a very high sky making it difficult to see fly-overs. Two Sharp-shinned Hawks were my first for the year. The only obviously migrating land birds were two Veerys.

## **9 September**

This morning was partly cloudy with a low sky and a northerly breeze. I spent only two hours in the park and examined only the area west of the airplane field, omitting the Mill Pond, Grove Point and the eastern section of the park. I left early because of inexplicable fatigue, however, there was virtually nothing around and I found only 33 species including my first Kestrel of the year. Since my last visit, Tobey has overseen the removal of the reed barrier that separated the air plane field and the Yellow Rail field (now denuded) from the salt marsh. This barrier was an important area for rails, Sharp-tailed Sparrows and Marsh Wrens amongst others. The entire park now resembles a poorly maintained golf course and it is most discouraging to watch the destruction by Tobey of an area that I have enjoyed for so many years.

## **12 September**

This morning I did the complete itinerary including the far eastern section that I often omit. I wanted to see the total extent of damage inflicted by Tobey and his staff. The worst is the former overgrown and bushy meadow just northeast of the air plane field together with the reed barrier that separated it and the airplane field from the salt marsh.

The far eastern section is starting to recover. The area between Woodcock Woods and the two ponds has been pretty much cleared of brush and bushes. It's difficult to say how long it will take for these areas to regenerate and whether Tobey will allow such regeneration.

There was a dry southwesterly breeze on this hot morning and I expected to see very little. I was not surprised. I found 47 species including an early Pipit and eight Red-breasted Nuthatches. This appears to be a flight year for the latter.

### **14 September**

The stagnant southerly weather front persisted and the morning was again rather dull birdwise with only 49 species. I did flush a Sora from the central drainage ditch, however, and this was a new species for the year. The lack of migrating raptors has been striking. So far this fall, I've seen two Sharp-shinned Hawks, a single Kestrel and perhaps five migrating Ospreys.

I met a woman and her twelve year-old daughter, Jennifer and Elizabeth Woodson who were "looking for migrating birds" on the Mill Bridge. They live at number seven on the Mill Beach road. They seemed to have considerable intellectual curiosity and the daughter was sharp-eyed and keen. They had been advised at the Westport Nature Center that Sherwood Island was a very good place to find "migrating birds"!!!

### **16 September**

Yesterday, there were some very strong thunderstorms and this morning there was a northeast breeze with a drizzle. I thought there might be some shore birds in the park but it had absorbed all of yesterday's water and remained dry without puddles. I spent less than two hours and included only the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the airplane field area. I did not find any noteworthy birds among the 39 species that I recorded.

### **18 September**

A modest westerly breeze, a few cumulus clouds, and not a single raptor!! The day's total was 45 species and there was clearly a movement of Catbirds (15) together with a few other migrating land birds in small numbers, two Gnatcatchers being the most interesting of a dull lot.

### **23 September**

The weather since my last visit has been dominated by a stagnant southerly system, clear, almost windless, and warm. This is supposed to change tonight and this morning there were a few more clouds than there have been recently. Despite a good day for

visualizing them against the cloud, raptors remained conspicuous by their absence. A single Sharp-shinned Hawk was the only representative. However, I was pleasantly surprised by a species count of 54 and a rather high volume of land birds including three Phoebes, a Pewee, 25 Titmice, two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, two Thrashers, 20 Catbirds, 30 Robins, three Palm and one Parula Warblers, 10 Yellowthroats and eight Savannah Sparrows. There was also a Green-winged Teal.

### **24 September**

There was a major weather shift overnight and continuing through this morning. Strong winds from the north northeast ushered in much cooler temperatures and it really felt like autumn for the first time this year. The sky was partly cloudy giving very good visibility yet I failed to record a single raptor. Compensations were more than adequate.

I started the morning at the Mill Beach and was pleased to see two Oystercatchers flying south. They must have been standing somewhere near the beach but I did not see them until I heard their note and observed them from the rear.

I then went to the Mill Bridge and the first thing I saw was an adult American Avocet. The bird was standing in the shallows at the left end of the island that is just north of the bridge and is where I do my shorebird counts. The bird was completely black and white, lacking the rufous wash of the head and neck that one sees in spring birds. I did not need even binoculars to identify it but did take pleasure in examining it through the telescope at my leisure. It was my first record for the park area and for the state.

There was also a reasonable flight of Passerine birds including: 12 Phoebes, a Least Flycatcher, 25 Catbirds, five warbler species including what I took to be a Tennessee although I am always uncertain about that bird unless I hear its song; and eight White-throated Sparrows to name a few. The list for the day was 48 but this number failed to convey the volume of migrating birds.

### **25 September**

This morning was overcast with quite a strong breeze from the south. I found the Avocet in the northeast corner of the Mill Pond, easily visible from the overlook on the entry road. I saw one each of Red-tailed Hawk (almost certainly a resident adult since perched on various small trees in the east parking lot), Harrier and Osprey. I spent only two and one-half hours and recorded just 42 species.

### **27 September**

Yesterday was rainy with a strong southerly breeze. Overnight and this morning, strong northwest winds cleared the low clouds although there were some cumulus clouds.

Considering that it was from the northwest, the wind was oddly warm. I thought there might be a substantial flight but there were rather few land birds amongst the 49 species that I found. Most interesting was a group of five Saltmarsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows behind the airfield that were vocalizing, a rare occurrence. The sound was a short and scratchy note or two. It wasn't clear to me whether to label it a "call" or a "song". At least there were a few raptors today, an Osprey, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Red-tailed Hawk and two Turkey Vultures. Be thankful for tiny favors! I think tomorrow may be good. The wind is predicted to diminish and the temperatures to drop.

### **28 September**

This was a fine early fall morning with a modest variable breeze and a clear sky. I found the Avocet in the northeast corner of the Mill Pond easily visible from the overpass of the entry road. I flushed two Golden Plovers (basic plumage) from the airplane field, the first I have seen in some years. Land birds were pretty good as well including six warbler species (Black-and-White, 1; Yellow-rumped, two; Black-throated Green, two; Palm, one; Pine, one; and Yellowthroat eight. The first five of these were all in a few pines near the Pavilion parking lot. As I watched them, a female or immature Merlin suddenly shot into the tree, clutched at a warbler, and left as quickly as it had come, apparently having missed his strike... The total list was a respectable 60.

### **30 September**

This morning seemed an ideal one for migration. Last night had produced a cold and gusty wind from the northwest. This morning was the coolest thus far this fall and had a few cumulus clouds blown by a modest breeze from the north. I examined only the park proper, omitting the Mill Beach and Grove Point.

Perhaps the most striking feature of the day was the paucity of raptors. Aside from the resident Red-tail, there was only one bird of prey, a Merlin that frightened a flock of Starlings. There were plenty of migrating land birds amongst the 53 species including two Winter Wrens, my first for the year. I had a particularly spectacular look at one of these. The Salt-marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrows continued to vocalize, the sound resembling the raspy notes of a Starling. I saw the Avocet in two places: first, in the northeast corner of the Mill Pond from the connector overlook; and later in the West Marsh just west of the West Woods.

### **10 October**

I have been away for 10 days. However, there has not been a frost or very windy day and many walnuts, hickory nuts, horse chestnuts and apples are still attached to their trees. Recent heavy rain has finally hydrated the park so that there is water in the depressions that form freshwater pools. The morning was overcast with drizzle and the birds were

not particularly interesting save that the Avocet was still there, this time in the West Marsh, just west of the West Woods. The total list for the day was 44 species.

### **15 October**

Recent weather has been extraordinary. Since my last visit, there has been a steady rain, often heavy, and a rather strong easterly wind. This morning, this began to change as the wind shifted to the northwest. The recently parched park was now saturated with water, and its pools were filled. There was also plenty of standing water. The tide was unusually high and there was some flooding with all the tidal ditches overflowing and both east and west marshes appearing as lakes.

Although I recorded only 46 species, there was something of a flight and some interesting birds including: a modest group of raptors comprising a Turkey Vulture, an Osprey, a Harrier, a Merlin, five Kestrels and 11 Sharp-shins. Until today, my total fall count of Kestrels and Sharp-shins was one of each; also a Clapper Rail wading in the newly filled pond next to the airplane field; my first Snipe of the fall; 15 Tree Swallows; and 30 Yellow-rumped Warblers.

### **17 October**

Yesterday there were very gusty winds, up to 40 MPH, from the northwest and, judging from the reports of others, quite a significant flight of migrants. This morning was also very favorable, with the winds continuing at 122-25 MPH from the northwest and a few cumulus clouds. I ran into A. J. Hand and Penny Solum quite early and we worked the western half of the park rather slowly so I never did get to the eastern half including the airfield area. Despite this severe truncation of my itinerary, I recorded 56 species and there was an enormous volume of birds. The only species that was new for the year was Purple Finch, of which I found three. The most abundant Passerines were Yellow-rumped Warbler and White-throated Sparrow. My estimates of 150 and 100 respectively, were probably quite conservative. There were eight Sharp-shins, a Cooper's Hawk, four Kestrels and three Merlins. Also 10 Phoebes, five Yellowthroats, three Black-and-White and three Palm Warblers and sundry other Passerines.

### **19 October**

The wind shifted to southwest last night but the migration remained active. I found 60 species, a respectable total, and the most numerous were 100 Yellow-rumped Warblers. There were no surprises and no new birds for the year. Late examples of Spotted Sandpiper and Little Blue Heron (immature) were the most interesting finds.

This fall has been marked by a significant recovery in the number of monarch butterflies which have been reasonably common after having been virtually absent for the past few years.

### 20 October

This was another splendid late October morning, cool with a brisk and gusting northwesterly breeze and a few cirrus clouds. Birds were everywhere with Yellow-rumped Warbler (150) the most numerous and conspicuous species. Amongst the 62 species, one, an immature Bald Eagle was new and represented my 190<sup>th</sup> species for the year. Also of interest was the fall's first Woodcock that I flushed from the boundry thickets between the far east marsh and the abutting field to its south. There were nine species of sparrows including both Sharp-tails and three White-crowned.

### 21 October

This morning was overcast with a prediction of rain for the next two day. However, the breeze from the northwest remained as did the large volume of birds. **The total of 70 species was the highest I have ever recorded for any date in October.** There were no new birds for the year although Frank Mantlik and Penny Solum each found a Vesper Sparrow that I was unable to locate.

Here are some of the highlights of this extraordinary day: Five Red-breasted Mergansers, the first diving ducks of the fall; an American Bittern flushed from the central drainage ditch; an immature Peregrine flying over the Mill Pond; single examples of Woodcock and Snipe; 75 Tree Swallows; 25 Pipits; two Winter Wrens; two House Wrens; 25 Ruby-crowned Kinglets including several virtually underfoot (the same applied to some of the Golden-crowned which seemed too exhausted to fly); a beautiful adult male Black-throated Blue Warbler; a flock of 11 Meadowlarks; a spectacular mass of sparrows including: 200+ Songs; 40 White-throated; 20 Swamp; 10 Savannahs; 8 Fields; 6 White-crowned.

### 24 October

The past two days were characterized by rain and a mild northeasterly flow. Last night the wind shifted to the northwest and the temperature dropped. This morning the wind shifted again to the north and a severe northeasterly storm is expected this evening and tomorrow.

The large flight of Yellow-rumped Warblers and Song Sparrows that I noted during my last few visits was considerably diminished today and the total species list dropped to 48 from 70 three days ago. A Vesper Sparrow in the east parking lot was new for the year.

There were still fair numbers of Ruby-crowned Kinglets (25) and White-throated Sparrows (40) and four Winter Wrens was noteworthy.

### **26 October**

Yesterday there was a major “noreaster” with very strong winds and heavy rain. This month of October has been one of the wettest months in Connecticut history and the park is now completely saturated and filled with standing fresh water. This morning the chilly winds were gusting from the northwest and gradually clearing out the sky.

I expected something of special interest today and was a bit disappointed although there was still considerable movement, mainly Ruby-crowned Kinglets (30), Yellow-rumped Warblers (40 and down from last week) and White-throated Sparrows (40). The big flight of Song Sparrows is finished. The list total was 51 and there were no new species for the year, nor new fall species arrivals.

### **27 October**

This morning was raw and overcast with a strong wind from the west northwest. I found 45 species in the two hours I was out, not bad considering that I omitted the entire western half of the park from my usual itinerary. The most interesting find was a fine Forster’s Tern, a new species for the year, that was sitting with 15 Laughing Gulls on an exposed mud surface just north of the Mill Bridge. A Spotted Sandpiper in the far east marsh seemed almost to fall into the category of “lingerer”. The late October flight is definitely winding gradually down.

### **28 October**

This morning was again quite cold, partly cloudy, and with a moderate wind from the northwest. I determined to examine the west half of the park particularly carefully because I omitted it yesterday and then heard from A. J. Hand that someone had found six Saw-whet Owls. I tried my best but failed to find any.

I was out for two hours and forty minutes and omitted the eastern section of the park from my itinerary. The day’s total was 51 species. A Forster’s Tern, presumably the same one as yesterday, was flying around the Mill Pond and single examples of Catbird and Yellowthroat perhaps fell into the class of lingerers. Otherwise, there were no surprises and the volume of Passerines continued to decrease.

### **31 October**

The wind shifted overnight from northwest to southwest and the temperature rose sharply during the morning. Although the species total was a very respectable 59, the volume of birds was much diminished from the past two weeks. I flushed a female Pheasant from the brush adjacent to the central ditch and this was a new species for the year. Pheasants, which were formerly common and bred here at Sherwood Island, have almost disappeared concurrent with the increase in Turkey population.

Other interesting birds were single examples of Merlin and Peregrine.

### **1 November**

The morning was delightful but there was a southerly breeze and there weren't a great many birds. I omitted the far eastern section of my itinerary and recorded 49 species, none of which were unexpected or in unusual numbers.

### **3 November**

There was a very strong wind from the southwest this morning and I was out for less than two hours and omitted the entire western section of the park. Birds were hard to come by although, among the day's 39 species, I did see a Lesser Black-backed Gull (*graellsi*) at the inlet separating the park from Burying Hill Beach.

After I returned home and as I was entering the day's the list, I received a telephone call from my son, PH, telling me that my daughter, Abby, had committed suicide. This, less than a year after the death of my wife, Maddy.

### **9 November**

I'm trying hard to adhere to my usual daily routine. This morning was cold and raw with an overcast sky and a forceful northeast breeze. I found 43 species including four Horned Larks, which were new for the year. These were on the beach reminding me that they are called "Shore Lark" in England. A flock of 25 Snow Geese flying over was also noteworthy as was the seasons's first Tree Sparrow. I am always struck by the white, or at the very least, pale outer tail feathers of the latter that are never mentioned in guides although sometimes shown in the illustrations.

### **11 November**

A cool late fall morning with cumulous clouds and a brisk breeze from the northwest. Despite a very respectable total of 50 species, there was nothing unexpected or of particular interest. A flock of 800 Red-winged Blackbirds flying over was perhaps the highlight.

### **13 November**

This was a warm pleasant morning with a gentle breeze from the west southwest. I found 50 species, none unexpected. The most interesting was a group of three Fox Sparrows. A Great Egret and a Catbird were lingerers.

During the past several days there have been numerous reports from nearby coastal sites of Golden Eagle, Cave Swallow and Evening Grosbeak. I have looked assiduously, albeit vainly for these, the more so since I have never seen the first two at Sherwood Island although both are on the park list.

### **17 November**

Yesterday was characterized by rain and a stiff breeze from the northeast. This morning the skies were cleared by a vigorous breeze from the west northwest. I spent only two hours and omitted the western half of the park. I was hoping for some interesting flyovers in the more open, eastern section of the park. The best I could find amongst the day's 44 species was a late Osprey.

### **18 November**

The wind was much abated this morning, just a slight breeze from the northwest. But it was cold with a thin film of ice in various places. I spent two and one-half hours, omitting the far eastern section of the park but covering the western section that I missed yesterday. There were not a great many birds. Two Great Egrets and a single Snow Bunting stood out amongst the 42 species that I managed to find.

### **20 November**

This morning was beautiful, slightly warmer than the previous two days, with a gentle breeze from the west. There were not many birds and I omitted the entire eastern section of the park from my itinerary. A male Bluebird on a fence post as I was leaving was the most interesting find.

### **23 November**

Tobey has closed all parking lots save the main one near the pavilion so that it is particularly difficult to cover the entire park. I omitted the complete eastern section from my itinerary this morning. The sky was clear but there was a strong cold breeze from the

northwest and the temperature was below freezing so that it felt uncomfortably cold. I recorded 41 species including a Common Egret, a Towhee and a Fox Sparrow.

### **28 November**

After several days of cold weather, this morning was warm but overcast with a moderate breeze from the northeast. There were some interesting birds amongst the 48 species that I recorded. These included: five Horned Grebes, the first of the fall; a female Ring-necked Duck, new for the year; a female Pintail; a roosting Great-horned Owl that I actually managed to find without the assistance of Crows; a Red-breasted Nuthatch; a Thrasher; and a Towhee.

Tobey's closure of all the parking lots save that at the pavilion is probably good for birds since it results in fewer people and less disturbance throughout the park.

### **29 November**

This morning was overcast and about 60° with a strong breeze from the southwest. The birds were similar to yesterday and in the same places. The total was 43 species. The female Ring-necked Duck was again in the east marsh. The Great-horned Owl was roosting in the same fir tree in the center of the park as yesterday. Woodcock woods was loaded with birds including single examples of Catbird, Thrasher and Towhee, the latter two having been in the same place yesterday.

### **1 December**

After a day of rain and southeasterly winds, this morning was clear and cool with a mild to moderate breeze from the northeast. I found a respectable 47 species. However, I failed to locate several of the lingering land birds that I saw the last two visits including Catbird, Thrasher, Hermit Thrush and Towhee. However, the Great-horned Owl was roosting in the same tree as those last two visits and a late Ospey represented today's "lingerer".

### **2 December**

This was an overcast, cool morning with a blustery and gusty northwest wind. I was out for only two hours and omitted the entire eastern half of the park from my itinerary recording only 35 species. There were some interesting lingerers, however, including a Towhee at Grove Point and single examples of Catbird and Thrasher in Woodcock Woods where I had seen them several days ago. The Great-horned Owl was no longer present in the tree I had seen it during my last three visits.

## 18 December

Today was scheduled for the Westport Christmas Count but I'm not certain whether Sherwood Island was included in it. In the event, I did my usual complete itinerary under overcast skies with virtually no wind. Standing water and the Mill Pond were almost entirely frozen but there was no snow coverage. I found 42 species amongst which an astonishing number of five Towhees was the only noteworthy observation.

## 24 December

Today was the first warm one in a long while with the temperature reaching the high 40s in the morning while I was in the park. There was a gentle southerly wind and there was some mist far out on the Sound that shrouded Long Island. I found 45 species including: 25 Brant; 10 Black Scoters in flight over the Sound; a Fish Crow; a Pipit; three Bluebirds; a flock of about 2,000 Starlings; and three Towhees. The Connecticut Rare Bird website listed two White-fronted Geese and 16 Black Vultures for the park area yesterday but I failed to find either of these. In fact Black Vulture is not yet on my list for the park although it has been seen there on several occasions by other people and is becoming increasingly common in southwestern Connecticut.

## 28 December

Two Razorbills and a White-winged Crossbill were reported in the park on December 24<sup>th</sup> when I certainly didn't see them, so I decided to give it a try this morning which was a pleasantly warm and windless one. When I came to the favorite evergreen for the Long-eared Owl in the center of the park, I encountered a young man, Tim Antanaitis, who told me he was looking for the Crossbill. I noticed that he had tapes with him and, since the Crossbill had allegedly been vocalizing, suggested that he play its song with which I was not familiar. He played it and, *mirabile dictu*, a young male White-winged Crossbill appeared at the top of the tree, the very tree so favored by Long-eared Owls. Whenever the bird left, it could be summoned by playing the tape. Quite extraordinary. Thinking that our luck seemed particularly good, we went immediately to the Pavilion Point and studied a very placid Sound but failed, at least while I was there, to find any trace of an Alcid.

White-winged Crossbill was a new Sherwood Island bird for me, although many years ago, Bob Winkler saw one here.