

Sherwood Island Diary

Richard L Soffer

2007

11 March

After a bitterly cold week, this was a delightful early March day with moderate temperature and a modest breeze from the northwest. There is a large fenced in enclosure full of gravel and large earth-moving machines in the west section of the park abutting the line of pines where the Great-horned Owls have bred in the past two years. There is also a foundation for a new Nature Center on the elevated mound in the eastern section of the park so, despite the fact that Tobey has left and been replaced by a new superintendent, there is still much ecological disturbance. However, there were lots of birds around. I recorded 50 species, probably the most I have ever had on such an early spring day. Included was: a Pied-billed Grebe off the west beach; a high count of 75 Gadwall in the open parts of the pond; a drake Eurasian Wigeon; three Woodcock, one walking within 10 feet at Grove point, the others flushed from the woods and shrubbery abutting the far east marsh; a Snipe flushed from the far eastern meadow; a Meadowlark near the model airplane field; and at least six Fox Sparrows all singing their Orchard-Oriole-like song.

Part of my time was spent with A. J. Hand.

13 March

Another nice morning with a slight breeze from the southwest. I was constrained by time and had to omit the western section of the park. None-the-less, I found 44 species including two species, 60 Brant and six Green-winged Teal, that I did not record the other day. The latter were in a odd place for them, namely off the Pavilion Point. The Eurasian Wigeon was still with the large flock of Baldpates.

28 March

Yesterday was the first really spring-like day but this morning felt very cool because of a strong wind from the northwest. I spent only two hours and 10 minutes and omitted the western half of the park because of time constraints. I found 43 species including the Eurasian Wigeon drake and seven species that were new for the year: one Red-throated Loon; one Black Crowned Night-Heron; two Ospreys on the platform; one Cooper's Hawk terrorizing a flock of Starlings; one Greater Yellowlegs; a fine Lesser Black-backed Gull with brilliant yellow legs and a slaty back (*graellsii* subspecies) at the eastern end of the park; and a Mockingbird.

3 May

This morning was cool with a moderate breeze from the northwest and I omitted the eastern section of the park since there were not many birds. I found 49 species, 18 of which were new for the year, amongst these the most interesting being a Snow Goose. Most of the early Passeres were present but Yellow and Yellowthroat were the only warblers.

8 May

After a very cool and windless early morning, a moderate breeze from the southwest warmed the atmosphere significantly during my three hours (11:00-2:00) in the park today after an earlier visit to the Dolce Property (formerly the Prudential Property). Given the fact that I was here during the most unfavorable hours of the day, the birds weren't too bad. There were plenty of migrating individuals and I recorded 59 species including nine that were new for the year and five warblers (Yellow, 3; Black-and-white, 1; Yellow-rumped, 1; Palm, 1; and Wilson's, 1) comprising seven individuals. The only slightly surprising find was a Laughing Gull. They are uncommon in spring and the few that I see in that season usually show up later.

9 May

Despite perfect weather, this morning was a complete bust. 49 Species with a hen Turkey as the only new one. Only a single (Yellow) species of warbler with five individuals. A monstrous day may be in the offing considering how little has passed through here or the Dolce property which was almost as bad earlier in the morning.

10 May

Today I went to the park in the late afternoon (3:15-5:45) after having spent the early morning at the Dolce Property. I examined only the park proper, omitting the Mill Beach and Grove Point from my usual itinerary but including both west and east sections of the park. I found 53 species including five that were new for the year: a Spotted Sandpiper; a Nashville Warbler; two Rose-breasted Grosbeak males; two male Bobolinks; and a Swamp Sparrow. There were only three warbler species (Yellow, 6; Nashville, 1; Yellow-rumped, 1) comprising eight individuals.

11 May

After a rainy morning, the wind shifted from southwest to southeast and the sky cleared partially although the humidity remained high. I spent two and one-half late afternoon hours in the park and there were more birds than yesterday. I recorded 60 species including eleven that were new for the year: two Least Sandpipers; two Rock Doves; a Great-horned Owl being harassed by crows; a Belted Kingfisher; a Kingbird; a Gnatcatcher; a Swainson's Thrush; a Yellow-throated Vireo that I heard; a Chestnut-sided Warbler; two Parula Warblers that I heard; and a Black-throated Blue Warbler that I heard. There were six species of warblers (Yellow, 6; Yellowthroat, 2; Parula, 2; Black-throated Blue, 1; Chestnut-sided, 1; Yellow-rumped, 1) comprising 13 individuals.

12 May

There was a southerly breeze this afternoon but no land bird migration (two warbler species, Yellow, 6 and Yellow-rumped, 2) yet there were plenty of interesting birds including five that were new for the year here: a Glossy Ibis; an Oystercatcher on the most westerly jetty; two splendid Dunlins in alternate plumage in the Mill marsh; three Least Terns noisily quartering the Mill Pond; and a spectacular male Scarlet Tanager that virtually glowed. In addition, I flushed a Great-horned Owl **from the ground** near where I saw one yesterday. If it was on prey, I couldn't locate that prey.

I noticed a family with goslings (quite recent) for the first time.

14 May

What an extraordinary afternoon! Here it is, mid May, a warm clear day with a gusty wind from the south and I can find only one warbler species, namely four yellows. One species of warbler on May 14th! And yet the day was interesting. I saw a Ruddy Turnstone on the large rock just off the Pavilion point and I found a Marsh Wren despite the overcutting of the Phragmites that they love. And the most extraordinary find of the year: I flushed a male **Whip-poor-will** (conspicuous white on tail) from the Woodcock Woods area, only my second record for the park, the previous sighting having been more than 25 years ago. I actually flushed the bird three times as I kept chasing after it hoping in vain to get a good look.

For the third day in succession, I flushed and briefly glimpsed what I took to be a Great-horned Owl. This time I decided to try and find where it had flown and I had the excellent luck to spot it sitting in a large White Pine adjacent to the fields in the center of the park. It eyed me but decided to stay put and I enjoyed a spectacular look at my leisure. So this seemingly awful day with virtually no migrants in which I recorded only one warbler and logged more non-passerines (28) than passerines (27) turned out to be extremely satisfying.

15 May

The wind from the southwest was so strong today that I couldn't hear myself think. Moreover, the center of the park has been converted into some sort of a truck depot and the resulting noise from the very large vehicles as they go in and out seemed particularly intrusive this afternoon. Not surprisingly, I had to work very hard for a paltry 47 species.

I had an exceptionally fine view of a Crested Flycatcher which was the only new year bird for the park. Three Yellows and a Yellowthroat represented my complete complement of warblers. I flushed a female Mallard from a nest with 10 dirty off-white eggs near the first drainage ditch (most westerly) in the eastern section of the park. There was virtually no cover.

I had never been to the park at dead low tide late in the afternoon and I was surprised at how quiet the mud flats seemed. They were very extensive and I found at least four and more likely six Oystercatchers far off the western section of the park at the edge of the mud. This was the most I've ever recorded for the park.

12 September

Whenever I go to the park after a long absence, I see something of interest. None of the 40 species of birds was noteworthy this morning, however, I did examine at my leisure, a group of at least three Otters fishing in the marsh channel north of the model airplane field. I had never seen Otter before in the park, my only previous Mustelid being the Fisher that I observed on the railroad tracks some years ago.

16 September

This seemed a perfect morning, cool and clear with a gentle breeze from the north. I limited my itinerary to the park proper and found only 41 species. A Sharp-shinned Hawk, a Red-breasted Nuthatch that I heard, and an immature male Redstart were all species that I had missed in my few spring outings and thus new for the year.