

Sherwood Island Diary

Richard L Soffer

1994

January 14

January 14th was the first day I birded at Sherwood Island in 1994. I began the year with less than my usual enthusiasm. Ordinarily, I make my initial trip as close to the first as possible, but this year a variety of obligations made the 14th the earliest feasible date. The sky was gloomy and overcast and there were occasional snow flurries. At least it was relatively warm. A very frigid front was predicted for the next two days. The five-inch snow cover had an icy crust through which I invariably crunched so that walking was quite unpleasant.

I took my customary route starting at the Walter D. Allen Preserve, a 6.1 acre parcel of land at the base of Grove Point Road that overlooks the northwestern corner of the Mill Pond. It contains a small salt marsh as well as a little woodland and shrubbery and is not part of Sherwood Island State Park *per se*. There are a number of dead trees that overlook the marsh and a fine adult Red-tailed Hawk was perched on one of these providing an auspicious debut for 1994. Its plumage appeared particularly luxuriant reminding me of Fuertes' portrait of a Peregrine in Forbush's *Birds of Massachusetts*. A Flicker flew by, another good sign, as they are by no means automatic here at this time of the year.

I continued down Hillspoint Road to the parking lot of Allen's Clam House which looks upon the southwest part of the Mill Pond. I disturbed a Great Blue Heron that had been fishing on the shore of the lot. This is always a good spot for herons. Today, almost the only open area of the pond was here and various ducks were about. They included small numbers of Mallards, Baldpates, Buffleheads, Canvasback, Red-breasted Merganser and many Blacks and geese. There was, however, nothing unusual either here or at the nearby Mill Beach where high tide had obliterated the mud flats.

The northeast corner of the Mill Pond can be easily scanned from the overlook at the turn off for Sherwood Island State Park. This is the best place in the park for surface-feeding ducks and there is usually some open water, even during cold weather. This was the case today but the open area was full only of geese and Blacks. The park was virtually deserted. The roads had been plowed but the fields were blanketed with snow. It was not recent, however, and, together with the gray, foggy sky, presented a dreary rather than fresh appearance. I parked first at the pavilion and walked out to the point. The Sound was absolutely placid which is highly unusual, and often very favorable, for observing large numbers of sea ducks. There weren't many about, however, and the fog precluded seeing those that were really distant. About 25 Goldeneye were very close and it would have been easy to distinguish the occasional Barrow's had it been amongst them. A Greater Scaup flew by and there were a few individuals of the regular salt water bird species including two Red-throated Loons. I had my usual cold weather aggravations with the telescope tripod and its

many mysterious knobs that never seem to be in the right position when it's uncomfortable to adjust them.

Then I drove onto the single plowed track on the east parking lot and left the car. I walked over to the brushy area that separates the model airplane flying field from the central drainage ditch since the wetness here makes it a good spot for snipe. Suddenly, I flushed a large bird from the high grass which temporarily precluded my seeing it. I rushed to an open space. Short-eared Owl! I had a superb look as it circled low, was discovered and harassed by two Crows, and rose higher and higher before apparently leaving the park. I was struck for the first time by the contrast of the heavily streaked breast and light belly and by the black wrist marks on the underwing. This species is difficult to record at Sherwood Island and my few other records occurred during migration. I think this is the fourth individual I've seen and they've all been in pretty much the same location, that is to say near the central drainage ditch. This was exciting and definitely the bird of the day. I did see a few other interesting species, however. Four Sanderlings were at the edge of the Sound between the bath houses and the east breakwater. And there was a flock of 25 Redpolls that landed in the West Woods. This is only the second winter in recent memory that Redpolls have been about. Their call, which I learned last month, suggests an unmusical Goldfinch.

I didn't scour the west part of the park as diligently as I might have. For one thing, the tide was so high that it was not possible to walk in the marsh. In addition, walking through the ice-encrusted snow became increasingly enervating. There were plenty of birds around, however, and I finished the day with a highly respectable list of 41 species. It was the best early January day I've had at Sherwood Island and I'm fired up for the next one.

January 22

They don't come any worse! An occupational hazard! one must take the bad with the good! Oh well, it's a fair representation. So I reflect on today's trip. Seven full days of extraordinary weather had elapsed since my last entry. During that period, the temperature had dipped to less than 10 degrees almost every day and on two of them had reached zero and minus two, respectively. There had been a major snow and ice storm and the roads had been quite impassable. Today was really the first since the 14th when it was feasible to get safely to the park i. e. without fear of skidding or frostbite. Never-the-less, the strong winds made it unpromising despite temperatures that finally had made it into the twenties. I suspected that the birding would be frightful. If there is one variable with predictive value about a day at Sherwood Island, it is the wind, which is always much stronger there than on the mainland. High winds mean a choppy Sound and no birds. So why did I go? Well, if I'm really keeping a diary, I feel obligated to get there at least once a week and just "tell it like it is". I think of myself as a reporter and I hadn't been there in slightly more than a week. And although I was pretty pessimistic, deep down I wondered whether perhaps the excessively cold weather had brought in a Snowy Owl or perhaps some Crossbills, either of which would have been new for my Sherwood Island list. Walking wasn't too bad because the snow was solidly frozen. So was the Mill Pond except where the sluices open into it from the Sound. Many Mallards were huddled in this little area of open water, as well as in the one other I found where the Mill Pond feeds into the east salt marsh just west of the entrance to the park. Here, the Mallards were sharing the water with seven Hooded Mergansers. The three jetties were all exposed because of the low tide and the icy rocks

made me feel that if ever I were to see Purple Sandpipers here, today was the day. But it wasn't! The cold wind blowing in from the choppy Sound made it impossible to scan for sea ducks and the Sound contained considerable ice inshore. In fact, to the west, between Norwalk and the islands, most of the Sound seemed frozen. I did considerable tramping around the west marshes in the hopes of flushing something interesting and I covered the land bird areas in the western half of the park quite carefully. An adult Night Heron was at the edge of the Mill Pond in the inlet just north of Allen's. It looked as though it thought it should be somewhere else. I should think it stood little chance for fish with such thick ice. After finishing the western half of the park, I found that I was beginning to talk to myself about obsessive personalities rather than feeling virtuous and scholarly. So I quit for the day!

It does happen every year. An absolutely miserable day, usually in January. This was one of the worst. Well, I've always said that Sherwood Island was basically a poor area for birding and that it was only by virtue of repeated visits and real marsh-beating that one could record as much as I have. 22 Species! They don't get any worse than today!

January 24

The temperature today was in the forties and the sky was clear. It seemed a good opportunity to redeem the disastrous visit of two days ago. The temptation was quite irresistible despite rather gusty southwest winds. Snow and ice were visibly melting everywhere but the pond was still frozen except at its margins. The sound was very choppy as usual and there were virtually no birds to be seen on it.

The day started with an immature Black-crowned Night Heron in precisely the same spot where I described the adult in my last note. Is that because children learn from their elders? A group of 46 Dunlins was among blocks of ice on an emerging tidal flat at the Mill Beach. The car flushed four Snow Buntings from the road by the circle as I drove to the pavilion. I did a lot of marsh beating in the eastern half of the park without any success but I did flush a Meadowlark from the field at the east end. There were raptors about. I had excellent studies of adult and immature Red-tails and of a superb adult Red-shouldered Hawk. Although I only recorded 32 species, I hadn't seen eight of them on my previous two trips of the year. I characterize it as an average January day.

January 29

The weather this winter has been extraordinary. Two days ago, the temperature dipped to 0 for the third time in January. Then yesterday it rose to 54 with torrential rains, and winds that gusted to 40 MPH. Much melted snow combined with the rain to cause swelling rivers and considerable flooding. Last night was clear and today the temperature was 40 and the sky somewhat overcast. Most snow had been washed away. At Sherwood Island, there were rivulets all over the place and the drainage ditches and marsh water were mostly open, yet the Mill Pond was still largely frozen. A gusty northwest wind rippled the Sound and it seemed colder than the temperature indicated.

Unusual weather often makes for unusual birds and I started this day with a sense of anticipation. Of course, I've learned over the years that I shouldn't expect anything exciting on any given day at the park. I know that if I put in my time there, I'll be rewarded, but that

it's a mistake to try and guess on which days those rewards will come. There were also two unpromising omens. First, my car wouldn't start. This wasn't surprising since it had been out in the heavy rains and the wires or distributor could easily have become moistened. I call this barely operational vehicle my "Sherwood Island car". It is thirteen years old and has managed more than 101,000 miles without special maintenance or repairs. It sputters as though missing several spark plugs and whenever I take it for an oil change, the mechanic says to me "you don't want to know all that's wrong. It may survive a few more station runs". But Sherwood Island is much more than a "station run". Its east parking lot is unsurfaced and would be the death of a much healthier machine. This car looks like a promotion for a movie about poverty and I know its insides are about to fall out. In any event, today I had to use my daughter Abby's car. And to make matters worse, while I was parked at the Mill Beach, a flock of Canada Geese defecated all over the window on the driver's side. How is that possible? They couldn't have done it if they tried, but there it was.

The second omen was that I had lower back pain. It started yesterday when I was lifting a heavy book from the shelf. I was in traction for 58 days with a herniated nucleus pulposus in 1974 and I learned the hard way that I should respect my intervertebral disc when it sends signals. It was signaling today but I was so eager to see what the wacky weather had brought that I decided to postpone an inevitable day or two of bed rest. Now I may pay more than that for this foolish transgression.

After all this talk about omens, the reader, if there be one, will doubtless assume that the day was, in some way, remarkable. Wrong! My superstitions (as opposed to reasoned pessimistic analyses) seldom have predictive value. The day proved to be a rather typical one. Some interesting observations but nothing of particular rarity. The most noteworthy event occurred next to a house at the Mill Beach where a feeder always attracts many House Sparrows. As I walked by, there was a loud squawking from the bushes and sparrows shot out in every direction. Seconds later, a large immature Sharp-shinned Hawk emerged without prey and alit not 20 feet from me in a small tree adjacent to the house. She (for the size certainly indicated a female) and I eyed one another for perhaps 90 seconds before she took off in a leisurely manner. I was reminded vividly of an almost identical moment of drama that I had experienced in one of Oslo's parks in 1984. In that case, the sudden havoc amongst small birds was wrought by Accipiter nisus, the Eurasian Sparrow Hawk. These incidents are always unforgettable because they come as a complete surprise and because they include a close look at a handsome bird of prey in action.

There were some other sightings of interest. Two Gadwall circled the Mill Pond with a flock of Mallards, although I don't know whether they landed. Surface-feeding ducks have become very scarce here during the past several years with the exception of Blacks and Mallards. One or two Gadwall now seem to represent a full year's quota. Flocks of 30 Sanderlings and 20 Snow Buntings were also noteworthy. Included amongst the latter, were two males almost in full breeding plumage. Snow Buntings can often seem quite wary but this group wasn't and I had a splendid look at these very handsome black and white males.

My list for January was 54 species, about average. Short-eared Owl and Redpoll were the only unusual species. I had hoped to average at least two visits per week for Sherwood Island Diary but I fell far short this month with only four trips. At least for the second half of the month, this was due to the exceptionally inclement weather.

March 12

My premonition of 29 January was correct and I spent the subsequent six weeks in bed with pain from my herniated disc. This was my first recurrence in 20 years so I guess I've been lucky. During this six week period, the unusual cold weather and snow persisted so perhaps it is not surprising that, with the exception of a few Red-winged Blackbirds, invariably the first spring bird to arrive, there was little at Sherwood Island today to suggest that it was no longer mid-winter. On this date there are ordinarily Robins, Cowbirds, Grackles and possibly Woodcock and Snipe but not today, although Robins and Grackles have been around my home on the mainland. I probably missed fewer species during this interval than I would have during a comparable span at any other time of the year and I think it remains to be seen whether total year list will be noticeably affected.

There was no hint of spring in the air. The west wind was still chilly, there was still considerable snow, and the Mill Pond was mostly frozen. It was open only at the north by the railroad tracks, but this was convenient since that part is conveniently observed from the overlook at the entrance to the park and most of the ducks were concentrated there. They included 110 Canvasback, seven Hooded Mergansers and a fine pair of Ring-necked Ducks which are quite uncommon in the park. Later on, I had superb looks at a few Canvasbacks in the east marsh and I particularly enjoyed studying the juxtaposition of the beady bright red eyes of the males and their more subtly colored heads. However, the bird of the day was surely a spectacular male Pileated Woodpecker that was conspicuously calling and flying amongst the few trees of the incline where the park slopes down to the marshes that border the Mill Pond. This is in the western sector of the park and extends from the maintenance lot on the north to the beach on the south. It is often the best birding area, particularly when the bushes and undergrowth are left alone as they have been for the past few years. The Pileated Woodpecker is rare at Sherwood Island, perhaps because there is no extensive tract of woodland. That certainly didn't bother this beautiful and rather tame male which flew from one to another of the widely spaced trees and usually landed quite low, thereby affording me extraordinary looks.

I was surprised that I saw no grebes. Apparently the great lakes were frozen this year, and the Horned, and particularly Red-necked Grebes that normally winter there have been reported in unusually large numbers on the Atlantic coast. The latter is normally uncommon at Sherwood Island but flocks of Horned Grebes often occur at this time of the year.

March 15

This was a curious and rather frustrating day. The weather was perfect. The temperature got into the fifties and there was almost no wind so that the Sound was unusually placid. Large areas of the ground were free of snow although occasional drifts persisted. I recorded a very respectable year's high 44 species including six new ones yet there was no real feeling of spring as there often is on this date. Perhaps this was because the Mill Pond was still half-frozen. The new birds were Common Loon, Pheasant, Pipit, Robin, Cowbird and Grackle, none of which were present in real numbers. The disappointments seemed more significant. First of all, I made a real effort to get Woodcock and failed. At this time of the year, it is virtually a sure thing, usually on the overgrown field just south of the maintenance

compound in the western section of the park. I tramped through this area ("Woodcock Field") and the adjacent little woodland ("Woodcock Woods") very scrupulously with no results. The West Woods, comprised largely of several species of Oak, was also devoid of birds. I will probably miss Woodcock for the year unless I find it within the next two weeks.

Also frustrating was the lack of interesting species that I could identify on the Sound. The placidity of the water and the rather good visibility made it seem very promising. I had been alerted to the relative abundance of Red-necked Grebes on the coast this year and there were three birds that could have been this species but they were too far out for me to be certain. I couldn't make out any plumage details but I was struck by a peculiar action of one of them. It constantly lifted a surprisingly long leg out of the water, stretched it behind itself and shook it. I've certainly never seen a loon do this and the shape of the bill and suggestion of a crest were also suggestive. Yet it may have been a Red-throated Loon since there were several of these quite close to shore. It is rather extraordinary that I have birded all my life and still can't distinguish between Red-necked Grebe and Red-throated Loon. Of course, these particular birds were so far away that I had to observe them at 40-60x and even then could not really make out anything save the shape of their bodies and bills. Nonetheless, I felt rather the fool after a half hour's study with no decision. All in all, today was not one to impress the memory.

March 20

One would certainly not have guessed at Sherwood Island that spring officially began today. The minute I stepped out of the car and into the cold and gusty northwest wind, I knew that I was in for a hard day. The pond was still mostly frozen and there was scattered snow coverage although most of the ground was exposed. The temperature was in the mid forties for the second straight day so the four new inches of snow that accumulated two days ago was largely melted. But it seemed like winter and there wasn't a single Robin to be seen. I shouldn't have bothered even going with such high winds, but I wanted very much to record my annual spring Woodcock and I have only a few more days in which it will be possible to do so. I made certain that I got to the Woodcock Field early, before any of the hikers and dog walkers, but I was still unsuccessful. Later on, I met my friend Bob Winkler, who shares my love of Sherwood Island and its birds. He told me he had flushed two Woodcock from the field on March 16, the day after my last visit. Today was one of those times when I really had to force myself to cover the entire territory rather than quit after having missed the Woodcock. I was reasonably certain that I wouldn't see anything interesting but my desire to be systematic for this diary kept me going. My pessimism was justified. It was pretty hopeless to scan the Sound amidst such brisk winds and choppy water and it was quite impossible to hear any songs because of the background noise of the wind which resembled the roar of a train. I did manage to log in 40 species including only two, Green-winged Teal and Turkey Vulture, that were new for 1994. The latter is only an occasional visitor to the park and is much less frequently seen here than on the mainland. I flushed two cock and two hen Pheasants which was rather a large number.

March 22

There is something special for me about seeing the Woodcock at Sherwood Island during its spring migration. It is as though it is a rite of passage for me without which I cannot continue my birding for the year. I don't know why this particular species has assumed such importance in my mind. Perhaps it's because of a certain amount of justice and reward in looking for the Woodcock. I have to know where to look and I have to search hard for it, but if I do, I know I am likely to find it. And when I do, I feel as though I possess very special knowledge and insight into birds and have accomplished something substantial. I've missed the bird up to now and there will be no chance of seeing it after the first of April. That is why I decided to go to Sherwood Island on this very unpromising day with a northwest wind gusting up to 40 MPH. I was rather pessimistic about my chances but I wasn't sure how many more times I could anticipate getting out in March.

There was heavy rain yesterday. Most of the snow was melted or washed away and the pond was largely open for the first time in months. But the wind was roaring and there were few birds about, species or individuals. I managed to record only 31 species which I'm quite sure is a record low for this date. Amongst these were five Ring-necked Ducks, two Robins, and two Flickers. It is puzzling that land birds seem to arrive at Sherwood Island later than they do inland. Robins and Flickers are common inland now but are just beginning to be seen at the Island. Phoebe have been at their nesting sites inland but have yet to arrive as migrants at Sherwood Island.

I tramped diligently through Woodcock Field without success so I decided to go into Woodcock Woods where I always pay a high price in cuts from the very thorny undergrowth. Today, I had barely stepped in, when up flew a Woodcock with the peculiar and unmistakable tinkling musical noise that its wings always make. It landed only about 20 feet further in and, for an instant, I actually saw it on the ground. My day was made and I felt very good indeed. But instead of accepting the fact that I was very lucky to see anything on such a windy day, I decided to erect a new challenge, namely, Snipe and Woodcock on the same day. Yesterday's rains had rendered the entire park a wet meadow so I thought the chances for Snipe were pretty good. It is a much commoner bird here than Woodcock, but comes through in numbers a little later in the spring. I didn't see it today but the challenge maintained my interest and optimism in the face of quite unfavorable weather. And my failure to find a Snipe did not diminish the pleasure I got from the year's Woodcock.

March 23

Today felt like spring! The weather was quite different from yesterday. The winds had shifted from northwest to southwest and were somewhat diminished although they remained sufficiently strong to render the Sound rather turbulent. The temperature rose into the mid sixties and the sky was clear. Many more species and individuals were in evidence. I recorded 47 species, a high for the year thus far. Only three of these were new:

Common Merganser, Snipe and Fox Sparrow. Until last year, I had never seen Common Merganser at Sherwood Island, perhaps not surprising since the Mill Pond contains salt water. Late last fall several showed up and today I saw four males and a female. What a beautiful duck this is! The duck population has been changing on the Mill Pond since new dikes were installed several years ago. The water is considerably deeper now and seems to be more desirable to reservoir species such as Common Merganser and Ring-necked Duck (again seen today) and less attractive to surface-feeding species like Pintail, Baldpates, Gadwall and Teal. Today I experienced an unusual "triple". I was able to observe simultaneously all three species of merganser on the Mill Pond. I had not previously seen the three together anywhere.

As I mentioned yesterday, it is a special challenge for me to see Snipe and Woodcock on the same day and today I achieved that unusual "double". I flushed the Woodcock in Woodcock Woods where I had seen it yesterday and then put up a Snipe in the wet grassy strip that separates the fringe marshes of the southern end of the Mill Pond from the beach in the western sector of the park.

I also saw a Fox Sparrow in Woodcock Woods. This is a species that is very easy to miss at Sherwood Island as it seems to come through on only one or two days each spring and fall. I suppose one might say that there is only a small "window of opportunity" for seeing it. This is to be compared with a species like the Snipe which will be a possibility anytime from now until mid May.

Woodchucks are common at Sherwood Island and today I saw the first of this year. I can't imagine a scrawnier individual than this one and I realized for the first time that metabolism without caloric intake is a form of starvation. In the case of hibernation, it is presumably fine-tuned with the metabolism low enough that the animal does not quite die of starvation. This poor Woodchuck looked pretty close.

March 26

I started the day at the Allen Nature Preserve and a brisk northwest wind greeted me as I stepped out of the car. A bad sign! Bob Winkler was there so we joined forces. Several Greater Yellowlegs near Allen's Clam House represented the first species that was new for the year. Their initial appearance is always at about this time. We got to the park and decided to start out in the West Woods. To get there, we had to traverse the wet meadow where I had seen a Snipe during my previous visit. I suggested to Bob that we separate a bit to cover this little area as efficiently as possible and we quickly put up four Snipe, a good number this early in the year. We would flush yet another later, in the eastern section of the park. Four Turkey Vultures began quartering the area, the first time I had seen this many here. I began to suspect that this was going to be a special day and that omens, either good or bad, were not really predictive at Sherwood Island. Of course, I've always known this but I must keep reminding myself. This is the time of the year when one expects early Passeres like Phoebe and Tree Swallow and they were not to disappoint. We had a total of four Phoebes. Rather than their signature vocalization, each of them signaled with the little chip they have that resembles similar calls of Swamp Sparrows and Palm Warblers. By the end of the day, we had recorded about 20 Tree Swallows, all of

which were flying over the beach, east to west, exactly as they do in the fall! I feel a real comfort in welcoming the early Passerine migrants. For me, their predictable arrival generates a pleasant sense of security and satisfaction. They will arrive and be there year after year for me to enjoy.

Although the sound was choppy, there were plenty of birds visible upon it. Most notable were 25 Red-throated Loons in flocks of five to ten. These, of course, were in winter plumage, but the one Common Loon was in fine breeding splendor, as was one of the eight Horned Grebes.

As Bob and I were walking on the eastern edge of the Mill Pond, he mentioned to me that there had been a report on the "Connecticut Rare Bird Alert" of the presence of a single Redhead amongst the Canvasbacks at Sherwood Island. I was mildly annoyed by this since I had never seen Redhead here and had carefully inspected this flock of Canvasbacks for it on all my previous visits. Bob told me that he had also always suspected there might be one hidden in the flock and had made a special effort to locate it. We wondered whether the observer who had recorded it was reliable. We were able to answer this question because when we came to examine the flock today, we got very good looks at a fine male Redhead. The bird drew attention to itself by its repeated diving amidst the sedentary Canvasbacks and by its blue bill, which was remarkably conspicuous in the excellent light that we enjoyed. Could we have missed it up to now or was it a relatively recent arrival? I suspect that we had missed it since I think the favorable light conditions under which we inspected the flock greatly facilitated our locating the bird. In any event, it is always a special day when I add a new species to my Sherwood Island list and today was no exception. Some newly arrived classical early spring migrants, a new bird for my list and a healthy total of 51 species combined to make this a remarkably satisfying visit.

March 31

Two days of rain and one of brisk northwest winds followed my previous visit. Last night the wind shifted to the southwest. When I arrived at the park, the Mill Pond resembled an enormous mud flat with almost no water. I haven't seen such a very low tide since the new sluices were installed several years ago. The ducks were dispersed amongst the several puddles and I managed again to find the male Redhead, although he was unable to dive for lack of deep water. Interestingly, he seemed to be consorting with a female Canvasback. There were 12 Baldpate and a like number of Green-winged Teal but no Pintail or Shoveler that I was hoping to see. With one extraordinary exception to be described shortly, there were few new arrivals. I did see a male Kestrel, a species that is becoming alarmingly scarce here except during the fall migration. A Brown Thrasher was also new for the year as were one Great and three Snowy Egrets which were enjoying the mud flats along with seven Great Blue and two Black-crowned Night Herons. I frightened a group of four deer that were resting in the pine grove behind the summer workers' residence.

An amazing and unforgettable experience occurred when I explored the overgrown meadow just to the east of the most westerly tidal ditch. I flushed no less than 26 Snipe, 17 of which were together. I had already flushed at least three others from the field between the Mill Pond and the beach where I had seen them on my last two visits. The total of 29 is far more than I have ever seen anywhere. The most I have previously seen here is seven.

I recorded 52 species today and I finish March with a total of 79 which is certainly an excellent start, particularly considering that I missed all of February. March will be most memorable for the Redhead and the “covey” of Snipe.

April 1

The weather was so pleasant today that I couldn't resist a quick return even though it was Good Friday and likely to be a bit crowded. I went in the afternoon which I rarely do and was impressed with how different the park feels depending on the time of day. I suppose this has to do with the perception of shadows. I chose to go later than usual in order to catch the incoming and high tide since I think these may be the best conditions for seeing the birds on the Sound. I still have perhaps ten days to see things like Red-necked Grebe and Surf Scoter and I wanted to give myself the best possible chance. I had no such luck despite a substantial number (40) of Red-throated Loons. The few times I have seen Red-necked Grebes at Sherwood Island have been characterized by good flights of Horned Grebes which was not the case today. While I was scanning with the telescope, a Bonaparte's Gull flew into view. I would probably not have noticed it without the telescope and I have a feeling that this species is probably much commoner here than my records would seem to indicate but that the birds are usually quite far out.

I was also specifically looking for Pintail and Shovelers so I took my telescope as I explored the eastern edge of the Mill Pond. It didn't enable me to see the species for which I had hoped, however, it did provide me with a superb study of the Redhead and I was astonished to find a second male. I was rather tired today so I didn't get to the eastern half of the park, which was probably just as well since a number of noisy model airplanes were being flown quite near to where I saw all the Snipe yesterday. I did record four Snipe today in the same spot where they have been since March 23.

April 5

Today was absolutely beautiful with virtually no wind and I found myself quite charged with enthusiasm as I drove towards the park. Provided the water is calm, the first ten days of April provide an opportunity for finding rare birds such as Red-necked Grebe and King Eider on the Sound. If I am to find Shovelers on the Mill Pond, it is also usually during this time period. The Sound was indeed placid today with just the slightest southeasterly wind and there were plenty of birds including both loons, newly arrived Double-crested Cormorants, Buffleheads, rather late Goldeneyes, a few Greater Scaup (an abundant bird during my childhood and now quite scarce), lots of Old Squaws and some Red-breasted Mergansers. But there was definitely nothing out of the ordinary despite the favorable viewing conditions. The Mill Pond was also disappointing. Most of the Canvasback seem to have departed and I couldn't locate any Redheads, Mallards, Black Ducks, five Green-winged Teal and 20 Baldpate represented the surface-feeding ducks, again nothing special. And there were no new Passerine arrivals. Yet the day was a good one for birds as well as the weather. Nine Monk Parakeets squawked as they flew over the Mill Beach. I've often seen them here in just this way, but today was my first record for this year. A dirty-looking

Snow Goose, an immature assuming adult plumage, was also the first of the year. This is the usual time of their migration. The abundance of Snipe continued and I counted 11 today. Most interesting to me was the presence of a Woodcock in Woodcock Woods. This is the latest I have seen one here in the spring and I am certainly wondering whether it might not breed. Unfortunately, the park personnel have recently done some clearing in this little tract of woods and thorny underbrush after having left it alone for at least 12 years.

I ended the day with 54 species, which is very respectable for this time of the year.

April 7

It rained rather heavily almost all of last night and there was still a slight drizzle when I arrived at the park today. However, a gusty wind from the northwest drove the clouds away and the sky became clear within two hours. These did not seem to represent promising conditions, yet there were plenty of birds about. Grackles, Redwings, Cowbirds and Flickers were present in higher numbers than previously. The wet weather continued to abet the Snipe population and I recorded 13. Their number this spring is at least three times as high as I've ever seen it. An advantage for me of wet days at Sherwood Island is the absence of people flying model airplanes on the field between the east parking lot and the marsh. The noise from these planes often frightens birds, that might otherwise lurk in the marsh. Today I flushed a Bittern from the edge of the marsh adjacent to the field. It would have been long since gone, had the model airplanes been buzzing about. The Bittern is an uncommon, but regular transient here. I usually see it once in the spring and often once again in the fall.

I recorded two other species that were new for the year. One, the Golden-crowned Kinglet, is ordinarily quite common from October through early April and I am surprised to have missed it up to now. The other was an early Barn Swallow, which was certainly an odd species to be seen on the same day as three rather late Goldeneyes. The latter are ordinarily the first of the ducks to leave here and the last to arrive in the fall.

April 8

How could I resist birding today? The sky was a brilliant crystalline clear blue and the weather report said there was no wind. I forgot that they don't measure wind velocity at the coast and I was unpleasantly surprised by a brisk northwest breeze that was quite chilly. Suddenly it seemed obvious to me that I would see nothing that I had not seen yesterday or the day before. This pessimism was dissipated almost immediately. As usual, I began at the Allen Preserve and within five minutes I had added three species to my list for the year. Two Towhees were duetting with their short calls and a Cedar Waxwing was perched and calling within 15 feet of the car. An Osprey was surveying the Mill Pond from the top of a dead tree and was surprised into flight by my presence. While taking off, it emitted its oddly incongruous shriek.

It's always especially exciting to locate an uncommon bird for which one is particularly looking and today I enjoyed that feeling when I found a Shoveler on the Mill Pond. This was only the fourth time I had recorded it at Sherwood Island, always at the end of March

or the beginning of April. It was a superb drake that I was able to study closely and in excellent light. For the first time, I was struck by the greatly elongated scapulars of this splendid duck and by its feeding behavior of cruising along with just its bill under water in something akin to the way of a Skimmer, except, of course, that it was swimming rather than flying.

Other interesting findings included a Cooper's Hawk that terrified a group of Flickers at the east end and another high count (17) of Snipe. I ended this outstanding day with 57 species despite the fact that the winds that weren't supposed to be there made the Sound exceedingly choppy and probably prevented me from seeing a few more.

April 11

Not every beautiful spring day is associated with a surge of new arrivals. Today was clear and warm with a relatively light northwest wind. For the first time, incipient budding foliage was evident. Yet I failed to find a single species that was new for the year and the volume of individuals was low compared with what I recorded during my last three visits. The only observation of interest was that there were now two drake Shovelers on the Mill Pond. I managed to squeeze out 50 species but it wasn't easy.

I noticed that most or all of today's ten Horned Grebes were in spring plumage. Their transition has been going on for about the last month. The Common Loon was also in full breeding plumage as have been the one or two I have seen throughout the last month. This is not the case with the much commoner Red-throated Loon of which I saw only two today probably indicating that their migration is almost over. These have invariably been in winter plumage as was also the case with the few that I have seen here in May. In fact, the only one that I ever saw in breeding plumage was an early fall individual.

April 14

After 48 hours of rain and fog, a west wind ushered in clear skies before dawn today and I had hopes that it brought some new birds with it. Such was not the case and I had to work very hard for the 47 species that I managed to record. There was not a single newly arrived Passerine individual, much less species. I was fortunate, however, to see two new ducks, single drakes of Pintail and Wood Duck. I could easily have missed either of these for the spring or even for the year. The Pintail was probing in the mud of the Mill Pond near Allen's Clam House. The pond continues to drain almost completely at low tide, which I don't think it's supposed to do with the new sluices. Pintail used to be regular and occasionally quite common here, but for the last year or two they have been very scarce. Wood Ducks are common on the mainland but rare here since there is no fresh water. The one I saw today was flying over the Mill Pond. Ducks have seemed scarce this spring, yet I have managed to record most of the species, albeit in small numbers. The only common ones I have yet to see are Surf Scoter, for which I still have ten days or so, and Blue-winged Teal which I usually get later in the spring.

The migration of Red-throated Loons is not tapering down as much as I had thought. There were nine today. Extraordinary numbers of Snipe persist. I counted 18 today. The wind shifted to the southwest after I left the park today and the temperature came close to 70. It is supposed to remain clear and warm with southwest winds tonight which augers well for tomorrow. I expect some new arrivals for tomorrow but I still recognize how hard it is to predict flight days at Sherwood Island. Still, it's fun to try.

April 15

As I started out at the Walter D. Allen Preserve today, I met Bob Winkler who, like myself, thought that the weather conditions were particularly favorable. The overnight southwest wind had shifted to a gentle easterly breeze early in the morning. It was low tide and the Mill Pond was again almost entirely a mass of exposed mud. Bob was as puzzled as I as to how this could occur with the new sluices that were presumably designed to prevent this. Both of us are wondering whether it might not have a beneficial effect on the number of shorebirds, usually quite low, that use this area as a stopover. The lack of water does not seem to bother the surface-feeding ducks particularly and we had two drake Blue-winged Teal amongst a group of six Green-winged.

For once, a prediction about Sherwood Island based on the weather was right on the mark. Birds were all over in good numbers and the contrast with yesterday was really striking. Flocks of Cormorants numbering 20-50 kept streaming over and we tallied a respectable 250. This is a species that is certainly increasing. There was a marked influx (25) of Savannah Sparrows. A Kingfisher was the first of the year although it is ordinarily a permanent resident here. Its absence until now was probably due to the prolonged frozen state of much of the water. Three Rough-winged Swallows represented a new arrival as did six Hermit Thrushes. The single Swamp Sparrow could have been one that eluded me up to now or perhaps a migrant. They do winter occasionally. The bird of the day was a very tame White-eyed Vireo, foraging in a low sapling so close to us that we couldn't focus our binoculars on it. This species is a very local breeder in southwestern Connecticut and hard to find away from its preferred sites. I have four previous records for it at Sherwood Island. This early date for it is certainly noteworthy but is only the third earliest recorded for Connecticut. Zeranski and Baptist list the earliest spring arrivals as March 24, April 14 and April 25.

The Canada Geese have been on their nests for about a week or ten days and my route takes me fairly close to two of these. One is on an island about fifty feet from the edge of the salt marsh on the southern end of the Mill Pond. The male either swims between the island and the shore or struts about the edge of the marsh. He seems to sense that the channel is a good barrier and has yet to make a really aggressive move at me although he does occasionally make the threatening, sinuous movement of his neck that indicates his concern. The second nest is about 50 feet from the trail by which I enter the west marsh and quite easily accessible. The male is always swimming in the adjacent tidal channel and my emergence from the very tall phragmites alarms him. Today, he flew hurriedly towards me until he realized that I was turning right rather than left which would have taken me to the nest. Until their young are well advanced at the end of May, these geese are an occupational hazard for bird watchers at Sherwood Island.

Today was really superb for birds and I recorded a remarkable 63 species. I had never had such a large list prior to April 28. My Holy Grail for birding at Sherwood has always been to record 100 species there in a single day but I have my doubts that such a number is feasible. However, it could occur on a mid May day as exceptional for that date as this one was for today so I have new hope for that goal.

April 18

The downside of an outstanding day, such as I enjoyed on my last visit, is the inevitable return to reality, which I experienced today. There was nothing to suggest that today would be comparable, indeed, a brisk and gusty westerly wind indicated quite the opposite. However, it turned out fairly well although the volume of individuals and the number of species (53) was much lower than the other day. The redeeming features were another high count (17) of Snipe and five species that were new for the year. These were: a flock of ten Glossy Ibis, two Black-bellied Plover in winter plumage, a Pectoral Sandpiper, a male and a female Bluebird and a Gnatcatcher. Last year, for the first time in my experience, a pair of Bluebirds bred at Sherwood Island. The nest was in a cavity four feet above the ground in a decayed stump in the West Woods. Five young were successfully fledged but the male founder was killed. The young stayed around for several months and the park superintendent was sufficiently excited to install several nesting boxes in promising spots (although not in the West Woods). The pair today was in these woods.

Today's new birds brought my list for the year to 103. This figure bodes well for achieving my objective of 200 species for the year since today is, by ten days, the earliest date that I have surpassed 100. The large number of species is likely a reflection of more rigorous coverage rather than any real change in bird diversity.

April 19

Today was a remarkable *reprise* of 15 April. As on that day, I had originally not intended to visit the park but was induced to do so by considerations of the weather. Yesterday's blustery west wind was replaced overnight by a gentle southwesterly breeze that brought a higher temperature and, for the first time this year, a placid Long Island sound. Also like that day, I ran into Bob Winkler whose thinking was the same as mine. Finally, as for that day, our prediction for today was accurate and the park was full of birds comprising a remarkable 64 species. Some of the highlights were: Three drake Blue-winged Teal, two Gnatcatchers and five new birds for the year including an early House Wren, four Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a Chipping Sparrow, a Field Sparrow, and most interesting of all, a Tricolored Heron that was foraging in the marshes adjacent to the West Woods. What a beautiful and elegantly graceful bird this is! It is rare here although single individuals were present during the summers of 1988 and 1989. We studied it for quite some time and were struck for the first time by the extraordinary length of its slender bill, which reminded me of pictures I had seen of the Agami Heron. The bill was at least 50% longer relative to its head than that of a Snowy Egret that was feeding nearby. This characteristic seems to have gone largely unnoticed, although it is mentioned by Baird, Brewer and Ridgway in their Water

Birds of North America (1884). It is also rarely shown in illustrations. For example, that in Hancock and Elliott's *Herons of the World* (1978) depicts a relatively short bill. Interestingly, the most accurate representation I have seen is Audubon's plate.

Spring migration for me is an extraordinarily exciting and renewing phenomenon as it surges towards its crescendo in May. Each species is in its handsomest state of plumage and, even though migrating, is usually vocal. Each day brings new variety and yet the process as a whole is so regular, predictable, invigorating and..... delightful.

April 22

Three successive days of blustery westerly winds and cool temperatures did not presage a surge of migratory birds today despite the emergence of blooming Magnolias and Forsythias. I didn't expect much and I went to the park out of a desire to be systematic and without much enthusiasm or anticipation. My pessimism was justified, yet it was an enjoyable day. It's virtually impossible at this time of the year to have a day during which nothing new passes through and despite recording only (!) 54 species, I did find three new ones. I surprised a Clapper Rail slithering through a ditch near the Mill Pond and I flushed a Marsh Wren in the west marsh. A single Yellow-rumped Warbler was the first of what I hope will be a large number of members of this uniquely Nearctic family. Plenty of Snipe and Red-throated Loons were still around.

April 25

Last night I could barely sleep because I was so excited about the prospects for today. Yesterday, there was a brisk southwesterly breeze with a temperature of 80. The wind abated during the night and the forecast was for another very warm day. When I arrived at the park today there was absolutely no wind, the sound was as smooth as glass, and the temperature at 9:00 A. M. was already close to 70. It seemed an absolutely perfect day for birds. Furthermore, the moon had been almost full last night and the resulting high tide completely inundated the west marsh, an unusual circumstance that could be expected to have interesting ornithological consequences. Finally, during my visit, there was a sudden dramatic change in the weather. A forceful northeast wind virtually exploded onto the island bringing clouds, a few raindrops and a drop in temperature of at least 10 degrees.

Atypical weather often brings atypical birds to Sherwood Island, particularly during migration. Alas, such was not the case today! The place was about as birdless as it gets at this time of the year and I had to work very hard to get 49 species. The one redeeming event was a brief glimpse of an Upland Sandpiper. This is quite a rare migrant and I am always excited to see it. I usually manage one record a year and it is always either on the airplane field or the field east of it across the central drainage ditch. I saw it in the latter location today but it ducked behind a clump of brush and the tide was so high that I couldn't get across the ditch which I was forced to circumvent. By the time I got there, the bird was gone. The only other new species I added was Black & White Warbler, a regular arrival at this date, of which I saw two. This was one of those days where my prediction and optimism led to some disappointment, the Upland Sandpiper notwithstanding. It was

bound to happen. This has been a wonderful April and it has spoiled me a bit. It's interesting that Bob Winkler called me tonight to ask whether I had been able to get out today. He couldn't and, like myself, had thought that it would probably be superb.

April 28

I didn't exactly have high hopes when I set out today but I thought the possibilities were good. Yesterday, the temperature was in the eighties and there was a good southwest breeze. After a thunderstorm in the evening, the wind shifted to west northwest but another warm day was accurately predicted. Days in late April can sometimes be extremely productive and I've gotten to consider April 28 as the beginning of the May migration. Bob Winkler felt the same way and I ran into him at the Walter Allen Preserve where I started. The day can be summarized briefly. It was dreadful! Three Catbirds had arrived so at least I got one new species but that was it. This was Sherwood Island at its most disappointing. It hardly seemed possible that the peak of the migration is only two to three weeks off and Bob and I had to laugh at our hopes of getting 100 species there in a single day. Today, we had 51.

April 30

Today was a good one and augurs well for May. It was warm without wind and there were lots (62) of species although the volume of individuals was not impressive. Fiddler crabs and Diamond-backed Terrapins were abundant in the west marsh and I saw 15 of the tortoises sunning on one small island of mud. Bob Winkler tells me this is a sign of ecological health in the marsh, yet its grass is flatter than I have ever seen it, probably from the huge mass of snow which covered it during this past severe winter. I will remember this day for having seen two Virginia Rails. Any rail besides Clapper is a noteworthy event here and although I occasionally see Virginias and Soras in the Fall, I had never seen either in the Spring. The first was at a puddle in the Woodcock field on the west side of the park. The other was in a small, very wet area of field that abuts the east marsh at the eastern extremity of allowed parking. Interestingly, I call this "the Black Rail place" because I have always fantasized it as the ideal spot to see that rare bird. Until now, however, I hadn't ever seen anything of interest there. Besides the rail, I added another four species today: Yellow Warbler and Yellowthroat, the two breeding warblers of the island, Orchard Oriole, which also probably breeds, and Pine Warbler. This is the prototypical arrival date for the first three. The Pine Warbler is not a common migrant. I've recorded it from late April through the first half of May although it's generally considered an earlier Spring migrant.

I was surprised to see a Red-winged Blackbird that I took to be a young male today. It was striped brown like a female but had red shoulder patches. The only sub adult males of a Passerine species that I can recall seeing in Spring are Orchard Orioles of which I have frequently noticed singing young males which resemble a female more than a fully amber colored adult male. Today was also unusual in that I failed to see a Ring-billed Gull. In fact, I've never seen fewer gulls of which I logged only 15 Herring and two Black-backed.

I finish April with a very good list of 119 species for the year up to now. I think I will always remember this April more for the large number of Snipe than for any particular species. I don't recall any apparent population change that was more dramatic. I think that I saw 5-10 times as many as in any previous spring. This was a rather rainy season and perhaps the seeming increase was just because the wet meadow habitat was better here than it had been in the past, thus luring birds from other places. On the other hand, it's also possible that there has been a *bona fide* increase in the population. Time will tell.

Today was the last portal leading to May, the single most exciting month of the year. The most important factor that makes May so exciting is the possibility of a really big day. On such an occasion, I've recorded as many as 91 species and I have always dreamed of 100. To reach that figure, there would have to be respectable numbers of shorebirds and warblers, neither of which groups are usually well represented at Sherwood Island. The day would have to be in the latter half of the month to see shorebirds and the tide would have to be low early in the morning so that the large mud flats of the Mill Beach would be exposed before the noise and bustle of the day disturbed the birds. A weekday would be more favorable since the park would be less crowded. Perhaps the ideal conditions would be a southerly wind the night before and a fog or drizzle in the morning to keep the birds and discourage the model airplane fliers. Once the latter go into action, the airplane field and adjacent meadows and marshes are pretty hopeless.

In addition to providing the possibility of a big day, May is also unique for delivering the birds at their handsomest and most vocal time of the year. Their arrival at this time, after what invariably seems to me a long and uncomfortable winter, always infuses me with a strong sense of renewal. May shares with August, September and October, the promise of the unexpected and rare. Every day of May is one of keen anticipation and I look forward to May more eagerly than to any other month.

There is, however, another side of the May coin. Whereas the migration in Fall does not seem to be pointing to a specific climax, that in Spring does and May is that climax. It almost seems as though the rest of the Spring doesn't matter and that May, and May alone, determines whether the Spring, and to a certain extent the entire year, will be memorable. The potential is thus present for major disappointment. There have been several years when I have not recorded as many as 75 species during a single May day. As a matter of fact, I cannot recall a single entire month of May, or single day in that month, that actually lived up to my most optimistic expectations. Is that a sad admission or a reflection of the reality of human existence? Anticipation is the name of the game and I continue to have it and enjoy it every May. I'm feeling it now and I wish it wouldn't end.

May 2

Today was an entirely splendid introduction to May, made the moreso by an unpromising northwest breeze. That it was a flight day, was indicated by the large (60) number of White-throated Sparrows that were present not only on the ground but also high in the trees. I recorded an excellent 71 species including 11 that were new for the year. Nine species of warblers represented a particularly promising omen since this family is definitely not partial to Sherwood Island. Five of these were new. The only really unexpected one was a silent

male Blackpoll foraging in a bush and providing much better looks than later in the month when they will be at the tops of very leafy trees and detectable mainly by song. Today is an exceptionally early date for this species which is usually amongst the last of the family to make an appearance. Zeranski and Baptist report only two earlier (4/29 and 5/1) records. A Prairie Warbler was sharing the same bush and allowed me an exceptionally close examination. I was able, for the first time, to note the chestnut markings on the back as I watched the bird uttering its rising trill. This is the nicest week for watching warblers since the trees are not yet in full leaf. The other new ones were Parula, Magnolia and Nashville. Additional new species were Common Tern and Spotted Sandpiper, both of which arrive about this date every year, as well as Kingbird, Bank Swallow, Wood Thrush and Solitary Vireo.

This is about the date when Passerine species begin to outnumber non Passerines and that was very marked today. About two-thirds of the species were Passerine. Most of the ducks are gone, although there are still a few Red-breasted Mergansers which are usually the last to leave. There was also a White-winged Scoter which surprised me, not because they don't occasionally linger, but because they have been so scarce this year. A male Hooded Merganser has been present for some time now in the small extension of the Mill Pond just north of the railroad tracks. This is quite an inaccessible and marshy area with some surrounding dead trees and I wonder whether Hooded Mergansers could be breeding here.

May 3

Remnants of yesterday's wave persisted today and enabled me to compile an impressive list of 70 species although most were probably the same individuals from the past several days. These included the immature Snow Goose that has been hanging around for the past month, the male Hooded Merganser just north of the railroad tracks, the male White-winged Scoter off the east breakwater, the Virginia Rail in the puddle on Woodcock field and the Prairie and Blackpoll Warblers in a bush by the barn (administration building). Almost all of yesterday's flock of White-throated Sparrows had departed. There wasn't much of an influx but I did manage to add three new species, namely Swift, Red-eyed Vireo and Northern Oriole. The vireo was a bit early. They usually arrive in the middle of the month. This was a nice initial May wave. I hope it is the first of three and not the last!

The wet meadow between the southern extremity of the Mill Pond and the West Beach is often a good spot. Today I noticed what appeared from a distance to be two female Mallards close together. When I got closer, I saw that one of these "Mallards" was actually a Woodchuck, probably the same one that I described as extremely scraggly when it first emerged from hibernation in March. How extraordinary that the Mallard could be so unafraid of this animal.

Human activity on Sherwood Island greatly in May and I prefer to go there on weekdays from now through Labor Day. Unfortunately, the park personnel are extremely assiduous about mowing the grass during these busy months and the noise from their machines is quite a distraction these days, particularly during May when locating and identifying various warblers depends so much on detecting their songs. I would be more annoyed by this if I didn't appreciate the park superintendent as much as I do. "Doc" as he is called, is

extremely interested in the wildlife of the park and has made various innovations designed to conserve it and to encourage its appreciation by visitors. He has also been kind enough to allow Bob Winkler and myself full access at any hour, even to restricted areas. This privileged status is most important for the Christmas Count and for potential "big days" in May when we occasionally start before the park is officially open.

May 6

It was probably ill advised to go to Sherwood Island today. My visit was between a morning downpour and an afternoon thunder storm and my coverage was hurried and scattered. Therefore, my list of 55 species does not represent all that was there and the absence of species that had been around for some time does not necessarily mean that they had departed. Brisk northwest winds made the last two days unpromising but last night was clear and calm. The weather prediction of a morning sprinkle was also encouraging. It might keep all the newly arrived migrants. So I got quite enthusiastic and was actually pleased at the overcast sky when I awoke. I stepped out the door at 8:00 A. M. and immediately it began to pour with the prediction that it would clear later. So I decided to wait and it did clear around eleven and, for about one half hour remained relatively windless. I started at the Allen Preserve and there were clearly plenty of Passerine migrants. I quickly added Warbling and Yellow-throated Vireos and Northern Waterthrush to the year's list. Then a very brisk northwest breeze ushered in some ominous looking clouds and it was obvious that a thunderstorm was on its way. I hurried through the park, distracted by the weather and skipping some areas that I usually cover. I did manage to add Least Sandpiper, Ovenbird and Scarlet Tanager before the storm hit but this was no way to bird.

I saw the first goslings of the Spring today and they looked 2-3 days old so the earliest hatching is probably around May 3. I also saw a most unusual female Mallard that was pale fawn-colored and lacked all the usual body vermiculations and barring as well as colored specula although her head was normally colored and patterned. Is there such a thing as intermediate albinism where pigment production is present but diminished? If the pigment were melanin, a partial defect in any of a number of enzymes could conceivably account for it. But how to explain the lack of blue specula? Her male consort did not seem to notice her atypical appearance.

May 7

Yesterday, I had an excuse for a rather unimpressive list. Today, there was no excuse. The weather was superb, clear and cool with a southwesterly breeze. Although it was a Saturday, the park was almost empty and no maintenance machines were droning away. I even got to the East Marsh before the airplane fliers. I began earlier than usual because I was quite excited. I shouldn't have been! There were not many new migrants about and the day was ornithologically dull with 66 species including Least Tern, Green Heron and Black-throated Blue Warbler that were new. The most interesting bird to me was a female Hooded Merganser in the East Marsh. The male was still in his usual hangout north of the tracks. But there is the makings of a pair! Female Red-breasted Mergansers also persist in the Mill Pond and I still found a Snipe, although only one. I saw just the male Bluebird today and

wondered whether the female might already be incubating. They are hanging about the north part of the West Woods where the pair nested last year and Bob Winkler has installed a nest box right near where the rotted stump they used would be if it were still erect.

The birds were forgettable but today was one I will remember. I ordinarily park my car at the most easterly allowed area and walk down to the East Marsh in order to follow its main canal to the eastern extremity of the park. As I got to the marsh today, I noticed a large animal in the middle of it. **A Coyote!** It was about 75 yards away, perhaps equidistant between me on the south and the railroad tracks on the north. It spent several seconds sizing me up and I had a faint feeling of apprehension. Then it turned and headed for the tracks. I haven't said much about the animals I see at Sherwood Island because I don't make any particular effort to see them and might not recognize them if I did. However, I do see Deer occasionally, and although I am quite certain they don't breed on the island, I have found as many as four at one time. The abundance of Deer is supposed to account for the reemergence of the Coyote in Connecticut and perhaps I should not be surprised to see one but this is not exactly a wilderness park and I simply never expected to run into a large predator here. In that context, I should mention that I did encounter a Red Fox several years ago.

There is still only one family of geese with goslings. I watched the parents and their four young today as they fed on the meadow just south of the Mill Pond. The young ate constantly and were visibly larger than they were yesterday. Only a very small fraction of the eighty odd geese on the island are actually breeding. Many of the remainder are often feeding on this same meadow as they were today. The productive couple and their brood did not mix with this main flock. I wonder what determines whether adults breed. The population here is certainly too large for the resources of Sherwood Island. Do geese believe in population control and in planned parenthood?

May 9

The results for today look better on paper than they did in the field. I can't deny that 79 species represents a good day at Sherwood Island. Indeed, for some years it would be the highest total. And yet, this day will not be memorable. While there were many species, none was particularly interesting and there were not many individuals of each. The Blackpoll Warbler was in the same bush where I found him last week but was now singing. The Hooded Mergansers and Snow Goose were the same individuals that I have noted before. I recorded 12 types of warbler, which isn't bad for Sherwood Island but only two, Chestnut-sided and Redstart were new. I saw none of the more exciting ones that often signify a flight day such as Tennessee, Bay-breasted or Cape May. Yesterday, there was a substantial rainfall and I imagined that I might find shorebirds in the resulting wet meadows. I was correct on that score because I did find a Lesser Yellowlegs and two Solitary Sandpipers in new puddles. I also saw five Brant flying over the beach. It has always struck me as quite extraordinary that this bird should be relatively scarce here, given its abundance on the south shore of Long Island. But that is true for many shorebirds as well. The last of my six new species was a Veery. I don't characterize today's results as a flight but I am hoping that it is a preflight and that its favorable winds will bring a more substantial influx overnight.

My tick count today is two so far. That means two that I found before they embedded. These ticks are a real problem beginning in late April. The ones I see are too large to be carriers of the spirochete for Lyme Disease but I suspect that they reflect the number of smaller ones that I've picked up. I must surely have had Lyme Disease by now since I tramp through as many uncut areas as I can. Sherwood Island is full of Deer droppings and, I suppose, of Deer Ticks as well. My only precaution is to take a bath as soon as I get home and to look for ticks at that time. This is certainly not completely effective since I often find them embedded in my scalp one, two, or even three days after the outing. Bob Winkler, who is much more careful about such matters than am I, went to a physician about two years ago because he was convinced, as I am about myself, that he must have acquired Lyme Disease. He had no symptoms but did have a positive antibody titer and was treated with a course of antibiotics. Perhaps I should do the same.

May 10

I thought that yesterday might be a "preflight" day and hoped that today might bring a substantial influx. But I certainly didn't imagine that it would be the most magnificent spring flight I have ever experienced at the island. It is hard to do it justice, particularly since there was no outstanding rarity. The numbers tell part of the story. Of the 96 species that I recorded, my highest total ever by five, 64 were Passeres and 14 were new for the year. There is no longer any doubt that 100 is a feasible goal because I missed 9 species that I had seen yesterday and thus had a successive day total of 105. Despite my high species total today, I had only one raptor (an immature Bald Eagle!), three herons, five shorebirds and one swallow, and I missed several common birds including Spotted Sandpiper, Rock Dove, Warbling Vireo and Towhee. But it isn't only the number of species that was impressive but also the volume of individuals.

In compiling this outstanding list, I had two major distractions on this beautiful Tuesday. First, there was a great deal noise from mowing and earth-moving machinery. The park's maintenance personnel were especially active. Second, there was a well publicized partial eclipse at 12:30. I scarcely noticed it but did wonder whether it would have any particular effect on the bird life and migratory pattern.

As I left home this morning, I heard Scarlet Tanager, Parula Warbler and Redstart and thus had my first indication that a flight was in progress. The Allen Preserve, my first stop, was alive with birds of which Crested Flycatcher, Blue-winged Warbler and Rose-breasted Grosbeak were new. I had eight species of warbler there. The tide was coming in and there was only a small mud flat left at the Mill Beach and no exposed mud on the Mill Pond so I had to be satisfied with a few Yellowlegs and Black-bellied Plovers. Some Laughing Gulls, my first of the year, did fly over but I could certainly have used a better opportunity for shorebirds. I then entered the park, left the car on the overlook facing the West Woods and walked east towards wooded central area that is the best spot for landbirds. On the way, I noticed some White-crowned Sparrows on a picnic table. This species only occurs on flight days as does the Lincoln's Sparrow which I saw in some bushes a few minutes later. The trees in the center of the park were teeming with warblers and the medley of their songs was a confusing but delightful and welcome symphony. Every year I must relearn these songs but rarely on Sherwood Island do I hear them all at once and in such profusion. I

logged 18 species of warblers which is two more than I've ever gotten here in a single day and yet I missed Pine and Blackpoll that I saw yesterday. The most interesting of the group were single examples of Blackburnian and Tennessee. But this was more than a flight of species. The volume of individuals was phenomenal for Sherwood Island. The commonest warbler was Yellowthroat (25) because it was in various habitats all over the park. Extremely common in the trees were Black and White (15), Black-throated Blue (15, the most I've ever seen anywhere), Magnolia (15), Redstart (12), Parula (12), Chestnut-sided (8) and Black-throated Green (6). Two Canadas were the first of the year as was a Least Flycatcher, a Swainson's Thrush and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow. There were also noticeable influxes of Catbirds (25), both orioles, and White-throated Sparrows (60).

I've heard it said that the biggest flight days in southwestern Connecticut occur relatively early in May, however, that had not been my experience and I was really quite unprepared for such a superb flight. I had thought that if 100 species could be recorded, it would have to be later in the month. I was wrong about that and I will be very surprised if I have a better chance this Spring than I had today. I didn't realize how close I was or I might have stayed longer or even left for a while and returned around five or six when the tide was low. But it was really a very special day, the kind one dreams about but seldom experiences.

May 13

There is a downside to experiencing a phenomenal flight day like May 10. One can scarcely imagine an *encore* much less experience one. A moderate southwest breeze prevailed on May 11. I couldn't get out but Bob Winkler was at Sherwood Island and there was still a significant remnant of migrants from the previous day. He did see one warbler, a Cape May, that I had missed. It rained on May 12 and the wind shifted to the northwest. The temperature fell into the low forties overnight and the wind increased to as high as 25 MPH this morning. And if this wasn't sufficiently unpromising, today was Friday the thirteenth! As I set out this morning, I recognized that I was a glutton for punishment, but enough of the scientist persists in me that I feel an obligation to tell a complete story. And the reality is that today at Sherwood Island was much more representative than Tuesday. When I got out of the car at the Allen Preserve, I was surprised at all the activity. Like the other day, I recorded eight warblers and today they included a fine singing Tennessee. The one that I saw Tuesday was in the park proper and was silent. However, today things went downhill. I only added one more warbler and the volume of individuals was low. For example, the 60 White-throated Sparrows from Tuesday had diminished to two. My total list of species was an anemic 68 including only one, Cliff Swallow, that was new. The day was probably not as bad as it seemed, because the very strong northwest wind rendered both hearing and observation more difficult than usual. What struck me as ironic was that on a day so vastly inferior to its predecessor, I found eight species that I had missed on that superb flight day. Four of these were swallows, and they alone would have given me a total of 100 on Tuesday.

I think there will be a third and last major wave within the next six days. I hope I'm out that day. The reader may ask why I don't go out every day, at least during the first three weeks of May. On occasions in the past when I have taken my vacation in May and tried this, I lost my enthusiasm. I remember one year when there was only a single flight day and it

occurred around the eighteenth. I didn't go out because, by the sixteenth, I had become completely discouraged.

May 14

Bob Winkler and I arranged to meet at 7:15 today for one of our annual attempts to get 100 species. I didn't think the day would be particularly good since yesterday wasn't and since the winds were still from the northwest. It turned out to be quite interesting and reminded me of 9 May. It was much better than yesterday and the total list was an extremely respectable 90. But the volume of birds was not noteworthy, there were only nine warblers, and it in no way resembled the spectacular flight of 10 May. I would characterize it as I did 9 May, a "preflight" rather than a real wave day. If I am correct, tomorrow will be even better and we are planning to try again.

That having been said, we saw plenty of interesting birds today including five that were new. The most unusual was a Yellow-crowned Night Heron, a remarkably local species that is easily found in a salt marsh only two miles west of here but of which I have only seen one individual here previously. We had all six swallows including a pair of Martins which are also very local. Martins nested here 20 years ago but are now seen only rarely during migration. A Broad-winged Hawk was also interesting. They are common inland but rare here, particularly in the Spring. The other two new species were Semipalmated Sandpiper and Bobolink. Low tide was just right today and the extensive flats at the Mill Beach seemed perfect, but we saw only Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers and Yellowlegs. The Mill Pond had no exposed mud, even at low tide, so apparently the sluices have been adjusted since last month when its entire surface was exposed. Both Bob and I had been relishing the possibilities for shorebirds that such a tidal mud expanse in the inlet might provide but apparently this will remain in our imaginations.

I think all the goslings have now been hatched. one walks at some risk since the parents are at their most protective. We flushed a Black Duck from a nest in the salt marsh near the West Woods. There were six creamy or buff eggs. We also watched the female Blue Bird in the West Woods for some time but she gave no indication that she is using the box that Bob installed there. We continue to see the male Hooded Merganser in approximately the same place every day and Bob feels, as do I, that there is probably a pair that is nesting here.

I am quite excited about tomorrow. I think we may well get our 100 species if the wind abates or shifts to the south.

May 15

Bob and I had arranged to meet at 7:30 at the Allen Preserve but when I arrived at 7:00, he had already just stepped out of his car. Like me, he was excited and had difficulty sleeping. Everything seemed perfect for today's attempt at 100 species. There was just the slightest warm breeze from the south and the Sound was as calm as it ever gets. It was a Sunday and dead low tide was at 8:30 so the flats at the Mill Beach would be exposed before there was much human activity and without the usual disturbance from land-moving equipment.

Visibility was superb and the high level clouds provided the possibility of detecting high-flying birds that might be invisible in a cloudless sky.

After 45 minutes at the Allen Preserve, our optimism became really unbounded. The trees there were alive with warblers of which we soon had 11 species including Cape May. The presence of this bird always signifies a Passerine wave day and it is easily missed during any given year. A singing Wilson's Warbler there was also a first for the year as was a Wood Pewee and a Red-bellied Woodpecker. The latter is another of those species that is common inland but difficult to see near the coast. The flats were a bit disappointing. We had had Oystercatchers amidst a flock of Dowitchers on a day similar to this last year, but today we had to settle for just the usual Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers, Yellowlegs and two Semipalmated Sandpipers. At least the latter were new for the year, although hardly unexpected. A White-crowned Sparrow was at the same bench in the park where I had seen several on 10 May and that was certainly another indication of a special day. However, the center of the park, ordinarily perhaps the single best warbler location was absolutely and astonishingly bereft of birds whereas on 10 May it had been the site of a symphony of singing land birds. Thoughts of 100 species vanished quickly as we reprimanded ourselves for an optimism that this park should long since have banished from our psyches. It really is not a very good place for birds as I have remarked more than once in this diary.

An amazing thing, however, about this small park, is how different the bird activity can be from one spot to another. When we got to the area around the barn, we were suddenly greeted with an abundance of bird life. It is sufficiently removed from the model airplane flying field that the noise from the Sunday horde at this popular location did not interfere with our ability to detect the songs of the numerous warblers that were flitting through every tree. Our list of these birds was quickly augmented to 18 including Bay-breasted, and reaching 100 species for the day was again an attainable, and even likely goal. Between us, we saw three Lincoln's Sparrows reinforcing the notion that this was a major flight day. As we arrived at the West Marsh, a female Merlin zoomed over our heads and across the marsh. My friend Manny Levine, as knowledgeable a field birder as there is, told me that one can always distinguish a Merlin in flight because it appears to have a very specific destination, and so it was with this one, which was gone as rapidly as it had appeared. A Bonaparte's Gull, far out over the Sound, was our 100th species. Next, we heard and saw our first Willow Flycatcher. This bird breeds at Sherwood Island and is the only Empidonax of whose identification I feel completely certain by sight alone. Its eye ring is so inconspicuous as to be barely discernible. Later on, we repeated our circuit of the park, and in the wet and swampy Woodcock Woods we saw another Empidonax which we decided was an Acadian Flycatcher. Its eye ring was very marked and it had conspicuous yellow flanks. This was a new Sherwood Island species for me but I must confess that it provided less of a thrill than might another such new find. The reason is that it is reputed to be almost impossible to distinguish except by voice. This one didn't sing, and if it had, I wouldn't have been helped since I don't know its song and it certainly wasn't a Least Flycatcher, which is the other of this confusing genus whose song (a euphemism) I do know.

I ended the day with 103 species including nine that were new for the year. I didn't see a Tree Swallow that Bob recorded, but he missed a Nashville Warbler that I had so we ended

up even. It's interesting that we failed to record Red-eyed Vireo and Blackpoll Warbler, two common species that are usually major components of flights in late May.

Getting 100 species at Sherwood Island in one day has been a goal of mine for many years. I am not accustomed to attaining goals, having spent a professional life in biochemical research where any achievement just raises new questions. The only new question raised by today is: where do I go from here? But didn't I feel that way after 10 May? What a remarkable Spring it has been and what an extraordinary and wonderful phenomenon migration is!

May 19

The three days that have elapsed since Sunday's great flight have been characterized by cold northeast winds and rain. I've been chafing at the bit and I decided to go out today even though the weather pattern was the same. It was cold and drizzling but I thought that perhaps the conditions might be conducive to some shorebirds. The amount of rain that has fallen in the past few days always creates puddles on the grassy fields of the park and in the past I've gotten some rare spring shorebirds including Ruff and Wilson's Phalarope on such wet meadows. Waders are about the only family with which I haven't done well this spring and I'm becoming such a believer that I had a strong premonition I would get some. Well, the puddles were there and they looked perfect but I had to settle for two Solitary Sandpipers and a Lesser Yellowlegs, neither of which I had last Sunday when the park was rather dry.

Today was average but it was tough to try and identify warblers and other Passerines in the tree tops because of the rain so my total list of 73 is probably not completely inclusive. None of the species was new. The same immature Snow Goose and male Hooded Merganser are still around, the latter perhaps one of a nesting pair. I saw 12 Martins today and I believe they are nesting around here since this is the third consecutive time I've seen them. Usually I'm lucky to see one an entire Spring. There is a Martin house in the park where a colony bred years ago but it seemed to be empty, as usual. I also saw a beautiful drake Blue-winged Teal in the marsh abutting the Mill Pond. Surprisingly, this is not the first time I have seen it here late in May.

Bob Winkler was quite excited about our species count on Sunday and submitted a press release about it to several local newspapers. Apparently he was actually interviewed by the Connecticut Post and a rather garbled article appeared on May 18 under the reporter's byline. The press release was much better written but I don't think it has yet been published anywhere.

May 21

Yesterday afternoon the weather finally cleared and today was perfect with a mild southwest breeze. There were still plenty of migrating birds but nothing new amongst the 75 species. The tide was very high with no mud exposure so there were still few shorebirds although the number of Black-bellied Plover had increased to 30. At the end of the month, the tide

should be dead low in the early morning and I should see some interesting ones on the Mill Beach mud flats. The 11 warbler species included some early ones like Black and White and Yellow-rumped, and some late ones such as Black-poll and Bay-breasted. I spent some time watching the female Bluebird and she gave no indication if, and where she was nesting. One Martin today represented the fourth consecutive visit that I have recorded it but the Martin house is still empty. I flushed a female Mallard from her nest with at least 10 eggs in the east marsh but I didn't examine the nest because of the courageous and pitiful injury display that she affected. It amazes me that biologists still quibble as to whether animals have feelings! These female ducks are really factories! The weight and volume of her eggs must have totaled the duck's own total weight and volume.

The other day with the northeast winds, I saw 60 Ring-billed Gulls. Today, there was only one. The counts of Herring and Black-backed Gulls were much less affected, if at all.

May 23

Today was the third successive one with perfect weather i. e. warm with a gentle southwest breeze. Birds continued to be present in significant numbers. I saw 14 warbler species, quite remarkable for this date. The most interesting was Wilson's of which I recorded five. Also noteworthy were two Yellow-crowned Night Herons. Amongst the 74 species was one, Dowitcher, that was new for the spring. I also watched, at my leisure, a foolishly tame doe that was wandering about the Woodcock field.

I'm not likely to see more than a few new species at best until the Fall. Some of these should be shorebirds and there was evidence for their arrival today with 50 Black-bellied Plover, and three Dunlin, in addition to the two Dowitchers. The tide was still unfavorable, actually exceptionally high today although the moon is not near full. I'm also looking carefully for Cuckoos, Yellow-bellied and Olive-sided flycatchers and Mourning Warbler. I'll be fortunate to get any of these, but I have had pretty good luck with the latter over the years. I should also see Little Blue Heron which is probably the commonest species that I have thus far missed this Spring.

May 24

This was the fourth consecutive day of glorious weather and, according to the prediction, the last. I will remember it for the following: I decided to vary my itinerary based on the tides and a desire to explore the east marsh before the model airplane fliers began their noisy hobby. To achieve the latter objective, I was the first person in the park at its official opening time of 8:00 A. M. I began by walking east from the first drainage ditch, along the junction of the marsh and the barrier of phragmites that separates it from the adjacent meadow and flying field. I was looking directly into the sun when a silhouette flushed in front of me and fluttered up with dangling legs in a way that gave me a quick impression of a Virginia Rail. But this "rail" did something extraordinary. It alit on a reed of phragmites and allowed me to approach within 30 feet. In order to gain more favorable light, I made a semicircle about it. As I did so, it kept rotating imperceptibly on the reed so that it was always facing me in the "frozen" position with its bill pointed up and its neck extended.

Occasionally it emitted a short note. Of course, it was a Least Bittern, a female, behaving in a characteristic way that I suspect few people actually get to observe. This species is extremely difficult to find at Sherwood Island, although I suspect it is a regular spring migrant. I've only seen it here twice before, both times flushing it, only to have it fly a short distance and disappear immediately. Nowhere have I seen it the way I did today and I won't forget the experience! Oddly enough, I also saw two other rare herons today, Tricolored and Yellow-crowned Night. The former was stalking in the Mill Pond. The latter was near the bridge leading to the private home in the northwest corner of the east marsh, the same spot where one or two have been several times during the past week. I doubt very much that I shall ever again see this triumvirate on a single day at Sherwood Island.

I learned something about the tide in the Mill Pond today. Low tide for the coast was scheduled for 5:15 A. M. with high tide about six hours later. I arrived at the Mill Beach at 7:15 and the tide was coming in although there was still some expanse of mud flats. But when I examined the sluices and the pond, I found that the tide was still going out of the pond whose surface was largely exposed mud. The tide began to come into the pond about two and one-half hours after low tide at the coast i. e. low tide in the pond and marsh is about two to three hours behind that at the beach. Once the tide turns, it quickly fills the pond so that there is a relatively short interval during which the muddy surface is exposed. My timing today allowed me what I thought were favorable conditions both at the beach and the pond, yet I failed to see significant shorebird concentrations or species. The conditions will be favorable for the rest of the week and perhaps I'll do better.

The warbler flight seems finally to be abating. Although I did observe a nice singing Blackburnian, I noted only six species today compared with 14 yesterday. Least Bittern was the sole new species amongst my total of 72 today. I noticed both Mallard and Black Ducks with recently hatched chicks today and I saw nests of Grackle and Northern Oriole high up in Oak trees. The former was an ugly platform of sticks that may conceivably have been made by a squirrel. The latter was pendular and so inconspicuous I should never have noticed it, had I not seen the female slip in.

May 26

Yesterday was punctuated by violent thunderstorms and high winds. This morning was humid, overcast, and occasionally foggy. Dead low tide was at 7:00 A. M. and found me at the Mill Beach. The extensive mud flats were impressive and the dull, hazy weather made them seem more remote than they really are. The water beyond them was entirely calm as it often seems to be at this time of the year. Such a surface in March or April would certainly have revealed many more waterfowl than I was able to see in the choppy waters that prevailed in those months this year. Daily noises had not begun as I scanned the flats early this morning and the possibility of interesting shorebirds seemed high. Alas, it was not to be. Nor did I see anything of particular interest in the park, despite the fact that I was the first person in it and had it pretty much to myself. Some of my recent friends have disappeared, or at least I haven't seen them for three successive visits. These include the immature Snow Goose, the Hooded Merganser and the Martins. My thoughts that the latter two species might be nesting in the vicinity were probably premature and wishful thinking. I

did tally a large number of Cedar Waxwings, perhaps 100. An influx of this bird in late May is not unusual. Some years ago, I recorded 450 at this time.

A couple of days ago, my wife Madeline asked me why a Yellow-crowned Night Heron is so designated. There were two in their usual location today and I took the opportunity to examine them closely. One had an absolutely white crown while the other exhibited the straw tinge that one sees in illustrations, but rarely in the field.

I'm beginning to notice individuals as much as species. When I studied the Tricolored Heron two days ago, I first examined its bill as I remembered the very long one I had remarked upon in the individual seen earlier this Spring. I had a similar impression this time and I am quite certain it was the same bird. Today, I was amazed by a Black-crowned Night Heron, the usually gray and white parts of which were replaced by a uniform fawn brown. It bore a striking resemblance to the Nankeen Night Heron, *Nycticorax caledonicus*. I'll be keeping an eye out for this individual. It seems that as one becomes increasingly familiar with the resident birds of a given area, one gradually becomes able to distinguish amongst individuals of the various species.

May 28

This was not a very interesting day despite perfect weather and tidal parameters. The Passerine migration is just about over judging from my tally of only three individuals of passage, namely single examples of Pewee, Cliff Swallow and Redstart. The ratio of Passerines to non Passerines amongst the total of 63 species was 36:27. This should be compared to a ratio of 64:32 on 10 May, arguably the peak wave day for Passerine migrants. The expansive mud flats during the early morning low tide were replete with gulls, terns and herons but again disappointed with respect to shorebirds. Of course, fall is always better for this group and the low turnout this Spring leaves me more new species to which I can look forward. I did add one bird to the list for the year today, Little Blue Heron. It's quite a common bird that breeds with egrets and night herons on the offshore islands and I'm surprised that I hadn't seen it until now.

May 31

There were still a few Passerine migrants around today including four Redstarts and a Wilson's Warbler. But it's getting pretty quiet. I had 62 species including a Cattle Egret, which is new for the year. They are quite irregular here but when around, they are easy to see because they like to feed in the field that abuts the entry side of the central circle. I spent a good deal of time scanning the mud flats at dead low tide in the hope of seeing some new shorebirds. Sometime this will pay off but it didn't today. However, there were many Common and some Least Terns and they made quite a spectacle with their repeated dives into the shallow water. There must have been a swarm of small fish and I had the impression that it ought to be perfect for Skimmers. I've never had them at Sherwood Island but they do occur on the offshore islands and other coastal locales and I think I shall get them here sometime in the future on a day like today.

June 2

The foliage is lush and most of the birds that are left are nesting and quiet so it is very difficult to detect them. Two Pewees were the only non resident Passerines that I had today. I flushed a Black Duck from a nest with four off-white eggs just east of the flying field. It seemed a bit late as most waterfowl hatching occurred some time ago. There were two Cattle Egrets in the field today and there was one Yellow-crowned Night Heron at its east marsh site. But the only surprise was the reappearance of the male Hooded Merganser which I hadn't seen since 15 May. I'm excited by this because I do think it indicates breeding even though I haven't noticed the female for an even longer time. I spent five minutes watching the male Bluebird in the West Woods thinking that because he had a caterpillar in his bill, he might lead me to the nest. But he remained sitting silently, then flying to another high perch, all the while keeping the caterpillar uneaten and dangling. With a little more patience, I suppose I could have located the nest but I just didn't have it in me. I worked very hard for today's 58 species and I am afraid that my interest is likely to flag before the Fall migration starts in about six weeks.

June 7

Today was summery, muggy and miserable and I really had to drag myself around. The species list, 54, was the lowest since April. The male Mallards are beginning to moult and they looked the way I felt. On days like this, I maintain my interest by imagining that I might see a summer rarity, perhaps a Tree Duck, White Ibis or Mississippi Kite. Of course, I never have and I certainly didn't today. With a few exceptions such as Common Loon, most of the species which I see and hear at this time are nesting locally, by which I mean not only the park proper but also the offshore islands with their rookeries. However, failure to record a species on every trip does not preclude it as a local nester, especially if it is secretive. Some such species which I think nest on the island and I hope to detect at least once during the summer include Marsh Wren and Sharp-tailed, Savannah and Swamp Sparrows.

Two Great Blue Herons flew over today after that species managed to elude me during all the good days in May. The only other interesting observation was a large doe in the marshes bordering the east side of the Mill Pond. Patience!

June 10

How beautiful Sherwood Island was today! I've been getting to the park early these days and it is amazing to me how few people are about. There is usually someone flying airplanes who arrives, as do I, when the park opens at 8:00 A. M. Otherwise, aside from a few serious walkers and the maintenance personnel, I have the place pretty much to myself for a couple of hours. Most of the cleaning and mowing is done Monday and Tuesday so later weekdays are usually quiet save for the model airplanes. Despite the pleasantness of the day, again there was little of ornithological interest. Amongst the 54 species, I was surprised by an injured Black-bellied Plover, a Crested Flycatcher, a Cliff Swallow and a Wood Thrush.

June 17

The past week has been exceedingly hot and muggy and I just didn't have the energy to go birding. I did go to the park on June 14 with my friend Bob Braun who generously agreed to identify some of the trees for me. He had a field guide that seemed useful so I bought a copy the next day and tried to distinguish amongst the deciduous trees around my house. I shall definitely need some more personal instruction but when I went to the park today, I brought the field guide along and reexamined some of the trees that Bob had identified for me. I changed my itinerary a bit by omitting my usual start at the Allen Preserve and beginning in the east marsh of the park at 8:00 A. M. I spent some time checking the details of the Eastern Cottonwood, several of which are in the fields adjacent to the east marsh. At the eastern extremity of the park, the marsh is separated from an overgrown field by a narrow barrier of trees, mainly Gray Birch. As I was walking along the marsh (north) side of this barrier, a Yellow-crowned Night Heron flew from the trees into the marsh and landed across the channel from me, perhaps 30 feet away. I spent some time studying and admiring this beautiful bird which is considerably more slender than the Black-crowned Night Heron. I was struck by its powerful, thick bill, so unlike the long, slender bill of the Tricolored Heron I had admired earlier in the year.

I continued birding at a leisurely and relaxed pace, eventually entering the west marsh just north of the maintenance buildings as I always do. I looked out at the Mill Pond and noticed that the little bare mud island that always contains numerous sunning cormorants also seemed to have several Mute Swans on it. I raised my binoculars and one of the large white birds was an adult **White Pelican!** I couldn't believe my eyes as I advanced to the edge of the marsh, perhaps 300 feet from the island. The bird was in breeding plumage, as indicated by a pronounced excrescence on its upper mandible. Suddenly I heard "Richard, come back, you'll scare it". I turned and left the swamp by the trail just south of the maintenance buildings. As I was walking out, I looked back and the pelican was gone. Had I been dreaming? No, there it was in the air, circling the pond on those magnificent black-tipped wings. I stepped out of the marsh to find Bob Winkler and Charlie Barnard, another active Connecticut birder. The pelican settled into the pond in front of us and allowed close inspection through Charlie's telescope. After perhaps 10 minutes, it took off again, circled higher and higher, and disappeared to the northwest. It seems that Bob had first seen it about an hour earlier. He had rushed to Glenn Dochtermann's office, called my home, and called Frank Mantlik before taking "Doc" out to see the bird. Frank, a highly knowledgeable and respected local birder and photographer, had called Charlie who made it to the park in record time. Bob, having learned from my daughter that I was already in the park, alerted security personnel to find and inform me. Fortunately they were unsuccessful, thus allowing me the satisfaction of making my own independent, and almost simultaneous discovery of this extraordinary vagrant.

Early on in this diary, I remarked that no matter how dull the birding might seem on any given day at Sherwood Island, if I persisted systematically, I would eventually see rare and interesting birds although I might not be able to predict exactly when. Today was a perfect example. The exciting spring migration ended three weeks ago and the pickings have since been very meager. At times it seemed that I was dragging myself around and, although I

hoped for a “summer stray”, I certainly didn’t expect anything noteworthy before late July at the earliest. Today was so unpromising that I actually spent a good part of it examining trees rather than looking for birds. And then came that incredible wonderful moment, an electric *frisson* that makes it all worth while. There are about five previous reports of White Pelican for the state of Connecticut.

Bob and I regained sufficient composure to continue our usual route that finishes in the West Woods. Bob showed me a surprisingly high hole, perhaps 35 feet up in the central trunk remnant of a dying White Oak, that he had identified as the Bluebirds’ nesting site. We found no activity at the hole itself but we did see both adults and thought we heard at least two other individuals in the vicinity. It thus seems likely that some young have already successfully fledged.

June 21

I went out today despite an overcast sky and intermittent rain. I went through my usual rounds rather hastily after I realized that the pelican wasn’t around. The day was not very interesting but I did see an immature Bluebird flying around the west woods so the surmise I made last Friday about fledging was correct. I also got another superb look at the Yellow-crowned Night Heron in the same spot as the other day and was again struck by its handsome appearance. Its secondaries and scapulars seemed somewhat elongated suggesting fine incipient plumes. The total species list was 47 which is probably as low as it will get during the summer.

Today was the summer solstice but the seasons are slightly different at Sherwood Island. I think of the period 1March-31 May as the spring so summer started for me on 1 June. I think of fall as beginning about 15 July and continuing until 15 November. My perspective is, of course, entirely based on migration and the fall migration is about one month more protracted than that in the spring. It lacks, however, the potential for a “big day”. I get special sensory inputs in the various seasons that involve odors, sounds and appearances as well as the sensations of temperature and humidity. I think I could probably predict dates pretty well if I were led blindfolded through my rounds. As spring turns into summer, the bird songs diminish and there is a kind of hot and humid silence. Later on in the summer, the cicadas begin their chorus and I know that fall has begun for me. There are special feels to the air after an easterly August storm or a late September-early October northwesterly cold front that are never present in spring. Which is my favorite, spring or fall? It’s like asking which of my two children I prefer. Each is a unique source of pleasure.

At this moment, I am looking forward to what I consider fall which will start with an influx of swallows in early July. However, this is also a time to reflect on the spring and early summer just passed and it has been an extraordinarily gratifying period that has given me great zest and satisfaction. Migration is an awesome event and I have experienced it in appreciative awe. I’ve gotten simple pleasure in exploring the unpredictable details of this permanently predictable phenomenon and I have reveled in the mindlessness this enjoyable pursuit. What will be the autumn counterparts for 29 snipe in a day? For 103 species in a day? For Least Bittern? For White Pelican? I can’t imagine but I know there will be some and I can’t wait to find out what they are.

June 23

Today I was mobbed by Red-winged Blackbirds when I inadvertently flushed a recent fledgling that could barely fly. I think my previous estimates of 25-35 for the number of individuals may have been low. I saw at least that many today and I didn't explore the eastern half of the park which has a third to a half of the total population. There must be 25-50 breeding pairs in the park and the Allen Preserve.

There is usually some tidbit of interest on even the most ordinary of days here and today's such finding was a group of six male Old Squaw. These were in breeding plumage although one or two might have been in early moult. I suppose one might expect to see an occasional summering individual. But six! Zeranski and Baptist say "Very rare in summer".

Were the three Tree Swallows at the Mill Beach the first fall migrants?

June 27

Today was certainly a humid summer "dog day" and I barely dragged myself through the western half of my usual rounds. I skipped the eastern part of the park which is why Killdeer is missing from the list of 47 species. The male Hooded Merganser was back in his favored position but I have seen no indication of a female nor of young, so perhaps this is just a summering individual rather than a breeder. The Common Loon that is summering is probably immature since it is still in "winter" plumage. There were a lot of recently fledged birds including several Robins, a Bluebird and, most interestingly, a group of at least five young pheasants with a Hen. These young birds were the size of Quail which, at first glance, they rather resembled. They were located in the thick grass near the Martin house between the barn and the maintenance buildings. Despite their relatively small size, the young flew well and they had rounded rather than pointed tails. Sometimes, after I flushed them, they would fly into the imported Douglas-firs that dot the field. They looked rather odd walking upright on the horizontal branches of these trees and reminded me of a picture by George M. Sutton of a young Crested Curassow (plate 2 in Curassows and Related Birds by J. Delacour and D. Amadon, New York, 1973). Some years ago, I saw a similar aged group of these birds in exactly the same spot and mistook them for Quail until, after several sequential sightings, I noticed that they were growing into Pheasants!

I'm having great difficulties with my "Sherwood Island" car. This vehicle is now 13 years old and has gone more than 100,000 miles. It is completely rusted and part of the floor has eroded. Yet it is ideal for driving through the east parking lot of the island which is gravel, often filled with puddles and full of large potholes. Any car would quickly suffer on this surface and I would hate to ruin a decent one by driving it here. Despite its disgracefully disreputable appearance, until quite recently my car has run well and has made close to 40 miles to a gallon. Recently, however, it has begun to sputter wildly, to stall whenever wet, and, in general, to give the appearance of being on its last legs. Now it only makes 22 miles per gallon. The other day, I took it for a required annual "emissions test" and it failed

miserably! The maximum acceptable value for hydrocarbon emission is 200 and I registered 1,500! The rule is that one must have at least 40 dollars worth of work done and bring it back for retesting within one month. If it fails again, which will certainly be the case for this car, a year's reprieve will be granted before it must be removed from circulation.

July 1

The second half of the year began today and I celebrated with a list of 44 species, the lowest total since early March. Even though it's Friday, a great deal of mowing was being done and the noise probably prevented me from hearing a few species. It was another hot and muggy day and insects were abundant. The most visible were the swarms of Dragon-flies that were moving west along the contour of the coast. However, the most conspicuous were the mosquitoes which were really biting and making the day unpleasant. There was little of ornithological interest. The five Tree Swallows were moving down the coast and were clearly early migrants. I saw a few Least Terns for the first time in a month suggesting that their breeding period is over.

The major event of the day, however, was the baptism of a new pair of "birding pants". I don't think I've had occasion to mention my Sherwood Island attire until now but it is not elegant. I've alternated between the same two pairs of cotton-polyester pants for at least the past 10 years and they have become something of a joke to my family. I have to admit that they are pretty bad and, as a matter of fact, I recently discarded one of them. This was probably the first piece of apparel that I have ever personally discarded. Ordinarily, although a worn out item seems to disappear on its own, the reality is that my wife has thrown it out. Last week, she surprised me with a new pair of fully cotton pants containing extra pockets in which to stash useful items like my new field guide to trees. The pants were far too long, which was perfect because they could be tucked into my boots. This helps prevent ticks from reaching the surface of the skin.

I got a note from Frank Mantlik today requesting a formal description of the White Pelican. Apparently no one besides Bob Winkler, Charlie Barnard and myself saw the bird which never returned after its one and one-half hour sojourn on 17 June. What a stroke of luck that I was there at that time!

July 5

The only thing memorable about today was garbage. Yesterday was a hot fourth of July and the resulting litter was still present this morning. The maintenance personnel were just beginning to attack it and I didn't envy them. There was no hint of migration amongst the day's 47 species.

July 11

The past week was extraordinarily hot and humid, so uncomfortable that I couldn't bring myself to venture out. Last night and today, a northwest breeze removed the humidity and

lowered the temperature. I arrived at the Mill Beach at 7: 30. It was close to dead low tide and the extensive flats were almost entirely exposed. It was obvious immediately that some fall migration had begun since swallows were streaming south west along the shoreline. I observed about 100 during the day and the major constituent seemed to be Bank, although Tree and Barn were also well represented. Black-crowned Night Herons and both egrets were all over the flats and later I recorded a Great Blue in the west marsh and a Yellow-Crowned Night in the far east part of the east marsh. There were a few shorebirds around including a Least Sandpiper and two Greater Yellowlegs. But the surprise of the day was finding two Upland Sandpipers on the east parking lot. I have previously recorded the species in late July but not nearly this early. Also, this is the first time I have ever seen more than one individual here. The day's total of 56 species was the highest for more than a month.

I'm getting obsessed by an exceedingly antisocial desire. I'm hoping for a severe northeasterly storm or a tropical hurricane within the next seven weeks! The shorebirds that result will be most welcome.

July 13

Quite high temperature and brutal humidity forced me to rush through my rounds this morning. I concentrated more on self preservation than on the birds. My main reason for going out at all was that low tide fell at 9: 00 A. M. and I have this notion that early morning mud flats at the Mill Beach are likely to yield interesting shore or water birds. The reason I feel this way is because my only Sherwood Island record for Oystercatcher was under such circumstances. Otherwise it has usually not been a promising scenario despite my hunch. It will be interesting to see whether anything interesting does show up there this fall. Today there were about 50 herons, mostly Snowy Egrets and a lot of gulls all in one rather confined area where there must have been a swarm of small fish. The day was decidedly uncomfortable and ornithologically unremarkable.

July 15

I must confess that midsummer birding at Sherwood Island is dull. I was optimistic today because the wind was from the northeast and the sky was overcast. There had been substantial rain last night and there was still an intermittent drizzle. The park was dotted with the sort of pools of rainwater which occasionally attract shorebirds at this time of the year. Not so today! The only ornithological indication of the weather was the presence of 70 Laughing Gulls, the first time this year they have appeared in substantial numbers. The migration of swallows, of course, continues in full swing. Otherwise, it was a boring day and I had trouble maintaining my concentration. In fact I lost it sufficiently to fall foolishly into a drainage ditch, thereby providing my new birding pants with their first real baptism under fire.

July 18

It was very overcast when I set out this morning and the prediction was for heavy rain and thunderstorms. There was a gentle wind from the southeast and I was again motivated to go out by the imagined possibility that some interesting shorebirds might arrive. I'm beginning to have a fixation that the year's list could be rendered disappointing by just the omission of this group. It has certainly been otherwise excellent. I only spent an hour today after which the heavy rain began and I wouldn't even bother to enter this list except that there was some indication that the fall shorebird migration is well underway. I recorded Semipalmated Plover, Lesser Yellowlegs and Dowitcher for the first time since May, all flying around the east marsh even though there was little exposed mud since the tide was high. It seemed a good day for the less common species that I have not yet seen this year such as Golden Plover, Willet and Whimbrel but none were about. They will remain reasonable possibilities for the next seven weeks. Today's list of 39 species is not representative since I was out for such a short time all of which was spent in the eastern half of the park.

July 19

Today I did it right and I even used my "first in the park routine". Alas, there was certainly no Least Bittern in the east marsh and the day was rather unexciting. Yet I did manage to log 58 species, the most since May and there were a few observations of interest. For one thing, the blackbirds are starting to fly over in small groups. Today these contained mostly Cowbirds with a few Redwings interspersed. It is interesting that these birds, which don't go south until late in the fall, migrate locally in flocks during the summer. The Redwings are still in the park but past experience tells me they will depart in August. Now there are still quite a few that are recently fledged and can barely fly. The parents remain very protective and continue to circle and harass me when I am in the vicinity of the young. I am surprised at how long their breeding season endures.

I am still puzzled by the tides here. I arrived at peak high tide as indicated not only by the Norwalk Hour, but also by the water level at the beach. Yet water was pouring into the Mill Pond which still had a considerable expanse of mud. Previously, I estimated that the tide in the pond was 2-3 hours behind that of the sound. Perhaps the discrepancy is even greater.

White herons abounded on the pond and in the west marsh today. Most of these were small and probably Snowy Egrets but I still have some difficulty distinguishing immature Snowies from immature Little Blues. The latter has been tough to find this year but I did see an adult and one bird I took to be an immature.

The steady passage of Barn, Tree and Bank Swallows continues. I think Rough-winged, which breeds in the park, is much less common than Bank during migration.

July 22

The humidity was quite unbearable and I truncated my usual route so that I didn't get to the central area of the park. Dead low tide was at 5:00 A. M. and I arrived at the Mill Beach at

7:00. The tide was coming in but there was still a large expanse of flats. The pond also had a large exposed area of mud and was still draining out which it continued to do until at least 8:30 i. e. three and one half hours after low tide at the beach. The muddy areas were full of white herons, 50 Snowy and 20 Great Egrets and this, combined with the tropical weather, made Sherwood Island seem like Florida. There was some evidence (10 Dowitchers, 25 Semipalmated Sandpipers) that the population of migrating shorebirds is beginning to swell. Nothing of special interest amongst them yet. I was surprised to see newly fledged Mallards, doubtless a second brood. I happened to examine a few of the ubiquitous Mockingbirds and realized, for the first time, that the young are spotted. How extraordinary that after all these years, I was so ignorant of the appearance of a common bird. I think of Mimids as thrush like and this juvenile plumage is certainly consistent with that notion.

There has been a happy ending to the most recent saga with my car. After it failed the emissions test, I took it to Tom, the trusty local mechanic, told him to do no more than 40 dollars worth of work, that I knew he couldn't really fix it for that amount but that I didn't care. He looked at it, changed a wire and put on a new distributor cap. He told me he thought it might actually pass the test and so it did. It was certified for two years and it's now making 37 miles per gallon and not stalling or sputtering. And all this for 40 dollars! Well, it's not quite so unexpected as the pelican but I guess good surprises can occur even outside the world of birds!

July 24

For the first time in quite a while, I was optimistic and enthusiastic. The dreadful humidity of the past week had exploded yesterday in a fierce thunderstorm that broke trees and dumped lots of rain. The park was bound to have lots of puddles. Furthermore, low tide was at 7:00 A. M. when I could expect the Mill Beach to be calm and quiet. And so it was, especially since it was Sunday morning and there was absolutely no commercial clamor. I arrived there at 6:40 and I spent the next hour on the flats which contained more than 100 herons, mostly Snowy Egrets and an extraordinary 40 Black-crowned Nights. But the shorebirds were disappointing again with just small numbers of the commoner species. Well, at least the puddles were still to be investigated. I was almost the first in the park and airplanes aren't flown on Sunday (because of the anticipated crowds) so the east marsh was undisturbed. Unfortunately by birds as well! The puddles were there although the grassy areas were not flooded as I had hoped they might be. It didn't really matter as there just wasn't much around. The day was generally a fizzle. It remained very humid and I again omitted the central area, which is good for land birds during migration, and concentrated on fields, marshes and puddles. In retrospect, I should not have been so optimistic. The storm yesterday was from the southwest and it probably has to be easterly to bring in the shorebirds. There were some observations of minor interest. Still another new brood of Mallards, small flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds flying over, and my friend the Hooded Merganser, barely recognizable because of his moult. At one point, he flapped his wings and they did not appear as though they could sustain flight.

It looks as though I may go through all of July without adding a species to the year list. Although this year has been generally superb, that has not been the case for shorebirds and each unsuccessful July visit makes me pessimistic that I shall miss several of them this year.

Oh well. I probably have about seven more weeks for most of them and I will certainly give it a vigorous effort. I need a hurricane!

July 27

Thunderstorms with heavy rain from the southwest last evening. Slightly less hot and humid this morning with a gentle northeast breeze. The weather scenario was almost identical to that of July 24 but this time I had the good sense to expect nothing and nothing is what I got. So I was less disappointed than I had been the other day. During normal years, when I'm not keeping a diary, I don't get out much at this time of the year so I didn't fully realize how dull it could get. Since 17 June, Pelican Day, there has been precious little to maintain my interest. And the heat and humidity have made it seem even worse. Today I noticed that the cicada music had become quite loud and constant, a sure sign of late summer. I saw two Ospreys, the first since the May migrants and a Meadowlark that was a bit of a surprise. There were no Grackles. They have departed the park for their local wanderings and the Red-winged Blackbirds will soon follow suit. I saw 80 today but most were flying over in small groups and the number actually in the park was smaller than it had been. They will all have gone within the next two weeks.

July 29

This was probably my last time out in July and, if so, I will have gone the entire month without recording a new species for the year. On the positive side, I doubt that will be the case for any of the next four months! The weather today was what it has been all month: warm, humid and almost windless. Last evening there were powerful thunder storms from the southwest that dumped lots of rain and created rather wet meadows. That has also been a prevalent pattern. Yet the birds remain disappointing. There was a Pectoral Sandpiper today but not much else of interest. I did happen on a recently fledged Cardinal fluttering in the mid story of a grove of white pines. I probably wouldn't have recognized it except for the excited male parent that was in attendance. The young bird was wren-sized, dingy brown above, gray below. A conical horn colored bill was its only distinguishing feature. I was surprised to find such a young bird at what seems to me a rather late date for it.

August 2

The equatorial weather is continuing. Hazy, almost windless, muggy conditions with the humidity over 90% resulted in my exhaustion after only one and a half hours. I was drenched with sweat and my spectacles were constantly blurred by moisture. I concentrated on looking for shorebirds on the beaches, meadows and marshes and I omitted all the spots for land birds. The park was beautiful and the marshes have become very luxuriant and have recovered completely from the beaten down appearance that they had after last winter's heavy snowfalls.

I arrived at the Mill Beach at 8:00 A. M., the peak of high tide. Of course, the Mill Pond was behind this schedule and still contained some mud flats although it was filling quickly. The

last flat to be covered is the one near the sluices and today it held quite a concentration of birds, more than 100 Semipalmated Sandpipers and a few Black-bellied and Semipalmated Plovers. This may not seem like a great many but it's the highest count I've had for shorebirds this year so they are definitely coming through. None of the ones for which I've been hoping, however, and I'm getting more and more certain that I won't see them unless there is some kind of a wet easterly blow.

August 4

I struggled and sweated through yet another enervating outing in the continuing humid weather that has been with us here for almost one month with little or no relief. Again, I was obliged to truncate my itinerary and concentrate on those areas that I thought might contain shorebirds. I started at the Mill Pond behind the beach at 7: 00 A. M., exactly midway between low and high tides. This is the point at which the water level is lowest in the pond the surface of which was almost entirely mud. The expanse was dotted throughout with Semipalmated Sandpipers and there were some Semipalmated and Black-bellied Plovers as well as both Yellowlegs and a Dowitcher. The migration of shorebirds is still building but again I was unsuccessful in finding any of the less common species. Red-winged Blackbirds have almost deserted the park yet they are flying over it in substantial numbers. There were about 450 today.

August 6

What a beautiful Saturday morning! Yesterday's rain was followed by a brisk northeast wind that swept away the stifling humidity. The park was fresh, beautiful and surprisingly quiet. There were no model airplanes since they are prohibited during summer weekends. Apparently cicadas don't like cool dry, weather. It was the kind of a day when one almost expects unusual birds and I was enthusiastic. Well, there was nothing really unusual but I did finally end the six-week drought of new birds by adding Turnstone to the year's list. There were quite a few gulls including 300 Laughing Gulls, the most I've ever seen at Sherwood Island. Have I mentioned the large flock of Starlings that has been in the west marsh for the past few weeks? Most of them are immature and today I think I saw the whole group in the air at once for the first time. There were at least 2500.

One may wonder with good reason why I continue to search so intensively at Sherwood Island for shorebirds like Golden Plover, Willet, Oystercatcher, Whimbrel and Hudsonian Godwit when I could easily see all these species in a single day on the south shore of Long Island. The answer is that in my mind a Willet at Sherwood Island is a different species from one at Jones Beach or Jamaica Bay. Sherwood Island is not a particularly good area to see birds but I regard it as my discovery and my property and I love it the way Gilbert White must have loved Selbourne and Thoreau must have loved Walden Pond. It is a special, magical place for me and each bird I see there is a special and magical experience. Perhaps the reader will remember the importance I placed on finding Woodcock and Shoveler this spring. They are rather common birds elsewhere but they represent an enjoyable and quite difficult challenge in this microenvironment that I have come to think of as almost part of myself.

August 8

The 7:00 A. M. low tide found me on the mud flats off the Mill Beach. During the summer, I've been wearing a long-sleeved turtle neck and a windbreaker because they seem effective in preventing the access of ticks to my body. Doubtless, they contributed to the exhaustion I felt during the sultry, humid weather that has dominated this summer. They provided welcome warmth this morning, however, as the temperature started out in the high fifties and the air was dry and cool. It was another lovely day but the birds didn't know it. There were practically no shorebirds and the only slightly noteworthy finding was an itinerant immature Phoebe, a species that doesn't nest on the island and that I never see here during the summer. Save for the airplane fliers, the park was quite deserted and it was disappointing to scan the long, undisturbed shoreline and not detect a single wader. The meadows were dotted but with garbage rather than with Golden Plovers. Monday morning after a delightful summer weekend is not the time to see Sherwood Island. The parts of it that are open to the public resemble my conception of a recently used battlefield and it amazes me that the park personnel can clean it as quickly as they do.

Two minor interesting incidents occurred today. The first was that I was stung on the right index finger by a Yellow Jacket. This happened as I was driving on the east parking lot. I felt something move on my windbreaker and thinking it was a tick I attempted to pick it off without looking. A stab of rather intense pain caused me to stop the car, leap out, curse, and flick away the angry insect.

Sometime later, I thought I saw a hummingbird on the edge of Woodcock Woods. It landed and turned out to be a cicada. I watched as the caudal part of its body vibrated and apparently produced the sound that emanated from it. The transparent wings did not appear to participate in this process.

August 10

Today's most interesting experience came when I surprised a deer in the central grove of small pines where I always look for owls in the winter. Deer here usually seem sexless rather small and somewhat wary. Not so this one, an obvious young stag. He was large with easily visible testicles and two decurved, mossy horns, and he was much more curious than afraid. He eyed me with little fear for several moments even though I was only about 30 yards away and was not attempting to hide. He displayed an air of confidence and a trace of braggadocio strongly suggesting he had yet to realize that those of my species were bad news. How do such deer survive the hunting season? Perhaps they don't.

As for the birds, well they were..... "for the birds". The next three weeks should be the best for waders but if the dry weather and southerly breezes continue, I will likely be disappointed. After this year's magnificent spring, I felt certain that I would easily surpass 200 species for the year. But now I am beginning to harbor doubts. It will be quite difficult unless I am able to add several shorebirds and, as I stood on the beautiful, deserted beach at low tide today and saw none, that seemed like a diminishing possibility.

August 12

Some days even writing a note becomes a struggle and this is one of those days. It rained last night and was very overcast this morning so I figured I'd have the park pretty much to myself and there might be some puddles. Well, there were no puddles because the parched ground soaked up the water immediately but I did have the park to myself and it was lovely. But it was ornithologically disappointing as most of the summer has been. I got tired and shortened my itinerary a bit.

August 16

The park was extraordinarily lovely this morning. I was the first one to enter it and thus found it pristine and quiet. Today was a Tuesday and the weekend's garbage had already been completely cleaned. There was no wind and there was just the slightest trace of an autumn chill. The sound was entirely placid, the atmosphere was crystal clear, and the visibility seemed as though it might be infinity although, as a practical matter, it carried only to the north shore of Long Island. There was a feeling of promise in the air and a definite premonition that anything was possible. And indeed, that is the case for the next two months. There was a good deal of bird movement. Flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds flew over from east to west (the preferred fall migratory route that follows the shoreline here). These birds are not really migrants but are moving about locally. The Barn Swallows that were sparsely but continuously flying down the beach were *bone fide* migrants as were the peep, Yellowlegs and plovers. There were no exciting birds, although I did experience a momentary thrill when I noticed 30 plovers on the meadow just right (west) of the main entry road. Surely at least one of them would be a Golden Plover. But none of them were. They were all Black-bellied Plovers and once again I remind myself that I am not going to see any interesting shorebirds unless there is an easterly influence to the weather.

August 18

I was awakened this morning by the roaring of the river by our house which was thundering over our little falls with as much power as it has ever shown. The sky was overcast but there had been heavy rain during most of the night, supposedly the "remnant" of a tropical storm. Certainly this circumstance would, at least temporarily, eliminate one of the two obstacles that had prevented me from seeing unusual shorebirds this year, namely the lack of standing water at Sherwood Island. The other problem, the lack of easterly winds, would remain. There was a nice breeze today but it was from the south and the southwest. It was so wet when I left home that I mentally reckoned this as a "now or never" day for finding some of these species this year.

When I got to the park, I found it devoid of people and full of standing water. The east parking lot was replete with puddles and as I pulled up to the model airplane field, so did a group of shorebirds. They included 20 Black-bellied Plovers, a Turnstone, several Least and Semipalmated Sandpipers, a few Semipalmated Plovers and Lesser Yellowlegs and a new

species for the year, a White-rumped Sandpiper. Sometimes I have difficulty identifying the latter, but this individual stuck out as obviously larger than the accompanying peep and with longer wings. It was especially accommodating in the display of its white rump as it flitted back and forth amongst the flock. I took a quick circuit about the parking lot before returning to this original group, and when I did, it had been joined by a superb Whimbrel that I inspected leisurely at close range. What a beautiful bird with its finely streaked upper breast, its subtle vermiculations and particularly its boldly striped head that is far more conspicuous in life than in any of the pictures I have seen. Up to this point I had been fortunate in having this field to myself and I figured that would continue since it seemed too wet for the model airplane fliers. Alas, I underestimated their determination. They arrived and the birds left. But I wasn't finished with new shorebirds for, as I was sloshing through the east marsh at high tide, a group of Snowy Egrets took off on the other side and with them was a Willet. The deep water precluded my getting anywhere close to its landing place and I didn't see it again. So I had three new shorebirds, each uncommon and by no means a certainty here during any given year. Not bad!

And there were other birds of interest including the first migrating warblers of the fall season, a Northern Waterthrush and a Canada Warbler. These two, as well as the Redstart, seem to be the earliest of this family to come through here in the autumn. And three Green-winged Teal at one of the puddles was a pleasant surprise. I've never seen them here quite this early. Finally, two Glossy Ibises that shared the airplane field with the shorebirds attracted my attention. They were clearly adults yet they exhibited conspicuous areas of white at the base of the bill. I don't know what the current taxonomic dogma about the eastern and western forms of this bird are, but for me they are certainly indistinguishable.

This was the first exciting day since 17 June, when I saw the White Pelican. Indeed, I would have missed nothing, had I omitted all my visits during that two-month interval. I suspect that this morning is likely to be quite significant in the year's accounting. First, it more or less assures that I will reach 200 species. Second, it will probably be the last time that I add as many as three new ones. However, in spite of the success and pleasure that I enjoyed today, I kept wondering what it would have been like, had there been an east wind to go with all the standing water. Isn't that the human species for you. I'm no better than an insatiable robber baron when it comes to the things I really want!

August 20

I shall call it a "cicada day"; warm, hazy, humid, muggy and without particular ornithological interest.

August 22

It doesn't get any better for shorebirds at Sherwood Island than it was this morning. The omens were quite similar to the only other good day this month, the 18th. It rained heavily all last night as it had the 17th. Suddenly this has become a very wet August. It continued to rain all today, however, so I restricted myself to shorebird areas i. e. the Mill Beach and the eastern half of the park. Low tide was at 7:00 A. M. and found me at the former. I

wandered out on the flats and was rewarded by two Oystercatchers that were foraging on the most distant mud flat. I've only seen them at Sherwood Island once before and, although that time was in the spring, the spot and time of day were identical. I don't think they like people or noise, so one must have a low tide at the quietest time of day, plus a little luck, in order to find them. I noticed that there was one important difference today from the 18th, namely that the wind was from the northeast. It seemed as though the conditions were perfect and I was surprised that besides the Oystercatchers, there were two Semipalmated Plovers and nothing else on the mud flats. I thought there should have been more. I drove into the park at 8:15 and found the entire east parking lot and adjacent fields almost flooded with standing water. At the extreme eastern parking extremity, there was what appeared to be a fine adult Snow Goose save that it was entirely lacking black on its primaries. Over the years at Sherwood Island, I have seen some very aberrant geese and gulls and this was certainly a good example.

Between the east parking lot and the beach, there is a grassy strip on which are located several bath houses. This area is easily flooded during heavy rains and it was here that most of the action was occurring. I parked the car facing southwest so that I could look out the driver's window directly into this area and yet remain dry. For once, the bird life resembled the south shore of Long Island. Of the 16 species of shorebirds that I recorded, my best ever at Sherwood Island, all except Oystercatcher and Solitary Sandpiper were seen right here. Birds were flying in and out and the panoply of species was constantly changing. A group of 20 Greater Yellowlegs dropped in briefly and provided a good comparison with the 10 Lesser Yellowlegs that were less restless and remained for the entire three-hour period. A few Least Sandpipers fed quietly while a flock of 100 Semipalmateds was constantly up and down. As many as 20 Pectoral Sandpipers were nervously feeding as were a similar number of Semipalmated Plovers. Two Turnstones flew by without settling. 30 Black-bellied Plover were scattered about and I examined them innumerable times for the presence of Golden Plover. Suddenly there was a series of high pitched whistles that I had never heard and 11 Hudsonian Godwits joined the assemblage. This is a new Sherwood Island bird for me although Frank Mantlik saw a flock here on a day just like this one several years ago. Birds don't mind parked cars and I had magnificent looks at these as they fed or, when the wind was particularly strong, turned to face it and stood motionless. They were all in a dingy kind of fall plumage. A Willet settled into another part of the strip. Finally, I decided to tear myself away from this wonderful spectacle and I scanned the Black-bellied Plovers one last time. I found three Golden Plovers amongst them, one in fall plumage, the other two changing. It had to be. This was my day!

So. Three more new birds for the year and all of them uncommon or rare at Sherwood Island. One week ago, I was deploring the lack of shorebirds here and wondering whether their absence might ruin the list for the year. On 6 August, I cited five scarce species and complained about how easy it would be to see them all in a day on Long Island whereas I might not see any of them here this year. Now I've seen them all and the year's list of shorebirds is very respectable. Standing water and northeast winds are what it takes. This was one of those days that I won't forget!

August 23

I could scarcely wait to get out this morning. During the night the winds had shifted to the northwest clearing the sky and dropping the temperature. I was certain these changes would usher in the first fall flight of birds other than waders. I was also curious whether any of the latter might have lingered after the disappearance of yesterday's northeasterly rains.

The park was beautiful, its untended areas bursting with luxuriant vegetation. All sorts of weeds were blooming in a variety of colors and innumerable fungi of different species had miraculously appeared after yesterday's deluge. There was a trace of crispness in the air which was perfectly clear with Long Island easily visible and seeming not very far at all. The wind was palpable and the cicadas were quiet.

There was still considerable standing water but a quick examination indicated that most of the shorebirds had left. I did find five Solitary Sandpipers, a rather high number, and I also saw three Upland Sandpipers, the most I've ever seen here. I flushed one of these near the airplane field. The other two were flying over, conspicuous because of their melodious piping whistle of three syllables. But the interesting species from yesterday were not here and there wasn't even a single Black-bellied Plover. The hawk migration is the major autumn ornithological spectacle and there was an initial miniflight today consisting of five Osprey, a Broad-winged Hawk and a Kestrel. A Hummingbird flying over was a new species for the year, number 190. Although there weren't many swallows, I did have my first Cliff of the fall. Other new arrivals included single examples of Veery, Gnatcatcher, Black and White Warbler and Redstart. Although there are few, if any in the park, flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds continue to fly over it and today there were 250. I've heard Bobolink overhead earlier this summer, but today was the first time they have actually settled into the park where they like the fields that have been left untouched like those adjacent to the airplane flying area and at the eastern extremity. It was certainly an eclectic array of species and I had the feeling that anything was possible with its accompanying premonition that there might be something really rare. I did see something suspicious in the field at the eastern end but I couldn't really make it out other than it was drab gray brown, catbird-sized, thick-billed and behaving oddly in its flight from weed to weed. I usually designate such inconspicuously marked land birds as Cowbirds but I would have liked a better look at this one which kept whispering "Blue Grosbeak" to me. I ended the day with 70 species, by far the highest total since spring and a very respectable number for this date. In general, lists in the fall are not nearly as high as those of the big May days although the numbers of individuals can be greater and the seasonal list is comparable. Except for an occasional late September wave, I've never had this many species on a day in fall.

August 24

Two days ago was by far the best I've had here for shorebirds. Yesterday, I had the highest species total I've ever recorded for August. Today.....an unmitigated fizzle. Instead of 16 species of shorebirds comprising hundreds of individuals, I managed just three species comprising three individuals. Instead of 70 species, I struggled to get 47. The day-to-day differences here can be extraordinarily striking. And this one isn't easily explained. Yesterday's northwest wind had diminished to a breeze, but it was still from the right

direction and I anticipated that this second consecutive day of such weather might bring a real slew of Passerine migrants. I suppose that I was due for a letdown, as my predictions had been working out rather well lately. And on the positive side, I did establish quite clearly that standing water, *per se*, does not assure the presence of shorebirds even during the height of their migration period.

I saw a doe and her fawn browsing in the east marsh, the first time I've seen a juvenile deer here. It was past the spotted stage, perhaps half the weight of its mother, with a beautiful light mauve body containing a large amount of white on its hind quarters. It was constantly wagging its tail in the manner of a dog, behavior which I have certainly never seen and wouldn't expect in deer. Perhaps the young of all species are slightly unpredictable.

August 26

This morning could have been worse considering that it was a cicada day. I had 53 species in two and one half hours. The highlight was a Whimbrel that I saw twice, first flying over the flats at the Mill Beach and later flying over the east marsh. In each instance, my attention was attracted by its call, an unaccented whistle containing four syllables of equal pitch, neither loud nor ringing. I hadn't expected any shorebirds today since the wind was from the southwest. Other observations of interest included a Hummingbird and a Parula Warbler. The local pheasant family has done well. I flushed a very motley group of 11.

My favorite parts of the park these late summer days are the overgrown fields of unintended beauty that have been left untouched. This year, they are the one at the eastern extremity and the Woodcock area which is presently a mass of jewel weed. I haven't seen any birds of particular interest in either of these spots thus far but I suspect that I shall.

The level of water in the Mill Pond defies logic. It has been quite high at all times during the last month with almost no visible mud. Today, when the sound was at dead low tide, the pond was a sheet of mud. On those uncommon occasions in the past when this has occurred, the tide on the sound has been about midway between low and high. It seems a very unpredictable phenomenon that could influence the shorebird population significantly. Perhaps the action of the sluices is altered from time to time. Herons were the main bird family taking advantage of the exposed expanse today.

August 30

Cicada weather predominated over the past several days until last night when it was swept away by a cool, dry front from the northwest that promised good conditions for migration. My optimism led me to the Mill Beach at 7:15. It was immediately obvious that an early flight day had just begun. This is one of the spots sufficiently removed from the highway so that I can hear birds overhead and there were plenty streaming by in small groups that continued until about 10:00 when they seemed to abate. The Kingbird is a species that flies over in small groups at this time of the year and continues to surprise me in so doing. I saw

two groups of four and 16 individuals, in each case having the initial impression that they were large swallows. Small flocks of Red-winged Blackbirds, mostly females and immature have been a constant sight this month. The call of Bobolinks overhead was quite constant although they were often difficult to see because of a high blue sky. My estimate of 100 is very conservative. Cedar Waxwings were also flying over in good number. My raptor count was 14 individuals comprising five species that included two immature (or female) Harriers, my first this year. Although I didn't record any other species that were new for the year, there were plenty of new fall arrivals. These included Sharp-shinned Hawk, Virginia Rail, Pewee, Red-eyed Vireo and Savannah Sparrow. The reader may get the impression that Virginia Rail, which I flushed today from the drainage ditch closest to the road, is commoner here than is the Clapper Rail. That may be true this year but has certainly never been so before. I think that the heavy snowfall flattened the marsh a bit this year during the spring and made it less attractive for Clapper Rails which are usually a fairly common migrant and possibly an occasional breeder. The marsh is perfect now and I imagine there will be plenty of Clapper Rails during the fall.

Today's species total of 73 was the highest I have ever had here in August. It included 10 species of shorebirds despite the lack of easterly winds. There is a lot of standing water, and while this may not guarantee the presence of shorebirds, it seems to help.

September 1

The weather was in a state of flux when I went out this morning. Yesterday's southwesterly winds became due westerly and then, as I was leaving, they began to shift to the northwest. There was a cicada atmosphere that should dissipate later today and, supposedly, tonight and tomorrow will be cool and dry and probably a flight day of sorts. Today wasn't, nor did I expect it to be. However, it was not without interest. Three Buff-breasted Sandpipers were foraging on the park's central grassy circle and allowed very close approach by car. This is exactly where two were on August 23, 1993, the only other time I've recorded this species here. I have a suspicion that this rare bird probably passes through the park regularly in the fall, but only once, so that luck is required to see it.

On August 23, I noted that a nondescript bird I had poorly seen "whispered Blue Grosbeak" to me. This bird was in the easternmost overgrown field and I have seen the same individual on each visit since that date. It behaves in a very elusive manner, hiding in the thick weeds and then flying weakly about when flushed only to settle again, invisible amongst the luxuriant shrubbery. Today I finally got a decent look at it and my more sober reflection of 23 August was confirmed. It was an immature Cowbird!

Migration in the fall here does not assume a crescendo format the way it does in the spring and there is no predictable peak, although sometimes there is a day in late September that yields a high species total. However, the number of Ospreys has been increasing with each visit recently and I am curious what it will reach and when. Today there were 12 and I also had a Cooper's Hawk.

In addition to Buff-breasted Sandpiper, I also added Nighthawk to the year's list today but it required a special effort. This date is about the peak of the Nighthawk's migration in

southwestern Connecticut and I have been seeing them every evening when I take a walk outside our house. However, I rarely see them during the day and I have relatively few Sherwood Island sightings. I reasoned that such a paucity of records was due to the fact that my visits to the park are almost invariably in the morning so I decided to return to the park in the evening. This decision represented more of a commitment on my part than the reader might imagine because of the traffic that encumbers the highway between Norwalk and Westport late in the day. The drive took one half hour instead of the usual 12 minutes and when I arrived at 6:30 P. M., I was in a very ill humor. I settled into the east parking lot which affords the most expansive vista and was immediately astonished at how different the park looks at this hour. How extraordinarily important lighting and shade are to a visual impression! Here is this wonderful place that I've come to love so much, that I think I know so well, and all of a sudden it's a different, but equally lovely spot that I don't know at all. There was a stiff breeze from the northwest and the temperature had dropped considerably since this morning. Tomorrow will almost surely be a flight day. I wasn't there for more than five minutes when a flock of Nighthawks made its appearance in the northeast and slowly wended its way over the park at an enormous height. A most satisfying experience that made me feel as though I really knew what I was doing! That is a good feeling that isn't easy to come by, at least for me.

September 2

The weather was perfect and there was a nice flight today as I predicted. Even though the Sound tide was high, that of the Mill Pond was low and there were plenty of shorebirds about. Ten of these and nine warblers were major contributors to a list of 74 species, my highest total of the fall.

One of the Buff-breasted Sandpipers remained on the central field but land birds were the primary attraction today. They were unevenly distributed. The woods in the middle of the park and those around the maintenance barn, usually the best spots for warblers, were devoid of birds. But the Woodcock and West Woods were teeming with insectivorous Passeriformes. The commonest of the warblers were Yellowthroat (15), Redstart (15), and Magnolia (8), the latter my first of the fall. Other new arrivals included Ovenbird and Least Flycatcher. But the most exciting was a male Mourning Warbler, new for the year's list, that popped into my binocular field as I was inspecting Redstarts on the edge of Woodcock Woods. The bird was facing me so I had an excellent opportunity to examine the black breast margin to its slate blue hood. This is a "once-a-year and you have to be lucky" species and I think I'm getting more than my share of these this year. I now have 24 species this year from each of the three "W" families (waterfowl, waders, warblers) that are the principal determinants of a year list for Sherwood Island. That is a good figure for each and I am doing very well.

Yesterday, I related an incident in which I had been confused about the identity of an immature Cowbird, both because of its obscure appearance and its unexpected behavior. The bird is grayish brown with faint spotting of the breast and a white throat. Today I found one foraging in the thick undergrowth of Woodcock Woods. This seemed yet another example showing that immature Cowbirds don't seem to know how to act, or at least they don't act like adults. I mentioned this to Bob Winkler, whom I encountered in the

park today, and he supplied a very appealing explanation, namely that each young Cowbird is probably imitating its own foster parent. Now that's good thinking!

Today is the Friday preceding Labor Day. I read in a local newspaper that 20,000 visitors are expected over the weekend. How does the park recover from such an invasion. Stay tuned.

September 5

Even though today was Labor Day, the park was deserted in the early morning and was unusually quiet in the absence of airplane fliers and the background hum of highway traffic. But it was really a bit too windy for birds and the day was rather ordinary with only two new fall arrivals, Red-tailed Hawk and Merlin and no new year birds. By far the most interesting observation was an incident between a Hummingbird and a Gnatcatcher that occurred in a sapling. The Hummingbird was clearly the aggressor in this encounter and made numerous passes at the Gnatcatcher with the seeming intention to knock it off its perch. The latter responded as though its attacker was a large gnat, more or less lunging at it with an open bill. When the Hummingbird tired of its forays, it perched only several feet from its "victim" and the two suddenly appeared to take no notice whatever of each other.

September 7

There was rather a paucity of birds today considering that the weather was nice and the park relatively deserted, quiet and clean. The most unusual sighting was that of two Least Terns hawking an Osprey high over the beach.

September 9

Another clunker of a day! There seems to be a fixed warm weather pattern of westerly or southwesterly winds and clear skies with birds trickling through in small numbers. Today there was one pocket of migrants that included a Wood Thrush and a Cape May Warbler but nothing else. It was decidedly dull and enervating without even hawks overhead so I quit after covering only the western half of the park which comprises most of the areas that can be good for land birds.

September 10

I scurried to the park with great optimism this morning after a front last night that brought in a cool, dry northwest breeze. The conditions were perfect and even though this was a Saturday, there were very few people around as is always the case here after Labor Day. There were plenty of birds as I had anticipated and more than half (37) of the 70 species were Passerines indicating a minor flight. There were no new birds for the year although there were several new fall arrivals including Chestnut-sided and Black-poll Warblers as well as Scarlet Tanager. Hummingbirds and Gnatcatchers continue to come through in relatively

large numbers. This morning I had three of the former and an astonishing six of the latter. I had my second Snow Goose of the fall and, unlike the first, this one was a fine typical white phase adult with nice black primaries. Although I recorded five species of Raptor, I was surprised at the low total of individuals, eight. The weather seemed perfectly designed for a good early Raptor flight and there were plenty of cumulus clouds against which they would have been easily visible. In summary, a pretty good day but one I will not particularly remember.

September 12

Superb weather conditions again fired me with enthusiasm and optimism this morning, but the results did not live up to my expectations. Perhaps these were too high. The day wasn't really that bad and included two species, Pipit and Wilson's Warbler, that were new for the fall. But now is the beginning of the best phase of fall migration and a time when one can almost expect the unexpected. The most striking and abundant migrants today were dragonflies which swarmed over the far eastern field as they had on my last visit. Evidently there is no avian predator that particularly fancies these insects which appeared quite undisturbed. Again I was surprised by the relative paucity of raptors, the six species of which comprised only 14 individuals. I would certainly have predicted more than one Kestrel, three Ospreys and three Sharpies. But this also may be unrealistic. Overall, the year has been so superb that I am probably not appreciating a good, solid but unspectacular day as much as I should.

The young males in this year's crop of Pheasants were looking particularly exotic today. The bare red skin on their face is conspicuously developed and their tails are now quite long. However, their plumage is still all brown so they rather resemble Soemmerring's Pheasant.

September 15

September 15 to October 15 is the most productive part of the fall migration and, if I am lucky, there will be one really outstanding day. That day was not today which was quite typical for the date and definitely in the "trickle" category. A "front" supposedly passed through late yesterday converting the sticky humid weather into a cooler, clearer and drier day. The winds were variable, coming from the west, northwest and northeast at various times. I did add a new species for the year, Palm Warbler. This was not as exciting as one might suppose, since it belongs to the relatively small group of common birds that I happen to have missed during the spring. Red-breasted Nuthatch was an additional new fall arrival. The count of raptors was a little more respectable than it has been with 11 Osprey, two Harriers, seven Sharpies and eight Kestrels.

September 16

Today promised nothing and delivered! Completely overcast skies with a breeze directly out of the south more or less guaranteed that yesterday's trickle would seem by comparison, a tidal wave. Why then did I go? One could call it perverse compulsion but perhaps, deep

down, I am fundamentally irrational. In the event, high counts for Great Egret (35) and Osprey (34) provided some redemption. Otherwise, the less said, the better.

September 19

I was enthusiastic and quite optimistic when I started out this morning. A front yesterday had brought in cool, dry weather which I did not exactly exploit while attending the funeral of an elderly aunt of my wife. I hoped to make up for it today and in so doing, to dispel some of yesterday's gloom that had been seriously intensified by unbearable traffic causing predictable ill humor in me, that, in turn, resulted in equally predictable angry marital discord. Practically the first bird I spotted, when I began at the Allen Preserve, was a Lincoln's Sparrow. I got very excited because that is a species that I only see here on major wave days. Until today! There were a few migrants around and I did see a rather large number (100) of Common Terns, but basically it was all downhill from that auspicious debut.

I am afraid that the end has come for my "Sherwood Island" car. The old Datsun has never been particularly comfortable but it has always been reliable in getting me from A to B and that's all I ever wanted from it. Today I noticed that the rear part of its chassis is loosely hanging down and could fall out at any moment. The metal is rusted and rotted and there is no possibility that it can be salvaged. If I ever drive it on a highway again, I deserve whatever happens. I do think it probably will remain intact for a careful slow drive to a junkyard.

September 20

Today's weather was a carbon copy of yesterday's so I didn't have great expectations even though it was glorious, crystal clear and brushed lightly with a with a pleasant westerly breeze. I got off to a rather late start in Abby's (my daughter's) Suburu so I decided to skip the Allen Preserve and the Mill Beach and I began with a brief drive around the east parking lot. The park was deserted and seemed wonderfully pristine. Two Golden Plovers were standing quietly in the middle of the lot and I approached them very closely in the car. They lacked black underparts but the change to winter plumage was not complete since they still retained the golden scales on their upperparts which almost seemed to glitter in the morning sun. There hasn't been a trace of an easterly wind within the recent past so clearly this is not an absolute requirement for their appearance here. I then headed to the central portion of the park where I found a rather early Winter Wren, my first of the year, foraging about a fallen tree trunk. The bird was not concealed by foliage and I had a splendid opportunity to observe it really well. It is certainly a species of very special and appealing character and it is easy to understand why it is such a favorite in England. I see it here every autumn in small numbers but almost never during any other season. Various other migrants were filtering through including a few warblers and three Phoebes but it certainly was not a major wave day and I was completely unprepared for the thrill that awaited me as I drove to the base of the new "interpretive nature trail" on the eastern edge of the east parking lot. As I stopped the car, I was aware of a bird flying over the edge of the marsh that veered and soared at the moment that I got out and closed the door. I put up my binoculars expecting

to see a Sharp-shinned Hawk and experienced the unique *frisson* that always affects me when I see a completely unexpected rare bird, for I immediately noticed a gray head and yellow belly. I knew right away that it was a Western Kingbird but I had to see the tail to rule out a Crested Flycatcher which would surely never behave in this manner. The bird was flying west and away from me but before it got very far, it again wheeled and soared, and its tail was conspicuously black. I think I even noticed a trace of the white outer tail feathers. It continued on the standard fall migration route over the park, east to west, interrupting its direct course several times to veer and soar, presumably in pursuit of insects. I don't think it landed in the park. This was the first Western Kingbird I've seen in Connecticut and, of course, a new bird for Sherwood Island and for the year. According to Zeranski and Baptist (p. 176) "it has been recorded (in the state) virtually every year since the mid-1970s". It's interesting that I saw it flying over, since the only other flycatcher I've seen overhead is the Eastern Kingbird. But I don't recall ever seeing the latter veer and soar during its autumnal passage. The only Western Kingbird I've seen previously on the east coast was at Jones Beach some years ago and I also saw that bird only in flight. This was quite a thrilling experience and I called Bob Winkler to tell him about it. He was appropriately excited. He mentioned to me that he had been to the park on Sunday and found a particularly vigorous migration of raptors including 50 Kestrels. That was the day I attended a funeral.

I've now recorded 197 species this year, thus equaling my previous high recorded in 1988, and bringing me close to my original goal of 200. I wonder what the next three new ones will be. Peregrine, Sapsucker and Creeper? Of course, I've revised that goal upward. Why, after all, should I allow myself the satisfaction of achieving a goal?

Today was one I will remember despite its mediocre total list of 53 species.

September 22

An interesting weather pattern that supposedly will last for the next two or three days, began this morning. Gentle southerly winds and clear skies gave way to a fairly brisk northeast breeze with an overcast, low sky. The prediction is for a real northeaster with heavy rain and high winds for tonight and most, or all of tomorrow. These will diminish on Saturday, the day after tomorrow, when Bob Winkler and I are scheduled to lead a bird walk at Sherwood Island. There is no telling what could be blown in at this time of the year, but certainly there should be unusual shorebirds at the very least.

There has been no rain yet and the park is rather dry. Today there were virtually no landbirds and few shorebirds. There were quite a few raptors (a Sharpie, a Harrier, 16 Kestrels and 18 Ospreys) and a flock of about 50 terns was close enough so that I could study it quite carefully. I have trouble distinguishing Forster's and Common Terns. The former is the regular one in the late fall here but either can be anticipated on this date. I can identify the adult Forster's Tern in winter plumage quite easily since its head appears largely light save for a black ear patch. There were clearly several of these in the flock. The pale primaries are always clear to me after I've noticed the mainly white head but they seem to be more difficult to evaluate when the birds have black caps. That was the case with a majority of these birds so I wasn't sure whether they were Commons or perhaps Forster's that had not yet acquired their fall plumage. Their call was a short single note completely

lacking the rasping quality of that of the Common Tern. But I have been fooled by this before, since the Common Tern can also emit a short, unmemorable sound. Fortunately for me, Charlie Barnard happened along as I was examining these birds and he has considerably more confidence in his ability to distinguish these two species than I have in mine. He concluded that the group was mostly Commons with the Forster's being restricted to the few individuals about which I, myself, had already been certain. He told me that mixed flocks are not uncommon in early fall. In any event, Forster's Tern was #198 for the year.

I saw one other bird of interest, an apparent, partially albino Mockingbird. Where the normal individual perched nearby possessed black and steely gray plumage, this bird instead exhibited a creamy gray appearance. Its white wing and tail markings could still be discerned, but were inconspicuous. It could not have been a true full albino since it displayed dark brown irides which contrasted markedly with its otherwise light appearance. It rather resembled my memory of some babbler that I saw years ago in Kenya.

September 26

The reader may wonder why there are no entries for the past few days during which there was supposed to be a northeaster, and I was to lead a bird walk. The northeaster did materialize on Thursday night. It ended Friday (September 23) morning and I made a quick visit to check out the east parking lot for shorebirds in preparation for the next day's tour. Although there was plenty of standing water, a group of 17 Lesser Yellowlegs constituted the entire wader population and I only spent one half hour in the park. The next day, Bob Winkler and I led the bird walk but it was for only one hour and consisted in a stroll from the east parking lot to the eastern extremity of the park. There were 30 people and fewer birds. I made no entry for either of these days since I don't feel my observations adequately reflected the bird population in the entire park.

Today, I got back to doing things systematically and it was much more interesting. There has been an "unstable weather pattern" during the past two days. This seems to mean overcast skies and a slight southeast wind. There were not many birds around but interesting ones continued to trickle through. The most exciting was a Chat that jumped out unexpectedly from the underbrush and jewelweed near the new observation platform at the edge of the west marsh and then disappeared just as suddenly. Although it allowed me only a glorified glimpse, I got an excellent look at the spectacles, bright yellow breast and white belly. I kept hearing what sounded like a subdued version of the song of a Brown Thrasher which may have been the Chat. This is my first Chat at Sherwood Island although Bob Winkler saw one several years ago. It's a bird I have seen only a few times, always unexpectedly, and each time providing a special thrill.

A little later I found a Vesper Sparrow, a rare but regular fall transient which I usually see in late October or early November, near the start of the interpretive nature trail. It was my 200th species here for the year. Other interesting observations included a flock of 26 Monk Parakeets, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, a White-eyed Vireo and a Swamp Sparrow. I also found the pale Mockingbird again in exactly the same place.

This was yet another good day despite a mediocre species total of 56. There has certainly not been a major wave thus far this fall yet a large number of species has been gradually filtering through. A high species total for a single day in autumn probably occurs only when there happens to be a real cold snap in September. If the first one comes along in October, it concentrates only the later fall migrants. That day will be the first when I record significant numbers of Kinglets, Juncos and White-throated Sparrows, none of which have yet appeared.

September 28

Today was kind of a dud even though a new southwest breeze cleared out the skies after yesterday's copious rain. I saw the first Towhee of the fall and virtually no other landbirds among the day's 48 species. I have a feeling that there will be a significant wave tomorrow or the next day since the winds are supposed to pick up from the west and the temperature to drop.

September 29

I am mystified by the low number of land birds at the park thus far this fall. Today seemed perfect with the first real autumnal feel of the year. Yet I felt lucky to hear a single White-throated Sparrow, my first for the season. It was as bad or worse than yesterday except for raptors of which I had single examples of Harrier, Merlin and Cooper's Hawk as well as 14 Ospreys, 19 Kestrels and seven Sharp-shinned Hawks. The cool and fairly brisk west wind combined with cumulous clouds to make it quite ideal for watching hawks and I had a premonition that I get on every day like this at this time of the year, namely that I would see a Peregrine. I gave the possibility every opportunity by walking the entire length of the beach but it just wasn't meant to be. Perhaps tomorrow?

September 30

Five years ago on this date, I recorded the best Passerine flight and the highest total species count that I've ever had at Sherwood Island. Most of that day's 85 species were Passerine and the numbers were fantastic, including, for example, 100 of each species of Kinglet and of White-throated Sparrow. Conditions were favorable for such a flight today with clear cool weather and brisk northwest winds. Yet of today's 59 species, only 23 were Passerines and these were present in small numbers, at best. The most noteworthy was a female Indigo Bunting, a first for the year. There wasn't a single Kinglet and there was only one Whitethroat! It seemed an even better day for Peregrine than had yesterday, and again I expended considerable effort to locate one. In fact Bob Winkler, whom I met unexpectedly at the start of the day, and I, even spent a half hour sitting on the east breakwater hoping to see one sweeping down the beach. We didn't but, it was probably about as good a day for raptors as I am likely to have this fall, at least in terms of volume. The numbers included two Merlins, four Harriers, six Broad-wings, 15 Sharpies, 21 Ospreys and 29 Kestrels.

With the approach of October, I find myself wondering what the final quarter of the year will bring. A number of species I haven't yet seen seem reasonably likely. These include Pied-billed Grebe, Surf Scoter, Peregrine, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Sapsucker, Horned Lark, Creeper, Lapland Longspur, Purple Finch and Siskin. I am always particularly thrilled to see a Peregrine, but in the case of the others, I will be more disappointed if I don't see them, than excited if I do. Anything not on this list will be unexpected and special.

October 2

What a glorious Sunday it was at the park today! It had rained all of yesterday, my birthday, but a cold front passed through during the night and today was stunningly clear and cool. The northwest winds were again just a little too brisk for perfect bird watching conditions but otherwise all indications were as promising as could be. The park was surprisingly crowded with participants in some sort of organized bicycle riding event and with families enjoying the invigorating fall weather. There was a movement of landbirds but it was a trickle rather than a wave. Three Passerines made their first appearance of the autumn: Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Solitary Vireo and Yellow-rumped Warbler. I also recorded Wood Duck and Turkey Vulture which I hadn't seen since spring. But the day belonged to raptors which were overhead virtually all the time although usually very high. In addition to the Vulture, the count included 125 Broad-wings, 28 Sharpies, 22 Kestrels, 10 Ospreys and one each of Harrier and Cooper's Hawk. The number of Broad-wings, by far the highest I have ever had here, was surprising for two reasons; first, the major flight over southwestern Connecticut supposedly took place on September 18, the day I attended the funeral two weeks ago. Secondly, Sherwood Island is not a good spot to look for flights of this species which ordinarily occur a bit inland. Of course, while today's total may qualify as a flight for Sherwood Island, the concentrations recorded inland on days of major passage are much larger, numbering in the thousands and even the tens of thousands.

I saw my second Coyote of the year today. This one was on the edge of the Aspetuck Land Trust, a peninsula that juts into the northern section of the Mill Pond. That area is extremely difficult of access because it can be reached only from the railroad tracks. Although it is all second growth, it is entirely undisturbed and is a morass of thorny undergrowth, brush and small birch trees. Despite having recorded two of my rarest Sherwood Island species on the Trust, Barn Owl and Connecticut Warbler, I rarely go there because it is so difficult to reach and seems so sinister and isolated. It occurred to me today, that if Coyotes don't mind the sound of passing trains, this would be a superb place for them to breed. I don't believe there's any human intrusion at all and, looking across the Mill Pond from the island proper, I've occasionally seen deer in the past exactly where the Coyote was today.

October 3

When I got to the Mill Beach early this morning, the temperature was 37 and almost the first bird I saw was a Peregrine in leisurely flight quite far off above the Sound. The observation was good enough for identification, no difficult task, but less than adequate for

satisfaction. Great birds deserve great looks. But I certainly knew immediately that the day would be good. The only question was how good and the answer turned out to be quite good. Oddly enough, it was not notable for raptors, the numbers of which were four Kestrels, three Ospreys, three Cooper's Hawks, two Sharpies and the Peregrine. It seems the rule rather than the exception that there are not many other raptors around on days that I see a Peregrine at Sherwood Island. I don't recall ever noting more Cooper's Hawks than Sharpies on a day during migration, but I must admit that I am never absolutely certain in distinguishing between these two. I added a second new bird for the year when I found an immature Sapsucker on one of the fine Hickories in the center of the park. There seemed to be a plethora of Woodpeckers of which I recorded five species. Unfortunately these did not include Red-headed, which is exceedingly rare here. But the day finally belonged to the Passeres which comprised 36 of the 68 species. The four new fall arrivals amongst them were Golden-crowned Kinglet, Black-throated Blue and Green Warblers and White-crowned Sparrow. I saw most of the birds during the early part of the morning after which the wind picked up and made observation rather difficult. It was a pleasant day, made the moreso by the lucky circumstance of seeing an exciting bird at the very start. That piece of good fortune enabled me to relax and enjoy the rest of the day without the apprehension of missing something special on a day when it seemed likely there was something special to be seen.

There is something unique about this time of the year here quite apart from the invariably interesting migration. The trees seem especially beautiful, not only because of the color change in foliage, but also, I think, because of the nuts they bear and shed. These nuts are always under foot and provide a sense of renewal at the very time of the year when one is sadly anticipating the onset of winter and an ebb of animate activity. The most conspicuous are the Black Walnuts which are almost apple-sized and provide something of a hazard to walking. Others in abundance are Chestnuts, acorns and the nuts of various Hickories, particularly Shagbark.

October 4

The perfect weather continues although today was not quite so cold as yesterday. Early this morning, I had a *deja vu* from yesterday. I was scanning the Mill Pond from the overlook at the turn off for the park and practically the first bird I noticed was a Peregrine, again at a considerable distance. Exciting, yet irritating not to have a better look! The spectrum of migrants was a little different today. There were more Phoebes, Yellow-rumped Warblers, White-throated Sparrows and Towhees and I found the first Hermit Thrush of the fall. The most interesting bird was a Lapland Longspur, a my first this year, that I flushed from one of the islands of short grass in the east parking lot, a favored location for it in the park. This is not the only time I have seen this bird in early October and I think that it arrives earlier, and is much more common, than is generally supposed. It is a nondescript and unobtrusive species that can be easily overlooked if one does not recognize the dry warble that it invariably seems to utter when disturbed. I'm glad that I happened to walk through the parking lot today, as I certainly would otherwise have missed it.

October 6

If not spectacular, the migration has certainly been good during this dry and cool early October. The numbers of Sparrows are gradually building up and today they included three White-crowns as well as 35 each of Song and White-throated. Phoebes, Yellow-rumped Warblers and Towhees continued to abound. Tomorrow is supposed to be considerably warmer with the wind shifting to the southwest. I'm curious as to what effect that will have on this rather sustained flight that has persisted since September 30. I'm also wondering whether surface-feeding ducks have yet to arrive or are specifically eschewing the park. I mentioned in my notes this spring that Gadwall, Baldpate and Pintail were much commoner on the Mill Pond a few years ago.

October 7

I got to the Mill Beach at 7:30 this morning when the tide was just about dead low and I thought perhaps I might finally record my first Sherwood Island Knot. However, there were no shorebirds on the flats. I was the first person in the park at 8:00 so I was able to tramp through the east marsh behind the airplane field in search of Soras before the daily human intrusion. There were no Soras nor other interesting marsh birds. I found the beautiful pale Mockingbird, which I hadn't seen for a few visits, back in its usual spot. The early October landbird migration was still in evidence but seemed to have slightly abated. I say "seemed" because I later ran into Bob Winkler, who had been at the observation platform where I had the Chat recently, and at 8:00, had found the area to be teeming with sparrows including White-crowned and Lincoln's. When I got there at 10:30, I saw virtually nothing aside from a Solitary Vireo. For me, the day felt quite unremarkable despite a very respectable list of 65 species. Perhaps I should take some time off to recharge my enthusiasm.

October 10

I took off the last two days, both of which were warm with southerly winds. Last night a cold front passed through and this morning was cool with northwest winds. The day was reasonably interesting with two new fall arrivals, two Red-throated Loons and four Field Sparrows. The loons were both still in breeding plumage which is often the case for the initial fall visitors. In fact, early autumn is the only time I have ever seen this species in breeding plumage. Evidently, it is not attained until rather late in the spring but is maintained well into the fall.

I enjoyed the nicest study I've ever had of a Vesper Sparrow in the shrubbery at the back of the west beach. This individual had an extraordinarily conspicuous eyering that looked as though it had been pasted on, much like the gummed reinforcements that one attaches to three-holed notebook paper. It also demonstrated beautifully why Wilson, and then Audubon, designated this species the "Bay-winged Bunting".

In general, there was a nice migration of land birds that included kinglets, sparrows and warblers, although not in particularly high numbers. The pale Mockingbird flew by me and I

didn't even notice white tail or wing markings which require very close and careful inspection just to detect. It is such a beautiful individual and I keep wondering whether its colleagues prize it or make it a pariah. The latter seems unlikely since I always see it reasonably near others that do not seem to be reacting abnormally to it.

October 11

I think it was the most beautiful day of the year, a red day as though the foliage had been miscolored in some sort of chaotic printing process. It was cold almost to the point of a frost in the early morning. I had the park almost entirely to myself. What an extraordinary luxury! The animals seemed to sense and exploit the fine October weather. I surprised two deer near the maintenance compound and an adult and two raccoons on the road leading to the private residence that borders the northern margin of the east marsh. The steady migration continued in the same impressive but not spectacular manner that has characterized it every day this month. Red-winged Blackbirds and Tree Swallows were flying over and I flushed the first Snipe of the fall. I had expected many more by this time based on the tremendous number of them during the spring. A Junco was a new arrival and there were quite a few flight day specialties including Winter Wren and Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrow. It was the sort of day when one feels that anything is possible and I rather expected something unexpected. But that was not to be and the most spectacular bird was the pale Mockingbird, a creamy, silvery sliver that seems more exquisite each time I see it. I am still missing relatively common birds for the year that I should be seeing now, most notably Creeper and Purple Finch. Somehow, it seems decadent to be going out every day, yet I can't resist visiting the park during this brisk migration in such a glorious season.

Abby is home from college so today I went back to using the car I said I would never drive again. I pulled off the rear bumper which was loose, dangling, and about to drag. No one seems to know whether it is legal to drive without one so I shall try until warned otherwise. The next disaster will be evisceration when the entire chassis falls out. I hope I have a warning!

October 13

Until this year, I don't think I realized that October was the most beautiful month. Each day is incredible. I certainly hadn't known that it is the driest month, but then I suppose I had never given the matter any thought. As for the migration, it is about equivalent to late April. Each day is pretty good with about 60 species and plenty to hold one's interest. When does the pace slacken? Amongst today's 63 species, there was a relative paucity of White-throated Sparrows but most of the other migrants of the past week were undiminished. A Bittern in the west marsh was the first of the fall and only the second of the year. Only one of three Red-throated Loons was in breeding plumage.

October 14

There was nothing new today but there were some interesting observations. I had the opportunity to examine closely a group of Forster's Terns resting on and flying about the west jetty. There was no question as to their identification as the black earmark on an otherwise light head was conspicuous in every individual. Their napes were either white or barely tinged with pearly gray. Their mantles, as they rested, did appear lighter than those of Common Terns yet the tips of the primaries were clearly darker. In flight, the appearance of their wings was very much affected by the way the light happened to strike them. The tips and edges of the primaries were darker than the remainder but there was a flash of silvery white in the center of the primaries when illuminated by the sun. The flight itself seemed different than that of Common Terns, rather a bit like Least Terns. The call, which I heard well today, had some of the quality of that of the Common Tern but was higher pitched and not nearly so forceful and harsh. I suspect that most terns at this time of the year here are Forster's, although in the past, I have usually designated unidentified terns as Common.

I flushed 9 Pheasants from various locations. They included six adult females and three adult males. I surmise that this year's crop has completely matured and most or all have survived.

It was an unusually good day for wrens, of which, for the first time here ever I believe, I had four species. Amongst them were three Winter Wrens which is clearly quite a common fall migrant. There were also two rather late House Wrens, which, like the Winter Wrens, I both heard and saw. I also enjoyed a fine study of a Marsh Wren and heard a Carolina.

The day's mammals included two deer and a rat. The latter was amongst the rocks of the Pavilion jetty where I always hear a high-pitched sound that I have been unable to identify. It may be that of rats.

This past week has seen quite a robust migration, yet I have been disappointed not to find a rarity or at least a new bird for the year. I found my concentration and enthusiasm wavering this morning so I should probably take off a couple of days.

October 17

The magnificent weather continued today but the remarkably sustained October migration subsided. Almost the first bird of the day was new for the year, an immature Pied-billed Grebe that I saw on the Mill Pond from the overlook. But it was downhill from there and most of the land birds that have been here for the past two and a half weeks were either absent or in smaller numbers. One species that has been much commoner this autumn than in the past is Forster's Tern. I saw 15 today. I also noted an immature Cooper's Hawk, probably the same individual I have seen around the east marsh several times during the past few weeks.

October 19

This was the first day in October with weather conditions that were clearly unfavorable for migration. There was a warm and humid breeze from the south with a muggy and hazy atmosphere following last night's drizzle, the first precipitation of the month. The day was devoid of ornithological interest with only 48 species and few individuals. Butterflies were by far the most abundant flying creatures and the east meadow, especially, was swarming with monarchs and a smaller yellow species. I had my third Coyote sighting of the year and my second on the edge of the Aspetuck Land Trust, thus fortifying my notion that they probably live on this small, but very wild tract.

October 21

Weather conditions were favorable today and the fall migration rebounded somewhat, although land birds were not exactly abundant. Cooler temperatures, clear skies and a mild northwest wind replaced yesterday's rain. I ran into Bob Winkler at the overlook and we had a reasonably interesting morning. The flight of Forster's Terns continued and my estimate of 20 was probably conservative. We had seven species of diurnal raptors including four Turkey Vultures and two Harriers. There were no Catbirds for the first time this fall and perhaps we have seen the last of them. Similarly, the single Yellowthroat may have been the last of these. I have the feeling that we are approaching the late fall stage of migration and that today may mark the end of the early stage. I must confess, however, that there is as yet precious little evidence of a late fall migration. For example, there are still no Horned Grebes, ducks, Dunlin nor Snow Buntings.

October 24

A rather heavy rainfall yesterday left considerable standing water in the park on this pleasant morning but the new feature did not attract any unusual birds. The day was ordinary and rather uninteresting although a flock of six Horned Larks on the east parking lot provided an addition to the year's list. I don't know how I managed to miss such a common migrant during the spring, but I did. I feel the same way about Brown Creeper which I still haven't seen. There was one other observation that intrigued me. I noticed a Red-bellied Woodpecker with a nut in its bill. This struck me as decidedly out of character until I sat down to write this entry and realized that it is in the same genus, Melanerpes, as the Acorn Woodpecker.

The leaves have now mostly fallen and the park, even on such a warm day, is beginning to assume its somewhat desolate wintry aspect. How evanescent is the splendor of autumn!

October 26

Today was raw, cloudy and a bit wintry though relatively windless. A flock of 11 White-winged Scoters far out on the sound represented the first of the cold-weather ducks here this fall. According to Bob Winkler, these and several other species of winter ducks including Common Scoter, Ring-necked and several surface-feeding species, have been present on local reservoirs for about ten days. Evidently, many ducks don't favor the sound and the Mill Pond when open fresh water is available. A group of four Horned Larks and a Lapland Longspur on the east parking lot allowed close approach and inspection from the car. They also suggested the imminence of winter which was, however, a bit belied by the continuing presence of seven Great Egrets and 25 Forster's Terns, the latter on the mud flats of the Mill Beach. Apparently someone saw more than 60 of them there a few days ago.

October 27

This morning was cool, clear, dry and beautiful with a brisk northerly breeze. Colored leaves were blowing about in chaotic patterns and on more than one occasion I mistook them for birds. Yet I had difficulty concentrating and decided to forego the far eastern portion of the park. The bird life has been monotonous for the past several weeks and the outings are becoming onerous. The whole notion of a "Sherwood Island Diary" is actually beginning to seem like work and I feel that a brief respite is indicated.

November 1

I can't say that I was exactly fired with enthusiasm this morning, despite having stayed away from the park for the past four days. I doubt whether I will see any really exciting birds from now until the end of the year and, to a rather large degree, it is the possibility of such rarities that is the generator of my passion. Thus, my present state of inertia. Today was wet, overcast and warm and I went out only because I thought the southeasterly breeze might bring in some seabirds. I only stayed for two hours and limited myself to the Mill Pond and the eastern half of the park so the list of 30 species is neither inclusive nor representative of the population in the entire park. The weather was really strange. I arrived at peak high tide and it was about as high as I've ever seen. Much of the meadow adjacent to the east (Greens Farms) marsh was inundated and the drainage ditches had overflowed as well. It seemed windless except at the beach where the Sound was churning as though under siege from a hurricane. Visibility ranged from very poor to not bad depending on where the fog was located. The park was virtually empty and very quiet. It was one of those days when anything seemed possible and nothing seemed likely.

As soon as I saw that the east parking lot was full of gulls, I knew I would find a Lesser Black-backed, and I did. This purportedly rare bird is regular here in fall and winter whenever an east wind blows large numbers of gulls onto this parking lot. It's fun to search

through these gulls, as they are completely unafraid of cars so that one can drive right up to them. Today's bird might have been the allegedly commoner grailisi subspecies since the mantle was just slightly lighter than that of an adjacent Great Black-backed. However, it was considerably darker than the usual examples of that subspecies which I have seen here in the past. The subspecies fuscus is supposed to be exceedingly rare yet I am certain I have seen it in the past and this bird approached it in appearance. The small black-backed gulls here are confusing. This one was easy enough to identify with respect to species since it had straw-colored legs. I have seen some with pink legs that might conceivably have been Western or Slaty-backed Gulls, neither of which is on the Connecticut list.

The islands of the Mill Pond were all almost entirely submerged including even the most prominent one nearest the sluices. This one is grassy and the reeds were still visible above the surface of the water. About 50 Greater Yellowlegs, a large number for this date, were wading amongst these.

The day seemed to present a wonderful opportunity for Gannet and I spent most of my time scanning the Sound. There seemed to be an interesting migration of Brant which were flying from east to west in small groups. But there were few flying gulls, no terns and certainly no Gannets. I suspect a much stronger wind is required for them to be blown this far west.

November 3

This morning I found that Sherwood Island had suddenly assumed its winter plumage. The change was expedited by yesterday's blustery northwest winds that stripped most of the deciduous trees of their remaining leaves. The avian population also began to assume its winter aspect as a Baldpate, eight Buffleheads and five Red-breasted Mergansers made the first fall appearances of their respective species. The day was warm and lovely with a gentle westerly breeze. There were many birds about and amongst the respectable 57 species that I tallied were a Wood Duck, a Thrasher, five Tree Swallows and a Clapper Rail that I flushed from the east marsh. The latter has been remarkably scarce this year. I only saw two in the spring and this individual was the first of the fall. I recorded some rather high counts including 60 Laughing Gulls, 30 Killdeer and 200 Red-winged Blackbirds that were flying over in small groups.

November 4

The temperature reached a balmy 70 today but the avian population was quite close to what one might expect in January. Yesterday's minor flight had abated and the migration of Passerines was almost nil. The numbers of various ducks increased, however, and I added two Old Squaws to the list of fall arrivals. At least 100 scoters were visible from the eastern extremity of the park but they were far away to the east and had to be studied at 40x. I think I could have distinguished a male Surf but I examined them for a considerable time and those that I could identify positively were all White-winged. Three large flocks of Cowbirds totaled at least 350 birds. Otherwise there was little of interest and yesterday's Laughing Gulls, Killdeer, Juncos and sparrows had largely disappeared.

November 7

A cold front last night swept out yesterday's southerly drizzle and brought an exceptionally clear atmosphere accompanied by very strong northwest winds. The reader may remember from notes made early in the year, that strong winds and turbulent water are the bane of winter bird watching at Sherwood Island. Therefore, I was not surprised to record only 42 species today despite careful and complete coverage. In fact, the day was more interesting than I thought it would be. I had the year's first fall records for two standard late arrivals, Tree Sparrow and Snow Bunting, and I found a late Common Egret which surprised me since I hadn't see it during my last two visits. A flock of ten Tree Swallows represented my latest record for that species here. Most extraordinary, however, was a female Canada Warbler that I saw foraging in a sapling near the bridge leading to the private residence at the northwest corner of the east marsh. This surpasses by three weeks the latest record (17 October) listed by Zeranski and Baptist. It is the sixth warbler species that I've ever seen here in November. The others include Yellow-rumped, Palm and Yellowthroat, which are not particularly surprising, and single records for Black-throated Blue and Redstart.

I also had an extraordinary negative observation today. For the first time in as long as I can remember, I failed to see a single Canada Goose. I suppose the park population moves around locally and perhaps enjoys unattended nearby corn fields at this time of the year.

November 8

The weather report last night said that the winds would abate and made today sound perfect. When I looked out the window upon awakening, the few residual attached leaves seemed relatively still so I headed to the park with considerable enthusiasm. But I entered a different world! The surf was pounding, the Sound was full of whitecaps and the wind was roaring out of the west with even more force than yesterday. In my imagination, it could have been the Straits of Magellan! I had a very strong impulse to leave immediately but I stuck it out by using my "reporter" rationale. That is, I convinced myself that "Sherwood Island Diary" is an attempt to portray the bird life here as it really is rather than to select only the most favorable aspects for presentation. I assumed, as I did yesterday, that I would see nothing, and again I did better than anticipated. The most interesting bird was a late Solitary Vireo which I have never previously recorded here in November. I saw the Great Egret again and, of course, each time I do so it will be my latest record. I had a fine look at a perching adult male Merlin that that was under siege from crows. I watched a beautiful male Kingfisher cocking its tail while on a telephone wire. I had not noticed this behavior before and was reminded of a superb plate by Keulemans in Sharpe's *Alcedinidae* depicting a Green Kingfisher in very much the same posture. Finally, I was astonished by a doe that was near superintendant Glen Dochterman's house and showed as little fear of me as the stag I described some months ago. At that time, I assumed that males were more aggressive and, therefore, less shy than females. Now I'm questioning such a generalization and wondering whether it doesn't just depend on the individual.

Although this morning turned out better than I thought it would , I still think it's a mistake to look for birds here on very windy days unless the direction of the wind suggests that something special may be deposited in the park. For example, in late fall or winter, I would rush out during a violent northeaster in the hope that I might find late migrating or wintering seabirds that had been blown into the Sound.

November 10

This was an interesting November morning. It rained heavily last night and was still quite humid and overcast when I entered the park. But a rather gentle and dry north wind gradually cleared the chilly atmosphere. A great many birds were flying over the park. The most conspicuous were constant flocks of 50-500 blackbirds, mostly Red-winged with a few Cowbirds. I estimated about 2,500 of the former, by far the most I have ever recorded here. Also flying over were 40 Horned Larks, a few Pipits and three very late Tree swallows. There was an extraordinary concentration of Ring-billed gulls (400) on the east parking lot and the Mill Beach mud flats that far outnumbered the usually commoner Herring Gulls. Although this was the most Ring-bills I've recorded here, I was even more surprised by the presence of 55 Laughing Gulls since this is the amongst latest dates I have for them, as it was for the five Forster's Terns that I saw. Yet another new high count for me was the astonishing group of 65 Hooded Mergansers that graced the Mill Pond. This is the only instance anywhere that I have ever found Hooded Merganser to be the most abundant of all waterfowl.

I also logged in two new fall arrivals, three Horned Grebes and a Woodcock. I am always excited to see the latter which is more difficult to find in the autumn than in the spring. I flushed today's individual from the edge of Woodcock Woods of all places!

On 30 September, I listed ten species that I had not yet seen this year but was relatively certain that I would. I still haven't seen four of these: Surf Scoter, Creeper, Purple Finch and Siskin. The scoters have so far been at too great a distance to distinguish easily other than White-winged. Red-breasted Nuthatches have been scarce this fall suggesting that irregular winter finches such as Siskins may be likewise. But there is really no explanation for the lack of Purple Finches and Creeper, both of which I have recorded every year at Sherwood Island.

November 11

Bob Winkler joined me on this on this beautiful, but cold and windy morning that was to prove memorable. The model airplane field is separated from the east marsh by a barrier of phragmites and dense shrubbery which often shelters a variety of sparrows. As we approached this barrier, I noticed a moderately sized gray bird slip into the bushes where it was immediately lost to view. I sensed that it was interesting and decided to plunge in and flush it so that Bob could get an unimpeded look. It jumped out and flew to the east where it settled in a small juniper. Bob was beside himself with excitement. "It's a shrike" he whispered tensely, "let's circle around the juniper and get the sun to our back". I scanned the juniper quickly and made out the masked head of the bird protruding into a space

amongst the branches. We circled around the tree and..... it was gone! We guessed that it had continued eastward and worked our way along the barrier. Suddenly it was flying ahead of us and alit on a cottonwood. The wind caused it to sway on its perch, perhaps 75 feet away, while I tried desperately to examine its breast, which appeared dirty gray (perhaps from barring?) and its lower mandible, which seemed paler at the base. But could that have been an artifact from the way the unfavorable sun was striking it? The mask did not seem to extend and meet frontally but again it was difficult to be certain about such a subtle point. Bob was impressed with the conspicuous separation of the mask from the crown by a pronounced white superciliary margin. The bird was skittish and elusive and I was struck by its striking and contrasting white rump as it flew evasively about the edge of the marsh, . We concluded that it was a Northern Shrike, the first of either shrike species that I have ever seen in the state of Connecticut, much less at Sherwood Island. In fact, I haven't seen a shrike in the northeastern United States for at least 20 years. It was even more significant for Bob, a life bird!

The rest of the day was anticlimactic, although interesting. A flock of 30 Dunlin represented a new fall arrival and a total of about 300 Robins flew over in flocks of 20-50. The single Great Egret and six Forster's Terns were still around and 80 Double-crested Cormorants seemed a high count for this date. Supposedly they are largely replaced by Great Cormorants in the winter although I don't know exactly when this is supposed to occur and have always harbored some doubts about the alleged predominance of the latter during that season.

Two foolishly tame does provided a mammalian diversion.

November 14

When I got home last Friday after seeing the shrike, I called Frank Mantlik and he went looking for it that afternoon. He didn't find it. However, from the eastern extremity of the park, he did see two Gannets far to the east. I've been trying to see them and Surf Scoters from that spot without success but his observation convinced me that I ought to spend more time examining the Sound with my telescope. Today started out with very gentle east winds and calm water that seemed promising for this venture, although there was a distant haze rendering Long Island quite indistinct. I scanned the Sound at 20-fold magnification for three quarters of an hour from the eastern tip and for another half hour from the point near the pavilion. I didn't see either of the *desiderata* but it was an interesting experience. For one thing, I learned that the commitment to the telescope must be complete. Thus, if I spotted something in the telescope and then tried to locate it with binoculars, I invariably failed to find it. The only hope for identification was to keep following it with the telescope even if it seemed to come within the range for which binoculars would have been better suited. I realized also that it made no sense to maintain the use of my spectacles when looking through the telescope. Why, after all, should one interpose an extra lens, the function of which could be compensated by adjustment of the telescopic focusing mechanism? By spending as much time as I did with the telescope, I became more comfortable with it than I've ever been and I was even able to employ it usefully at 40x and to identify birds that flew into its field of vision. One such individual was an extraordinarily late and completely unexpected Oystercatcher flying far out over the Sound east towards

the offshore islands. I would never have found this bird without the telescope nor would I have noticed a flock of nine Forster's Terns. My new proficiency at 40x also enabled me to identify most of the White-winged Scoters and to convince myself that, today at least, there were no male Surfs amongst them.

Other species that I saw today also seem to be lingering later into the fall than usual and I can't help but wonder whether any of them will remain for the Christmas Census next month. Amongst these are individuals such as the Great Egret, the female or immature Harrier, and the adult male Merlin, that have been in the park for some time. A single late Laughing Gull was still here and I discovered a male Towhee in Woodcock Woods.

I saw the two does again in the same spot between the barn and the maintenance compound. The smaller of these, probably a fawn of the year, is especially attractive because she has endearing white circles that surround each of her eyes and her nose.

November 16

Today was an exercise in frustration. Almost my entire time was spent in two unsuccessful diversions. The first was scanning for sea birds. Despite an overcast sky, the visibility was good. The wind was from a favorable northeast direction and the surface of the Sound, while not exactly placid, was not too bad. But there was nothing special to be seen. The second was trying to locate the source of raucous enmity that attracted about 80 Crows to a large White Pine in the center of the park. This scenario is invariably associated with the presence of a Great Horned Owl, but I couldn't find it. It is the only species of owl seen with some regularity on Sherwood Island and a pair even fledged a single young bird here three years ago.

November 18

Hurricane "Gordon" has been idling off the coast of North Carolina for the past few days and its area of low pressure has elicited a strong northeast wind on the New England coast. This represents a promising scenario for seeing Gannets, sea ducks, and perhaps other sea birds and keeps luring me out. There was considerable fog today, however, and the combination of poor visibility, high winds and a very choppy Sound was quite unsatisfactory for seeing birds. I found nothing of interest on the water although I spent a good deal of time scrutinizing it from both the eastern extremity and the point at the pavilion. The only noteworthy bird of the day was the Great Egret that continues to linger in the east salt marsh. I feel quite certain that the hurricane, whose remnants will be felt here within the next few days, offers an exciting opportunity, but I have the feeling it will be a very brief one and that I will have to be very fortunate if I am to exploit it. Perhaps I will take a couple of quick trips just to scan the Sound rather than cover the entire park which is a waste of energy on windy days.

November 19

Yesterday, the results of the hurricane seemed certain to be felt in the northeast. Last night, however, it took a turn and then dissipated to the southeast. So today, instead of the remnants of an easterly hurricane, we had beautiful warm dry weather with a mild breeze from the northwest. The visibility was superb and, if the easterly wind of the last several days blew anything special into the Sound, today was definitely the time to see it. I went to the park later than usual since my primary interest was in scanning the water. Quite a few people were enjoying a fine Saturday. The total list of 36 species is misleadingly low because I spent most of my time examining the Sound. I found an unusual inshore flock of 30 Bonaparte's Gulls, including many immatures, at the eastern tip where there were also three late Laughing Gulls. The group of scoters was as far away as it had been during the past several visits and there was certainly no recent influx of sea ducks. After scanning from the eastern lookout for about a half hour, I took a rapid, truncated itinerary around the park and then decided to scan the Sound once more, this time from the pavilion point. I didn't see anything and was about to close my telescope when, *mirabile dictu*, an adult Gannet flew into its field of vision. The Gannet is one of those birds that, by virtue of its characteristic flight, can be identified at a very great distance. This is fortunate if one is looking for it on the Sound. I was using the telescope at 20-30-fold magnification and this bird actually disappeared beyond visibility to the southeast as I followed it. I could never have seen it without the telescope. Gannets are rarely recorded on the western part of the Sound, but I suspect that they are probably quite regular here in November. My experience from the last few visits suggests that considerable effort must be expended to find them. I feel pretty good at having done so!

November 21

Conditions were decidedly unfavorable today as a strong, warm and humid wind from the southeast caused an overcast sky and churning water in the Sound. Despite the absence of a really cold day this fall, the spectrum of bird life is now that of winter. Most of the land birds this morning were concentrated in the patch of woods adjacent to the Allen Preserve where I was pleased to see a Winter Wren and a couple of Yellow-rumped Warblers. However, the rest of the park was dead and the it was impossible to scrutinize the Sound adequately. What I would like now is a windless day with placid water.

November 23

This morning was the first uncomfortably cold one of the fall. It rained heavily the night before last and the resulting puddles of standing water on the east parking lot were covered by a thin layer of ice. A gusting and howling wind from the west precluded adequate examination of a turbulent Sound and prevented me from locating any birds by call. A sudden cold snap at this time of the year is often more associated with efflux of lingering migrants than influx of new ones and that was the case today. The only late species I found was an immature Laughing Gull. The other satisfying observation was a Lapland Longspur amongst a flock of 35 Snow Buntings. Otherwise, the day reminded me of that dismal one

that so discouraged me in late January. My total list of only 34 species was not due to lack of effort.

November 26

This turned out to be quite an interesting day despite a strong wind which obviated use of the telescope for scanning of the turbulent Sound. Cold weather for the past two days resulted in a thin layer of ice covering a part of the Mill Pond, however, this morning was not particularly chilly and was very clear and beautiful. The ornithological highlight was a group of five Shovelers, two males and three females just off the Allen Preserve. The males were in a grungy plumage resembling closely that depicted for nine and 15 month birds in a chromolithograph by J. G. Millais in his Natural History of British Surface Feeding Ducks (London, 1902). This is the largest number of Shovelers I have ever seen at Sherwood Island and the first time I have seen any here in the fall. There was a nice mixed flock of shorebirds comprising 50 Dunlin, five Black-bellied Plover and two Turnstones foraging on exposed flats near the pavilion. Also of interest was an adult Red-tailed Hawk that I saw both perching and flying with a large mouse or small rat clutched in its talons. It was set upon by Crows whose clamor, however, was decidedly less strident than it had been the other day when I supposed the cause of it to be a Great-horned Owl which I never managed to find. I've always felt that one could distinguish the owl and the hawk as targets of Crows by the particularly frantic cries that the former seems to elicit.

November 29

I learned today that a strong wind can make the spectacular crest of a male Hooded Merganser seem even moreso. I also relearned for the nth time that it doesn't make sense to go birding at Sherwood Island on a windy day. Yesterday's significant rainfall rendered the park full of standing water which attracted lots of geese and not much else. Moderate temperature and clear skies seemed not to make up for a very gusty and noisy westerly breeze. I couldn't hear because of the wind; I couldn't keep the telescope steady because of it: and the turbulence that it created in the Sound obviated the possibility of locating swimming birds. The result was a historically bad day with a total list of only 31 species in spite of the fact that I covered the area quite completely.

December 1

The wind wasn't too bad today so the Sound, while not exactly glassy, was rather placid. Such relatively favorable conditions for use of the telescope enabled me to study satisfactorily a pair of Red-necked Grebes which I saw from both the east end and the pavilion point. These are stately, elegant birds with very long necks and dagger-like yellow bills that render them quite unmistakable. I think of how many times I've been undecided between them and Red-throated Loons and conclude that in such cases of doubt the birds were surely loons. I believe this is the first time that I have seen Red-necked Grebes here in the autumn. They are surprisingly uncommon at Sherwood Island and the few occasions I have seen them have been around the first week in April.

The day was also rather good for ducks with high counts of Mallards (100) and Red-breasted Mergansers (120). The former were almost all in one extraordinarily tightly packed group on the Mill Pond, so dense that the birds almost seemed to be atop one another. Now, and for the next three months, is the time of the year when I consider myself lucky to record 40 species and that was today's total. The lingering species seem all to have departed save for an overhead flock of 75 Red-winged Blackbirds and three Greater Yellowlegs both of which species are uncommon here in winter.

I saw a doe and three young deer at the edge of the east marsh.

December 3

I had difficulty concentrating this morning because I foolishly missed an opportunity to buy a great book for my library yesterday. I attended an auction at Christie's East in New York and was the underbidder on an absolutely superb copy of the *editio princeps* of Gilbert White's *Natural History and Antiquities of Selbourne* (London, 1789). That celebrated work represents the first intensive study of the natural history of a small area and was one of my inspirations for Sherwood Island Diary. It is quite rare, indeed vanishingly so in the condition of this particular copy, and it was an idiotic time for me to become suddenly penny-wise and pound-foolish.

Today was pretty good for birds. I logged 42 species including an increasingly late Great Egret and the year's first Great Cormorant, distinguished by its robust body and relatively thick neck. I ran into Bob Winkler at the pavilion point as I was finishing my walk. He had seen two egrets and also several species that I had missed including a Fox Sparrow. He mentioned a White-fronted Goose that he had learned about from the "Rare Bird Alert" and subsequently seen at the Nyala Farm. We decided to stop at this farm just west of Sherwood Island from which it is separated by the Connecticut Turnpike and tracks of the New Haven Railroad. The bird was with a flock of about 100 Canada Geese on a wet meadow. It was much smaller than its companions and exhibited an orange bill and orange legs which, despite the absence of any white on the forehead, identified it as an immature representative of the Greenland race of the White-fronted Goose. I had never seen this species in Connecticut, where it is very rare, and would have loved to add it to my Sherwood Island list. Indeed, we briefly even considered trying to scare it into flight, in the hope that it would cross the turnpike and alight in the park. However, I am pleased to report that we managed to restrain ourselves from performing such an asocial and selfish act. Presumably, this well staked out and seemingly sedentary individual will be a much sought objective for many local birders.

December 6

Today was very warm and pleasant with a gentle northwest wind and a rather placid Sound. There were plenty of birds yielding a total list of 48 species which is very respectable for early December. The best was yet another Red-necked Grebe. The Westport Christmas Count is only 12 days away and, as usual, Bob Winkler and I will be responsible for

Sherwood Island. While this represents only a small fraction of the total count area, it generally contains a few species that are absent from the other subdivisions and the grebe would certainly fall into this category. I don't think any have been recorded on the count for many years. Several other birds that I saw today might also be their only representatives on the count if they stayed around though none would be as unexpected as the grebe. These include Great Egret, Winter Wren and Ruby-crowned Kinglet, all lingerers that might be expected if the warm weather persists.

The latest regular fall arrivals at Sherwood Island are almost always Goldeneye and Canvasback and today I saw the first of the former, a flock of eight. In my mind, Goldeneye particularly is very much a cold weather bird and even though the date is late, its appearance seemed inappropriate in such mild weather. Although last winter was the snowiest and one of the most frigid on record here, there hasn't yet been a really cold day this fall.

The relative abundance of Herring and Ring-billed Gulls has changed dramatically over the past fifteen years. Before then, Herring Gulls predominated by a margin of about 10:1 during all seasons. Since then, there has been a steady increase in the proportion of Ring-bills such that this fall, for the first time, they have consistently outnumbered their larger relative. Most of this change has resulted from an absolute increase in Ring-bills, but there seems also to have been some diminution in the population of Herring Gulls. The latter appear in large numbers when the temperature is sufficiently low to freeze the entire Mill Pond and it will be interesting to determine the relative numbers of the two species when that occurs this winter.

December 8

After all my recent talk about how warm it has been, I suffered from the cold today. The temperature of 25 was less the culprit than was the frigid westerly wind. Furthermore, I was dressed improperly and psychologically unprepared. The day's list of 30 species, however, is misleadingly low as I omitted the eastern extremity and spent almost no time examining the very rough Sound. I convinced myself that I wouldn't see anything and quit after only two and one-half hours. I did notice a coyote on the Aspetuck Land Trust, my fourth sighting of one this year and third at that location. The only interesting ornithological observation of interest was Herring Gulls outnumbered Ring-Bills on this chilly day thus reversing the recent trend.

Most of my time was spent inspecting the numerous conifers for the presence of roosting owls. This was not because I considered the venture promising, but rather because it was relatively warm in the shelter of the groves. As usual, I forced myself to examine the base of the tree for pellets before actually looking amongst the branches. I am not good at this, perhaps lacking sufficient patience, the requisite keen eyesight, or both. In fact, I've yet to discover a roosting owl in the park although I was once shown one, a Saw Whet, for my only record of that species on the island. The single Barn Owl, occasional Short-ears and more frequent Great-Horneds that I have recorded have all been individuals that I flushed.

December 9

Yesterday was a chore and today was a pleasure. The major difference was today's absence of wind but it also helped that I wore a hat. It was still chilly but I was none-the-less surprised to find that half the Mill Pond was covered with a thin layer of ice. After all, the sub-freezing temperature has only been present for two days and the temperature has not been below 25.

There are very few cold days during which the Sound is as calm as today and the visibility was very good. In fact the partial cloudiness was helpful in obviating the blind spot often caused by the sun. The conditions were ideal for use of the telescope and anything on the water could be easily identified. If Surf Scoter, Barrow's Goldeneye or either eider were in the vicinity, this was the day to find them. Well, plenty of birds were there but none of these species was amongst them. I tried hard to find them by spending a full hour with the telescope. The scoters were all definitely White-winged. I had wonderful looks at the flock of 40 Goldeneyes, almost all males, and there certainly was no Barrow's to be seen. But loons, grebes and ducks were in abundance and it was fun. I saw two Red-necked Grebes again and I'm beginning to feel as though they are a given provided the conditions allow proper scrutiny of the Sound. Will that be the case on the Christmas Count nine days hence? And will the Great Egret that has survived the last two days continue to do so? The fine male Merlin that afforded me a splendid look in a tree near the pavilion today would also be a good find for the count. I'm optimistic that interesting birds will be around but it's more problematic whether the wind will permit us to see them. I hope the day of the count will resemble today but it could be like yesterday.

The first Canvasback of the season, a male, arrived today, the last of the regular wintering ducks to put in an appearance. The Baldpate population, which a decade ago regularly reached 100, rose to 28. When they are plentiful, there is occasionally a Eurasian Wigeon amongst them. But the past few years have been lean ones for surface-feeding ducks at Sherwood Island.

December 12

This morning was definitely wintry. The temperature remained in the mid twenties and I felt uncomfortably cold. An extra pair of socks, long underwear, and perhaps warmer gloves, would have helped. This is the type of weather that usually characterizes the Christmas Count which takes place in six days.

I can't remember a day with fewer landbirds. They comprised only ten of the 36 species I recorded and I managed to miss House Sparrow, and even more astonishingly, Starling, for the first time ever. Of course, I didn't expend much effort for these two, yet a day when I see more deer (6) than Starlings is quite remarkable. Amongst those deer was the endearing adolescent with the white muzzle on which I have previously remarked. As for the birds, I did find a male Gadwall, the first since January 29. They used to be quite common here. I also saw a fine female harrier that would be nice for the Count. The Sound was a bit choppy but could have been worse. However, it didn't contain many birds.

December 13

Two complete days of sub-freezing temperature have really transformed the park. About three-quarters of the Mill Pond is frozen solid as is all the standing water. The cold weather keeps almost everyone except me away. Even the hardy model airplane crowd appears to have called it a year. As the Christmas Count approaches, the birds, too, seem to have departed. I haven't seen Red-necked Grebe, Great Egret, Canvasback, Horned Lark, Snow Bunting or Longspur during my last two visits and Sherwood Island is occasionally the only Count locale where these are recorded. I was better dressed for today's frigidity and only my hands suffered as much as yesterday, since I used the same pair of gloves. They look as though they should provide warmth, and they do certainly provide an encumbrance, yet their protective value leaves much to be desired. My warmer pair is even bulkier but apparently necessary. Each December, I am reminded anew that I don't like cold weather. Of course, it is not yet really very cold and I have managed to cope at much lower temperatures. Right now, I'm wondering how. The presence of a few interesting birds would unquestionably help. There weren't any today.

December 15

If this morning is an indication of what to expect for the Christmas Count on the eighteenth, then Bob Winkler and I will be in for a very frustrating day. At least it was warmer than it has been lately and the Mill Pond was almost entirely open. But the humid northeast breeze made the Sound rather rough and the atmosphere rather hazy so scrutiny of the water was unrewarding. The disappointing absence of noteworthy landbirds also continued. My total list of 39 species did not contain a single one that would likely be a unique contribution to the Count. We will certainly not approach our success of last year, our best ever. We had 58 species that included Canvasback, Turnstone, Snipe, Creeper, Redpoll, Snow Bunting and Longspur.

December 18

The Westport Christmas Count has special significance for me. The reader will recall that in 1944 my family rented a summer home in Westport where my inchoate interest in birds flourished. That interest led me and a group of friends from school to organize and execute what I believe were the first published Christmas Counts for Westport in 1945 and 1946. The family of one of the boys owned a house in Westport that we stayed in and used as our base of operations. We managed to include Sherwood Island and Compo Beach, its westerly neighbor, on our itinerary, even though that necessitated quite a long walk from the inland location of the house. I still possess my original notes for these days. In 1945, there were four of us and we divided into two groups. Six of us split into three groups in 1946. If I remember correctly, we submitted our results to Audubon Magazine where they appeared with the annual national tabulation. I wondered at the time whether the editors would have accepted our data so readily, had they realized that none of us had yet reached the age of 15. I must admit that these are rather dim memories of events that occurred 49 years ago and I plan to examine the published census accounts the next time I visit a library that contains

them. The most interesting birds that we recorded were Snowy Owl and Pine Grosbeak, both in 1945 although the latter was not on the Count day. The most conspicuous difference between the bird life then and now was the relative rarity in the 1940s of various southern species that have subsequently become common. Examples of these that are particularly conspicuous by differences in the Count results are Tufted Titmouse, Carolina Wren, Mockingbird and Cardinal. Of course, the Westport Christmas Count is now a much grander and better organized affair that usually includes around 100 participants and cannot realistically be compared to our initial efforts.

We were very fortunate with the weather for our Christmas Bird Count today. Yesterday there was a northeast wind and more or less continuous rainfall but this morning the wind shifted to the north, the skies cleared and the temperature continued at a pleasant level. Indeed, it came very close to 50. Moreover, early in the day the wind was gentle and the Sound placid. By afternoon, however, both of these parameters were less favorable. Bob Winkler and I began at the Mill Beach at 7:00. This was only two hours after dead low tide but it wasn't really very low because the moon was full last night. The warm weather and calm Sound promised a good day and a pair of Black-bellied Plovers seemed an auspicious beginning as did a Gadwall amongst the Baldpates on the Mill Pond. The Allen Preserve was alive with common landbirds but contained nothing unusual. I had seen Winter Wren and Yellow-rumped Warbler there earlier this month but neither was present today. The first lingering species to make an appearance was a pair of Pipits on the east parking lot. However, there were no Horned Larks, Snow Buntings or Longspurs. A Palm Warbler on the easternmost field was a pleasant surprise and we were delighted to find our late Common Egret in the east marsh. I was afraid it had departed during the recent cold weather.

We scrutinized the Sound very closely from the eastern extremity at around 9:10 when it was still placid. The tide was relatively high and expected to peak at 11:00. Red-throated Loons and Horned Grebes were all over the place but the one likely Red-necked Grebe was too far away to identify with certainty. I was actually rather disappointed with our results from scanning the Sound. We spent at least a full hour at it and, considering the favorable conditions for observation and the large number of ducks and diving birds, I anticipated that we would likely find something unusual. We didn't. We did find some additional interesting species in other parts of the park, however, including Snow Goose, Harrier and Greater Yellowlegs.

There was a great deal of standing water from yesterday's rain and, for the first time during my visits this month, large numbers of Canada Geese were foraging in the grassy areas. We examined these very carefully for the White-fronted Goose that had first been detected at the Nyala Farm. I mentioned on the day when I saw that individual that I wished it would fly over the highway so that I could add it to my Sherwood Island list. Well, apparently it has occasionally done just that since Bob found it there amongst a large group of Canada Geese on December 11, and someone else reported it on the Rare Bird Alert. However, we failed to locate it today although we expended considerable patience and effort to do so. We didn't know whether anyone else had been assigned to look for it at the farm so we attempted, alas unsuccessfully, to go there. Unfortunately, there was a traffic jam on the highway of such historic magnitude that it was shown on national television and it spilled over onto the connector which one must take to reach the farm from Sherwood Island.

I recorded 55 species at Sherwood Island today which is an excellent count for this date. However, it must be noted that it was an exhausting day during which I spent almost eight hours there, much more time than usual.

December 20

Today was the last day of fall and it was so beautiful that I couldn't resist going out even though I was still quite tired from the census. The result was a truncated visit to the park during which I covered only the Mill Pond from its southern and western edges and the eastern half of the park, thereby omitting entirely the central and western parts of the park that usually contain most of whatever land birds happen to be around. I hoped to find the White-fronted Goose grazing with Canadas and perhaps to find an unusual duck on the water. Neither of these optimistic expectations materialized. Most of my time was spent scanning the Sound but the only observation of note was the presence of a rather large number (50) of Horned Grebes.

December 22

What a beautiful, warm and windless day! If this is winter, I can definitely handle it. The Sound was as calm as it can get at this time of the year and, save for some distant haziness, conditions were perfect for identification of water birds. Today seemed the best opportunity of the latter half of this year to locate Surf Scoter and perhaps Common Scoter, Barrow's Goldeneye and even an Eider or Harlequin. So what did I actually see? An exceptional number (65) of Horned Grebes and reasonable numbers of other common sea birds but nothing out of the ordinary. It looks as though I shall miss the rarer sea ducks entirely this year. Perhaps that's because there has not been any really cold weather yet. Even the standard flock of Canvasback has not yet arrived although there have been rather large numbers of Goldeneye, usually a signature cold weather duck. The temperature rose into the fifties today and I managed a rather high total list of 45 species without much effort. However, the lack of anything special is beginning to remind me of July and I am pretty sure that the year will end without any more exciting birds. I must admit to disappointment in the lack of winter birds this year. I mean not only the rarer ducks but also Rough-legged Hawk and the wandering finches. This last part of the year has been rather a bust.

December 25

Yesterday and the night before were consumed by a ferocious "northeaster" with winds up to 60 MPH. There were numerous power outages including our own house for 12 hours. Fortunately, the temperature was in the forties and fifties so precipitation was in the form of rain rather than snow. This Christmas morning the wind and rain had abated and I went out anticipating hopefully that some sea birds might have been driven into the Sound by the extraordinary winds. The birds I found in an abbreviated itinerary that included the Mill

Pond from the southern dikes and the eastern half of the park can be summarized as follows: nothing unusual and not much of it.

December 27

The reader will have long since recognized that watching birds is the most effective way that I have for coping with insoluble problems. My daughter Abby was hospitalized with a serious illness on December 23 and, while she has survived the acute phase of her disease, she is likely to remain in a somewhat critical state for a considerable period of time. Her problem has consumed my wife and me. I felt at first that I should not mention this turn of events in the diary and omitted it in my Christmas entry.

Today was gloriously beautiful and perfect for birding. It was warm with bright sunshine and was virtually windless so that the Sound was almost glassy. Such conditions are very unusual in late December. Even though I could identify almost any bird I could see on the water, I still failed to find any unusual species. Sea ducks, Red-throated Loons and particularly Horned-grebes were in good supply. I also had exceptionally fine looks at two perching hawks. One was an adult Red-tail. The other was probably a large female Sharp-shinned but could have been a small male Cooper's. The list of 43 species was good for the date but I was a bit disappointed that I couldn't locate something special.