

## **Sherwood Island Diary**

**Richard L Soffer**

**2000**

### **8 March**

Various minor ailments precluded an earlier visit to the park this year and today's first venture in the new calendar year was not exactly an auspicious debut. The "renovation" is in full swing and the entire road system is being substantially widened and is flanked with trenches, all adjacent trees and ancillary vegetation having been removed. In addition, the entire east parking lot, the largest area of open space in the park, is torn up and in the process of being extensively altered. It is presently covered with huge mounds of what appears to be a mixture of dirt and gravel. The best snipe area, from which I once flushed at least 20 birds, has been cleared. I would be very surprised if this work were completed while I was still alive.

These discouraging observations and thoughts contributed to a generally disappointing day. I limited my itinerary to the west side of the Mill Pond and the eastern section of the park so the total list of 32 species is not really representative of what may have been around. The wind was quite strong and the Sound was too choppy to see anything on it.

### **15 March**

This morning I limited myself to the Mill Pond and the western section of the park. This section has also been severely altered, primarily by removal of virtually all shrubbery and underbrush save that in the area of Woodcock Woods, which now seems to represent the only remnant not yet impacted by the ongoing renovation. I'm afraid its time will come! I covered it carefully today in the hope of seeing a Woodcock but without success.

There was almost no wind today and the Sound was smooth allowing good observation. There were good counts of Horned Grebe (50), Old Squaw (75) and Red-breasted Merganser (75). I recorded 39 species. The most unexpected by far was a single **Osprey** that flew in a northeasterly direction over the Mill Pond. Zeranski and Baptist list March 17 as the earliest date of arrival.

### **16 March**

My itinerary this morning was the same as yesterday but there more wind and the Sound was not nearly so placid. Again, I recorded 39 species the most interesting of which was a group of five Cedar Waxwings.

## 4 May

This was my first visit to the park in more than a month because I was in Bhutan. The east parking lot is now a disaster area, filled with land-moving equipment making a great deal of noise. Furthermore, this area is closed to the public, at least during the week when work is going on. The east marsh and the model airplane field are therefore off limits during the work week. This morning, which was a perfect early May morning, I avoided the eastern section of the park and confined myself to the Mill Beach, Mill Pond and western half of the park.

I had 58 species, many of which were a few days earlier than usual. These included both orioles and both terns as well as semipalmated plover and sandpiper. There were still three Red-throated Loons and three Horned Grebes. Yellow Warblers and Yellowthroat had arrived as expected and I also had single Black & White and Parula Warblers. One pair of Canada geese was escorting six goslings that looked about one week old.

A pair of Ospreys is again using the platform in the west marsh as a nesting site.

## 5 May

The southwest airflow continues and the temperature this afternoon is predicted to reach into the eighties. There was a breeze and some cloudiness early this morning but the skies cleared during my visit. Warm weather and favorable winds, predicted to continue for at least three days more, are clearly associated with an early migration. Today, I recorded 65 species including single examples of Lincoln's and White-crowned Sparrows which usually show up only during later major flight days. The sluices to the Mill Pond are set in such a way that it is one huge mudflat and this is responsible for the presence of more shore birds than usual this early. For example, I had 50 Greater Yellowlegs today. More surprising, I saw six Solitary Sandpipers, three of which were flying over the Mill Beach. I finally decided to explore the eastern section of the park, hoping that some of the birds usually found near the model airplane field and the parking lot where the earth moving equipment is in operation, might remain in the park by moving to its eastern extremity. I saw two Clapper Rails in the marsh east of the airplane field, found two Killdeers in the meadow just east of the parking lot and heard one Willet in the most easterly section of the marsh. It's hard to imagine that the Willets will continue nesting here this year with all the chaos and noise in the park. I saw five different groups of goslings.

This was quite a good morning of birding. I had 65 species compared with 58 yesterday and I am amazed at how much the birds will endure to maintain their traditional migratory habits. If I were a bird, I'd certainly skip Sherwood Island for now and the immediate future.

## 6 May

Crescendos continue for both the warm weather and the migration. The temperature is predicted to hit 90 this afternoon and I had 73 species this morning including fine looks at a pair of Virginia Rails and single examples of White-eyed Vireo, Pine Warbler and Blue-winged Warblers. This was Saturday so the earth movers were not in action and I took the opportunity to explore the east marsh behind the machinery, i. e. its westernmost part. It was here that I found the pair of Virginia Rails but no Marsh Wrens nor Seaside, nor Sharp-tailed Sparrows as yet.

How does one figure the water level of the Mill Pond? For the past two days, the entire pond was one large mudflat, whereas this morning there was complete water coverage without a trace of mud.

I think there are again two pairs of Willets. I took a look at the spot where I found the nest last year and by some miracle that particular area remains undisturbed. No bird sitting there at this time, however.

## 7 May

Weather wise, this morning was virtually identical to the last several save a bit hotter. Although, I recorded one less species (72) than yesterday, the spectrum was considerably different with more vireos and warblers (three and ten species, respectively) and with 10 species that were new for the year. The work crews were absent since it was Sunday and I examined the entire east marsh with little reward except for one Virginia Rail.

## 9 May

The same weather continues. I didn't get to the park yesterday because there was a thunderstorm at 4:00 AM and I figured it would be quite wet. Perhaps this was a mistake since I heard 13 species of warblers on my walk for the newspaper in Norwalk! In the event, this morning was quite similar to the past two visits. I had 75 species including eight that were new for the year. Single examples of Laughing Gull and Cattle Egret were probably the most noteworthy finds. I recorded 11 species of warblers including two Chestnut-sided and single examples of Northern Waterthrush and Canada, all of which were new for the year as was a Swainson's Thrush, eight Turnstones and two Green Herons.

## 10 May

There has been an extraordinary change in the weather. The temperature dropped this morning accompanied by strong winds from the east southeast. When I first got to the beach, the wind was at least 30 MPH and the only reason I didn't go home immediately

was my hope that some shorebirds would be driven into the flats at low tide which was at 10:30. I didn't imagine that there would be any land birds. However, there was no influx of shorebirds but there were quite a few warblers comprising 11 species of which two, Black-throated Green and Black-Poll, were new for the year. Amongst the 66 species were two others, Bonaparte's Gull and Swift, that were also the first of the year. Also of interest were six Common Loons flying northeast over the land, three in one group.

### **11 May**

There was another major weather shift. After a predawn thunderstorm, the winds shifted to the northwest and the skies cleared. The northwest breeze did not portend well and the visit to the park was uninteresting. I only examined the Mill Beach and Pond and the western sector of the park and my list comprised 62 species, none of which were either noteworthy or new for the year.

### **13 May**

Yesterday was cold and rainy. There was a heavy rainfall at four this morning followed by overcast skies and a mild breeze from the east. I suppose one must label the morning a "flight" since I did find 81 species including 13 warblers. Yet there was little of interest and only four species that were new for the year: a Pewee that I heard and single examples of Marsh Wren, Nashville Warbler and Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The latter had the breast and sides streaked on an ochre background wash and the ochre of the face was not particularly orange.

### **14 May**

At around four this morning there was another major thunderstorm after which the skies cleared. When I started this morning, there was no wind and plenty of migrants. However, a breeze from the northwest became stronger as the day advanced and the birds disappeared. I finished with 74 species of which 12 were warblers. There were four species new for the year. I heard a Least and a Willow Flycatcher, heard and saw a Kingbird, and caught a glimpse of a hummingbird. The day was less interesting than the list might lead one to believe.

### **15 May**

The figure of 65 species is deceptive for this morning and reflects the fact that I didn't go to eastern section of the park. In reality, there was a significant flight early in the morning but, as the winds picked up, the birds departed. There were significant numbers of Yellowthroats (20), Magnolia Warblers (20), Parulas (15) and Redstarts (10). I failed,

however, to find anything new for the year not encountering any of the scarcer warblers such as Blackburnian, Bay Breasted and Cape May although this was the kind of day when they might have been expected.

### 16 May

This morning was virtually a carbon copy of yesterday as regards the weather and the birds. I limited myself to the same truncated itinerary and I recorded 69 species of which 11 were warblers. The most common of these were the same as they were yesterday although the numbers were a tad lower.

### 17 May

Although I have had difficulty up to now distinguishing which day(s) might be considered "flight" days, I have no difficulty in concluding that this morning was an "unflight" one. I did the complete itinerary including the eastern section of the park that I have been excluding during week days and I still ended up with only 63 species of which a measly four (Yellow, Blackpoll, Yellowthroat, Redstart) were warblers. The White-throated Sparrows have also left. I didn't find the single examples of Sharp-tailed Sparrow and Marsh Wren that I had previously found in the East Marsh but I did have a nice study of a Clapper Rail there and I heard another in the West Marsh. It appears that the two pairs of Willets will stay and try to breed despite the incredible noise and pollution from the innumerable trucks and ground movers that are involved in the destruction of the east parking lot. The noise and commotion is so disheartening!

I frightened a Black Duck with six very recently fledged chick on the edge of the far eastern section of the East Marsh and I had a beautiful adult Little Blue Heron in the West Marsh. But the surprise of the day was a drake **Bufflehead** in the Mill Pond, my latest record by more than a month. However, Zeranski and Baptist list two June dates! There has also been a drake Red-breasted Merganser in the Mill Pond for the past several days.

### 18 May

Is it possible in the northeastern United States on May 18<sup>th</sup> not to find a single migrating Passerine bird during three hours of looking in diverse habitats? The answer is yes! I accomplished the feat this morning which was even worse than yesterday. Of course, I certainly have more difficulty listening for songbirds this year than ever before because of the tremendous background of noise from the numerous trucks and earth movers. I consider every Passerine species that I recorded today as a breeder either in the park proper or in the immediate vicinity. The only items of ornithological interest today were a total of 11 Common Loons flying north in groups of 1-4, a pair of Sharp-tailed

Sparrows in the east marsh just north of the airplane field, and a Marsh Wren in the Allen Preserve where I hadn't previously recorded it.

The day was more interesting for mammals. I caught a glimpse of a gray-brown canid racing rapidly toward the Mill Pond not far from the "Old Barn". It disappeared into the dense vegetation near the edge of the pond before I could get much of a look at it but based on size, proportions and tail, I believe it was a fox although certainly not a Red Fox. I also encountered an obdurate skunk that refused to cede me right of way on a path at the far eastern end of the park. I retreated gracefully. I haven't mentioned animals this year but I have seen as many as 10 rabbits in a day as well as one or two Woodchucks and a very tame young female deer that seems to enjoy Woodcock Woods.

### 21 May

The last two days have been very rainy and overcast and this morning continued that weather pattern. The bad weather and the Sunday absence of the large work crew insured that there would be relative quiet and I had the feeling that because of this, I might see something in the east marsh. And, *mirabile dictu*, I did! I had an excellent look at a splendid King Rail which stood at the edge of the marsh for several seconds before slipping into the adjacent tall grass. I've gotten rather accustomed to Clapper Rails and by contrast with them, I could easily understand how the King Rail could be termed "Rallus elegans". This bird had a bright robin-red breast and beautiful conspicuous black and white striping on the side as well as rich brown upperparts and a conspicuous red bill. Clapper Rail is definitely "Rallus drabus" by comparison.

There was nothing else of interest and the land bird volume was extremely low.

### 23 May

This morning was yet another dreary one and amongst the 63 species that I recorded, except for an immature Cooper's Hawk, of which I caught only a glimpse, only one other bird, a Clapper Rail, was of interest. This bird was in the first ditch, i. e. the most westerly, in the east marsh. This is an area very close to a great deal of road work and noise. I saw the bird walking in the ditch and I had quite a nice observation. I designated it "Clapper" because it had drab gray brown upper parts and the top of its chest was a dingy gray. But it certainly had some "King" characteristics, namely a rufous lower breast, a bright orange-red bill and quite strong barring of the flanks. It was pretty close to the midpoint in the continuum between these two "species".

## 27 July

Heavy rain and a modest east wind had blanketed the area for the past 30 hours, so I thought perhaps I could find some shore birds. I wasn't really certain how my chances might be affected by the recent paving of almost the entire east parking lot. Things seem to have worked out better than I had anticipated. The grassy patch between the east parking lot and the beach was filled with pools much as it formerly was under these conditions. And there were quite a few shorebirds of ten species foraging about it and the airplane field as follows: 15 Killdeer; 2 Semipalmated Plover; 1 Spotted Sandpiper; 2 Semipalmated Sandpipers; 5 Least Sandpipers; 5 Greater Yellowlegs; 40 Lesser Yellowlegs; 5 Pectoral Sandpipers; 8 Dowitchers and, best of all, **8 Stilt Sandpipers**. The sandpipers were, for the most part, in alternate plumage although their coloration was certainly not as intense as it might have been earlier. I also had 10 Bank Swallows, my first of the year.

I limited myself to the grassy areas between the east parking lot and the beach and between the Mill Pond and the beach since I was just looking for shore birds. Therefore, I did not record a list of total species.

## 6 September

The weather had been humid and sultry until yesterday when strong winds from the northeast ushered in a cool, dry atmosphere. I imagined that there would be a major flight of land birds but I couldn't get out yesterday. Today was probably, all things considered, the worst day for birds that I had ever had at the park. I tortured myself for only two hours and examined only the west woods and associated Mill Pond, and the eastern half of the park. The total list for this truncated itinerary was 31 species and there were virtually no land birds. Of course, I am still trying to figure out how best to cover the park which has been markedly altered in the past year. Most of the change has been in the east parking lot and the areas adjacent to the main road. I suspect that these changes may not be as deleterious as I had originally imagined since the east lot is only partially paved and has a series of interesting trenches which may well collect water. Work on the park has not been entirely completed. Completion is anticipated sometime before next summer.

## 14 September

Much work continues at the park and it is difficult to develop a reasonable birding itinerary. Today, trees were being transplanted into the gullies that had been dug in rows across the east parking lot to develop separated parking rows. I covered the Mill Beach, the western shore of the Mill Pond including the Allen Preserve, and the eastern half of the park where I couldn't park because it was blocked off for the transplantation operations. There were few birds around and I was tired from the walk from the pavillon

lot around the entire eastern section so I didn't examine western part of the park. The total list for this truncated visit was 36 species with nothing worthy of note.

### **16 September**

Sultry nondescript weather ended yesterday with thunder storms followed by a cold front with northwest winds. Today was the first day that hinted of autumn and I knew it would be a good one for birds so I started out early, spent more than three hours in the field and executed an almost complete itinerary save for the easternmost extremity of the park. This was the first time since the "renovation" that I had visited some of the areas and a major change, albeit not necessarily permanent, is the loss of shrubbery and undergrowth. Someone in the present administration likes parks cut and orderly. For example, the central wooded and bushy part of the park where I found a Turkey on the nest several years ago has been cleared and its big dead tree where I had several times seen Olive-sided Flycatcher has been cut and removed. On the other hand, the westernmost part of the park abutting on the salt marsh of the Mill Pond has been spared and is more overgrown than I can recall ever having seen it and the far eastern section of the park remains partially uncut.

Today was a good one for migration. The best find was a splendid adult Bald Eagle that flew low over the Mill Beach. Other new species for the year were single examples of Sharp-shinned Hawk, Kestrel, Hairy Woodpecker and Gnatcatcher. The total list of species was 57 including three species of vireo and six of wood warblers.

### **20 September**

There was a tremendous amount of rain last night, supposedly the remnants of a tropical storm although the (southeast) wind was not exceptionally strong (10 MPH). I thought the rain might cause puddles for some interesting waders so I arrived at the park at 8 AM only to find the earth movers in full swing over the east parking lot. I examined only the eastern section of the park and the West Woods with its adjacent wet meadows so the total list of 39 species is not reflective of everything that might have been there. In fact, I might not have entered the list except that I recorded two species that were new for the year: two Palm Warblers in the shrubbery adjacent to the east marsh and four Sanderlings on the mud flats off the Mill Beach. The flight of Common Terns that I noticed last visit seemed to be continuing.

### **22 September**

Another cold front passed through yesterday and this morning seemed very promising with gentle westerly winds and an initial chill. The sky was cloudless and high which explains, perhaps, why I saw only four raptors, two Osprey and single examples of Harrier and Kestrel. The day started off auspiciously with a Golden Plover in basic

plumage foraging on the entry oval with several Killdeer and oblivious to much nearby active earth-moving equipment. Shortly thereafter, as I was walking from the pavillon lot to the central wooded area, I caught the briefest of glance of four Evening Grosbeaks flying west southwest. I was excited and thought this boded very well for the day. Unfortunately, it was pretty much downhill thereafter, although I did find a female Blackburnian Warbler and two Phoebes, both new for the year. The day's total was 55 species.

### **25 September**

Yesterday, another cold front entered the area and last night was chilly with a northerly wind. This morning was the same way with mainly clear skies save the occasional nimbus clouds. These conditions promised a flight and that promise was reasonably fulfilled. The problem was that the birds were poorly seen as they flitted quietly through dense foliage. Even though parts of the park have been cleared of underbrush, plenty is left near Woodcock Woods and just south of the old barn as well as around the eastern extremity. These various areas were swarming with Catbirds and Yellowthroats. Of the 55 species that I recorded, five were new and all were poorly seen. I flushed one Green-winged Teal from each of the two ponds between the Mill Pond and the West Beach. Both were either females or males in eclipse plumage. Two Merlins flew over. One stopped to harass Crows over the Mill Pond Marsh. I heard a Winter Wren. I got fairly decent albeit brief looks at a bird that looked like a Philadelphia Vireo and behaved like a Redstart. This combination of appearance and activity convinced me that it was a Tennessee Warbler. I had the briefest of glimpses of a Vesper Sparrow that I flushed from the long grass abutting the east marsh.

### **27 September**

Yesterday morning was rainy but a cold front with mild northwest winds starting last night cleared the atmosphere. This morning seemed perfect quite cool (ca 42°) with a mild northwesterly breeze. There were certainly plenty of Passerine migrants but they were difficult to see as they flitted through dense foliage. The predominant migrants were Catbirds (30) and Yellowthroats and Redstarts (ca 15 of each). Again very few raptors (six individuals of four species). There must have been great schools of fish because there were large numbers of gulls and cormorants both in the Mill Pond and following a fishing trawler in the Sound. The migration of Common Terns is over. I haven't seen any since 20 September.

### **29 September**

This was another seemingly perfect morning, the chilliest yet at 38-45°, clear with a modest wind from the north-north east. If you like Phoebes, of which there were 20, it lived up to its promise. Otherwise, it was a disappointment. Most of the previous

migrants had cleared out (viz. only three Yellowthroats) and the only major arrivals were Phoebes and Yellow-rumped Warbler (10). I didn't record a single raptor which was really the most striking finding, albeit negative, of the day. A good day for wrens, however. I had all four of the reasonable possibilities. The total list was 41 species.

### **30 September**

There was really no reason to suppose that today would be better than yesterday but I went out because it is a Saturday and I knew there would be no earth movers in action. Also, low tide was around 8 AM and I thought perhaps the flats at the Mill Beach might have something. I hadn't been there or to Grove Point recently because school buses clog things up at that hour of the morning. In the event, there was virtually no wind this morning, the park was quiet and the weather was very pleasant. I recorded 54 species, none new for the year and none of special interest. I did see two Ospreys and a Cooper's Hawk which, I suppose is better than no raptors but is still an unbelievably low number. It will be interesting to learn whether this paucity is noted at the entire state level.

### **5 October**

There hasn't been any serious weather change since my last visit and the temperature has been rather high, reaching 70° every day. Last night there was a mild front with wet weather that continued this morning with overcast skies and some sprinkling. I don't expect much before some cold weather and I was not optimistic about this morning's prospects. However, there were clearly plenty of migrants with good numbers of Flickers (20), Phoebes (8), Palm Warblers (20), Yellowthroats (25), White-throated Sparrows (40) and Song Sparrows (50). Whoever said Song Sparrows are sedentary? The total species list was an unimposing 51 and the only remotely unusual species was White-crowned Sparrow of which I saw three immatures.

### **7 October**

Last night there was rain followed by a northwest breeze that seemed promising. The morning seemed perfect but was a bit disappointing. I heard a Pipit, new for the year but that was the most interesting amongst the 50 species I recorded. Some movement of Phoebes, Palm Warblers.

### **9 October**

This morning seemed like late November. The temperature was barely above freezing and there was a blustery northwest wind. Skies were clear save the occasional cumulus or nimbus cloud and it seemed a perfect day for Peregrine, which, of course, I did not see. However, plenty of birds were being blown about, particularly Myrtle Warblers (50) and

Sparrows (seven species including 50 White-throats, four White-crowns and five Field) and 35 Tree Swallows. Also of interest were five Brant, new for the year, that were feeding on the shoreline at the eastern extremity. They were extraordinarily tame and allowed me to approach within perhaps 25 feet. I flushed a Clapper Rail near the airplane field at just the moment when an immature Harrier was passing. As the rail landed and scurried into the vegetation, the hawk emitted a penetrating call and stooped briefly and without success. I felt a sense of relief as I would not like to have been the agent of death for the rail.

### **11 October**

It has remained raw, windy and cold although the winds began to shift this morning from northwest to southwest. The breeze remained strong. I didn't expect to see much and I didn't. Myrtle Warblers, White-throated and Swamp Sparrows were the principal Passerine migrants amongst a total of 47 species and eight Osprey was my pathetic year's high for that species. Indeed, ten individual raptors was my high count for the family this year. The group of five Brant was in the same place and an additional pair were feeding on a lawn.

The ground was a mat of hickory nuts this morning. Have I previously noted the large number of superb hickory trees in the park?

### **13 October**

There has been a gradual warmup and today was just delightful, save, of course, for the earth-moving equipment that continues to ruin weekdays. There was a nice Passerine flight this morning featuring mainly Myrtle Warblers and Swamp Sparrows. Amongst the 55 species was one that was new for the year, an immature Sapsucker. Within my memory, Sapsucker has never been common in the park.

I saw two Sharp-tailed Sparrows today and they allowed me careful studies. They looked quite different from those seen earlier this year because they exhibited a particularly conspicuous ochre eyebrow and because the streaking on the underparts was limited to the conspicuously ochre upper breast and was rather fine. Earlier examples had less ochre on the breast and more conspicuous streaking. I suspect the birds that I saw today were "Nelson's" Sharp-tailed Sparrows of which I saw a group of eight two years ago which these resembled. Still, I have yet to accept this as a full species in my own mind so I recorded these as "Sharp-tailed Sparrow".

## **19 October**

After several days of rain, the skies were cleared overnight by a gusty but not cold northwest wind. I couldn't get out until relatively late and I limited my itinerary to the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the Allen Preserve, and the eastern half of the park.

This morning was a qualitatively exciting day for raptors although they did not come over in numbers. I saw two immature Bald Eagles. The first flew west relatively low over the west marsh and was entirely dark save for dirty white wing linings. The second soared westward high over the marsh and showed considerable mottling all over. While I was walking on the meadow in the far eastern section of the park, an adult Goshawk flew over me heading west. It dwarfed a nearby Sharp-shinned Hawk and was noteworthy for its overall pearly appearance including light underparts with faint gray, almost invisible barring and/or streaking. In addition, I recorded two Turkey Vultures, 10 Sharp-shins, four Kestrels, a Merlin, and a Red-tail.

## **20 October**

Weatherwise, this morning was very much like yesterday and today I carried out the complete usual itinerary. I recorded 48 species amongst which one, a Meadowlark, was new for the year. More surprising to me were two different male Nashville Warblers at opposite ends of the park. Apparently they can be rather late migrants. In sharp and disappointing contrast to yesterday, I did not see a single raptor!

## **23 October**

This morning was fine and clear, slightly cool with a moderate east wind and nothing noteworthy amongst the 45 species.

## **2 November**

Since my last visit, virtually every day has been cold and raw with strong northerly winds. Most leaves have been blown down during this period. Today was a bit warmer and was clear but the northerly winds were still quite strong. Despite the wind, there were quite a few migrating birds. I shortened my usual itinerary and limited myself to the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park. Planting and moving earth is still prominent in the park. Amongst the 39 species that I recorded on my shortened route were Fox Sparrow, a first for the year of which I had a particularly fine look as it fed with some Juncos, two Winter Wrens, one of which I saw very well, 18 Black-bellied Plover and three Sanderling. The number of Juncos (35) was unusually high.

### **3 November**

I went back to the park this morning to examine the eastern section which I had omitted yesterday. The visibility was very good and the variable wind was gentle so I thought I might see some ducks on the sound and perhaps some Gannets. Neither of these materialized but amongst the 30 species that I saw in a small area over a short period of time were 11 that I didn't record yesterday including 12 Snow Buntings, a new bird for the year. The eastern section beyond the east parking lot is relatively unscathed and has some nice bushy habitat.

### **17 November**

I can't recall why I decided to go to the park this morning. It was certainly a mistake as very strong westerly winds more or less guaranteed that I would see very little. I limited myself to the Mill Beach, Grove Point Road and the western half of the park and I saw nothing unexpected. A group (18) of Bufflehead were in the Mill Pond, the first I had seen this autumn.

### **15 December**

The day after tomorrow is the Christmas Count so I went out this morning to do a little advance scouting. I covered only the Mill Beach, Mill Pond, Grove Point and the eastern half of the park so I did not try to find whether the Long-eared Owls have returned. I shall do that Sunday. A gale is predicted for tomorrow so Sunday may be quite different than today. The weather during the latter half of November and first half of December has been colder than usual with two minor snowfalls. However, all the major water was open today.

The only noteworthy finding this morning was the rather large number of ducks including 12 Gadwall and 35 Baldpate on the Mill Pond. The Canvasbacks should show up for the count as there were seven today.

### **17 December**

Fred Purnell and I did the park for the Westport Christmas Count today amidst an extraordinary gale with winds up to 50 MPH and intermittently heavy rain. Fortunately, the temperature was 48-58 so we did not suffer as much as we might have. We managed to eke out 41 species, the only interesting one being a flock of 10 Horned Larks. Of course, we missed all the birds of the Sound such as Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Goldeneye and Old Squaw to name the most obvious. I suspect that not a few common birds will go unrecorded on this unlucky census.