

## **Sherwood Island Diary**

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**2002**

### **10 January**

There has been virtually no winter this year so perhaps it should not be surprising that today's list of 48 species seems more reflective of a typical mid March date than of one in the dead of winter. The temperature was in the mid forties, all water was open, and there was no snow coverage. Some of the findings that suggest an early spring date were: a Woodcock on the path adjacent to Woodcock Woods; single examples of Pipit and Horned Lark heard flying over; a Ruby-crowned Kinglet heard and seen near the private property bridge; and a flock of 25 Robins. Also of interest were two female/immature Harriers, a Cooper's Hawk, and a Red-tailed Hawk. I believe that the list of 48 is the highest January day total I have ever had. Because of the strong westerly breeze, the Sound was too choppy to permit good observation. Had it been calm, I should have had an even higher total!

### **28 January**

This winter continues not to be! Today the temperature was in the mid fifties and some of the birds reflected the mild climate. Despite hurrying through my usual itinerary in less than three hours, I still managed an excellent total of 44 species. Five of these were new for the year, not exactly a remarkable number since this was only my second trip. But two of those species were highly unusual for mid winter, namely Greater Yellowlegs which I heard at the Mill Pond and Yellow-breasted Chat at which, for once, I had a great and leisurely look in the brush on Meadow Lane at the foot of Grove Point Road. The other three species that I failed to see two weeks ago were Old Squaw, Rock Dove and Savannah Sparrow. The Sound was again too choppy to see much so I again missed some rather common water birds.

### **6 February**

I started out too late this morning and it was quite windy with gusts so I limited my outing to the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park and recorded only 32 species in the rather brief (1.5 hours) interval that I was in the field. There were not many birds around and, for the first time that I can recall, I did not even record a Song Sparrow. I did, however, see two male Red-winged Blackbirds in the marsh at the base of Grove Point Road and I also found the first Kingfisher of this calendar year. I was not surprised by the blackbirds since there has been little evidence of winter this year.

## **9 February**

The most extraordinary point about today's birds was how ordinary they were considering the persistence of warm weather this winter and the good field conditions this morning. Despite a complete and rigorous itinerary, I recorded only 39 species, just one of which, Red-throated Loon, was new for the year. I saw a Red-winged Blackbird again and, for the first time this year, had reasonably good viewing conditions on the Sound although the birds on it were not exciting.

## **15 February**

This morning was again disappointing despite continued warm weather. I shortened my usual itinerary by confining my observations to the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the western half of the park. I recorded 35 species during the two hours I spent birding. Single examples of Turkey Vulture, Flicker and Swamp Sparrow were new for the year. The latter was skulking deep in the east marsh and behaved much like a Sharp-tailed which, alas, it wasn't. The Sound was far too choppy for me to hope to see anything on it.

## **19 February**

The weather report said there was little or no wind today so I visited the park in the hope of seeing some water birds on a placid Sound. However, while it may have been calm inland, there was a significant westerly breeze that ruffled the surface of the water considerably and, although I did see a few grebes and diving ducks, the results were disappointing, particularly for such an otherwise pleasant day. I shortened my itinerary by including the Mill Beach, Grove Point, the Pavilion point and the eastern section while excluding completely, the remaining western half of the park with its better land bird areas. I was out for only two hours and recorded just 32 species, none of which were new for the year.

## **26 February**

This morning could not have been better suited weather-wise. It was warm with the temperature approaching 60° toward the end of my visit. An initially dense fog quickly dissipated in the wake of a gentle southeasterly breeze. I confess that I was a wee bit disappointed in the birds even though I recorded 46 species including a Great Cormorant, 20 Grackles and 15 Cowbirds, each a new species for the year. I certainly wasn't surprised to see these standard late February birds nor the 20 Robins, usually an early March arrival. I expected both Woodcock and Snipe and I did manage a brief glimpse at the year's first Snipe as it flushed from the more easterly of the two ponds between the west marsh and the west beach. The possibility occurred to me that perhaps I should start

earlier in the morning now that I anticipate more land birds. Perhaps my expectations are too greedy!

## **2 March**

This morning was a bit raw with an east wind that presumably presages a heavy storm that is predicted for the evening and tomorrow. I truncated my itinerary by omitting the eastern section of the park. Despite this, and despite my impression that there weren't many birds around, I still managed 42 species in only two hours. I flushed a Snipe from the more westerly of the pools between the west marsh and the west beach. White-breasted Nuthatch was the only species new for the year.

## **7 March**

This was yet another perfect morning for birding, warm, clear and with just a touch of a southerly breeze. The Sound was the calmest it has been this year, however, there was some haze that prevented me from identifying some very distant sitting flocks. None-the-less, there was clearly a good number of Horned Grebes, 60 that I could identify and probably others more distant. I recorded my first Common Loons (3) of the year. Also new was a Brown Thrasher that I glimpsed only briefly as it dove into the dense shrubbery at the periphery of Woodcock Woods. My list of species was 52, a substantial total for the date. However, only the Thrasher was unusual. Baptist and Zeransky list 14 March as its earliest date of arrival, however, I note that I saw one on 5 March, 1999. Four Snipe was a good total for the first week in March.

## **14 March**

This morning was the first promising one since my last visit. In the interval there had been considerable rain and some cold northwest winds in between the rain episodes. However, today was perfect, warm with a southwest breeze. Moreover, there is considerable budding and there have been some ground flowers blooming since the end of last month. However, despite the favorable signs, the results were uninspiring. Amongst the day's 46 species, only Pheasant was new for the year and the others were present in quite ordinary numbers. In other words, the day was unremarkable for birds.

## **28 March**

March has been rather cool and overcast the weather has not seemed favorable since my last visit two weeks ago. However, this morning was clear and pleasant although there was a rather strong westerly breeze that roiled the water of the Sound. I expected quite a significant change in the avifauna because of my two week absence but there were really

not a great many birds around. However, it was about as exciting as it gets at the park because of two very unexpected birds.

The first was a Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow which I examined closely at the favored spot for this species, namely the edge of the west marsh just north of the model airplane field. This bird had a very deep ochre-yellow facial pattern and the color was much stronger than the slight ochre was on the breast. Sibley describes this as an important distinguishing characteristic amongst the Sharp-tailed Sparrows. The streaking on the sides of the chest was discrete and unblurred, although there was little, if any, streaking in the center of the breast.

The second was a Barn Owl which I flushed from the evergreens in the middle of the park that hosted Long-eared Owls a couple of years ago. This bird was unmistakable because of its unique overall tawny color interrupted by some darker coloration on the back and tertiary coverts. The only other time that I've seen this species here was about 15 years ago on the peninsula owned by the Aspetuck Land Trust that juts into the northern section of the Mill Pond.

In addition to these two, I had for additional species that were new for the year. They were:  
eight Green-winged Teal; three Great Egrets; an Osprey on the platform; and five Bonaparte's Gulls.

The grebes were a motley array, most changing, a few in complete alternate plumage, a few still in complete basic plumage. The Bonaparte's Gulls were still in basic plumage.

## 29 March

This morning was about as windless as the park gets, and for the first time this spring I was able to obtain a really satisfactory overview of the Sound. This proved useful in the case of a large group of water birds about halfway to Long Island which I was able to identify as a minor raft of Brant. Other new species for the year included a Double-crested Cormorant, a fine drake Pintail, a Snowy Egret and a quartet of Glossy Ibises flying east overhead. The latter record is an early one, however, some years ago, I had a larger flock considerably earlier in March.

In general, birds seemed to be much commoner than yesterday and I had a very healthy total of 58 species. Noteworthy was an eyeball to eyeball confrontation with an immature Red-tailed Hawk on a low branch only about 10 feet from me. The bird was just finishing tearing apart and eating some bloody prey and refused to let me disturb him. I also had a marvelous study of a superb cock Pheasant. They are indescribably handsome at this time of the year with various hues of purple, red, green blue and copper which could never be adequately reproduced by either painting or photography. A count of 75 Horned Grebe probably owes more to the good visibility conditions than a bona fide flight but will probably be my high for the year.

No sign of yesterday's rare birds, the Barn Owl and Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

## **2 April**

Today was not as interesting as my last two visits, perhaps because the cool westerly breeze was a bit too much. I recorded a respectable 55 species but I had to work very hard for them and there seemed far fewer birds than during my last outing. The only observations of interest were a fine and tame adult Snow Goose foraging with the locals and new for the year, and a nice count (55) of Red-throated Loons. This was the third consecutive visit that I recorded Bonaparte's Gull. In each case, the birds were part of a considerable flock of gulls, mostly Ring-billed, that were sitting far out on the Sound and occasionally rising and flying about. Presumably, the congregation signaled the presence of a school of fish. Black-headed Gull is now a fairly regular visitor to Connecticut shores, appearing amongst flocks of "Bonies". So far, I haven't found any but I think the species can probably be recorded from the park.

## **5 April**

This morning was colder than almost every day of the past winter and there was quite a brisk northerly breeze. Not exactly a promising scenario, but I don't like to miss too many consecutive days during the migration season especially since I will be away in late April visiting the Bahamas. Because of the cold, I shortened my itinerary this morning by omitting the eastern half of the park. None-the-less, I did find 46 species including two new ones, a Towhee and a fine male Kestrel. I first heard the Towhee at a fair distance and actually succeeded in attracting it to within a few feet by "pshing". The only species for which this has ever worked for me in the past is the Song Sparrow and I haven't seen it work for anyone else either so I was very pleasantly surprised when this male bird came to me and responded to each "psh" with his own call. The experience made me feel like much more of an expert birder than I really am! The way I always feel when I locate a Woodcock in Woodcock Woods which has not happened this spring.

Today, I saw the second, presumably female, Osprey for the first time this spring. The happy couple were both atop the nesting platform.

## **9 April**

This morning was the first warm one since my last visit. There was a brisk but pleasant southerly breeze and I suspected, correctly for once, that there would be some birds around.

Amongst the 57 species were five new ones for the year. A Laughing Gull was my earliest park record by a month, yet is not unusually early for the region as a whole. A

Rough-winged Swallow was a bit early as was a Chipping Sparrow. But eight Golden-crowned Kinglets and two Phoebes were hardly unexpected.

The Laughing Gull was one of five Larids, a nice number for the park. It was in full alternate plumage although the Bonaparte's was still in basic plumage. The two Common Loons and all the Horned Grebes were in alternate plumage whereas the Red-throated Loons retained winter attire.

I frightened two deer in Woodcock Woods. Since the brush was removed from most of the park, deer have become much less obvious.

### **11 April**

The wind was not noticeable when I left home this morning. However, there was virtually an easterly gale when I reached the coast and had I known how windy it would be, I would certainly not have gone. Such conditions always mitigate strongly against finding many birds although they rendered Gannet a distinct possibility. I couldn't find a Gannet, perhaps because there was a distant haze and for the rest, I was lucky to record 50 species, none of which were new for the year. A conspicuous pair of Thrashers was newly arrived and that was all.

### **12 April**

This morning was very similar to yesterday. It seemed pleasant and windless around the house, but when I arrived at the beach, it was overcast and there was a significant easterly breeze. There were even fewer birds than yesterday and, despite pursuing a complete itinerary, I only managed 48 species. However, I was lucky with the Gannet this morning. While searching the rough Sound with my binoculars from the eastern end of the park, I found a superb, aggressively white, black wing-tipped adult Gannet flapping and sailing due east within easy binocular range, indeed visible with the naked eye. On most of the relatively few occasions I have seen Gannet here, I have needed a telescope to find and identify them.

### **15 April**

A southwesterly breeze brought the front of a predicted heat wave this morning after rain last night. The day began with fog that was soon dissipated. There seemed to be more birds around than the total species list of 56 implied. There were three new species: a Bittern that I flushed from the field between the airplane field and the east marsh; six Hermit Thrushes; and a Palm Warbler. There were also good counts for Red-winged Blackbird (60) and Swamp Sparrow (10).

## 16 April

Conditions this morning were absolutely perfect. There was a gentle breeze from the southwest. The skies were clear and the heat wave accelerated with the temperature going up to about 80. Diamond-backed Terrapins were apparent for the first time this spring. Early on, I met A. J. Hand and we birded together most of the morning.

Surprisingly, there did not seem to be as many birds around as yesterday. However, there were more new species arrivals and the total of 56 species included five that were new for the year: a pair of Blue-winged Teal at the north end of the Mill Pond near the overlook; a Tree Swallow; two Barn Swallows; a Solitary Vireo; and three Pine Warblers including two males heard and seen and one seen well that corresponded to pictures of an immature female i. e. a dull brown bird above, white below, with two conspicuous white wing bars, an inconspicuous white line above the eye and just a trace of yellow on the upper breast. The bird was in the company of a male.

Also of interest: a fine adult Snow Goose.

## 17 April

The heat intensified today. Yesterday afternoon it reached 92 and the prediction for today was even higher. There wasn't a breath of wind and the Sound was as smooth as I've ever seen it. Unfortunately, there were few water birds to be seen on it. Overall, the day was quite similar to the two preceding it. I found 55 species of which the following four were new for the year: a Sharp-shinned Hawk; a House Wren at Grove Point; a Marsh Wren in the east marsh; and two Yellow-rumped Warblers.

The trees are beginning to bud and today felt like midsummer. Yet the birds were distinctly April. One might suppose that with such a heat spell, birds normally arriving in early May would make their appearance now. So far that has not been the case.

## 18 April

When I got to the park this morning, there was absolutely no wind so I went immediately to the point to see what might be on the Sound. I was not disappointed. Within easy binocular identification range were two groups of birds comprising respectively six and 14 individuals. They were all Red-necked Grebes in fine breeding plumage with even the yellow, black-tipped beaks clearly visible through the telescope. Three was my previous maximum count. According to Zeranski and Baptist, the high count for the state is 21 seen in Westport (probably Sherwood Island) on 31 December, 1955. In the event, this was an exciting birding experience.

I finished the day with a very respectable 61 species including one other, a Clapper Rail that I heard, that was new for the year. Of interest was that the two Bonaparte's Gulls

were in breeding plumage. Until now I had seen them only in basic plumage. Also of interest, I watched a Palm Warbler singing, the first time I had ever heard the song which reminds me of a weak Yellow-rumped but slightly more buzzy and unaccented.

Thanks to the hot spell and my recent intensive birding, my list for the park this year stands at 101, a most respectable figure for this date.

### **30 April**

After a week at Treasure Cay on Abaco, this morning seemed downright cold. A brisk northwest wind did not help and these weather conditions did not augur well for birding. There wasn't a large volume of birds and the species total of 56 was not impressive. However, there were quite a few interesting birds including 10 that were new for the year: an early Cattle Egret; two Willets; a Pectoral Sandpiper near the airplane field; a pair of Kingbirds; a Cedar Waxwing; three Catbirds; a Wood Thrush heard near the stone barn; Yellow Warblers heard at Grove Point and near the stone barn; a Parula heard at Grove Point; and a Prairie heard near the Martin house. Despite my absence from the park for 12 days, I am still a bit ahead of last year's number of species up to this date.

In my absence, the park suffered another episode of severe depredation. The area of dense brush just north of the easterly of the two ponds north of the west beach was cleared entirely. This was the spot where the Chat lingered last fall. It seems that Tobey, Doc's replacement as Park Superintendent, must abhor bush, even when it is nowhere near the areas occupied by summer visitors.

I ran into A. J. Hand who showed me some interesting birding areas not far from the park. These included a marshy, brushy area at the intersection of the Sherwood Island connector and Greens Farms Road where we had fine looks at a singing White-eyed Vireo and two Solitary Sandpipers (not included on my formal Sherwood Island list); Sasco Creek Road at the Sound end of which we found large numbers of gulls including Ring-billed which was absent from the park today; and Beachside Drive which passed Burying Hill Beach before intersecting with Sasco Creek Road.

### **1 May**

Today was very similar to yesterday, a bit cool with northwest winds. The birds were also quite comparable. I recorded 58 species including five that were new for the year: a fine adult Little Blue Heron in the Mill Pond. As usual, I was struck by the slight but noticeable downward curvature of the bill. Two Common Terns over the Mill Beach; a Spotted Sandpiper in the easterly section of the east marsh; a Swift overhead; and three Orchard Orioles including two singing individuals that I didn't see and a female that I did.

Precisely on schedule, two broods of Canada Geese emerged today. The chicks were not more than a day or two.

#### 4 May

Two days ago, it rained heavily most of the day. Yesterday, there were winds up to 30 MPH from the northwest. Last night the winds shifted to the southwest although it was still cool in the early morning. As might be anticipated, quite a few birds were about today. My total list was a respectable 70 species. There were no positive surprises but there were six species new for the year: a Solitary and eight Least Sandpipers; a singing Warbling Vireo; single, singing Black-and-White and a singing and seen Blue-winged Warblers; and singing Baltimore Oriole. A negative surprise was the absence of Yellowthroats. Doubtless, this is partly due to the removal of much of their brushy habitat, but enough remains to accommodate a good number. They are late!

Today's Red-throated Loon was still in basic plumage. Last year around this time, I had one in alternate plumage.

#### 5 May

Despite continued favorable weather, the migration this morning did not build on yesterday's promising results and actually abated. The species list diminished from 70 to 63 and the volume of Passerines was much reduced. I didn't find a single White-throated Sparrow compared with 25 yesterday. I did manage to record two new birds for the year: two Lesser Yellowlegs and a heard Ovenbird. However, the highlights, if one could call them that, were a well-seen Clapper Rail in the east marsh and an adult Snow Goose by itself on the far east meadow.

#### 7 May

There was a bit of a drizzle with the overcast early this morning followed by a beautiful, virtually windless mid and later morning. The birding results could be characterized by the word "dribble". There were not a great many birds around but there were 12 White-throated Sparrows implying some movement. I recorded 67 species including three new ones: three Black-bellied Plover; a Black-throated Green Warbler; and a Field Sparrow.

The tide and the Mill Pond had a paradoxical interaction today. High tide was listed for 9:00 AM. I got to the Mill Beach at 7:30 and the tide was quite high with no exposed mud flats. However, the Mill Pond was almost entirely depleted of water with extensive areas of exposed bottom. There were many egrets and yellowlegs foraging and the latter were divided fairly equally between Lesser and Greater. Of course, I've noted this paradoxical level of the Mill Pond in past years and I suppose it has something to do with the setting of the levies.

I found a juvenile (i. e. post chick phase) Killdeer at the far eastern end of the park today and was treated to an injured wing display by a concerned parent. I suspect the Killdeer have more or less finished with their parental responsibilities as there seemed to be quite a few of them, some of which may have been additional young of the year.

It's hard to know which days to come out to the park. I don't want to burn out early and miss a late May flight as I did last year. On the other hand, there is likely to be a flight within the next few days and a morning like today could be "dribble" or could presage a flight tomorrow. If everyday is like this one, I would be impelled to keep going back the next day and I would burn out by the 20<sup>th</sup>. We shall see.

Still no Least Terns or Yellowthroats!

### 8 May

Today there was a nice **wave** of migration! It was made even nicer by virtue of the still relatively sparse leaf cover that enabled me to get good looks at all the singing birds including 11 species of warbler as well as Scarlet Tanager.

When I started out at the Mill Beach at 7:20, there was a brisk northwest wind, reversing the southerly trend of the previous few days. However, as the day progressed, the wind abated, then shifted to the southeast and picked up again. In view of the initial northwest wind, I did not anticipate a good passage. Yet Grove Point contained a substantial number of migrants including six warbler species. I ended up with a total of **81 species** including eight that were new for the year: five Dowitchers on the muddy Mill Pond; a Cliff Swallow with migrating Barns and Rough-wings; a Red-eyed Vireo; three Chestnut-sided, six Magnolia and a Wilson's Warbler; eight Yellowthroats (very late first appearance); two Scarlet Tanagers.

The Mill Pond was paradoxically muddy at high tide again, and again there were large numbers of Lesser Yellowlegs and Snowy Egrets.

### 10 May

Yesterday was chilly with strong northeast winds and intermittent rain. A westerly wind blew the rains away last night and today was pleasant and warm with an intermittently gusty breeze from the west north west. The results are difficult to characterize. I had 66 species, an unimpressive number, yet there were eight warbler species. I found three birds that were new for the year: two Least Terns and single examples of Black-throated Blue Warbler and Redstart that I heard. Today many songs had an odd ventriloquist quality and making it difficult to find the songster. Today could have been a dribble, the end of the wave of two days ago, or the beginning of a new one. The correct description amongst these possibilities should emerge tomorrow.

I saw two baby Killdeer at the east end today and got a touching wound display from both parents, or at least from two adults.

### 11 May

Dribble! I had 66 species again with four new ones including single examples of Semipalmated Plover, Turnstone, Hummingbird and Pewee. There was an immature Snow Goose and I found three baby Killdeer at a different place in the eastern section of the park and unattended by adults. Although today was clear, there was a significant northwest breeze. The weather prediction calls for chilly and rainy conditions over the next two days so only a late wave can redeem this may. It has been since 1996 that I have had more than one day with over 80 species. In 1995, I had six!

The Mill Pond continues to pose a paradox. When I arrived at the Mill Beach, it was just an hour past dead low tide, yet the Mill Pond had almost no exposed bottom as opposed to the past few days.

### 14 May

After two days of heavy rain and easterly winds, this morning was cool and dry, mostly overcast with occasional periods of sun. The wind was from the northwest and not strong although predicted to become so later today. **There was a significant migratory wave** to which I could not devote as much attention as usual because of a dental appointment with the likelihood of more to come in the very near future. I was only out for two and one-half hours, omitted the entire eastern section of the park, but managed to record 79 species including 12 warblers. I would certainly have approached 90 had I spent the usual 4-5 hours that I devote to a promising morning. Only two new species, however. A Veery that I observed well and a Nashville Warbler that I heard. I suspect there may be at least one more good day ahead and I hope it's not marred by my dental problem which should be identified today.

### 16 May

My dental problem required root canal the first step of which I had yesterday. I doubt I missed many birds because there was a northwest wind of 30-40 mph. I did get out to the park for a 5:00 PM meeting of the Sherwood Island Friends and there were virtually no birds to be seen or heard above the howling winds.

Overnight, the winds diminished and they were calm when I started out this morning at 7:00 AM at the Mill Beach. Later there was a rather brisk breeze from the southwest. Thus, the conditions were really quite perfect for a good flight. The results could be characterized as either a weak wave or a strong dribble. I recorded 80 species including 11 warblers. Five species were new for the year: Willow Flycatcher heard at the favored

east end locality; Crested Flycatcher seen at Grove Point; Northern Waterthrush heard at Grove Point; Blackburnian Warbler heard in the West Woods and irritatingly elusive at the top of high oaks; and two White-crowned Sparrows in the center of the park. The Bonaparte's Gulls that I saw today and the last time out were all on the Mill Beach mud flats and were in basic plumage which surprised me. I've already seen some in alternate plumage this spring.

There must have been a school of small fish at the Mill Beach flats at low tide. I walked out on the flats and watched a substantial number (75) of Common Terns plunging constantly into the shallow waters around me. Quite a nice spectacle!

The weather prediction is for gathering clouds tonight and tomorrow morning before rain and a cold front tomorrow night. Sound as though there may be some birds pushed down tomorrow morning and it may be pretty good. Always the optimist!

### **17 May**

It rained overnight and was overcast this morning but gradually became clear with an increasing wind from the southwest. It was definitely a "dribble". I found 76 species yet the bird life did not seem very active. The tide was ideal with dead low at 10:00 AM so that I could examine the Mill Beach mud flats not only when I arrived at the Mill Beach at 7:00 but also from the west end of the park at 10:00. I recorded five species new for the year:

A Green Heron in the far east marsh; three Dunlin on the Mill Beach mud flats; a Bank Swallow over the airplane field; a Canada Warbler seen and heard in the West Woods; and a Tennessee Warbler heard at Grove Point. I've now recorded 154 species this year, one more than I finished with last spring. But there has been neither a spectacular day nor a spectacular bird this May. Sometimes unexpected birds pop up in late May but I'm quite certain any chance for a spectacular number of species has passed.

### **20 May**

There was a full-blown northeaster with torrential rain on May 18<sup>th</sup>. I paid a brief visit to the park to see whether it was loaded with shore birds and it wasn't despite massive amounts of standing water. The 19<sup>th</sup>, yesterday, was marked by clearing with cold, very strong northwest winds. This morning was also cool with northwest winds but more moderate than yesterday. It was yet another "dribble" migration day. I recorded 71 species including 10 warblers. Two, a Red-breasted Nuthatch near the stone barn, and a female Bobolink flying over the airplane field, were new for the year. I am always surprised to realize yet again, that the nuthatch can be a May migrant, the more so this year since the bird was absent during the fall and winter. An adult Snow Goose amongst the Canada Geese seemed rather late. I flushed sparrows from the east and west salt marshes respectively that may have been Sharp-tailed or Seaside but I couldn't get a

decent look at either. It is odd that my only record for the former this spring was in March! Where is the local breeding population?

## 22 May

This morning was a red letter day because I recorded a bird that was new for my Sherwood Island list. I had run into A. J. Hand in the middle of the morning and we were just finishing up the day and walking to our vehicles in the Pavilion parking lot. As we passed through the nearby picnicking area with the exotic shade trees and tables, A. J. said "what's that funny little goose?". Amongst the numerous Canada Geese was a White-fronted Goose, the Greenland race with the orange bill and feet. It seemed scarcely larger than a Mallard and was half the size of a particularly large neighboring Canada Goose. It was about two-thirds the size of the average Canada Goose and seemed somewhat smaller than the two Snow Geese, adult and immature, that were present at another site in the park. The white forehead did not extend particularly high and there was no yellow eyering (characteristics of Eurasia's Lesser White-fronted which has a pink bill). The bird was reasonably tame and A. J. had his most sophisticated camera equipment so excellent pictures were obtained. How remarkable to find two Snow Geese and a White-fronted Goose on 22 May.

Other than that the day was good but not exceptional. 72 Species including two others that were new for the year, a Semipalmated Sandpiper on the Mill Beach amongst a group of Leasts, and a Yellow-throated Vireo heard in Woodcock Woods and frustratingly elusive to the eyes. I saw a newly fledged Killdeer in the wet area between the East Beach and the East Parking lot and I saw four adolescent Killdeer from a family raised a bit further east in the park that I had previously recorded. There have been at least two and possibly three pairs of Killdeer that have raised young in the park this year.

Interesting sight: a Great Egret trying to swallow a medium sized rodent, probably a rat that it had speared on the meadow behind the east bathhouse.

## 23 May

Today was very similar to yesterday save it was a bit warmer and I did not see the White-fronted Goose. The adult Snow Goose was still conspicuously present but not the immature. I had 68 species including three Swainson's Thrushes which represented a new species. Seven species of warblers included good numbers of Redstarts (10), Magnolias (8) and Wilson's (4).

I recognized for the first time today how common squirrels are in the park or perhaps they are increasing. In any event, I counted 40 in a loose agglomeration just north of the pavilion parking lot and I must have seen around 100 during the morning. If this represents a bona fide increase, it may be due to the cutting of thick brush which is a habitat they do not seem to like.

I haven't seen or heard any Willets the last two visits. This may mean they are quieting down because nesting is underway or it may mean they have deserted the park.

Least Terns seem very much decreased this year.

### **24 May**

This morning was much like the previous two save that the warming trend continued and the breeze shifted slightly from westerly to south westerly. I found 68 species including two Blackpoll Warblers, the sole species new for the year. I did see two Willets so my fear that they may have flown the coop was not validated. They are quiet, presumably because they are well into nesting.

I ran into A. J. Hand who had been to Greenwich Point in the early morning. He found warblers abundant there amongst them Bay-breasted and Blackburnian. Here, there was a great deal of noise from mowing for the Memorial day weekend which begins tomorrow so it was difficult to hear warbler songs. There were plenty of Redstarts and Magnolias but I couldn't find any Bay-breasted although I tried hard. A problem for finding warblers in the park is that the trees are all rather large so one lacks the opportunity to see the birds within easy visible range. A. J. commented to me on how easy it was to see warblers at Greenwich Point because they frequented low cherry trees and the like.

### **29 May**

Memorial day weekend did not seem very birdy around our house so I doubt I missed much in the park. This morning started out with a slight fog that dissipated very quickly. I recorded 62 species including a fine Olive-sided Flycatcher that frequented the top branches of a couple of dead trees that the present park administration forgot to cut down in the central evergreen area. I was surprised to see this species because the two dead trees it used to favor in the center of the park about 50 yards north of where it was today, were cut down this past year.

Also of interest was a flock of 65 Brant on the flats off the Mill Beach when I arrived there at 7:30.

Most interesting, however, was a gull on these flats. I had excellent looks at it through the telescope at about 40 yards both standing and flying. The bird had the size, configuration and appearance of a beautiful adult Herring Gull in full breeding plumage. It was the size of a Herring Gull and had the pearly gray back with black-tipped primaries and a few white mirror spots. In flight, the trailing edge of the wing was white. The legs were fleshy pink. The bill was bright yellow with a pronounced red spot at the gonyx and an ivory mandible distal to the red spot. There was no black on the bill. The iris was

yellow and I couldn't distinguish an eye-ring from the boundary of the eye itself. There was, however, one conspicuous and puzzling feature. The bird had a broad conspicuous subterminal black band on the tail. I say "subterminal" because I could just make out the white tip to the feathers. The bird was alone and at one point made an aggressive pass at a nearby Ring-billed Gull.

Adult Herring Gulls in full breeding plumage do not have black on the tail. Black-tailed Gulls have a dark slaty back, yellow legs and a black ring around the bill. Perhaps this bird was a variant Herring Gull or, perhaps it was a hybrid.

### 31 May

This morning was probably my last visit to the park for this spring. The weather was identical to my last outing. I didn't go to either the Mill Beach, Grove Point, or the far eastern section (i. e. east of the airplane field) of the park. The tide was low and I spent considerable time on the mud flats off the Mill Beach which I approached from the western section of the park instead of the Mill Beach itself. I found 55 species including a Black-billed Cuckoo that I heard which was a new species for the year. Also of interest was the continued presence of the White-fronted Goose and both the mature and immature Snow Goose, each of which was in a different location from the others. Worth noting is that I failed to record a single Yellowthroat this morning. I'm sure a few still breed in the park, but the number has clearly been reduced greatly by the cutting of brushy areas.

Yesterday I went to Cockenoe Island with A. J. Hand in his boat. The island has a rookery containing fairly good numbers of Black-crowned Night-Herons and both egrets. I can't estimate the numbers because we did not really penetrate the entire area of dense, rather low, mangrove-like vegetation in which they breed. There is also a colony containing perhaps 200 pairs of nesting Common Terns where we also saw four Skimmers that presumably breed there as well. We saw at least three pairs of Oystercatchers. On a clear day, this island is within good telescopic view of Sherwood Island so this morning, after the fog dissipated, I spent about 20 minutes examining it through my telescope. Had either an Oystercatcher or a Skimmer taken flight in my field of vision, I would have identified it without difficulty. It didn't happen.

In addition to Cockenoe, A. J. showed me several of the other Norwalk, Islands yesterday amongst them Goose Island which is quite barren and contains many nesting cormorants and gulls, that latter including perhaps 150 pairs of Herring Gulls and 40 pairs of Black-backed Gulls. We didn't debark at the island and I am inferring that the birds were nesting. I'm not certain that Black-backed are considered local nesters although last year there was a pair in the park with a female sitting on eggs in a very conspicuous location adjacent to the east bathhouse.

I finished the spring period with 163 species, nowhere near my 1994 record of 183 for the spring, but still considerably better than the last few years. This is because I birded more intensively this year.

### **20 August**

I hadn't been to the park for two and one-half months so I should have expected changes. First, the area of brush and saplings in the far northeastern section of the park has been completely and gratuitously denuded. Second, ground breaking has begun on the point to install a memorial for those killed in the terrorist incident of 9/11/2001. These add to the large number of recent actions which have enormously altered, and in my view, degraded the park's habitat.

There was a significant shower that supposedly yielded about one-half inch of rainfall ending just when I entered the park. I went to the park imagining that the conditions were quite good for shore birds and I limited my itinerary to the eastern and southwestern sections of the park. I didn't go to the Mill Beach, Grove Point, nor the northwestern part of the park that ordinarily contains most of the land birds. Therefore, the total of 44 species in two hours is actually quite good.

The park must have been very dry before the rain because there was no standing water and the two ponds northwest of the nature center were dry. The number of shore birds was about average for the date and included eight species, amongst them a Turnstone.

By far the most interesting bird was a Chat which I saw in the bushes adjacent to the first pond northwest of the nature center. This was the same area that I had seen one last fall and reasonably close to Grove Point where I saw one on 28 January of this year. Could this bird have summered and perhaps even bred at Sherwood Island?

I also saw two Northern Waterthrushes and was reminded anew that they are amongst the earliest warbler migrants.

### **21 August**

Today was clear with a variable, rather strong breeze that was usually from the north. I saw two exceedingly interesting birds amongst the 54 species that I recorded.

While walking east along the channel in the far east salt marsh, I noticed a dark brown duck with a light cheek swimming approximately 25 yards ahead of me. I assumed it was a Black Duck but suddenly noticed that the bill was entirely very dark or black and that there was no obvious speculum. Then the bird dove and I realized it might be a female Black Scoter. Unfortunately, I never saw it surface despite remaining in the area for 15 minutes and its true identity is a mystery.

There was no such problem concerning the identification of the second interesting bird because I studied it at my leisure at 40 feet. It was a Baird's Sandpiper foraging amongst a mixed flock of shore birds, which included Semipalmated and Least Sandpipers and Semipalmated Plovers, on the tidal detritus at the east end near the jetty. The circumstances provided a clinic for field identification. The bird was larger than the other peep and about the size of the plovers. Its most striking characteristics were the warm buffy finely streaked breast and head which contrasted sharply with the almost black and white scalloped back. This scaling of the back was very conspicuous and the causative light edgings of the feathers were easily discerned. The legs of the bird were very dark. The bird obligingly foraged with its bent head directly in front of me allowing observation of the primaries extending noticeably beyond the tail. The identification was so clear cut that I did not flush the bird in the hope that it might be more likely to remain if undisturbed. White-rumped Sandpiper was clearly ruled out by the very buffy head and breast. I have only seen Baird's Sandpiper once before in the park.

### **23 August**

After two consecutive good birding days, my luck ran out this morning. It was a warm, overcast day with northeast wind. I found a total of 47 species of which the most interesting by far was a rather early Merlin that streaked over the Mill Beach. There was also a migrating Sharp-shinned Hawk that put up a group of Yellowlegs near the Mill Bridge. The single Osprey and Red-tailed Hawk were probably resident birds.

### **25 August**

Last night there was moderate rainfall followed by a clearing northwest breeze this fine Sunday morning. Despite this promising weather, there were not a great many birds. I recorded 49 species including two Gnatcatchers which were new for the year. A congregation of ca. 150 Common Terns on the tidal rocks off the eastern extremity of Compo beach was noteworthy. The park became crowded so I left without examining the northwest section i. e. the area of the superintendent's house and the stone barn.

### **27 August**

Today was partly cloudy with a variable breeze. There was nothing to suggest that there would be a great many birds and the 53 species that I recorded was about an average total for the date. There was one extremely interesting observation, however. I watched for several minutes as an Osprey harassed an immature Bald Eagle while both were migrating southwest along the shore. It resembled, on a grand scale, the spectacle of a Crow harassing a Red-tailed Hawk. The Osprey would swoop upon the Eagle whereupon the larger bird would turn upon its attacker which would veer off at the last possible moment. The Osprey appeared small, agile and audacious, not the first adjectives of which I would usually think to describe it. Of course, I've read of Bald Eagles harassing

Ospreys and forcing them to relinquish fish which the eagle then seizes. I've never, however, heard of this contrary scenario. Later, however, I looked up Osprey in Bent's *Life Histories...* and found that a similar incident had been noted.

### **30 August**

Yesterday was a real "noreaster" with winds up to 25 MPH and about one and one-half inches of rain. I thought there might be a real shore bird fall out so I did go out to the park for about an hour and I investigated the various shore bird areas with little success. A few Black-bellied Plovers and a Lesser Yellowlegs was about it. There was considerable standing water.

The storm ended last night and this morning there was a slight drizzle and no wind. Almost all of yesterday's water had already been absorbed indicating how dry the year has been. There was a bit of a warbler migration including mostly Redstarts (12) but with five Black-and-Whites, four Yellowthroats, two Canadas, a Yellow and a Northern Waterthrush. I also saw a splendid adult Snow Goose which has apparently spent the entire summer locally since it has been sporadically reported at the park throughout the entire period. My species total was 51.

### **3 September**

There was another "noreaster" yesterday with torrential rainfall (2-3") but not terribly severe winds. Mild northwesterly winds cleared the air during the night and early morning. The park had already soaked up most of the water by the morning and there was not a great deal of standing water. There were quite a few birds and I recorded a very respectable 64 species but numbers were generally low and there were no species that were new for the year. The most interesting find was another immature Bald Eagle flying rather low along the shore line. There were a total of seven raptor species the other six being a Cooper's Hawk, two Red-Tails, a Merlin, a Kestrel, a Harrier and three Ospreys. I came across an adult Red-Tail on the ground tearing up a rabbit that it had just caught. When I examined the corpse it was intact save that the intestines had been ripped out and were lying on the adjacent ground. I suppose this is the first part of the prey that the raptor selects. During my examination of the dead animal, the hawk perched patiently rather low in a nearby tree.

### **5 September**

There was a massive thunderstorm with a full inch of rain yesterday followed by a fairly brisk northwest wind that cleared out the clouds. It seemed promising weather for a nice little flight this morning but such a flight did not materialize and the morning was disappointing. I found 53 species none of which were noteworthy.

## 7 September

This morning was windless, clear, and quite warm. It was Saturday and the park was beginning to fill by the time I left. There seemed to be some movement of birds. I found 57 species including one that was new, an Empidonax flycatcher with a conspicuous eye-ring and clear underparts that was certainly not a Willow and that I designated a Least. There were 15 Mockingbirds, more than I have ever had in the park and an early Phoebe. I didn't get to the northwestern section of the park (area around stone barn and caretaker's house).

## 9 September

The weather has been quite unchanged since my last visit. There weren't a great many birds around this morning although six Marsh Wrens and seven Yellowthroats indicated a migration of sorts. Amongst the day's 53 species, by far the most interesting was a **Sora** that I flushed from the east marsh just northwest of the model airplane flying field.

## 12 September

There was a major change in the weather yesterday and last night such that the winds shifted to the northwest and the temperature dropped by almost 20 degrees. It seemed an ideal morning for a raptor and passerine flight. There was indeed a minor flight of sorts as indicated by seven hummingbirds, eight Yellowthroats and seven raptor species amongst the total of 60. There was nothing of particular interest, however, and the raptor counts were low save for two Merlins, the first time I've ever had more than one in a day if I remember correctly. One of these made a half-hearted pass at a Killdeer.

## 13 September

This was a morning I am unlikely to forget. The weather was warm, calm and clear and at Grove Point it was obvious that a Passerine flight was occurring as evidenced by the presence of at least six Gnatcatchers. For the day I had 63 species including five species of warbler (Yellow, Parula, Magnolia, Palm and Yellowthroat) and two vireos (Warbling and Red-eyed). There was another good count (8) of hummingbirds. I flushed a Clapper Rail (they've been quite scarce this year) from the east marsh and a Cooper's Hawk that happened to be migrating overhead did a quick and dramatic u-turn, swooped to the spot whence the rail had flushed, hovered and emitted a series of shrieks. I thought surely it would go in for the kill but instead it flew quietly away, presumably because the rail had managed to find a safe hiding place.

These observations made for a pleasant morning but the experience that made the day a red letter one that I shall always remember occurred in the overgrown meadow just

northwest of the air plane flying field. I've flushed many interesting birds in this area although nothing rivaling what I saw today. As I was beating the bush from east to west at about 9:00 AM, a rotund grayish brown bird resembling a button quail in size (between House Sparrow and Starling) and conformation, (stout body, rounded wings, very short tail) flushed about 75 feet in front of me to my right, flew straight and rapidly to my left, and pitched into the grass perhaps 100 feet ahead. **It had very conspicuous white secondaries on the trailing edge of the wings and was unmistakable. A Yellow Rail!!!!** I couldn't believe my eyes and I was numb with excitement. Had I imagined it? I quietly walked to where it had settled and, miracle of miracles, it went up again, flew rapidly behind me, and again pitched into the thick grass. The white patches in the wings could not have been more obvious and were not a dream!! Not surprisingly, I failed to find it again. I do believe this may have been the most exciting field observation I have ever made. Of course, the bird is not on the Sherwood Island list and I don't know when the last one was seen in the state. The experience was apparently quite uncharacteristic as the bird is supposed to be virtually impossible to flush. However, I am not the first to comment on the rapidity of its flight. Audubon remarked "The flight of this pretty little bird is rather swift, and more protracted than that of some of our Rails.." and C. J. Maynard flushed one that "flew quite rapidly, for a rail, in a straight line for some distance...."

### 17 September

I am afraid my expectations will never again be realistic after last week's Yellow Rail. This morning should be a sobering dose of reality. After a major rainstorm yesterday and last night, the wind shifted to the northwest early this morning and cleared out the atmosphere. Very promising indeed. However, there were not a great many birds. Amongst the 53 species that I found, a high count (20) of Palm Warblers was the most interesting. I saw seven more Hummingbirds which seem especially common this year. Surprisingly, to me at least, I have yet to see an adult male this fall.

I'm a bit disappointed in the raptors so far this year but I think at least part of the explanation is the lack of clouds during the mornings I have been to the park. The very clear skies make it difficult to see distant birds. I saw 10 Ospreys this morning, not many, yet my high count so far.

### 18 September

This morning was pretty good. It was quite warm with a slight variable breeze and a few nimbus and cirrus clouds. I started out at 7:30, about two and one-half hours before high tide and the entire Mill Pond was drained with its mud exposed. I found an adult Yellow-crowned Night-Heron on this heron haven and that was my only year bird for the day. However, I did find 70 species, a very respectable total for the early fall and included were a Chat in the Allen Preserve and a Sora at the second freshwater pool behind the

Nature Center. Amongst the eight species of warblers, only Yellowthroats were in good number (15).

### 19 September

Conditions today were identical to those yesterday but there were fewer birds around. I did add one new one for the year, however, a bird I chose to call Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow because the facial coloring and the entire bird were exceedingly dully colored. The faint ochre of the face matched that of the breast. I recorded two Yellow-crowned Night-Herons in the same spot where I saw the adult yesterday. Today, there was also an immature whose dark primaries I was able to discern. I think the same bird was present yesterday but I was uncertain of its identification.

### 21 September

The weather pattern has been the same for the past several days and I suspected that there wouldn't be many birds around this morning. I was correct. The only evidence of migration was a good number (25) of Savannah Sparrows. I omitted the entire western half of the park from my itinerary this morning, in part because there seemed to be so few birds, and in part because of excessive leg fatigue which has afflicted me recently.

### 24 September

The weather pattern finally changed with the wind shifting to the north last night and this morning was quite cool. Conditions and the date seemed promising for the possibility of a major flight day. It didn't happen. The day was unremarkable save for a Virginia Rail that I flushed from the major drainage ditch just east of the east parking lot.

### 25 September

This was another day I won't soon forget. I added three birds to the list for the year, namely, a Lincoln's sparrow in the shrubbery by the first pool north of the Center, a Creeper in the Oak Woods, and a putative **Black Rail** in the main drainage ditch just east of the east parking lot. Here is the story of the latter. It was about 11:00 AM. The tide was midway from low to high. There was no wind and the sky was partly overcast. I walked the entire length of the drainage ditch starting in the east marsh and continuing south to the spot near the parking lot where it broadens out and then goes under the wooden bridge. I started back and then, perhaps 25 feet from where it broadens out, I stopped and stood quietly. I was standing in marsh grass (*Spartina*) about three feet from the sliver of open water that characterizes this part of the drainage ditch. I was looking west and I decided to try and pish out some land birds. As I did so, I heard a sound at the sliver of water three feet from where I was standing. I looked down and, to my

complete astonishment, a small rail scrambled from the western edge of the sliver of water, three feet from me, ran into the adjacent marsh and was immediately lost. It had evidently been virtually under my feet for the past several minutes. I saw it for only the briefest instant, a glimpse of a primarily black bird with some rufous. The only points I am positive I saw were a rich rufous upper back, a black lower back presumably including wing coverts, and barring on the flanks. I did not see the bill and I'm quite certain I would have had it been conspicuous since I was looking almost directly down on the back of the bird. I am accustomed to calling any small rail which exhibits rufous, a Virginia, but I immediately said to myself, "this is too small for a Virginia". I must confess, however, that the bird seemed considerably bigger than a mouse. The next moment the thought of "flufftail" flashed through my mind. Then I realized that the bird must have been a Black Rail. Of course, with such a brief glimpse and no really conspicuous diagnostic marking, I can't be absolutely certain. But I am reasonably so.

### **26 September**

This morning I went out with A. J. Hand and Frank Mantlik to see if we could locate the Black Rail. We didn't but we did flush one Sora and we did see another walking in the main drainage ditch. Both views were very brief. Interestingly, we failed to see either of them on our north-to-south canvas of the ditch yet found them both when we retraced our route in the opposite direction. We limited ourselves to the marsh and meadow around the airplane field, the main drainage ditch, and the brushy area with the two ponds behind the Nature Center. In addition to the rails, we recorded a fair number of falcons (12 Kestrels, two Merlins), an immature Bald Eagle, and a Pipit.

### **29 September**

There was a significant shift in the weather yesterday with cooler temperatures and very strong northwest winds. These abated somewhat overnight and the conditions seemed perfect for a very significant flight this morning. It didn't happen, nor did it help that the day was a Sunday crowded at the starting point with cyclists on a health-related charity. I recorded 51 species, none in the least unexpected. There was a good number (10) of Phoebes. The reason I have been omitting the northwestern section of the park comprising the area around the superintendent's house and the stone barn is because Tobey, the man who replaced Doc as superintendent, has forbidden me to go anywhere that is marked "closed to the public". Apparently, his wife or the workers who occupy the dormitory complained that they were discomfited by my "snooping around". Starting with my next visit, I shall use the term "complete itinerary" even though I am omitting this section of the former "complete itinerary".

### **30 September**

This was yet another seemingly perfect day for migration with just a trace of a northwest breeze and a very slight chill in the early morning. There did not seem to be many birds yet I had a respectable list of 61 species including three, an adult Sapsucker, a Meadowlark, and a female Indigo Bunting, that were new for the year. There was a good number, at least six, of Sharp-tailed Sparrows, I think all adult and immature examples of the Salt Marsh variety. All had strong ochre facial patterns. About half had strong and distinct chest streaking with little ochre background, the other half had strong streaking with a strong ochre background. None seemed dull with only faint ochre face markings like the individual I thought was a Nelson's earlier in the month and none was lacking chest streaking as seems to be the case in the immature Nelson's.

About 200 "real" Canada Geese migrated over the park this morning, honking at quite a high altitude.

### **1 October**

The wind shifted to southwest last night and I should not have bothered to go to the park today. The most interesting of the 51 species that I managed to find was probably a Sora that I glimpsed out of the corner of my right eye as it flushed when I entered the east marsh. A single Brant off the Mill Beach is also worth mentioning.

### **3 October**

No new weather fronts have passed through since my last visit although one is predicted for later today and was presaged by cloudiness this morning. There were at least 12 Sharp-tailed Sparrows along the edge of the east marsh and most were clear adult examples of what Sibley calls the Atlantic population of Nelson's. These are rather grayish birds that have very blurred streaking of the breast in a clearly defined ochre background with an intensity identical to that of the ochre on the face. There were also examples of the Salt Marsh species with very distinct streaking and only a poorly defined hint of ochre on the breast. The only other interesting species amongst the total of 53 was yet another Sora, in this, the year of the rail. This individual flushed from the marsh bordering the far eastern channel that separates the park from Burying Hill Beach. I've previously had Clapper Rail there but I think this is my first Sora from that location.

### **8 October**

Last night and this morning featured a northwesterly wind with the strongest cold front of this fall and I expected a sizeable flow of birds. There was, indeed, an ample volume of migrants with good numbers of Phoebes (8), Palm Warblers (15) and Savannah Sparrows

(40), however, there was nothing of special interest and the total list was only a modest 52 species.

### **9 October**

This morning was a continuation of yesterday with a higher volume of birds, particularly sparrows, and with two noteworthy species, a Bittern that I flushed from the edge of the second pond northwest of the Nature Center, and two Winter Wrens, my first examples of the year. The counts of Sparrows were impressive including 30 Songs, 20 Swamps, 40 Savannahs and 30 White Throateds as well as two Nelson's and one Saltmarsh Sharptails.

### **13 October**

The past two days have been characterized by heavy rain and moderate northeast winds. This morning, the rain abated although there were heavy clouds and some drizzle. The winds remained northeasterly. It was a Sunday and there was a charity running event in the park, the paved paths of which were filled with participants. There were plenty of migrants amongst the 52 species. Highlights included a male Baldpate; a female Pintail which actually landed in the little pond adjacent to the airplane field; a Sora by the second pond northwest of the Nature Center; three Snipe; a Winter Wren and six Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows. A cold front is expected to pass through tonight and tomorrow or the day after should bring a nice wave.

### **14 October**

The front came through last night and this morning was cool and clear with a strong northerly wind. Conditions seemed favorable for a big flight and there were a good many birds about but they were darting around and difficult to see. I expected a fine raptor morning, particularly when it started out with seven Turkey Vultures including one that actually landed on the east parking lot. But that and two Lincoln's Sparrows were the highlights among the 50 species that I found on this rather disappointing day. There is a frost warning for tomorrow morning because the wind will abate before this evening. I really wanted a Peregrine today. Perhaps I'll get it tomorrow.

### **15 October**

The temperature was under 40, the sky was mostly clear with a few nimbus clouds, and there was a gentle northwest breeze this morning. Perfect conditions! Small land birds were flitting through the trees in good numbers but it was difficult to see them well and the percentage of unidentified birds was probably higher today than it has been all year. Among the 49 species for the day, Yellow-billed Cuckoo was by far the most interesting.

I had possibly the best look I've ever had at this species as it worked its way around the low bushes amongst the dunes adjacent to the west bathhouse.

### **17 October**

A substantial "noreaster" blew through yesterday with considerable wind and rainfall. Last night the wind shifted to the northwest and this morning was clear and a bit cool with a slight northwesterly breeze. Perfect! There were some birds around. Amongst the 57 species that I recorded were at least two and possibly three Clapper Rails that I saw including one foraging at 15 feet; a flock of 75 nondescript shore birds, probably Dunlins; a single lingering great Egret; 12 Tree Swallows; two Marsh Wrens; a lingering Yellowthroat; four Nelson's Sharp-tailed and a Field Sparrow. Nothing new or particularly noteworthy but a pleasant day with plenty of birds.

### **18 October**

A minor front pushed through last night with some rain. This morning was again clear save for a few cumulus clouds. The temperature was moderate and there was a pleasant northwest breeze. Perfect again! And again there was an excellent volume of Passerine migrants including Chickadees, Kinglets, Palm and Yellow-rumped Warblers and Sparrows. The species total (59) was respectable, however, there was nothing unexpected and none of the scarce October birds (Peregrine, Orange-crowned Warbler, Evening Grosbeak, Siskin, Longspur, to name a few) for which I've been hoping. I ran into A. J. Hand who had just seen a Bittern at the same place (second pond northwest of the Nature Center) I saw one on 9 October and a Sora near the airplane field.

### **20 October**

Another small pushed through last night with some rain and this morning again presented ideal weather conditions. Unfortunately, it was a Sunday with some sort of special event and by the time decided to leave at close to ten, the park was enormously crowded. I left without investigating the western half of the park. As has been the case almost every day recently, there was clearly a good flight of Passerine birds, particularly sparrows. I barely spent two hours so the total list of 41 species is not meaningful. Although there were noteworthy numbers of Song and White-throated Sparrows (35 of each), I didn't see anything of particular interest.

### **22 October**

The first frost of the year was present on this beautiful fall morning. There was a good volume of migrants, particularly Ruby-crowned Kinglets (35) and sparrows of which I

saw seven species. There were no new arrivals amongst the 49 species that I recorded. This is the first day I can remember when I failed to record Mourning Dove.

### **24 October**

This morning was the coldest of this fall with the temperature at, or just below freezing. The icy north wind and the widespread frost went right through my Wellington boots and two pairs of socks and I regretted not taking gloves. Yet the park was beautiful, the leaves gloriously colored and mostly still attached. The volume was a bit down from previous visits, mainly due to a decrease in White-throated Sparrows. I still found 53 species including 200 Red-winged Blackbirds flying south, two Winter Wrens, three White-crowned Sparrows and one Sharp-tail in the location where the Nelson's Sharp-tails had been found on my last several visits. A Spotted Sandpiper in the east marsh seemed rather late.

### **27 October**

Yesterday there was continuous rainfall with southeasterly winds until late afternoon when the wind shifted to the northwest clearing out the overcast and leading into another seemingly perfect fall morning. It was considerably warmer than during my last visit and standard time returned last night so I actually started later than I had been although this was not reflected in clock time. There were plenty of birds including two Bluebirds that I heard flying over, a new species for the year. Also of interest among the 55 species was a Bittern at the first pond near the Nature Center near where I saw one on October 9<sup>th</sup>. Apparently it is the same bird because A. J. Hand has seen one at one or the other pond on several occasions since I told him about the one I saw. The trick in seeing this individual is to be the first person near the appropriate pond because after being spooked early in the morning the bird does not return during the day. Other observations worth noting included four Brant in the Mill Pond, an unusual location for them; six Hooded Mergansers, the first of the fall; a cock pheasant that walked within 15 feet of me in the same general location I saw it the other day; three Great Egrets; and single examples of lingering Marsh Wren, Thrasher, and Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. A pleasant, if unspectacular day!

### **29 October**

This morning was clear with a forceful and chilly north/northeast wind. Once again, I recorded 55 species with large volumes of Song and White-throated Sparrows (ca. 50 of each) but with diminished numbers of other Passerine migrants. A female Wood Duck, amongst the Black Ducks in the east marsh, was a new species for the year. Other birds of interest were a lingering Great Egret; two cock and two hen Pheasants in the shrubbery on the edge of the east marsh; a Pectoral Sandpiper; and a lingering Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

## 31 October

This was a splendid morning in every respect. The weather was perfect, clear, cool, and with a gentle northerly breeze. The birds were great too, all 57 species, a very respectable total for the date. One was new for the year, a lingering Broad-winged Hawk. Other lingering species included single examples of Spotted Sandpiper and Thrasher. The Cormorants have finally left save for a small remnant. I didn't see any egrets but I did flush the Bittern again, this time from the dry phragmites just north of the first pond near the Nature Center. I suspect this is the same individual that A. J. and I have seen off and on since 9 October. There were still two Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrows as well as three immature White-crowns. Five Bufflehead were the first of the fall. But the most memorable sighting was that of **16 Gannets** far out in the Sound yet still within binocular range. This is by far the most I've ever seen from the park.

## 2 November

Another front passed through last night and it was cold this morning with a bone-chilling northwest wind. None-the-less, there were still plenty of interesting species although the volume, particularly of sparrows, had diminished. The bird of the day was a first-year Goshawk that I first saw perched and at remarkably close range just north of the Nature Center. Later, I met A. J. Hand and we chased the bird around in the hopes of getting him a good photograph but, at least while we were together, it failed to provide the type of close-up that I had gotten earlier. Other interesting birds amongst the highly respectable 57 species included: good numbers of ducks including 15 Baldpate, 25 Buffleheads and six Red-breasted Mergansers, the first of the season; the Bittern, again flushed from the second pond just as on 9 October; two Winter Wrens and two Marsh Wrens; a Palm Warbler; an immature White-crowned Sparrow and a Nelson's Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

I caught a glimpse of a large animal, probably a Coyote, in the dense brush bordering the east marsh just northwest of the model airplane field. I haven't seen any Coyotes in the park for the past three years or so and this was an odd spot for one. However, I did see it well enough to be quite certain that it was either a Coyote or a Fox, probably the former.

## 5 November

A front passed through with rain last night and was cleared by a rather mild northwest wind that made for perfect conditions this morning. I birded with Chris Bosak, a reporter for the Norwalk Hour. We found 53 species, none particularly remarkable. We ran into A. J. Hand who had just finished photographing the Bittern which we were unable to locate.

## **9 November**

There has been a warming trend for the past two days with strong southwesterly winds yesterday and a moderate southwest breeze today. I spent considerable time with a very confusing marsh sparrow in the east marsh at the spot where I had heretofore seen Nelson's Sharp-tails on several occasions. I got a very good look at this bird which was overall dull and dingy. It had a single rather strong yellow spot just above the eye and virtually no other yellow, buff or ochre on the face. There was a fairly discrete buffy band on the breast which was quite clearly streaked. I finally concluded that the bird was a juvenile Seaside Sparrow but I could be wrong. In addition to that bird, I also added Sanderling to the list for the year. The day's total was a respectable 54 species but I felt as though I were working very hard to get them and the volume of birds seemed somewhat diminished. For example, most, but not all of the Cormorants have departed. I had only two.

## **12 November**

This morning was warm and overcast with a drizzle that eventually became a quite heavy rain leading me to omit the entire western half of the park. Supposedly, this weather is a prelude to a modest northeaster which may persist for the next day or two. There was no wind at all this morning, however. My list for the shortened itinerary was 44. These included a fine view of a perched female Merlin, a late Spotted Sandpiper, and the first Tree Sparrows of the fall. Many Goldfinches were flying over (75) as were 25 Horned Larks.

## **14 November**

After a mild, but rainy "noreaster" yesterday, this morning was perfect, clear with seasonable temperature and a mild northwest breeze. I found 49 species, one of which, a Purple Finch that I heard flying, being a new species for the year. Other birds of some interest included good numbers of Hooded Mergansers (35), Snipe (3), and Red-winged Blackbird (900).

## **19 November**

Two days ago there was a significant "noreaster" with much rain and wind. Yesterday was clear with fierce winds from the northwest. These were major exfoliative events and this morning the trees in the park were largely denuded. It was overcast with a low sky favorable for seeing flying birds and a gentle northwesterly flow. I had a feeling I might find some unusual nonpasserine birds. I was wrong but the day did prove quite productive, mainly because of a large number of passerine species. The day's total list of 57 species was by far the highest I have ever recorded this late in the year. I saw two Fox

Sparrows, new for the year. Other interesting birds were late single examples of Phoebe and Catbird. Other than these, nothing else was unexpected save for the high total.

### **20 November**

After a bit of rain last night, this morning was clear and warm with a southwesterly breeze. The birds were much the same as yesterday. Again I had a relatively high total of species (54) without anything particularly rare or remarkable. A Phoebe and Catbird were in the same spot in the far eastern section as yesterday and a second Catbird was in Woodcock Woods. There was a female Pintail in the west marsh and a Merlin streaked over the west parking lot. Still no Horned Grebe, Canvasback, Goldeneye, so winter is not yet here.

### **25 November**

I have been sidelined during the last four days because of an infected toenail. Two days ago, a day characterized by a very heavy northwest wind, was apparently ornithologically remarkable. Cave Swallows were reported from several localities along the Connecticut coast as were large numbers of Gannets. There was a report of Cave Swallows, an unidentified Jaeger, White-winged and Common Scoters and several Lapland Longspurs at Sherwood Island. AJ was in the park that day and felt it was much too windy to see anything and he is rather skeptical. This morning was warm and beautiful and I happened to run into AJ just as I was starting so we birded together the whole morning. It was a good morning but we failed to see any of the rarities that had been reported the other day. My list was 54 species including one, Vesper Sparrow, that was new for the year. Six Horned Grebes and three Gadwall were the first of the fall. A fine adult Snow Goose and a flock of 35 Brant on the Mill Beach mudflats were noteworthy as was a single Gannet about three quarters of the way to Long Island.

### **26 November**

I went out to the park today in the hope of seeing some Cave Swallows which, even yesterday, were still being seen at Lighthouse Point in New Haven. No luck and, since snow is expected tonight, I suspect I have had my last chance. The morning was not without interest. I added one new species, a Lesser Scaup, to the year list. I'm never really certain when I try to distinguish the Scaups. This bird was swimming with Red-breasted Mergansers and Buffleheads in the Mill Pond and was not much bigger than the latter, so my identification was based on size. It did flap once and I did see the white wing stripe but it didn't really help me decide. Sometimes, the head shape did seem a bit like that of the Ring-necked but sometimes it didn't and, in the final analysis, size seemed the most useful point for this particular bird with the fortunate circumstance of nearby Buffleheads. This brings my year list to 190 species for the park, very respectable and my best total since 1996.

Other noteworthy birds amongst today's 51 species included three Gannets, 10 Bonaparte's Gulls and a Thrasher in the small patch of dense shrubbery that survived the uprooting of the far eastern section of the park. Yesterday's Vesper Sparrow, of which AJ Hand got a wonderful photograph, was gone.

### 6 December

Yesterday was a virtual blizzard with low temperature and six inches of snow. The park was plowed only on the main road this morning and my visit lasted for just one hour and comprised only the Mill Beach, Grove Point, and the Pavilion Point. Grove Point was very active and I found a Fox Sparrow and a Yellow-breasted Chat there. The Chat looked great against the snow. Thirty Goldeneye were the first of the season.

### 13 December

Cold weather has persisted since my last visit. However, the temperature has usually been above freezing during the day and heavy rains have removed the accumulated snow from 5 December. This morning was overcast with a feeling of rain or snow to come and a slight breeze from the northeast. The Christmas Count is in two days and I went out this morning to canvas the area. I couldn't get out until 8:45. The day was quite birdy and I accumulated 50 species. Two were new for the year: two first winter White-winged Scoters were diving just off Burying Hill beach and a **male Redhead** was in with a flock of 80 Baldpates, two Gadwall, and 80 Black Ducks in the center of the Mill Pond. This flock could not be seen from the Mill Bridge and I had to go into the east marsh to be able to examine it. Redhead is rare bird in the park. I remember one spring where there were one to two males for about two weeks but today's example is my only other sighting for the park. I also saw a very distant flock of scoters that did not appear to be white-winged.

Another interesting bird of the day was a Thrasher north of the first pond behind the Nature Center. This is the same area where A. J. Hand and I have been seeing a Yellow-breasted Chat intermittently for more than a year.

Finally, the most potentially interesting bird which I failed to identify was one I saw as I was walking from the Pavilion parking lot to the point while carrying my extended telescope. When I first saw it flying over the Sound it was within binocular identification range but I had difficulty getting to my binoculars because of the encumbering telescope. I noticed the peculiar stiff bow-winged flight of the bird which reminded me of a Spotted Sandpiper with which its size, but not the date, was consistent. When I finally got onto it with my binoculars it was much too distant but the flight was extraordinary. It was skimming the surface and I was reminded of a petrel or swallow. I have the definite impression that I missed a good one here.

My park list for the year now stands at 192 which is by far the best since 1996.

### 15 December

Today was the Christmas Count and I was responsible for the Sherwood Island section. I was joined by Fred Purnell and A. J. Hand who started early in the park while Fred and I started at the Mill Beach and then investigated Grove Point before entering the park and joining A. J. I tallied 51 species including **the Redhead**. There were also five Canvasbacks. We flushed a Great-horned Owl from the grove of large Cedars. I didn't see the bird well other than to note its large size and owl-like flight but Fred apparently had quite a good look. There was a pellet and some whitewash underneath one of the large cedars in the area from which we flushed it. It flew into a tall white pine whence we flushed it a second time, but again I had only a glimpse. This was my 193<sup>rd</sup> species for the park this year.

Fred had a brief glimpse of a rail, probably a Virginia, in the marsh at Grove Point and A. J. had an excellent look at a tame male Japanese Green Pheasant with two female pheasants north of the Nature Center where I saw the Thrasher the other day. When the three of us went back there to look for the Pheasants as well as the Chat and Thrasher which we had seen there at various times, we saw only the two females which I entered on the list as Ring-necked although they could certainly also have been Green Pheasants since the females of the two species are indistinguishable.

We would certainly have had a higher list save for the brisk northwest wind which made it difficult to examine the sound and also probably kept the land birds quiet.

### 18 December

Yesterday, Stacy Shaw, a ranger in the park, telephoned A. J. to tell him she had seen one or two White-fronted Geese amongst the Canadas in the park. A. J. was going to validate her sighting this morning and I, too, decided to go and see the bird(s) myself. Before I began my usual rounds, however, I stopped at Compo Beach because I had heard that there were single examples of Iceland Gull and Purple Sandpiper there, both of which I had not recorded from the state of Connecticut. The Iceland Gull, a first-year bird, was tame and easy to find at the edge of the high tide line just beneath the cannon. I approached within about 25 feet of the bird. I got excited when I saw a medium-sized sandpiper at the end of the jetty. The light was bad and I had to clamber along the entire jetty before finally getting a fine look at a Dunlin that disappointed. I couldn't find a Purple Sandpiper. Six Brant were adjacent to the end of the jetty. These three species, Brant, Dunlin, an Iceland Gull, were not seen during the standard part of the itinerary and are not included on the list for Sherwood Island, either today's, or, in the case of the Iceland Gull, my own Sherwood Island life list.

I ran into A. J. just as I was starting my standard itinerary at the Mill Pond. He told me he had seen a White-fronted Goose and an Orange-crowned Warbler in the park. After we found the male Redhead just off Allen's Clam House and drew a blank at Grove Point we went to the park together and looked for the warbler and goose. We found a White-fronted Goose immediately in the central oval. It was a huge bird, the size of a large Canada Goose, with orange legs and a pinkish bill. There was a large white patch on the forehead as well as considerable white and black markings on the head and neck including a substantial white area around the eye.

AJ had seen the warbler near the bridge over the main drainage ditch and in one of the ditches in the parking lot but we failed to find it despite searching the land bird areas all the way to the eastern end of the park.

We then drove to the Nature Center and looked for the cock Japanese Green Pheasant AJ had first seen on 14 December. We found it together with a cock Ring-necked Pheasant and an unidentified female. The putative Green Pheasant had a fine iridescent blue maroon color from its head all the way down to its belly on the undersurface and to its mid back on the upper surface. It also had peafowl like spangles on its scapulars and was altogether a much more spectacular looking bird than those I have seen illustrated. I can't help but wonder whether there might not be some Indian Peafowl in its background. One of the park personnel told AJ that it had been released a few days previously.

We next examined a large group of Canada Geese near the Pavilion parking lot and found a second, and more conventional looking White-fronted Goose. This one was also huge, the size of the largest Canada Goose. It had the convention white forehead, fleshy orange feet, and a bill that could be construed as fleshy orange or pink. Both of these geese looked completely different from the tiny example of the Greenland race that we saw this past spring which had a bright orange bill and bright orange feet. If I had to guess, I would consider the second of today's birds, the one near the parking lot, as the Tule Goose, i. e. the subspecies gambeli or Taiga. The first bird, the one we saw on the central oval, may be a hybrid. AJ will be sending photographs of these to various members of the birding community and it will be interesting to learn what consensus emerges.

## 24 December

There was a rather brisk northwest breeze this morning and I shortened my itinerary to include the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park only. I recorded 42 species including the large White-fronted Goose that I considered gambeli, the Redhead, and the group of four pheasants including single male Ring-necked and Green as well as a light and a dark female (or immature male) of indeterminate species. Since these were present last time I was out, they did not surprise me. The only mild surprise was a Grackle at Grove Point.