

Sherwood Island Diary

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5 January

This afternoon was warm with all water open and no snow on the ground. Several rare species (White-fronted Goose, Black Vulture, Razorbill) had been reported from the park recently in addition to the White-winged Crossbill and I made a special effort to see one or more of these. I was not successful, however, the day was still pretty good. I found 46 species including a young Peregrine Falcon sitting in a cottonwood tree, a Pipit, two Red-winged Blackbirds and a male Towhee.

9 January

I was lured out today by a temperature approaching 50°, but when I got to the beach I found that a very gusty wind from the west southwest made it uncomfortable and impossible to see anything on the turbulent Sound. Therefore, I limited my itinerary to the Mill Beach and Pond and Grove Point as well as a quick drive into and out of the park. I was out for only an hour and would not even have entered the 26 species that I recorded save that they included a male and two female Canvasbacks, the first I have found this winter.

30 January

I've been in Brazil for eight days. On the day that I left, 15 January, there was a brief, but violent blizzard and it seems to have knocked down quite a substantial number of evergreen trees in the park. Moreover, Tobey has apparently started to surface the road through Woodcock Woods which will probably ruin that last unspoiled segment of the park.

When I left the house today, there was bright sunshine and no wind. Moreover, the temperature was more than 50, continuing the unusually warm January which the northeast has experienced this year. However, by the time I got to the Mill Beach, a cold fog and strong east wind had arrived. I persevered for almost two hours but failed to find the White-winged Crossbill which is still reported to be in the park. In fact, I recorded only 32 species, the most noteworthy being a flock of 20 Tree Sparrows. I don't recall ever having seen them in such a large group. Single examples of Killdeer and Kingfisher were new for the year.

11 March

The weather is finally turning spring-like and this morning was delightful, a moderate northwest breeze notwithstanding. I covered only the Mill Pond, Grove Point and the eastern half of the park because I carried my telescope and tired myself after completing a circle around the eastern section. Despite this truncated itinerary, I found 43 species including six that were new for the year here: a drake Eurasian Wigeon off the Mill Bridge; a drake Pintail and 20 Green-winged Teal from the entry overpass; a Snipe in the central drainage ditch; a Fish Crow; and at least 10 Cowbirds amongst a flock of Starlings.

30 March

This morning was the first that seemed almost spring-like with a rapidly rising temperature and the gentlest of a westerly breeze. Because I'm not coming to the park as regularly as in the past, I am invariably aghast at the changes Tobey has wrought in the longish interlude since my last visit. Many favored trees and virtually all the underbrush has disappeared.

Nevertheless, and despite omitting the entire eastern section of the park, I still found 44 species of which six had not been on the year's list. One of these, Grackle, I'm quite certain I saw on March 11th but forgot to enter. The others were bona fide new arrivals. They were single examples of Great Egret, Snowy Egret, Osprey and Oystercatcher as well as three Greater Yellowlegs.

7 August

I discontinued my visits during the spring and concentrated on the Prudential (Dolce) Property near my house because I had become so depressed by Tobey's destruction of most of my favorite parts of the park. Later in the spring, Tobey was assigned to another Connecticut State Park and a new Superintendent was named for Sherwood Island. Apparently, it was someone who had been working at the park for some time, but I am not certain. In the event, this morning, at high tide (10:15), I went to the Mill Bridge looking for shore birds and afterwards I wandered into the park to see whether there was any improvement or just further destruction. I was moderately pleased. There was regeneration of the tall phragmites that formerly shielded the east marsh from the adjacent meadow and this will probably mean that the spot remains a good one for migrating rails. Moreover, there is healthy overgrowth of the most westerly path, that between the maintenance facility and the observation deck. Tobey seemed on the verge of turning this into a highway! The "Woodcock Woods" area will probably thus be spared. On the other hand, the overgrown meadow where I flushed the Yellow Rail a few years ago remains carefully mowed so that experience will certainly not be repeated. However, this extends the open meadow area of the model airplane field and may make it

more hospitable for Upland, Buff-breasted and Baird's Sandpipers and it should be especially appealing to shore birds after heavy rains.

This morning, I found 10 species of shore birds comprising 172 individuals. Off the Mill Bridge were five Black-bellied Plover, five Semipalmated Plover, 15 Greater Yellowlegs, five Lesser Yellowlegs, three Short-billed Dowitchers, three Willets and 125 Semipalmated Sandpipers. In the park were five Killdeer, three Spotted Sandpipers and four Least Sandpipers.

I also saw an immature Salt Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow as I was examining the island off the Mill Bridge with my telescope. I had never seen one there before. I saw two more in the east marsh adjacent to the airplane field.

9 August

Today I went only to the Mill Bridge. The high tide was at 11:40 and the sand bar of the island became almost submerged as I watched. I saw six species of shorebirds comprising 176 individuals (Semipalmated Plover, 15; Greater Yellowlegs 30; Lesser Yellowlegs, 2; Willet, 1; Short-billed Dowitcher, 3; Least Sandpiper, 125.) Also of interest were three Forster's Terns, two in first winter plumage, the other an adult in alternate plumage.