

Sherwood Island Diary

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1995

January 9

The first day at Sherwood Island in the calendar year is always fun because every species is new for the year. Conditions were pleasant this morning. The sky was clear, the temperature and winds were moderate, and the Sound was not particularly rough. Almost all of the Mill Pond was frozen but the few open spots and the edges did hold some ducks. It hasn't snowed yet this winter so walking was easy. The birds of the day were ordinary. The most interesting of the 38 species were a superb male Harrier over the east marsh and a pair of Pintail amongst a flock of Mallards on the edge of the pond.

January 13

If this was a typical day, then I've become an ardent advocate of winter! The temperature was in the fifties, there was no wind at all, and the Sound was as smooth as glass. It wasn't quite perfect because there was considerable fog, but anything that could be seen, could be identified. And the closest birds, as I stood at the eastern extremity, were a pair of Barrow's Goldeneye diving about at the end of the breakwater. I'll never have a better look. The male was easily distinguished, not only by the facial crescent behind the bill and the discrete spots on the scapulars, but most conspicuously by the black mark separating the white sides and breast. The female with it was a bit more problematic but had an exceptionally dark head said to be characteristic of the species. I think that Barrow's Goldeneye probably winters here regularly, although I have only recorded it once before. Someone does seem to see it every winter, however, and I think its apparent rarity is due to the usual choppy water that precludes the possibility of certain identification.

There was yet another remarkable find, namely a Great Egret, presumably the same one that we recorded on the Christmas Count almost one month ago. Zeranski and Baptist state that the Great Egret is "accidental in winter". I wonder whether anyone else anywhere has ever found Barrow's Goldeneye and Great Egret on the same day.

I finished the day with 47 species, the best I've ever done in the month of January.

January 28

A typical clear, cold winter day with sufficient westerly wind to render the Sound too choppy for satisfactory observation. No noteworthy observations.

February 2

Again a bit too windy. Bob Winkler had a Chat at the base of Grove Point Road on January 27 and I spent some time looking for it today without success.

February 14

There was a heavy snowfall about ten days ago and since then the temperature has remained below freezing so much of the snow is still present. This recent interval has been the only really wintry weather during the present season. Today was beautiful and I saw a couple of interesting species. Two Pipits were the first of these I have ever recorded here during January or February. Perhaps they are the same twosome that we found on the Christmas Count. Just as remarkable was a Coot bobbing around in the only open spot on the Mill Pond near where it goes through a culvert under the railroad tract. My last Coot here was in December of 1989.

February 18

It was rather warm today and I hoped to be able to find some early spring migrants. It was not to be. There was little of interest save for a high number (110) of Horned Grebes.

February 24

I managed to see two Red-winged Blackbirds today, the first spring migrants even though the weather was cold and blustery. A few Cormorants, presumably Greats, were visible on a line of rocks far out in the Sound that emerges only during dead low tide. The Coot was still on the Mill Pond but the day was otherwise unremarkable.

March 2

I hoped to find some new spring arrivals today but little had changed since my last visit save that the count of Red-winged Blackbirds had increased to eight. I also saw a Turkey Vulture which flapped more than I had ever seen do as it negotiated through the winds over the Mill Pond. Most interesting were separate sightings of what seemed to be two different Coyotes, one foraging in the east marsh, the other on the Aspetuck land trust.

March 6

Conditions were just about ideal for birding today. It was warm, humid and overcast, and there was virtually no wind so the Sound was placid. Therefore, it was not surprising that I ran up a total of 52 species, the most I've ever recorded this early in the year. There weren't many new species, however. Just a Sharp-shinned Hawk, 16 Black-bellied Plovers and ten Grackles. Yet there was plenty of evidence for the beginning of migration. Most notable

was a total of 3,600 Red-winged Blackbirds flying from southwest to northeast in flocks of 40-400. I've seen such flights here in fall but I don't recall any in spring. Red-throated Loons are starting to build up judging from today's total of 20 along with 60 Horned Grebes. But the nicest observation was the pair of Barrow's Goldeneye in almost the same spot that I had them in January but even closer at the edge of the eastern breakwater. Looking at them through the 40x objective, it seemed as though I could almost touch them and I was even able to see the blue gloss of the drake's head. What a handsome species it is with the row of six white spots on the drake's scapulars!

March 11

It seemed rather cold and windy this Saturday morning and I was surprised at the large number of people in the park. They were flying model airplanes, playing volley ball and soccer, or just walking. The northeast wind rendered the Sound too rough for successful scrutiny. I was thinking, as I walked towards Woodcock Woods, that had I come earlier, I would probably have found this year's first Woodcocks. But it seemed an unlikely possibility at 11:30 with all the action that the park had already seen. There is a path that parallels this remnant of woodlands and walking south on it, I enter the woods on my right and then make a right (north) turn until I am stopped by brambles. At this point, which is a good spot for the bird, I often stop to urinate. As I was doing so today, a Woodcock flushed up a few yards in front of me. They never go up immediately and it often pays to remain in a likely place for a short while rather than to simply walk through it. The next preferred locale in this tiny woods is about 100 feet to the south and I flushed a second bird from there. I flushed one also at the new observation deck just south of the woods but this may have been the same individual I had found in the southern part of the woods which had flown in that direction. Finally, I had yet a fourth sighting, a bird that went up from a copse on the hillside southeast of the woods. Thus, I found at least three individuals of this elusive favorite that always pleases me so particularly because I feel like I really know what I'm doing when I set out to find it in such specific spots at this time of the year.

Three other species were new for this year in the park. They included seven Green-winged Teal, a Red-bellied Woodpecker, and ten Robins.

March 13

Today seemed very promising indeed. It began with intermittent dense fog, a gentle variable breeze that finally stayed southwest, and a very calm Sound which was excellent for viewing when it wasn't obscured by the fog. This is supposedly the beginning of a warm spell whose front has been stalled just southwest of us for the past several days. The results weren't bad although they did not entirely satisfy my expectations. I thought I would certainly see Snipe, for example, and perhaps Phoebe and Tree Swallow. However, the only new birds that I added for the year were Cowbird and Bonaparte's Gull. I did see seven Gadwall, however, the highest number for me here since 1979, and I also found the pair of Barrow's Goldeneye at the same spot they have been since January 13. I suspect that there will be many arrivals during the next several day which are predicted to be very warm.

March 16

Today was probably the last of the warm spell to which I alluded in my last entry. These days have each started rather coolly with fog and then warmed into the high sixties and even low seventies when the sun burned through and dissipated the fog in the early afternoon. My optimistic predictions about today were not fulfilled. Although conditions were excellent, I managed to record only two new species, three Snipe and a Meadowlark. I left my house to the accompaniment of several calling Flickers, yet they have not yet arrived in the park. I did see a Woodcock today in an unexpected spot. I flushed it from the high grass adjacent to the first (west) drainage ditch in the eastern half of the park, a locale that last year was teeming with Snipe.

March 20

A single fleeting instant compensated for an otherwise dreadful morning on this last calendar day of winter. That was the moment required for a superb adult male Peregrine to fly over the Allen Preserve as I watched with pleasure and surprise. I have only one previous spring record here, a bird flying over the west marsh in early May eight years ago. There was absolutely nothing else around despite seemingly favorable conditions including a pleasant southerly breeze and a relatively calm Sound. It was sufficiently dull that I skipped the eastern section of the park.

March 24

A brisk northwest wind swept through the park this morning and convinced me to truncate my usual itinerary. I covered only the Mill Pond and the eastern half of the park. I ran into Bob Winkler, who convinced me with little difficulty, that there was nothing of interest in the western section. I did manage to find a few interesting species including two Greater Scaup, a Kestrel, and a Hairy Woodpecker.

March 28

Today was beautiful but the brisk northwest winds of the past week continued and seemed again to preclude the arrival of expected migrants like Phoebe and Tree Swallow. I did add Greater Yellowlegs and Bluebird (a nice male) to the year's list. A Great Egret was the first of the spring although I had seen one in January. Dick Gershon accompanied me since he was already in Westport for a visit to his dentist. Dick and I go back a long way and had birded together in Westport as children. In fact we were two of a small group of school boys who initiated the Westport Christmas Count in 1946! Dick was originally a New Yorker like myself but, after establishing himself as a successful advertising executive, he moved to Westport where he lived until moving back to the city in about 1980. After we finished at Sherwood Island, we went to Bob and Judith Rabenold's house where we saw the Varied Thrush that has been in their backyard for the past three weeks. Judith is a colleague of Maddy's and I first identified the bird for them on March 20. I called Frank

Mantlik about it and he put it on the "Rare Bird Alert" last week so they have had many visitors since then. This bird was to remain through 19 April.

We met Bob Winkler and "Doc" at the park today and they told us that park workers had seen four Wild Turkeys there yesterday. It's a new bird for the park list but I wasn't surprised because I had seen a group of six on the road by our neighbor's house last week.

March 29

This was an odd sort of day. I went to the park at 9:00 omitting my usual stop at the Mill Beach and the Allen Preserve and I found Bob Winkler who was eager to see the Turkeys that had been reported two days previously. We ambled about the western half of the park in a rather unsystematic way for about an hour, not even bothering to examine the Sound which was turbulent from the persistent northwest winds. There seemed to be absolutely nothing around so we left after an hour. However, I went back at 4:30 because Frank Mantlik called to tell me that he had seen nine Gannets. The wind had shifted and was now southeast. I proceeded straight to the eastern extremity and immediately saw the Gannets, nine exactly, at least two of which were reasonably close, at least close enough to be seen without the telescope. They were diving a great deal and then resting on the surface which I hadn't realized they do. Doc drove up in the park truck and I pointed them out to him. He told me that he had seen two Turkeys near the barn earlier in the day so I spent about an hour nosing around that part of the park. It seemed much more active than had been the case in the morning and I found a Creeper which was perhaps the commonest species that I missed last year. There were a lot of Robins and Grackles and I watched the latter in what I took to be some sort of sexual activity. Two of them would wrestle on the ground and when I first saw this I thought it was a single bird in the agonal state of a terminal illness. I was struck, as I was on the evening when I saw the Nighthawks here last year, on how different the park seems in the late afternoon as opposed to the morning.

March 31

Today was yet another with bright sunshine but northwest winds that seem to preclude an interesting early spring flight day and that definitely preclude the possibility of interesting water birds on the Sound which was quite rough. I skipped the Mill Beach, the Allen Preserve and the far eastern section of the park and I was only out for two and one-half hours. A single Swamp Sparrow was new for the year.

Of six Horned Grebes that I saw today, five were in breeding plumage, the first such individuals that I have noticed this spring.

April 3

Where are the birds this spring? The weather was right today with a south wind and clear skies. But there was nothing save the first Snowy Egret of the season, a single bird. The park was very noisy because the maintenance personnel were busy sawing logs with gas-

driven instruments. However, I don't think there was anything to be heard. I restricted myself to the Mill Pond and the western half of the park. That was enough! The Sound was hopelessly choppy which only made things even worse. For an early April day, this was as bad as it gets.

April 4

According to the weather report, there is to be a severe cold and windy spell beginning this afternoon, so I decided to go out this morning. This turned out to be a good decision since conditions were favorable with just a gentle southwest breeze, a calm Sound and overcast skies. The park was quiet and relatively deserted. I skipped the Mill Beach and Allen Nature Preserve so that I could walk through the east marsh before the model airplane fliers arrived. This was the first noticeable flight day of the year, perhaps best signaled by five Kestrels, the most I've ever seen on a spring day. I found five new birds for the year including 20 Double-crested Cormorants, three Brant, a Tree Swallow, three Phoebes and a Field Sparrow. A Mute Swan was incubating on a small island in the Mill Pond where I had first noted her yesterday.

The list of 54 species was the best of the year and quite respectable for the date.

April 6

The cold snap that was predicted did, indeed materialize and was reflected by an initial temperature of 30 this morning, and by the presence of a thin film of ice over the water in some of the ditches. However, despite these unpromising conditions, there was still plenty of evidence for spring. High counts of Flickers (25) and Phoebes (6) indicated some movement and the four Common Loons were in fine breeding plumage as was a male Goldfinch for the first time this season. But there were no new species for the year and the birdlife continued to be rather prosaic. Thus far, the year has been ornithologically rather uninteresting.

As usual, these migrant Phoebes did not give their signature call, but invariably indicated their presence by their dry chip vocalization, which is completely indistinguishable from that of Swamp Sparrows (also calling today) and Palm Warblers.

April 10

The weather was again unfavorable this morning, cold with a gusty north wind that rendered the Sound quite choppy. I didn't expect much and I was pleased to add two species to the list for the year, namely a Barn Swallow and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet. There seem to be fewer Red-winged Blackbirds this year and today I found only two!

April 11

Today seemed a bit more promising than yesterday because it was a bit warmer and the wind was a bit gentler. There were large numbers of common birds including Robins and the three blackbirds but there were no new species arrivals. This spring continues to be dull, or am I just becoming jaded?

April 17

Since my last visit, every day until this one has been characterized by relatively strong northwest winds. This morning they shifted to the south so I decided to go the park in the afternoon, a significant variation from my usual routine. My itinerary included the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the western half of the park, however, I skipped the eastern section because the Sound was rather choppy. There were not many birds around but I did find a male Shoveler and a Hermit Thrush as new species for the year. I also removed my first tick of the season.

Today's Bluebird was a female in the West Woods so I suspect they will be nesting there again. The Horned Grebes are now all in breeding plumage and it would be easy to identify an Eared Grebe if one were around.

April 18

There was a gentle southerly breeze last night and this morning making me feel very optimistic about today's possibilities. It turned out pretty well, although far from spectacular. I added five birds for the year including a female Martin, by far my earliest record for Sherwood Island, but apparently not particularly early for where the species actually nests. The other new birds were Rough-winged Swallow, Gnatcatcher, Towhee and Chipping Sparrow. There were clearly many arrivals since yesterday, especially swallows which also included several Tree and Barn.

April 20

Yesterday was rainy with strong southeasterly winds. The night, however, was clear and absolutely calm so I expected a very productive morning despite a gentle northerly breeze. I was wrong. A single Yellow-rumped Warbler was the only new arrival and there were astonishingly few birds.

April 22

There was a dense fog and no wind when I arrived at the park this morning. Land birds were swarming and it was as good a late April flight as I've ever had, reminding me, for the first time this season, of last year's great spring. I recorded nine new species for the year: A Bittern, three Catbirds, five Solitary Vireos, two Yellow Warblers, a Black-throated Green, a Pine, 10 Palms, five Black and Whites and an Ovenbird. High counts of other species included 15 Ruby-crowned Kinglets, 18 Hermit Thrushes, 12 Towhees and 60 White-

throated Sparrows. I finished with 63 species, by far my best total this year. Bob Winkler birded the park two hours before I did and found a Worm-eating Warbler, a new species for the park. Otherwise, his results were quite similar to my own.

April 25

Today was rather poor although I did add three species: Two Kingbirds, a pair of Thrashers which Bob Winkler had noted more than a week ago, and a beautiful singing male Prairie Warbler, the first time I have seen it here before May. However, there weren't many birds about and I adjusted my itinerary by omitting the entire eastern half of the park as well as the Mill Beach and the Allen Preserve. I thus birded only the western section of the park and spent just over two hours.

Here is a mystery. On several occasions during the past two months, I have encountered two young and very tame deer in the pine grove adjacent to the residence for summer helpers in the northwest segment of the park. Last week, I found one of these two dead. I thought it had probably been killed by predators, perhaps coyotes, since its abdomen was slashed with its entrails exposed. Today, right next to that corpse, which had by now clearly been scavenged, lay the body of the second individual. In this instance, there was no sign of a violent death, at least from a predator, since the entire body was intact with no sign of slashing or even blood, although I did not examine it closely. What happened to these deer?

April 26

Today was another dud although there were a few more migrant land birds than yesterday. I found a pair of Wood Ducks and a House Wren as additions to the year's list so at least I am managing to locate something new on these rather dull days.

Apparently the tragedy that struck the deer I described yesterday has not afflicted the whole park population. Today I saw three, including a very light colored young individual accompanied by a normally colored adult female.

April 27

There was a good flight today as well there should have been. Last night and this morning were characterized by warm temperature and a very gentle southerly breeze. I recorded 62 species with little effort and without going to the eastern extremity of the park. Hermit Thrushes, White-throated Sparrows and Solitary Vireos were common as they were on 22 April, the previous good migration day. I found seven new species, the most interesting of which was an early Yellow-throated Vireo that was foraging low in a sapling and allowed me the best examination of this species I have ever had. Other new birds included a Wood Thrush, a White-eyed Vireo, a Blue-winged Warbler, three Parula Warblers, a Yellowthroat and an Orchard Oriole.

I also saw the first goslings of the season.

April 29

Today was almost entirely windless so I imagined it might be good. It was neither good nor bad. There were some migrating land birds around but none that hadn't been here earlier. I did add Cattle Egret to the list for the year giving me 119 species, exactly the same number with which I entered May last year. I am rather surprised by that since last year seemed an exceptionally good one and this year seems mediocre. Of course, the major determinant is the May migration so the story has yet to be written.

May 2

A raw, overcast atmosphere with northeast winds more or less guaranteed that my first May outing would be uninspiring and that was certainly the case. I was lucky to add even the three species I did. They were: Marsh Wren, Veery and Chestnut-sided Warbler, in each instance just a single bird.

May 4

I had a year's high species count of 65 including 10 warblers today yet it was, at best average for the date and rather dull. Only two of the birds, a Northern Oriole and a Northern Waterthrush, were new. The gentle breeze continued to be from the northwest as it has been for most of the time recently. So far, May does not seem promising this year.

May 5

This was a wet and overcast morning with a gentle southeasterly breeze. There was the same sort of dribbling migration as yesterday with a species total of 62 including nine warblers. There were three new species: a Spotted Sandpiper, eight Least Sandpipers and two Redstarts. More interesting were a Bittern and a single group of five Snipe.

I should perhaps mention that I have not yet tried terribly hard to run up a large list of species and have excluded the eastern section of the park from most of my visits. I probably could have reached 70 today and yesterday if I had given it more of an effort. I plan, however, to reserve that effort for a real wave day when I stand the chance for 100 species. Of course, I am by no means certain that such an opportunity will arise this year. Last year, 10 and 15 May were major days, however, there have been plenty of years without them.

May 7

May continues to be a big disappointment. Yesterday, there were northwest winds that gusted to 30 MPH so I didn't go out. Today the winds were still out of the northwest but had subsided a bit so I paid a brief visit to the park to make certain that I wasn't missing a major flight. I wasn't. There weren't many birds and I spent only an hour and a half, rapidly canvassing only the western section, and that incompletely. At this time of the year, no matter how bad the day, I always manage to find some new arrivals and today I had four including a Bank Swallow, a Cedar Waxwing, a Black-throated Blue Warbler and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. None-the less, another lackluster outing.

May 9

Last night the constant northerly winds finally abated and today was pretty good. I recorded 70 species despite omitting the eastern half of the park from my itinerary. I found 17 species of warblers although none of them were present in particularly high numbers. The best was a beautiful singing male Hooded that sounded very much like a loud and clear Magnolia, of which I saw two. In addition to these two warblers, other new birds for the year were a Clapper Rail, a Warbling Vireo, three Nashville Warblers, a Scarlet Tanager and three White-crowned Sparrows.

The Mute Swan is still incubating on an island in the middle of the Mill Pond where it has been since April 3. There are numerous goslings all over the place and I flushed a Black Duck from her nest.

May 12

The past two days were cool and rainy with northeast winds. I went to the park for a few minutes yesterday, enough to assure me that the place was absolutely bereft of birds.

Today was a different story. Although still overcast, it was reasonably warm and windless. When I got to the Mill Beach at 7:20, the tide was already at medium level, yet the Mill Pond was almost entirely exposed mud and full of shore birds. Later on, about 11:30, the pond had become excessively repleted and the Swan, still brooding on her nest, appeared to be in imminent danger of having her nest submerged.

There was a superb migration, noteworthy for the fact that it composed both shore birds and passerines. I had 84 species including 11 shore birds and 13 warblers. While the park was not exactly swarming as it had been last May 10 and May 15, it was still pretty impressive and I found two birds that were new to my Sherwood Island list. That certainly hasn't happened in many years. A Moorhen was standing on a rock that forms part of the breakwater of the western limit of Burying Hill Beach. What an incredible location to see one. And a Worm-eating Warbler, a locally common nester on the mainland, was foraging in a bush near the evergreens in the central area of the park. In addition to these two, I recorded 12 other species that were new for the year. They were: a Laughing Gull, seven Turnstones, eight Semipalmated Plovers, a Lesser Yellowlegs, two Solitary Sandpipers, 20

Dunlin, 50 Semipalmated Sandpipers, two Swifts, a Swainson's Thrush, a Blackburnian Warbler, two Bobolinks and a Sharp-tailed Sparrow.

The White-crowned Sparrow was singing and reminded me much of a Black-throated Blue Warbler.

Today falls into the category that I will remember.

May 13

This was the day that Bob Winkler and I decided to try for 100 species. It dawned clear with absolutely no wind and a few minutes after arriving at the Allen Preserve at 6:30 A. M., I had already amassed 10 warbler species and our goal seemed a sure thing. The first disappointment was that the Mill Pond did not nearly arrive at the low level it had reached yesterday which must have been due to some special adjustment of the sluices. Our next disappointment was that the wind suddenly picked up straight out of the north. At that point I lost interest and the day seemed rather dull. When I calculated the species list, I was astonished to find that we had reached 90 including 15 warblers. It certainly didn't seem more than a rather minor flight day. I added six birds to the list for the year. They were: a Snow Goose, an Osprey, five Common Terns, two Least Terns, two Least Flycatchers and four Wilson's Warblers. Basically, it was similar to yesterday save that we didn't see the Moorhen or the Worm-eating Warbler. Had the wind not appeared, I feel certain it would have been spectacular.

May 14

Bob and I made another attempt at 100 today. The weather was perfect, calm, reasonably warm and quite clear. For the third day in a row, it was quite good but not spectacular. My 92 species included 14 warblers and five new species for the year. They were: a fine adult Little Blue Heron, a Black-billed Cuckoo that was new for Bob's Sherwood Island list, a Pewee, a Red-eyed Vireo and a Black Poll Warbler. As usual, we missed some very common birds including Brown Thrasher. I'll see additional interesting species this spring but I think the chance for 100 is gone since I haven't reached it despite three successive flight days. Rain is forecast for tonight and tomorrow.

The Mute Swan was gone from her nest today. She had been on it since April 3. I didn't see the cygnets but I suspect they are around.

Bob spotted a Raccoon in a cavity at about 30 feet up in an oak. This is the first time I've ever seen an animal under such circumstances. Bob also showed me a nesting box that was being used by a pair of Nuthatches. We watched the male proffering food from the outside, presumably to a sequestered mate.

May 16

Yesterday was wet and overcast but today was absolutely perfect and I recorded 90 or more species for my third successive visit. Today's total was 93 including 17 warblers yet it again seemed little more than a minor flight. I managed to find only two new species for the year, two Canada Warblers and an Indigo Bunting. I have yet to see Bay-breasted, Cape May or Tennessee Warblers and today's best was a couple of Blackburnians. I did see a female Bluebird in the West Woods so perhaps they are nesting there again. I hadn't seen one in quite a while.

This is an odd May. High daily species counts, yet scarcely anything of real interest so far.

May 18

This unusual migration that began May 12 continued unabated today when I recorded 90 species, the fourth consecutive visit with 90 or more. Like all the other days, there was nothing unusual despite a good volume of expected species including 16 warblers. The only new bird was a Hummingbird.

Bob Winkler, whom I met today, was out yesterday when the weather was cool and rainy with a fairly strong northeast wind. Despite those unpromising conditions, he found 83 species amongst which were 19 warblers, the highest total either of us has ever had here. These included three Bay-breasted which I have yet to see this year.

May 20

The weather was again perfect today and the migration continued yielding 85 species including 17 warblers, none of which were either new or particularly interesting. This was the sixth straight visit over a ten-day period with a total species count of 84 or more.

Like the first day of this run on May 12, today was memorable. As I was walking east in the east marsh just west of the first drainage ditch I flushed a large rail that flew right by me and headed to the first drainage ditch. **King Rail!** I was surprised at how unmistakable it was, previously imagining that in habitat where they both occur, it would be difficult to distinguish King and Clapper Rails. This bird appeared almost black as it flew to my west thus affording me perfect light. It looked more like a Glossy Ibis than a Clapper Rail! This was my third new Sherwood Island species in the last ten days so I can't complain even if I have missed several interesting warblers that I usually get in the spring.

Other new birds for the year that I saw today included a Glossy Ibis, a Willet in the east marsh, and a Willow Flycatcher.

May 22

The bulk of the spring migration is over. Today I recorded 71 species including only six warblers. The day was not entirely without interest, however, as I had an Osprey, two Martins and the year's first Seaside Sparrow, of which I had a particularly good sighting.

I am already beginning to view this May with more perspective than while it was in progress. I was disappointed not to experience flight days quite so spectacular as May 10 and 15 of last year, yet this May 12-20 was the most sustained spring flight that I've ever had at Sherwood Island. Moreover, it included some very interesting species such as Moorhen, King Rail and Worm-eating Warbler, each of which was new for my Sherwood Island list. Seeing three new species in just nine days is more than I could have, or did, expect and is an accomplishment that I am almost certain not to repeat. The year's list stands at 171 and will probably increase by three or four species before July 1. I had a record 182 by that time last year but this spring will be certainly be a worthy second.

May 24

What a difference a few days can make! Today could scarcely have been duller. There were virtually no land bird migrants and I totaled a paltry 65 species including only five warblers and no new species. Not even Green Heron or Dowitcher. My interest was piqued only by wondering why the two Loons seemed to be in winter plumage and the three Laughing Gulls had retained their juvenile appearance.

May 26

It poured from the northeast all last night and this morning was overcast, drizzly, and cool from a residual northeasterly breeze. The conditions seemed about as good as they could be for shore birds and the date was also favorable. When I got to the Mill Pond at 7:00, three hours after the nominal dead low tide, almost the entire pond was exposed, so the person who programs the sluices was also looking out for me. I was rewarded for going out on such a miserable day by about 20 Dowitchers on these flats, my first for the year. But by and large, the muddy pond was not exactly overflowing with shore birds. The exciting member of the family that made my day worthwhile was a beautiful Knot in full breeding plumage that was with a few Black-bellied Plovers on the east parking lot. This was my first record of it from Sherwood Island although Charlie Barnard has seen it here twice. This is perhaps the best example of a species that is abundant on the south shore of Long Island, yet virtually absent from the coast of western Connecticut. This spring has turned out very well indeed. This was my fourth new Sherwood Island bird during May. Quite remarkable.

May 30

Quite an interesting day considering the rather late date. I saw a female Mourning Warbler at Grove Point, always an exciting find, although I seem to manage it once each year, and two additional species that were new for the spring. These were Green Heron and Crested

Flycatcher. These are almost certainly the last I will add before the fall so I complete the spring with 176 species. Excellent!

I keep seeing that pair of Mute Swans without cygnets and perhaps that long incubation I noted above went to no avail.

There was a Tree Swallow that kept flying pretty near the Martin house and eventually perched on an adjacent dead tree. Could Tree Swallows be using this structure for a nest. Not unlikely. Will Check.

Found four Marsh Wrens in east marsh. One pair in particular aroused my suspicion that there might be a local nest.

June 1

This was again a remarkable day considering that May is now over. I started off at Grove Point, where I ran into Bob Winkler at 6:30 A. M. I suppose the most interesting find was my first Yellow-billed Cuckoo for the park which we heard near the "barn". But I think both of us got even more of a kick from a female Martin which was circling the Martin house that Bob had convinced Doc to put up this spring. Two Tree Swallows were also circling the house and Bob has seen them in it. But he tells me that Martins and Tree Swallows have been known to share this type of construction. The notion that Martins may breed in the park is very exciting.

Also surprising and exciting were the presence of singing Pine Warbler and Yellow-throated Vireo. Each of these breeds locally inland so a late park record raises the question of an incipient nest. Yet there are plenty of migrants still about so such speculation is probably much ado about nothing. I was impressed with the persistence of migration as manifested by four Redstarts and two Magnolia Warblers as well as two Crested Flycatchers although this is another one that might breed in the park.

June 15

Today Bob Winkler and I conducted a sort of "breeding bird survey" of the park and its environs i. e. of our usual complete itinerary. It was a perfect day and very enjoyable, not only for its respectable 57 species that included most of the species that we consider to breed there, but also for yet another new species for the park.

This observation was remarkably similar to that of the White Pelican last June 17. Bob and I had just entered the west marsh south of the maintenance shacks and were in exactly the same place at exactly the same time as when I saw the pelican. Of course, we weren't together when we saw it last year and he actually found it an hour before I did. This time I was a bit ahead of him on the marsh trail when I heard him say " Gee, look at this swan". I looked up at an adult swan flying north, quite low over the Mill Pond and almost directly over our heads. I saw immediately that it had a black bill, yelled to Bob " my god, it's a Tundra", got my binoculars on it and actually saw the yellow spot in front of the eye. Bob

had not really been looking at it until then and had brought it to my attention, not because he had noticed anything about it, but because it seemed to be coming unusually close to us. Now he finally looked at it as it was past us, observed the black bill and said “no wonder it wasn’t making that swooshing sound with its wings”. It was another of those exciting moments when one sees a rare bird which is gone by the time one assimilates and processes the information to identify it.

July 29

I came out of hiding today because Bob Winkler and I were supposed to lead a bird walk for the general public. This idea had been concocted by Devon, one of the enthusiastic young summer rangers and, as Bob and I suspected might be the case, he and Doc’s son Jimmy were the only takers. It was brutally hot and humid, even early in the morning. It was low tide and we were pleasantly surprised to find a Lesser Scaup swimming in the channels between exposed flats at the Mill Beach. There were substantial migrating groups of swallows and blackbirds and there was a Cattle Egret on the model airplane field. It was much too muggy to be at all systematic yet I still managed to locate 52 species in two and one-half hours.

August 24

My friend Woody Bracey was visiting today and wanted to see Sherwood Island where his daughter had once worked as a lifeguard. Woody is a very keen birder and an important collector of ornithological books. It has been an extremely dry summer and the wind today was an unpromising gusty one from the southwest. I was very pleasantly surprised by a Whimbrel wandering around the parched parade grounds as well as by a group of six Forster’s Terns that was quartering the Mill Pond. This is by far the earliest date I have ever recorded them here.

August 25

The wind shifted to the north last night and this morning was quite good. I found 68 species including two Upland Sandpipers that flew over the park and revealed themselves with their melodic three syllable whistle. In each case, I heard the bird before seeing it and would not have found it, had I not recognized the call which I learned last year on almost the same date as today.

August 29

Considering the favorable date and weather, today must rank amongst the worst I’ve had at Sherwood Island. Despite a significant effort, I managed a mere 50 pedestrian species.

September 2

Another disappointing day, although there were a few migrating land birds.

September 9

Yet another disappointing day despite it being somewhat cooler than heretofore.

September 12

Yesterday was the first really chilly day this fall and a hint of it persisted today. But there were very few birds and I was sufficiently discouraged to limit myself to just the western half of my usual itinerary. Therefore, things were not quite so bad as the species total of 47 suggests and I did manage to add Cliff Swallow to the year's list.

September 15

Today was PH's birthday and it had all the earmarks of a very good day. Hawks were flying and land birds were passing through. Unfortunately, I met Bob Winkler and he asked me to help lead a group of women from the Waterman Bird Club of Dutchess County. It seems that one of their members was a special friend of Doc's. They were a nice group and some of them were quite knowledgeable but we moved much too slowly and never even got to most of the good land bird spots. Never-the-less, I still managed to add Pied-billed Grebe, Broad-winged Hawk and Merlin to the year list. I'm also almost certain that I glimpsed a Migrant Shrike at the observation deck but it darted into the foliage and my look was really much too cursory even to be sure that it was a shrike. I have a hunch that tomorrow will be very good since this was the first day of a cold snap that is supposed to last through tomorrow.

September 16

I arrived at the park at 8:00 this morning precisely at the same time as Bob Winkler. He had the same idea that I had. Yesterday was good despite our failure to exploit it and perhaps today might be better. It wasn't but I did get two species that were new for the year, namely Red-shouldered Hawk and Red-breasted Nuthatch.

September 18

An odd and rather interesting day. The weather was quite promising, clear and cool with a rather gusty northwest breeze. However, there were neither many individuals nor species. Yet eight Blue-winged teal, all in eclipse plumage, were sitting on the sandbar near the walkway at the outflow of the Mill Pond, a decidedly unusual occurrence. And an immature

Bald Eagle soared low over the West Woods affording me a splendid look. Finally, there was a Carolina Wren that I watched imitating a Mockingbird imitating a combination Carolina and House Wren. This bird sang two different Carolina Wren songs, gave a Carolina Wren slurring call and sang a House Wren song. And I watched the single wren doing this.

September 19

Favorable weather but rather average birds comprising 58 species but nothing special.

September 23

After several days of southerly winds that culminated in a full day of rain yesterday, cold weather and a northwest wind arrived this morning. There were not a great many birds around although flocks of Blue Jays and Goldfinches overhead signaled the beginning of a fall flight. The next several days are supposed to be cold and clear and they may contain a major flight. Unfortunately, I don't think I'll be getting out much during that period.

September 29

Today was cool and clear with a rather strong breeze out of the northeast. There was a nice flight of real fall migrants including 12 Phoebes, 5 Golden-crowned Kinglets and lots of White-throated Sparrows. I saw a female Purple Finch which was new for the year although I think I may have been hearing them flying over for the past ten days. I recorded 59 species despite limiting myself to the western half of the park.

October 3

A windless, warm and pleasant day that was ornithologically uninteresting.

October 6

Yesterday exhibited very unusual weather. There were very heavy rains and a strong easterly wind. Supposedly, these were related to "hurricane Opal" that hit the Florida panhandle the previous day. I hoped that perhaps some interesting birds had been blown in when I went out this morning by which time the wind had shifted to the southwest. The park was inundated with puddles everywhere. There would certainly have been plenty of shore birds had it been late August. At least it was not now entirely bereft of birds. I did see a few species that have either been absent or uncommon this fall including six Blue-winged Teal, a Clapper Rail, a Snipe, a Lesser Yellowlegs, a Solitary Sandpiper and a Meadowlark.

October 9

This was an ideal early October day both weatherwise and birdwise. There was a large flight of sparrows including 150 White-throated, 100 song, eight White-crowned and a Lincoln's amongst the eight species. The total list for the day was 66, almost the first respectable total of the fall. There were also plenty of Yellowthroats and Kinglets. In addition to Lincoln's Sparrow, Sapsucker was also new for the year.

October 11

The vast majority of migrants that I saw two days ago were gone today. I did hear a pair of Black-billed Cuckoos duetting in the West Woods which struck me as unusual and I also recorded the first Pipits of the fall.

October 13

Today was almost an ornithological copy of October 9 with a fine flight of sparrows and some other migrants. There was nothing unusual or new for the year, however, and the birds were slightly less numerous.

October 17

This morning was the coolest of the fall with a brisk northwest wind and there was a notable migration. Species of which I noted exceptional counts included Killdeer (40), Titmouse (75), Yellow-rumped Warbler (250), Meadowlark (15) and Swamp Sparrow (30). There was also an immature Bald Eagle, the first Winter Wren of the season and the year's first Horned Lark. A flock of 10 Meadowlarks was the largest single group I've ever seen of this rather solitary bird. Yellow-rumped Warblers and Titmice were actually flying over in groups. Not a bad day at all, although I recorded no unusual species.

November 5

This was the second day of the most significant cold snap of the fall. Despite a rather brisk west wind, I saw two Gannets, an adult and an immature, far out over the Sound. It was a good day all around and other birds of interest included a Short-eared Owl that I flushed from the east marsh, a Woodcock that I flushed in Woodcock Woods of all places, a flock of almost 40 Bufflehead, the first fall group of Hooded Mergansers, two late Great Egrets and 15 Laughing Gulls, two species I hope will stay for the Christmas Count, White-crowned and Sharp-tailed Sparrows and a flock of 60 Snow Buntings.

November 9

It was cold and windy this morning and there was ice on some of the puddles. There was still quite a large sparrow flight with 60 White-throats. But the gusty winds from the west rendered it a difficult day for birding and I didn't see anything of particular interest.

November 13

Since I was last out, there have been heavy rains and southeast winds. Today, there was no wind and a lot of standing water. There are plenty of birds still around. A Laughing Gull and Great Egret were late and a pair of Fox Sparrows were the first of this year.

November 16

Since my last visit, there has been a "northeaster" and some very cold weather which persisted this morning with a brisk westerly wind. Thus far, it has been a cold and wet November, so I was pleased to find that a Laughing Gull and a Common Egret were still surviving here. Will they last until the Christmas Count? Also of interest: a male and female Harrier; 35 Horned Larks and 60 Snow Buntings.

December 2

Despite the strong northwest winds that kept the species total down today, I did find some interesting birds including Turkey Vulture, Harrier, Greater Yellowlegs, Marsh Wren and Meadowlark.

December 17

Today was the Christmas Count and it worked out much better than I anticipated. The last two weeks have been cold and snowy and most local standing water is frozen. There have been two significant snowfalls and there was a light dusting last night. The weather did clear this morning, however, and the temperature rose to almost 40. The northern half of the Mill Pond was frozen but the part near the entry sluices was open. There had not been many interesting birds around before the bad weather and I imagined there would be even fewer now. Moreover, the two inch snow covering made it more difficult to get around. Despite all such negative considerations, I recorded 51 species including two Harriers, two Greater Yellowlegs, a Woodcock, Ruby-crowned Kinglet and Winter Wren all in the central evergreen area, a Thrasher in the woods of the Allen Preserve and 12 Horned Larks and 10 Snow Buntings on the east parking lot. Bob Winkler had a Flicker that I missed. This is a fairly impressive list but the Sound was a bit disappointing. I spent about one and one-half hours scanning it without finding anything of particular interest although I did find representatives of most of the common expected species. The water was fairly choppy rendering detection and identification of rarities such as Barrow's Goldeneye more difficult

so it is not surprising that I failed to find any. Overall, I was quite pleased with the results of the day.