

Sherwood Island Diary

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1999

January 13

This morning marked an auspicious debut for birding at Sherwood Island in 1998. The morning was warm, overcast and windless so the Sound was calm. Most of the pond was frozen and there was a trace of snow remaining from recent cold weather. I recorded 44 species. I found two Long-eared Owls in the same location where I and others have found this species for the last year. This is the first time two have been seen. I flushed them together. They then separated and I found one of them perching briefly before flushing a second time. Other interesting findings included a Coot, my first January record; three Pipits; a Harrier and 150 Snow Buntings.

January 20

This morning was not as interesting as that of my previous visit. The only species that I saw today and failed to see then was a Great Blue Heron. The only other observation of interest was the presence of three Long-eared Owls, all of which flushed from the same spruce in the usual location. I did not pursue them and did not see them perched.

January 28

I don't know why I went out this morning. The weather was raw and gloomy with a moderate northeast breeze. I was wearing my "wellingtons" and my feet were cold despite two pairs of socks. I rushed through my usual itinerary in a cursory, unenthusiastic manner and recorded only 28 species, the low number probably reflecting my state of mind rather than the local avifauna. There was one bird of interest, a Snipe that I flushed from the wet brushy area between the flying field and the westernmost ditch. This was my first January record. I failed to find the Long-eared Owls although I made a reasonably serious search for them.

I had fine looks at a seal that was cavorting quite close to the shore off the western beach.

February 6

In terms of weather, this morning was a carbon copy of my last visit, raw, overcast and with an easterly breeze. I spent only one and one-half hours and birded only the Mill Beach, Grove Point and the Allen Reserve, and the eastern section of the park. I flushed

a Bittern from the central drainage ditch. This represented my first winter record for the species.

February 11

This morning was warm and pleasant with a gentle variable breeze. I found 40 species including five that were new for the year: five Red-throated Loons; a Ring-necked Duck; a pair of Gadwall; a Kingfisher; and a Savannah Sparrow. The birding was a bit disappointing.

February 16

Six Red-winged Blackbirds and a Grackle signaled the beginning of ornithological spring this morning. The past two days had been a bit cool but today was warm and clear with an easterly breeze that whipped the Sound a bit.

Yesterday, a fine male Ruddy Shelduck appeared on the Bonny Brook Road pond. It was still there today.

March 5

It has been quite cool and unpleasant since my last visit and today, although clear, was no exception with a temperature at about freezing and a biting northwest wind. I restricted my itinerary to the Mill Beach, the Allen Preserve and the eastern half of the park and spent only an hour and a half. A Brown Thrasher skulking in the brush of the Allen Preserve was the only interesting bird.

March 25

This has been a cool March with snow and rain. I've been to England since my last visit to the park. Today was clear and quite pleasant but a brisk northwest wind precluded much ornithological excitement and I recorded an unexciting 41 species, five of which were new for the year: seven Green-winged Teal, a Sharp-shinned Hawk, 10 Robins, a Hermit Thrush and 10 Cowbirds. I also had a Thrasher again.

March 31

This morning was the third warm one in succession but the first with the winds from the southwest as opposed to the northwest. These winds were quite strong and made the Sound too turbulent to see any sea birds. None-the-less, the visit was rewarding with 44 species including my second Bittern of the year and five new species for the year

including single examples of Double-crested Cormorant, Great Egret, Snowy Egret and Tree Swallow as well as five Greater Yellowlegs.

April 1

The southwest breeze abated somewhat during the night and supposedly is carrying with it, a rainstorm that is due to arrive this afternoon. I thought there might be some interesting birds ahead of this storm and that the diminished winds might permit me to find some uncommon sea birds. In the event, I found 49 species including four that were new for the year. These comprised single examples of Osprey (on its platform), Kestrel and Phoebe as well as three Flickers (extraordinarily late first date of occurrence) and two male Turkeys. The latter were foraging at the northerly edge of the east marsh where it abuts the railroad tracks. I had a nice opportunity to study them through the telescope. One of them exhibited the spread tail and inflated chest tuft that one sees often in pictures but that I, at least, had not previously seen in nature. Both showed striking bare blue facial skin and vivid red wattles.

There were substantial numbers of Horned Grebes (30), Red-throated Loons (50), and Old Squaw (150).

April 3

This morning was overcast and rather raw with a slight southeast wind. I made an early start for the first time this year. The day was interesting ornithologically. Amongst the 50 species that I recorded for my second consecutive visit, four were new for the year. There was a fine adult Gannet (they're all adults in spring!) sailing low over the Sound about halfway to Long Island. It appeared to settle on the water which may explain why the species was once called "Solan Goose". I happened to see the bird initially because it was flying distal to a group of 20 Brant heading east. Both of these species are easy to miss during a given season as is Winter Wren, one of which I found amongst some dense shrubbery not far from the stone barn. The other new species was the year's first Pheasant. No Flickers today so the few that I saw the other day were passerbys.

The telescope provided me with a good luck at a Harbor (?) Seal that was resting on a small exposed rock off Burying Hill Beach.

April 6

This morning was ideal for birding. Clear, warm and windless. Amongst the season-high total of 55 species was another Gannet, again seen both floating and flying, 100 Brant, again seen flying east, and four species that were new for the year. A pair of Greater Scaup far out on the Sound, two Ruby-crowned Kinglets, one with the crown visible, an exceptionally brightly colored Palm Warbler and two Towhees. The Sound

was very placid with superb visibility and there were substantial numbers of Horned Grebes, mostly in breeding plumage, and Red-throated Loons, still in basic plumage. Plenty (6) of Flickers today!

April 7

Last night there were thunder storms. They were blown away this morning by brisk west winds which made birding difficult at the park. I had 10 fewer species than yesterday but they included three that were new for the year, single examples of: Barn Swallow; Pine Warbler; Field Sparrow. The two Ospreys are loading their nesting platform with sticks. This year it has a predator guard so perhaps the pair will be more successful than last year when they failed to generate any offspring.

April 8

Conditions this morning were just perfect. Clear, warm, and with a mild southwesterly breeze, insufficient to ruffle the placid Sound. The birds were pretty good. I found 54 species including single examples of Bonaparte's Gull, Rough-winged Swallow and Chipping Sparrow which were new for the year. Large numbers of birds were sitting on or flying east over the Sound. They included a flock of 200 flying Double-crested Cormorants, an assemblage of 350 swimming Old Squaw, more than I've ever seen anywhere, and 50 each of Red-throated Loon and Horned Grebe. Somehow, the day seemed better than the numbers indicate. The favorable weather is supposed to end this evening and Maddy and I are going to France for two weeks starting April 18th so I shall probably not get to the park again more than once or twice before May. Too bad because it has been a pretty good April there.

April 15

This morning will be my last visit until May. Since my last visit, the weather has been cool with predominantly westerly winds which were quite gusty. This morning was warmer and less windy than the previous several days although there was still enough of a breeze to render the Sound quite rough. I recorded 49 species including single examples of two new ones: Meadowlark and a Seaside Sparrow in the east marsh where it abuts the model airplane field. I confess that I expected more. There was a bit of a flight of Ruby-crowned Kinglets (5) and Hermit Thrushes (6).

May 2

After two weeks travelling in France, I expected to find a large change in the avian population since my last visit to the park. Yet the day was pedestrian despite favorable

weather. I had only 48 species including four new ones: three Willets; a House Wren; a Yellow Warbler; and a fine singing adult male Orchard Oriole.

May 5

Since my visit two days ago, the weather has been unfavorable with strong northeast winds, overcast skies and occasional rain. This morning the winds abated but the skies remained overcast and there was an intermittent drizzle. None-the-less, there were some interesting birds led by my first Upland Sandpiper in several years. This bird was on the airplane field and flew to the adjacent parking lot before taking off for good. Other species that were new for the year included a calling Clapper Rail, six Swifts, two Kingbirds flying over, a Marsh Wren, a Cedar Waxwing and four Yellow-rumped Warblers. It is interesting that birds seem to arrive later at the park than inland. Warbling Vireos, Catbirds and Northern Orioles have arrived chez nous but have yet to put in an appearance at the park.

I saw four Willets today so there seem to be two couples taking up residence. I saw three Ospreys. One was migrating. One of the local pair was incubating on the platform while the mate was perched in the nearest oak, presumably standing guard.

May 6

Yesterday afternoon was clear and warm. Last night started out clear but by this morning the sky was entirely overcast with considerable fog. There was virtually no wind. Thus, it's not entirely obvious why **this morning was by far the most striking early May wave I have ever recorded at Sherwood Island**. I found 85 species, the first time I have ever had more than 79 prior to 11 May. These included 16 warbler species, only two short of my all time record, achieved during a major mid-May wave day. I've never remotely found this many warbler species before 11 May. Passerine species outnumbered the non-passerines by more than 2:1, another characteristic of a mid or late May wave. Even during massive wave days, parts of the park are usually pretty dead. Not so today. There were passerines all over including, for example, Ovenbirds in the thickets of the east end. The commonest warblers were Black & White and Ovenbird of which there were at least 10 apiece. There were also at least 5 Parulas, Yellow-rumped, Palms and Yellowthroats. There were three BTG, three Yellows, two Northern Waterthrushes, two Blue-winged, and single examples of Prairie, Chestnut-sided, BTB, Redstart, Nashville and Magnolia. There were also single examples of Solitary, Yellow-throated and Warbling Vireos. Lots of Mimids and thrushes were about, the new ones of which were six Catbirds, five Wood Thrushes and four Veerys. Five Northern Orioles were the first of the year as were five Common Terns, two Black-bellied Plovers, two Semipalmated Plovers and 20 Least Sandpipers. There were also at least five Willets and today I managed to flush the Clapper Rail from the spot where I heard it yesterday.

May 7

After a day like yesterday, of course I had to go out again this morning despite quite heavy fog. I thought the marsh birding might be noteworthy so I got to the park at 6:45 but two Clapper Rails was my only reward in this area. Most of the Passerines had departed but from the total of 59 species, I did squeeze out three non-passerines that were new for the year. They included two Cattle Egrets, two Spotted Sandpipers and a solitary Solitary Sandpiper.

Two families of geese with goslings several days old. Osprey still sitting.

May 9

There was rain most of yesterday and last night but clearing began early this morning. It is predicted that the clear skies will persist all afternoon and night and this prediction, together with this morning's list, suggest that tomorrow, and next week in general which is supposed to be clear, will have lots of birds. This morning I had 67 species including three new ones: Lesser Yellowlegs; Hummingbird; and Lincoln's Sparrow. There was a large influx of Catbirds (30) and a smaller flight of Yellowthroats (12).

Osprey still sitting.

May 10

This morning was a disappointment. I expected a significant flight but had only three warbler species among the total of 65 species. The three that were new for the year were: four Least Terns; 10 Dunlin; and a Gnatcatcher.

May 12

Yesterday was marked by strong northerly winds but these had abated by this morning during which the light breeze was variable. There were certainly plenty of birds. Most striking were the large numbers of Catbirds (50) and Yellowthroats (40). I heard a late Pipit. Amongst the 78 species were three new ones: a Wilson's Warbler; three Bobolinks; and a Rose-breasted Grosbeak. There were 11 warbler species. This kind of day occasionally represents the leading edge of a major flight. We shall see.

May 13

Yesterday was **not** the leading edge of a flight! Fairly gusty northeast winds sneaked in overnight and this morning there were no new visitors for the first time this month. Even though there were still nine species of warblers, the volume of migrating Catbirds and

Yellowthroats that came through yesterday was much diminished and the days total of species was 67.

Frank Mantlik has seen Killdeer chicks already to go along with the numerous goslings. The Osprey is still sitting.

May 14

Today was virtually a carbon copy of yesterday with 66 species and no new migrating arrivals. I did add a species to the list for the year, however. I heard a White-breasted Nuthatch and discovered that I had thus far failed to record one!

Osprey still sitting.

May 15

Another carbon copy with clear skies, east wind, 63 species of which only one, a Willow Flycatcher, was new. Only five species of warbler. Osprey still sitting.

May 17

Yet another carbon copy clear day with east winds and 65 species of which only one, a (Salt Marsh) Sharp-tailed Sparrow was new. Manny Levine told me yesterday that the absence of a mid or late May flight has been noted throughout the New York City area and has been attributed to the predominance of easterly winds during this May.

I had an observation of the Ospreys that I don't understand. I noticed what appeared to be the two adults, one sitting on the nest, the other standing on the nesting platform and was astonished when another one flew right by the platform without any indication of distress on the part of the two platform birds. Eventually, only the sitting bird remained and it occurred to me that this bird, which looked fully developed, might conceivably be the chick. If so it is virtually fully grown and shows no indication of juvenile behavior. More likely it is still the sitting parent, but if that is the case, how was the third adult related to the breeding pair? Further observation should reveal whether there are **bona fide** chicks waiting to be hatched.

May 18

Today was another of this year's standard with an east wind and a measly 66 species. There were a few migrants, however, mostly in the parks largest oak between Doc's house and the stone barn. New for the year were single examples of Green Heron, Red-eyed Vireo and Black Poll Warbler.

The Willets are much quieter and are probably seriously into nesting. Probably there are two pairs. The Osprey platform contained a sitting adult and, episodically, her visiting mate.

May 20

Yesterday there was extremely heavy rain well into the night. This morning, a strong front with northwest winds finally drove away the easterly flow which had been present for most of May. It was really too windy to expect much but I decided to go to the park since any weather change at this time of the year can be interesting.

I had 68 species including three that were new for the year. One of these, a **Piping Plover**, was a new Sherwood Island species for me although they are reputed to have nested here 35 years ago. I had just emerged from the West Woods when I noticed a shore bird on the beach close to the most westerly breakwater. I had only a brief glimpse through the binoculars before it ducked behind a rocky corner, but I was certain it was a Piping Plover and, excitedly, I moved closer to where it had disappeared. When I was positioned so that I could examine the spot, all I saw was a Black-bellied Plover in basic plumage. I scanned the adjacent flats and beach to no avail. After 20 minutes, I began to wonder whether I had imagined the bird and I started to think about what I would write here. I decided I couldn't count the bird for my Sherwood Island list but would discuss it here. Suddenly the bird mysteriously reappeared not 20 yards from where I had first seen it. Where had it been hiding? I have no idea but I enjoyed a leisurely examination at 25 yards through my telescope. There are some new fenced dunes which do not start far from where the bird was foraging on the beach and the thought did cross my mind that it could conceivably attempt to breed there but that is very unlikely. Surely, I would have seen it earlier in the spring if that were the case.

The other two new year birds were a seen Pewee and a heard Scarlet Tanager.

I am quite certain I know where one of the Willets has a nest. For the second time in a week, I almost stepped on a Willet that flew up silently (unusual for this species) from the same spot in uncut grass about 10 yards south of the east marsh and about 50 yards east of the drainage ditch that separates the airplane field from the eastern section of the park. On both occasions, I have purposely not stopped to find the nest because I did not wish to frighten the bird any more than I already had.

Nothing new with the pair of Ospreys, one sitting and the other visiting the platform.

There was a great deal of standing water today and a pair of Bonaparte's Gulls were resting near some on the east parking lot, the first time I've ever seen them actually settled in the park. Also of note was the large number (125) of Common Terns, many of which were resting on the beach, while others joined five Snowy Egrets in going after a school of small fish in the shallows of the Mill Bay as the tide went out.

I haven't mentioned the abundance of rabbits this year. I must see between 10 and 20 each time out. In addition, there are three very tame deer one or more of which I see almost daily. One of these is a young buck with small antlers just beginning to grow in.

May 21

This was a frustrating morning because there was obviously plenty of movement but there is so much foliage, that the only warblers I could identify were those whose songs I knew and remembered. So the nine warbler species represents less than was there. The day's total species list was 72 with Canada Warbler the only new one.

I flushed the Willet from the identical spot and there must be a nest there but I couldn't find it. Unfortunately, there was a man nearby who witnessed the event and, unlike me, stayed around for a considerable period. I hope the nesting was not ruined.

Osprey still seems to be sitting.

I had a very good study of this morning's Sharp-tailed Sparrow. The throat was white and clear and the very upper part of the breast was finely streaked on an ochre background. The central portion of the chest and belly was entirely clear and uncolored. The sides of the chest and the flanks were heavily streaked and there was an ochre wash. This doesn't fit particularly well with either of the newly split species but I think it's probably the "Salt-Marsh Sharp-tailed Sparrow" based on the heavy streaking even if it was only on the extreme sides and even if it was associated with an ochre wash.

May 22

This morning finally presented the perfect conditions for which I have waited since 6 May. It was cloudless, windless and warm with the Sound completely placid and Long Island easily visible. A fundamental question was answered. Yes, it is possible to have a significant wave as late as this. I had 79 species including 15 warblers. The species list could have been significantly higher save for two factors. First, and most important, the thick foliage made it virtually impossible to see the majority of the warblers so I was restricted to those whose songs I knew. Second, I had some extraordinary misses. I didn't see a Black Duck for the first time that I can remember and I also failed to record Least Tern, Rough-winged Swallow and House Wren to cite the most glaring examples. So the day was actually better than the statistics might indicate. I got four species that were new for the year: a Crested Flycatcher; eight Swainson's Thrushes; two Blackburnian Warblers; and a Tennessee Warbler that I heard only despite spending 20 minutes trying to find it high in the leafy canopy. There were good numbers of Warblers: 30 Yellowthroats; 15 Yellows; and 10 each of Magnolia, Canada and Redstart to name the most common. There was also a noticeable influx of Marsh Wrens, seven as opposed to none yesterday.

May 25

The past two days were very rainy but last night and this morning, a strong west-southwesterly breeze blew the clouds away. The park was replete with standing water this morning and I rather anticipated that there might be some unusual shorebirds. There weren't but the morning was, none-the-less, the 73 species including two of the most interesting of the spring. For the first time, I observed the young of the two loud Killdeer I've seen in the western section of the park on the meadow between the Mill Pond and the Sound. The four young were almost fully grown which accords well with the fact that Frank Mantlik, whom I met today, had seen them as chicks several weeks ago.

I flushed the Willet from the usual spot today and this time I found the nest. I had missed it before because it was shielded from view by overhanging blades of grass. In the nest, which was just a depression, were four very ovoid eggs, white with large dark blotches on the broad end of the ovoid. I did not spend a great deal of time inspecting these since I have already sufficiently intruded on this parental bird.

I had a beautiful study of a pair of Clapper Rails in the west marsh and heard two more there and one in the east marsh to yield a total of five. I think this may be my highest count.

Flycatchers provided most of the day's interest, however. The first interesting one was an Olive-sided that was perched in the same spot as the only one I had previously seen here. I.e. in one of the bare trees near the clump of evergreens in the center of the park. This was an obliging individual that preened itself occasionally to enable me to see the white tufts hidden under its wings. After I met Frank, I brought him back to see it and this time I had my telescope with me and so had a particularly satisfactory look.

The other flycatcher also represented my second record for the park. It was a Yellow-bellied in "Woodcock Woods". I was struck when I first saw it by how conspicuous its eyering was, unlike the Willow Flycatchers that breed in the park. It was tinged with yellow underneath including the throat and the eyering was also slightly tinted. I was fortunate to hear it and its song resembled that of a Semipalmated Plover, as I told Frank when I ran into him a few minutes later. "That's a Yellow-bellied" he said immediately and he confirmed the identification when I found the bird for him a few minutes later. I had not been entirely certain because the yellow is just a faint wash rather than a bright color. Apparently, at least according to Frank, this is not unusual and, come to think of it, it's been true of the two other individuals I've seen in my life. Of course, any yellow underneath in an Empidonax is significant in the spring though not necessarily in the fall. I was astounded when I got to the car to find that the "Golden Guide" actually says that the song resembles that of a Semipalmated Plover, exactly as I had described it to Frank. Frank told me that the bird is often identified by song, sometimes without being able to find it.

May 28

This morning was almost certainly my last visit of this spring. Despite the late date, I was able to record 64 species, although none of them new for the year. The Olive-sided Flycatcher was in the same spot as the other day. The Osprey is still sitting and I skirted the nest of the Willet to avoid disturbing it so I don't know the status there.

September 14

I spent only two hours today and just covered the Mill Beach, Allen Preserve and the eastern half of the park. There was not a great deal of interest.

September 18

This morning was beautiful with a clear, high sky and a westerly breeze. The remnants of Hurricane Floyd, downgraded to a tropical storm when it struck here 36 hours ago, were nowhere to be seen. The birds were unremarkable. I suspect there were many more raptors than I recorded since they would have been largely invisible against the clear blue sky. There seems to be quite a discrepancy amongst the egrets this fall. I saw 40 Greats and only one Snowy. A Green-winged Teal was the only slightly surprising bird although when I come out here regularly, I usually do find it in September.

1 October

A sudden cold front passed through late yesterday and this morning was a perfect fall migration day. There was quite a large volume of land birds including at least 75 Chickadees and 125 Myrtle Warblers. The total number of species was 65 with nothing that was surprising.

A new development project was started in the park this week which may permanently destroy its attraction as a migration trap. Many of the trees in the central portion of the park just west of the toll booths are being taken down to allow for a wider entrance. This is a particularly good area for land birds and also abuts on the roosting spot for Long-eared Owls. In addition, there seems to be general removal of brush throughout the park. Clearly, Toby Buff, Doc's recent replacement, is not interested in maintaining a "bird-friendly" park. Something is also going to happen to the large east parking area which has often been a good spot for Upland and Buff-breasted Sandpipers as well as Lapland Longspurs. The recent influx of State money into the park has not had a salutary effect.

5 October

This morning was raw and overcast with a northeast wind. There was not so marked a flight as the other day, but there were plenty of birds. The total species list was 56. One, Creeper, was new for the year. A flock of 10 Common Loons flying overhead was unusual. There were 16 Osprey, nine Kestrels, two Harriers and only two Sharp-shins. The latter has really diminished during the past decade. I had a Snipe and probably also an immature Bald Eagle but I saw the latter only from the side and am not really certain of its identity. There was only one Yellowthroat with six each of Palm, Blackpoll and Yellow-rumped and two Pine Warblers. An adult Snow Goose was feeding with a flock of Canadas.

8 October

This was a superb morning for migration. Last night was the coldest of the season. The winds had been from the north but were calm during the night and early morning. The ambiance was crisp and clear. The total of 63 species does not do justice to the day. The prize was a Lark sparrow that I studied at 20 feet at the eastern end of the fenced reconstituted dunes i. e. near where the refreshment stand used to be located and where the new west bathroom has been recently constructed. I've had Vesper Sparrow at precisely this locality so when I noticed a sparrow with white in the tail alight on the fence guarding the dunes, I raised my binoculars expecting to see a white eye ring. Instead, I found a boldly patterned head with a streaked crown, a light superciliary stripe, a conspicuous brown ear patch and a bold thick black mustachial stripe. The chest was unspotted save for a single large, but rather faint central spot. The patterned face lacked the chestnut one might expect, having chocolate brown in its place, yet the bird was clearly not a juvenile since it lacked fine streaking of the breast. This is only the second Lark Sparrow I've had at the park. The other was an immature that I saw at the east end of the park about 20 years ago.

I had a splendid study of a dark brown, heavily streaked Merlin, presumably an immature, that flew around the margin of the grass and the east beach and settled several times on one of the small saplings found in this area. A Pectoral Sandpiper in the east marsh was yet another new species for the year.

There were also significant numbers of Chickadees (40), Ruby-crowned Kinglets (50), Creepers (5), Winter Wrens (7) and Goldfinches (100).

12 October

This morning was another perfect one for fall migration and again yielded a total list of 63 species. The only new one for the year was White-crowned Sparrow of which I saw five immatures. Also of note were 60 Brant, 300 Yellow-rumped Warblers which were

streaming down the coast, and 100 and 75 respectively of Song and White-throated Sparrows.

15 October

This was yet another perfect morning but, unfortunately, I could only stay out two hours and had to omit the entire western half of the park. Birds were streaming down the shrubbery bordering the east marsh, the most common being Goldfinches (250), Yellow-rumped Warblers (150) and various sparrows, mainly Song, Savannah and Swamp but also including White-throated, White-crowned, Field and Sharp-tailed.

Most interesting, however, were approximately 15 Siskins amongst the various flocks of Goldfinches. It has been so long since I have had Siskins flying over here (perhaps 15 years) that I wasn't certain of their call at first and had to verify it by finding several individuals that alit and then listening to them.

26 October

This morning was better than the species count of 52 would indicate. Two Vesper Sparrows represented the best find but I also had fine looks at a Merlin, a Clapper Rail, at least 40 Siskins which seemed to outnumber Goldfinches, and four White-crowned Sparrows.

October 29

Yet another pleasant and productive morning! The total of 54 species included three that were new for the year: a drake Wood Duck, always a rarity in the park, flushed from one of the drainage ponds south of the west marsh; a Woodcock flushed from the path adjacent to Woodcock Woods; and three Purple Finches heard flying over. They used to be regular flyovers but have virtually disappeared since House Finches became common. Snipe and Woodcock on the same day represented my first autumn record for this doubleton in the park. I'm particularly pleased not to miss Woodcock for the year after doing so during its March peak of abundance. I logged in the first Buffleheads (4) and Snow Buntings (2) of the season.

November 9

The entire eastern section of the park was closed to parking this morning as part of the huge changes that are being wrought, amongst which is a big alteration of the east parking lot. The expansion of the park entrance is also continuing with the sacrifice of numerous trees from the edge adjacent to the western side of the entry road.

I limited my itinerary today to the southwestern quarter of the park. I added two species for the year: at least one Bluebird flying over and a Fox Sparrow in Woodcock Woods. I also saw my first Tree Sparrows of the fall. I spent only one and one-quarter hours in the park so my species total of 32 has little significance.

19 December, 1999

I did the Christmas Count today with Fred Purnell and Harvey ("Trace") Black. Much of the park is under renovation, specifically the entrance area which has been widened with the loss of many trees that formerly abutted the entrance road, and the east parking lot which is presently a series of holes and piles of dirt and gravel.

The highlights of the day were a flock of 35 Common Redpolls in the birches at the eastern end of the park and a Long-eared Owl in just the area that it preferred last winter. This is the third count on which I have recorded Redpolls and they have always been in exactly the same place. The widening of the road has resulted in clearing and loss of trees quite close to the preferred roosting place for the owls and I was surprised to see that at least one has not yet deserted the area.

In addition to Redpoll, I added Great Cormorant to the year's list on the basis of a single rather bulky cormorant flying far out over the Sound.