# OBSERVATIONS ON GREAT GULL ISLAND-SUMMER 1969

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During the summer of 1969, a study was made of the birds visiting Great Gull Island, New York. Although observers were present from May 1 to September 14, the report deals with the period the author was on the island—June 6 to September 14.

Great Gull Island is seven miles northeast of Orient Point, Long Island, New York and ten miles south of the Connecticut shore. The distance over water is broken by Fisher's Island to the northeast and Plum Island to the southwest. The island consists of about 17 acres of bayberry and beach grass and is dominated by a deserted army fort. The most evident bird poopulation on the island is the breeding colony of 6,000 Common and Roseate Terns. Seven other species were found nesting: Mallard, Spotted Sandpiper, Barn Swallow, Starling, Yellowthroat, Redwinged Blackbird and Song Sparrow. Because of intensive searches for tern nests it is unlikely that any other species nested, unknown to us.

The following is a list of the birds which visited the island between June 9 and July 13; for several reasons their appearance was regarded as noteworthy, either because they did not nest on the island, because the time of appearance was unusual according to John Bull (*Birds of the New York Area,* Harper and Row, 1964), or because they were unusual for a small island with the Great Gull habitat.

Almost all of these birds were netted and banded, and many of them were photographed. An early fall date for the Great Cormorant is also included.

Great Cormorant—September 6, immature and adult birds on dock pilings with immature and adult Double-Crested Cormoraants. Bull lists the fall early extreme (specimen) as September 14.

King Eider—June 14, immature male, first seen and identified by Richard Plunkett; it was observed throughout the day. Out of eleven previous summer records from the New York area, three are from Great Gull Island.

Sharp-shinned Hawk—June 13, immature, stayed through June 16; July 2, bird perched on mist net pole.

Mourning Dove—June 20; July 12.

Yellow-billed Cuckoo—June 15–19; June 28.

Black-billed Cuckoo—June 24.

Ruby-throated Hummingbird—June 29, female or immature.

Eastern Kingbird—June 14; July 12.

Great Crested Flycatcher—June 20.

Eastern Wood Peewee—June 23.

Blue Jay—Large numbers passed over the island throughout the summer on flight days, going both north and south. On July 3, almost 100

passed over during the afternoon in groups of three to five, all flying in a southerly direction. All 23 banded proved to be second year birds. Determining the number of Jays on the island at any one time was extremely difficult as they were mobbed continuously by the terns and were very secretive. Jays were found hiding under rocks and in the many decaying tunnels of the fort. Two birds collected by Dr. Kenneth Parkes were found to be not in breeding condition.

Black-Capped Chickadee—June 10.

Carolina Wren—July 12, possibly one of the Gardiner's Island breeding population.

Brown Thrasher—June 14.

Swainson's Thrush—June 12.

White-eyed Vireo—June 27, adult.

Red-eyed Vireo—June 20, adult.

Baltimore Oriole—June 15, second year male.

Scarlet Tanager—July 3, adult male in breeding plumage.

Summer Tanager—June 12, female, identiled by Dr. Parkes. There is only one other June record from the New York area. This species breeds just south of New Jersey, yet it is a "rare but regular spring migrant" (Bull p. 411).

Cardinal—June 16, adult male, found dead June 21; June 23, immature male; June 27, adult male.

All the species noted are among those that should generally have stopped migratory movement and established territories or nesting sites at the time they were seen. Some of the birds—the Swainson's Thrush, first Kingbird and Brown Thrasher—could probably be late migrants. The Carolina Wren, Scarlet Tanager, and Mourning Dove are perhaps very early post-breeding dispersals. Nevertheless, the amount of "traffic" would seem to indicate that the spring migration continues far later than is generally believed and that the extent of the post-breeding dis persal is much greater. Also, the list would seem to indicate that the dispersal begins much earlier, in late June and early July. Maybe these birds and some of the other vagrants are birds that were not able to establish or maintain breeding territories or else had a hormone imbalance. Perhaps there is a large body of these non-breeding birds that has not been distinguished from the indigenous population.

Certainly further study of these aestival wanderings is in order, but it must be done where there can be no doubt that the birds are wanderers and not part of the local population.

My thanks to all who helped with the preparation of this paper and especially to Miss Helen Hays, Mrs. Mary LeCroy and her daughters, Lauren and Sara, to Dr. Kenneth Parkes, Miss Catharine Pessino and to John Bull.

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