

Governors Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
New York



A Cedar Waxwing perched on a tree in Nolan Park. This bird prefers wooded areas and is probably just passing through.

August 1, 2009

Last weekend I reported that I had seen no cardinal young. This week I saw three! Near Building 333 (Women's Army Corp) , a male and female cardinal pair worked frantically to feed their 3 fledged young, who were constantly moving about in the shrubbery around the building. They must have been newly fledged. They were tiny, almost all brown and each one sported a lovely, miniature crest on its head. And they were all calling frantically for food.

August 1, con't.



White breasted Nuthatch. Photo credit naturepicsonline.com.

The common tern colony on the Yankee Pier still has many brown, fuzzy and helpless young birds, and their parents also working overtime to feed them. The young robins and starlings I saw were more independent, doing their own foraging for the most part, though at least one robin reverted to begging whenever a parent came close. The house wren pair in Fort Jay occupies the same nest, but now has a second brood to feed. They had 4 young earlier in the summer, and today at least 3, much younger juveniles were in the nest, still snugly tucked under the eave of a building at the southwest corner of the fort.

I spotted two bird species I personally have not seen on Governors Island before. A white-breasted nuthatch was moving about in the trees at the south end of Building 107. I only caught a quick glimpse of the bird, but clearly heard the unmistakable nasally call of a nuthatch. Its sound is reminiscent of one of those red, squeaky clown noses. At the southwest corner of Fort Jay, as I watched the house wren nest, I heard *chek, chek, chek*, and frankly thought I turn and see a grackle. I was very pleasantly surprised to instead see a male red-winged blackbird fly into a nearby tree. Later in the day I saw four female red-winged blackbirds foraging on the ground near yews on the western side of the *glacis*. They seemed oblivious to the game of Frisbee going on just up the hill. My guess is that all five of them were in transit and too busy fattening up before moving on to be bothered by their surroundings.

I got around to looking up again today, and saw two great egrets flying westward. Beyond these wonderful sightings, roll call today consisted of laughing gulls, herring gulls, ring-billed gulls, double crested cormorants, all with immature birds among them, a female mallard, barn swallows, chimney swifts, crows, mourning doves and a pigeon, house sparrows, three blue jays, a mockingbird and a grackle.

August 8, 2009

9:45-1:00 and casual observations through the day



House Wren. Photo credit naturepicsonline.com.

Today the common tern young on the Yankee Pier were much more difficult to distinguish from their parents. They have shed their brown, fuzzy down and look much more like terns, though their wings still have brownish bars on them. The colony on the whole appears to be doing quite well. I spotted a sandpiper in their midst, at least briefly. The bird, perhaps a migrating semi-palmated sandpiper (I didn't get a good enough view to say for sure), got too close to an empty tern nest and was chased away by an adult member of the colony. It was a brief sighting, but one that reminded me that some birds are already migrating toward their winter grounds.

Governors Island was not overwhelmed with migrants today, but I saw some other birds that were passing through. Two female American redstarts, a female black and white warbler, and a female yellow warbler foraged in a tree between St. Cornelius Chapel and the Promenade. Another female redstart flew about in the shrubbery behind Pershing Hall, and a female black and white warbler was in the shrubbery between Liggett Hall and Building 333. All warblers and all females, and all on their way to points south for the winter.

The house wren family in Fort Jay is going strong, though it is hard to imagine how the parents can feed so many young. I saw a bird from the first brood of the summer begging for food from an adult in a small tree growing out of the wall on the southwest end of the fort, not far from the nest. A nestling from the younger brood was on the ground just below the nest, loudly squawking for food. It appeared helpless, and I resisted an urge to pick it up and return it to its nest, realizing that the adults likely knew exactly



Rough-winged Swallow.
Photo credit naturepic-
sonline.com.

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where it was. And before long, it scooted under the door of the small corner building in which the nest is located. There were at least two more juveniles in the nest under the eave. The adult wrens have so much work to do!

I saw evidence that the eastern kingbird I have seen around the Parade Ground has a mate and that they have young. Two kingbirds were vigorously harassing several crows who came near a tree on the northeast end of the Parade Ground, just behind the building that houses the Sculptors Guild.

Five cedar waxwings were eating berries in the stand of trees at the top of the *glacis*, at the southeast corner of the exterior of Fort Jay. A warbling vireo shared that tree near St. Cornelius with the redstarts and yellow warbler. Barn swallows and northern rough-winged swallows swooped over the Parade Ground, Nolan Park and Yankee Pier, but I did not spot a single chimney swift. Female brown-headed cowbirds strutted around in Nolan Park, near the Hospital and on the *glacis*, not far from the encampment of re-enactors, on Governors Island for Civil War Weekend.

Roll call of other birds: Double-crested cormorants, ring-billed gulls, herring gulls, a great-black backed gull, two Canada geese, crows, robins (adults and immature), house sparrows, cardinals (I saw no sign of the young), a mockingbird, house sparrows, mourning doves and a pigeon.

August 9, 2009



Robin. Photo credit naturepic-
sonline.com.

7:30-8:00 am

I stayed on Governors Island overnight to help out with Civil War Weekend. When I woke up I took a short walk outside, though it wasn't good weather for birding. It was gray, dreary and the sky was dripping water (not actually raining, just dripping). As I passed the barbican, I heard some of the house wrens chattering away in Fort Jay. Chimney swifts and barn swallows were overhead, chasing a falcon, either a peregrine or an American kestrel. It fled the smaller birds so quickly that I didn't have a chance to really identify it. Robins and cardinals sang all around. And an immature black-crowned night heron foraged in the grass in Nolan Park. I have wondered why these herons spend time on the island. This bird gave me a hint. It had the same hunched over stance as a heron foraging in shallow water, and darted its head out several times to grab worms off the ground. After the rain over night, there were plenty of worms on the surface for robins and night herons alike!

3:45 pm

After finishing my volunteer duties for the day, I took a stroll on Buttermilk Channel just as the tide was turning. At least fifteen, perhaps twenty, double-crested cormorants were diving for food in the roiling waters. From afar, I saw a couple come to the surface with dark squiggly things in their bills. Moving a little closer to those particular birds, hoping to see what they were feasting on, I was amazed to discover that they were catching and eating seahorses! I only learned recently, on City of Water Day, that there are seahorses in New York Harbor. That is surprising enough. Seeing cormorants catching and eating them was astonishing.

August 22, 2009



Black-crowned Night Heron.
photo credit USGS

9:45 am-1:00 pm

Overcast, humid, periodic rain, 80 degrees

Today Hurricane Bill was off the east coast, making for a cloudy, very humid day with occasional showers. The temperature hovered around 80 degrees. Very few visitors came, so it could have been a great day for birding...if the birds had shown up. There really is very little of interest to report today, except that a female Baltimore oriole was foraging amid a flock of robins in a kousa dogwood tree between two houses on the west side of Nolan Park, an adult red-tailed hawk was skulking about in Colonels Row, and an immature black-crowned night heron took off from the Parade Ground as I approached, eventually perching in a tree near St. Cornelius' Chapel. And the common tern colony is gone. I saw just one common tern all day. The pier was strangely quiet after a summer of tern hubbub.

August 29, 2009

9:38-12:30 and casual observations throughout the day

Overcast, humid, periodic rain, about 75 degrees

Today Hurricane Danny was off the east coast. Storms off the coast two Saturdays in a row! But unlike last Saturday, some exciting migrants were on the island, particularly in the middle of the day. With few human visitors on the island because of the rainy whether, I had plenty of opportunity to bird...and to get my feet wet.

The most abundant migrants were American redstarts. I saw 22 of them today, every one a female. They were everywhere in the Historic District, including in Fort Jay, where they were joined by a blue-gray gnatcatcher and a male pine warbler. Also scattered over the district were 5 ovenbirds, 4 female black and white warblers, and 3 female and 2 male black-throated blue warblers. A male magnolia warbler was in the bushes next to the library. Two hermit thrushes move nervously about in Nolan Park. In the southeast corner of Nolan Park and on the Parade Ground I saw several birds that I haven't spotted on Governors Island before. A male hooded warbler flitted about among a flock of robins still feasting on the abundant fruit of the Kousa Dogwood between the houses on the west side of the park. Three blue-winged warblers, 2 female and 1 male, foraged for insects in nearby trees. And a single red-eyed vireo moved about in trees at the southeast corner of the Parade Ground.

A flock of cedar waxwings moved about in Nolan Park and in the trees behind Pershing Hall. A female Baltimore oriole continued to feed alongside that flock of robins at the dogwood tree. A great-crested flycatcher was perched at the top of a tree on the southwest corner of the Parade Ground. Warbling vireos (2) were spotted in Colonels Row and in Nolan Park. These could all be summer residents of the island, though I have not seen them consistently these last several months.