

Governors Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Governors Island National Monument
New York



Birding at Governors Island with Annie Barry– August, 2008



Cedar Waxwing sighted at Fort Jay - Summer, 2008
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Red-tailed Hawk sighted at Fort Jay- June, 2008
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Governors Island Bird Census

August 16, 2008

9:00 am-12:00 pm

Today I saw a few birds that I had not seen on Governors Island in previous trips, and I began to notice the absence of birds that I had seen all summer. The usual array of gulls and cormorants were to be found, as were house sparrows, cardinals, starlings, grackles, robins, rock pigeons and mockingbirds. Mourning Doves are worth noting, simply because of their sheer numbers. I spotted 49 of them on the lawn at the former site of the Super 8 Motel. But this is not surprising, since grass seed has been laid down here. Noticeable for their absence were common terns. I did not see a single one. The numbers of chimney swifts and barn swallows were down significantly. I saw just a few of each. As usual I saw just one blue jay.

Among new birds that I spotted was an Eastern Kingbird. This bird has probably been here all summer, but has simply eluded sighting. Today I saw it on the northern end of the Parade Ground. Inside Fort Jay, I spotted a Baltimore oriole around a fence where grapes are growing. The grapes are reminiscent of the time when officers and their families lived in the apartments at Fort Jay. It is unclear if the oriole, a young male, has been here all summer, or if he was just passing through. In Fort Jay I also spotted a warbler, clearly an early migrant, but it was too far away to identify positively. It was olive green with a bright yellow underside, resembling a female Wilson's warbler or a Kentucky warbler.



Cormorant swimming by Governors Island
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At least two more early migrants were to be found on the island today. A northern waterthrush was in the small pine trees between the library building and the *glacis*. And a female black and white warbler flitted about in the trees on the eastern side of the Parade Ground, next to Nolan Park.

Finally, today I was lucky enough to spot a female and male kestrel together, if only briefly. They flew together to a tree at the southern end of the Parade Ground, then split as the male headed off to Ft. Jay. The female remained in the general area for much of the morning, seemingly hanging out with the mourning doves, though they did not seem happy to see her.

August 23, 2008 4:00 pm-6:45 pm



Today I decided to bird in the late afternoon and early evening, hoping to see some different birds or behaviors. What was most noticeable to me today was the lack of birds. The island was very quiet. Even the crows seemed subdued, though I did see a number of them throughout the day. I did see the same "usual array" that I reported on August 16, though the numbers of songbirds were down, and the numbers of gulls and cormorants were up. The latter seemed to be settling in for the night. There were two birds that were reported to me today that I did not see. The first was a male red-tailed hawk which was spotted by National Park Ranger Charles Kahlstrom. The second sighting came from an employee of the island's security team who reported a "large gray hawk." This is likely one of several peregrine falcons which make their home around the harbor. The witness told me that he often sees the bird on the island early in the morning.

Common Tern at Governors Island
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I again spotted the male and female kestrel pair around the perimeter of the Parade Ground. The female spent much of her time in a tree near the former site of the tennis courts along with several nervous mourning doves. The male seems to prefer the area around Fort Jay. Sadly, as I was walking around Fort Jay, I found what appeared to be a chunk of a kestrel, bone and all. It seemed that the kestrel was a victim of a bird fight, or was captured and killed by a larger bird. The feathers had the distinctive rust color and black spots of a kestrel. My two birds looked healthy, so this chunk may have come from another kestrel that strayed into their territory, or from one of their young that did not survive.

The mourning doves that were drawn to the former tennis court and motel sites have increased in numbers. Today I spotted 91 either feasting on the grass seed that was strewn over both sites or roosting in the trees around them. At least one northern flicker was on the island, passing through on its migratory path. I did not see or hear a single blue jay, and common terns, chimney swifts and barn swallows seem to have left the island for the season. - Annie Barry, National Park Service Volunteer in Park at Governors Island National Monument