

Governors Island

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

National Monument
New York



Male Northern Cardinal *Photo courtesy of naturespicsonline.com.*

June 6, 2009

10:30-12:30 and some casual observations throughout the day

For today's journal I won't go into every bird I saw. Spring migration has ended and summer residents have settled in. There is not much avian news of note, with a few exceptions. I'll write about those exceptions.



Red-tail hawks are occasionally seen on Governors Island. *Photo credit naturespicsonline.com.*

The common terns have grown in numbers-I saw about 88 today-and many of them were sitting on nests on the Yankee Pier. I look forward to seeing young terns. A tree swallow sat on the railing of the pier, oblivious to the terns. It was enjoying a good bath. I'm not sure where this bird is living, since the island does not have much tree swallow housing stock (tree cavities or bird houses). It is more amenable to barn swallows and northern rough-winged swallows, both of which I saw in good numbers today. It is also unusual to see just one tree swallow.

The killdeer seem to be gone for good, though I heard a killdeer call for quite some time, and looked for the bird. I eventually found a mockingbird expertly mimicking a killdeer. It certainly had me fooled!

The kestrel pair are still no where to be seen. An immature red-tailed hawk did make an appearance, though it did not stay for long as a mob of crows chased it away. There were quite a few crows on the island today, and they did not want a hawk around at all.

I did not see the cedar waxwings today. They had been feasting on the flowers of tulip trees, which are almost gone by now. It's hard to tell if they will return anytime soon. The warbling vireo was still here, in the trees next to Building 107. It seems to move between that area and the trees near the front gate of Ft. Jay. Joining the vireo, and a first for me at Governors Island, was a male indigo bunting, singing away. I have seen a female in this general area, so there is a good chance that this is a breeding pair.

June 13, 2009

10:50-12:30 and casual observations through the day



Double-crested cormorants sit on pilings around Governors Island. *Photo credit naturespicsonline.com.*

I got a late start today, not getting into the field until 10:50. By then, the Figment art event was in full swing. The festival included many sound installations, which made it difficult to bird by ear. There was also a great deal of hustle and bustle on the island, and it was wonderful to see a lot of visitors. But it was very distracting and did not make for optimal birding conditions. I did not bird in Nolan Park at all, having run out of time, and finding it too busy with artists and visitors to even try. I must give more consideration to the timing of my excursions!

Nevertheless, I did some birding, though I had to settle for birding mostly by sight. I saw the usual summer residents. The common terns are settled on the Yankee Pier in large numbers, many of them sitting on nests. They have been joined by a nesting pair of herring gulls. Double-crested cormorants, including 2 juveniles, sat on pilings at several piers around the Historic District or swam in the water just below. I saw no Canada geese today, which is fairly unusual for Governors Island, but they probably opted to spend the day on another island in the harbor that was not having an art event. Some herring gulls, a laughing gull and a great black-backed gull rounded out the water birds for the day.

Not all bird sound was drowned out by the festival. Warbling vireos, one in the trees between Building 107 and Ft. Jay, the other in trees across the path from Castle Williams, were singing away as happily as ever. A good thing for me, too, since these grayish little birds are so hard to see as they blend in so nicely with their surroundings. A house wren called constantly as it busily flitted about the fence behind the officers housing on the south side of Ft. Jay. Crows called overhead. And of course there were the mockingbirds. From Ft. Jay to Castle Williams to the South Battery, and in places in between, there were mockingbirds mocking away. They are delightful birds.

For the rest, I had to depend on my eyes. There were starlings aplenty, grackles, robins, a male and female cardinal (I usually see or hear 6 or 7 cardinals but had to settle for seeing 2 today), house sparrows, mourning doves and pigeons. Chimney swifts, barn swallows and northern rough-winged swallows

(Continued from page 1)

swooped and dipped overhead, joined by a single tree swallow. And it is clear by now that the Eastern kingbird I have been seeing just to the south of Ft. Jay is staying for the summer, enjoying an insect feast on the *glacis* and Parade Ground. And today it was enjoying a little bit of art; I spotted it on a metal arch in one of the pieces created for Figment.

June 20, 2009

1:30-2:30; 3-30-4:30 and casual sightings through the day

Today was just horrible for birding. It was raining steadily for much of the day, and when it wasn't raining, it was dark and dreary. But the rainy conditions did allow me to see more than my usual share of herring gulls (I only count those on land) as a small flock spent much of the day in the moat around Ft. Jay and on the Parade Ground, eating worms that had been forced to the surface by water. The gulls were behaving like robins, just scooping up worm after worm. They were joined by a large flock of starlings in the grass, and by barn swallows and chimney swifts overhead. Despite the rain, the Parade Ground felt very busy!

Not much of more of note was spotted, though I was lucky enough to see a female indigo bunting in the tall grass on the wall of Ft. Jay, next to the main gate. Her presence confirms for me that there is probably a breeding pair on the island, though I have not seen their nest. The common terns are still sitting on their nests on the Yankee Pier. An Eastern wood pewee pee-ah-weeing in Nolan Park, a house wren busily foraging behind the eagle statue above the gate in Ft. Jay and northern rough-winged swallows swooping around Castle Williams were all good sightings. Also on the island, and around it, were laughing gulls, great black-backed gulls, double-crested cormorants, including 2 immature birds, 2 male mallards and a single ring-billed gull. Crows, cardinals, robins, house finches, house sparrows, pigeons and mourning doves, and of course the ubiquitous mockingbirds were all spotted today. Unseen were Canada geese, blue jays, cedar waxwings and kestrels. I may have to admit at last that the kestrels have left the island, or at least the Historic District. I have not seen them since last fall.



Mocking birds are numerous on Governors Island. *Photo credit naturepicsonline.com.*

June 27, 2009

I had very little opportunity to bird today. Other duties kept me busy and I did not collect bird data, but I would like to note a couple of things. First, the National Park Service has removed some of the spruce trees on the northeast corner of the exterior of Ft. Jay. Gone also is most of the small stand of trees at the northwest corner. The latter especially was a sure place to find birds. I have to keep in mind that changes like these, large and small, will play a role in how birds are experienced on Governors Island. And second, and much more happily, I managed to find the nest of the house wrens I've been spotting inside Ft. Jay. The nest is in the wood bordering the top of the small building on the southwest corner of the row houses, at the rear of the building. At least one adult wren, probably two, made repeated trips to collect food, returning to the nest to the loud calls of the nestlings inside. The nest is well concealed, so I could not see the young birds, but there had to be at least 3 inside.



House wrens use Fort Jay for their nests on Governors Island. *Photo credit naturepicsonline.com.*