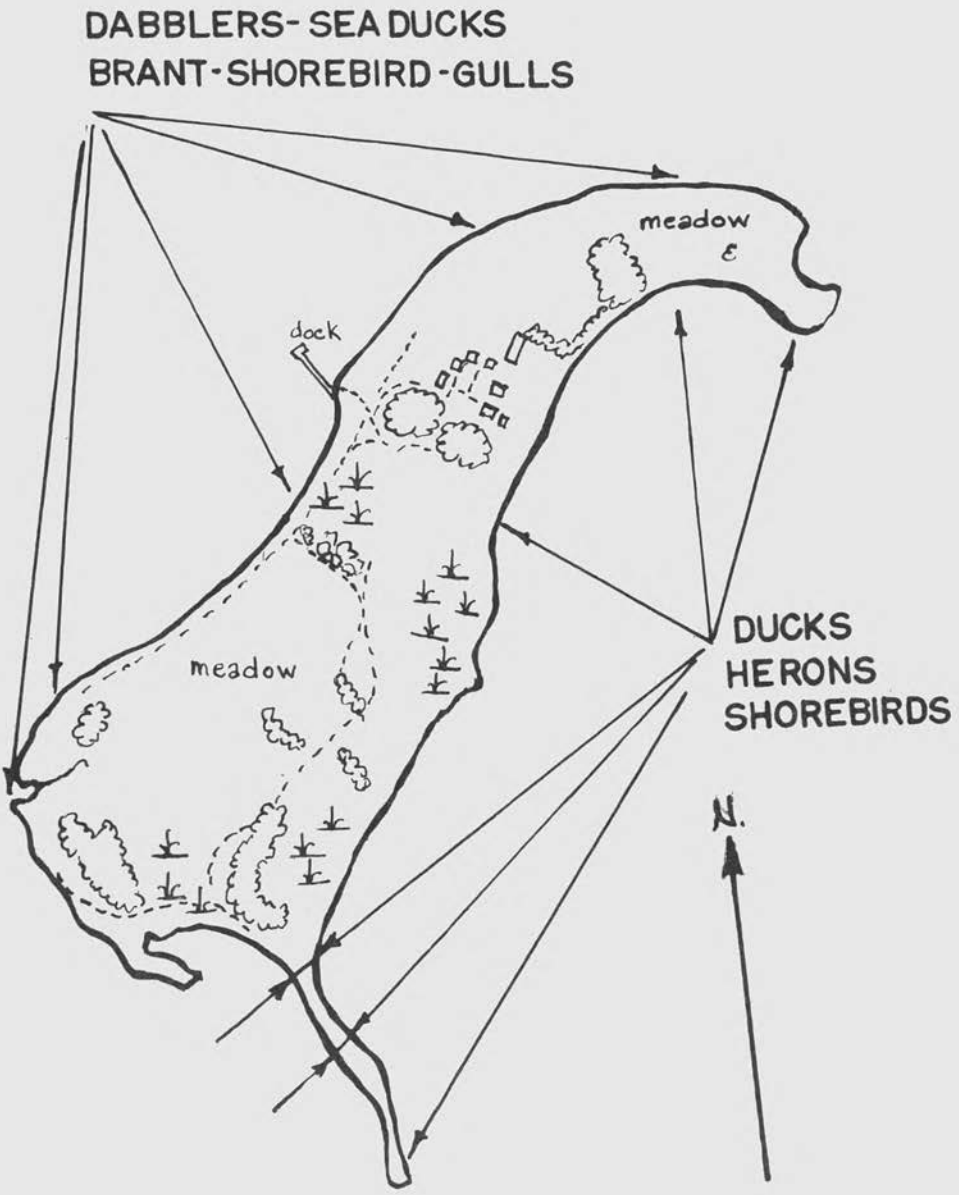
DABBLERS- SEA DUCKS
BRANT-SHOREBIRD-GULLS
meadow
dock
meadow
DUCKS
HERONS
SHOREBIRDS
N.

THOMPSON'S ISLAND -- A GOOD PLACE FOR BIRDS

by David T. Brown, Wollaston

Thompson's Island, located in the Suffolk County portion of Boston Harbor, is comprised of 157 acres of quite varied terrain -- rolling hills, meadows, pastureland, a spring-fed pond, and a tidal cove with salt marsh. The interior portion of this cove, located on the western side of the island, is choked with stands of eel-grass and partially filled with pebble bars, constantly changing and being shaped by the swift tidal currents running between the salt pond and the rocky beach on the outside. During the mid-1800's this cove was dammed up and dikes built to reduce the salinity of the water so that it could be used for irrigation. So what used to be geologically a much larger cove has filled in and become a meadow. It was at this site that David Thompson, a Scotsman, set up the first trading post in Boston Harbor in 1619. He traded with the Indians who were already either living or camping on most of the harbor islands.

Although Thompson had to return to England, he made arrangements with William Trevour and Captain Miles Standish to claim the island for him. This was done but it was given the name "Island of Trevour." As Thompson was an attorney, he came to be the Agent of the "Council for New England," and returned to America, and by 1626 claimed in person the island given him by Trevour. He changed the name to Thompson's Island and established what is believed to be the first permanent settlement by a colonist in Boston Harbor. While at the island he was involved with fishing, hunting, trading and farming. After Thompson's death the Massachusetts Bay Colony took possession and granted the island to the Town of Dorchester. In 1666, the Lynde family purchased the island and owned it for 148 years, using it solely for farming. As for the history of bird populations here, it seems evident that large numbers of sea ducks and brant must have found shelter and feed in the original very broad cove. Upon damming of the cove the area, and thus the number of ducks and gulls using it, would lessen. With the advent of farms, and the resultant clearing of land, songbird numbers doubtless lessened and open country birds, such as meadowlarks and Redwinged Blackbirds flourished.

During the American Revolution the British seized the island for a short time but the Continental Army soon captured the outpost and set the island on fire. The last private owner of the island was George W. Beale who sold it to the trustees of the "Boston Farm School" in 1834. The next year a new school building was erected and called the "Farm and Trades School." This school housed and taught orphans in the ways of practical farming and mechanical trades. Out of this emerged a private preparatory school called "Thompson's Academy" and a number of buildings and playing fields were built on the summit of the main hill. The Administration Building burned during the winter of 1971 and for a while some school activities were curtailed. Mrs. Thomas, one of the administrators and a good friend to the winter birds who maintained active feeders, moved away. Shortly thereafter, however, the school facilities took on new life with the advent of "Thompson Education Center," which currently teaches visiting students not only mechanical skills but also ecologically important fields such as land management and natural history. The author has been involved in bird surveys in winter and summer on the island and has contributed migrational data to the administrator to be used in developing the recreational potential of the island with a view to protecting the ecological value of its features.

With the expanding program of creating recreational facilities on the Harbor islands going ahead, it is very important to protect the fragile biological communities housed in such places as salt marshes. On Thompson's Island, for example, studies have shown that trampling feet and indiscriminate clearing of brush and undergrowth have caused the removal of several species of nesting birds just from the 1960's to the 1970's. Discussions with the island manager, Mr. Timothy J. White, have been encouraging in that plans are being considered to erect board walks and nature trails so that visitors may enjoy nature without disturbing it.

One would think that with several disastrous fires raging upon the island, vegetation, especially trees, would have suffered a great deal. Probably for a short time this has been so. However, in 1846 Theodore Lyman donated and planted a grove of 6,000 oak trees. "Lyman's Grove," as it is still called, protects the southwestern shore of the island and two more groves of mature deciduous trees surround the administration buildings and border the playing fields. Also, two small groves of pine trees were planted some time ago on each end of the island to serve as windbreaks.

Being an island, the low tide is effective in creating a habitat well used by shorebirds and gulls. Besides the rocky beaches, and exposed mud flats, a long sandbar that stretches nearly to Squaw Rock on Squantum becomes at low tide a resting place during migration for hundreds of sandpipers and terns. These may be easily observed by telescope from Squaw Rock, Squantum, without actually visiting the island.

Now that we have discussed the history of Thompson's Island since the settlement by white men, and the various changes that have occurred in the physical features of the island that changed the populations of the birds, perhaps you would like to peruse the following list of birds found on the island. After doing so, we should share the same conclusion--that Thompson's Island is indeed a good place for birds. In fact, you might want to visit there yourself at

various seasons to enjoy its variety. The island is open in a rather limited and formal way to the public. The island management requests that you contact them ahead of time as to the date and purpose of your visit c/o Mr. Timothy J. White, Thompson Island, Boston Harbor, Mass., 02169, or call Mr. White at 328-3900. You will also want to contact the Pilgrim IV at Kelley's Landing, South Boston, to ascertain the schedule of the public ferry. The schedule is changeable, according to season, and you may have as little as two hours or as much as six or seven hours on the island, depending on your birding needs. The management requests no firearms be carried, and you might be stopped out on the beach somewhere by one of the staff investigating whether your telescope might be a shotgun. We are happy they keep a strict watch because many hunters illegally trespass by boat.

The following list of birds has been compiled from years of observations by the author and his friends, and the island staff. Two journals were also consulted: RECORDS OF NEW ENGLAND BIRDS (produced by the Massachusetts Audubon Society but no longer published) and BIRD OBSERVER OF EASTERN MASSACHUSETTS. Although over two hundred species have been recorded it may be noted that there are some glaring misses of relatively common species that may be found on the nearby mainland and doubtless occur. Due to the brevity and sparcity of visits these have not been located (e.g. American Bittern, Winter Wren, etc.). It would therefore be appreciated if anyone visiting the island would keep a list and submit it to Mrs. Ruth P. Emery, 225 Belmont St., Wollaston, Ma. 02170, so that it might be incorporated into the BIRD OBSERVER records reports and the species list might be kept up to date and enlarged. Thompson's Island lies within a heavily travelled migration lane and many interesting records should be produced here. Proper use of the island as a good place to find birds will provide an example that will be helpful in the future as the rest of the harbor islands are opened to the public. The list below contains an abbreviated evaluation of the current status of each species plus major areas bird-watching on Thompson's Island has changed since the 1960's. Ten years ago many migrant species were quite obvious since they could congregate and feed at low-level in and around the main grove of trees and shrubbery east of the main buildings. Now that the undergrowth has been removed and a playground and obstacle course set up for recreation right in the middle of the grove, warblers and transient sparrows are much more scattered and probably do not stay as long. Also, on the bright side, a change has taken place in the status of herons and shorebirds following a cycle of milder winters. Several heron species that used to be accidental have now become regular summer visitors, using the shallows for feeding as they are close to the outer island nesting areas. In 1976 Glossy Ibises, Snowy Egrets, Great Egrets, Little Blue Herons, and even Louisiana Herons were a daily morning and evening sight on the southwestern side of the cove. Since autumn freeze-ups have been lacking for several years, shorebirds such as Yellowlegs, Black-bellied Plovers, Red Knots and Ruddy Turnstones have remained sometimes throughout the winter, either at the spring-pool or on the outer beaches.

A complete summary of the status of Thompson's Island birds has been placed on file with the Thompson Education Center and is of such length as to preclude publication in Bird Observer. The species list is lengthy so for the purposes of this paper the following key is provided in order to understand the abbreviations used. One should use the Massachusetts Daily Field Card published by the Massachusetts Audubon Society in order to determine actual weeks and months involved in seasonal records. It should also be noted that some species are included as offshore sightings since the island provides a vantage point for viewing the harbor not available from most of the mainland areas. Since we are discussing an island and since the actual numbers of any species present limited, the abundance code (A, C, U, R) refers to a species' availability or island distribution during proper season during a field trip.

A - Abundant (widely distributed or seasonally numerous-- can be expected on any field trip in season)
C - Common (well distributed or sometimes in numbers during migration -- perhaps not seen on every field trip)
U - Uncommon (of regular occurrence but seldom seen, or secretive, or of limited distribution)
R - Rare (not seen every year but possible due to wandering or weather conditions, etc.)
Ac - Accidental (a chance record with no expected duplication)
PR - Permanent resident
W - Winter
SR - Summer resident
WR - Winter resident
SM - Spring migrant
FM - Fall migrant
M - Migrant both seasons
V - Visitor, perhaps also out of season
Sp, Su - Spring, Summer
OS - Offshore
* - confirmed breeding
x - suspected breeding
f - former breeder, can only occur again through proper ecological management

BIRDS FROM THOMPSON'S ISLAND, BOSTON HARBOR

Common Loon: U, M. V
Red-throated Loon: U, M. V
Red-necked Grebe: R.V., UWROS
Horned Grebe: C, WROS, V
Pied-billed Grebe: U, M, V
Great Cormorant: AWROS, V
Double-breasted Cormorant: ASROS, V
Great Blue Heron: UV, M
Green Heron: CVSu
Little Blue Heron: UVSu
Cattle Egret: RVSu, RSM
Great Egret: USM, RSuV, UFM
Snowy Egret: A, SM, SuV
Black-crowned Night Heron: CMSuV
Yellow-crowned Night Heron: RSp, SuV
Glossy Ibis: CSM, SuV
Mute Swan: RV
Canada Goose: CM, UWV
Brant: CM, AWV
Mallard: UWR
Black Duck: AWR, CPR*
Gadwall: RM
Pintail: UM, RWV
Green-winged Teal: CSM, UFM, RWV
Blue-winged Teal: CM, RSR x
American Wigeon: CM, UWR
Northern Shoveler: RFM
Wood Duck: RSM
Ring-necked Duck: RM
Canvasback: UM, RWV
Greater Scaup: CWV, AWOS
Lesser Scaup: RSV
Common Goldeneye: CWV, AWOS
Bufflehead: AWR
Oldsquaw: RWVOS
Common Eider: AWVOS
King Eider: RWVOS
White-winged Scoter: CWVOS
Surf Scoter: RWVOS
Black Scoter: RFMWVOS
Ruddy Duck: RM
Common Merganser: RWV
Red-breasted Merganser: CWV, AWOS
Goshawk: RWV, UM
Sharp-shinned Hawk: UM
Cooper's Hawk: RM
Red-tailed Hawk: UV,UWR
Broad-winged Hawk: UM
Rough-legged Hawk: RWV
Marsh Hawk: UM, UWV
Osprey: RM
Peregrine Falcon: RM
Merlin: UM
American Kestrel: CPR*
Ruffed Grouse: RWV
Ring-necked Pheasant: APR
Virginia Rail: RSM x
Sora: RSM
American Coot: RM
Semipalmated Plover: CM
Piping Plover: RM
Killdeer: UPR*, AM
Lesser Golden Plover: RFM
Black-bellied Plover: AM, RWV
Ruddy Turnstone: AM, UWV
American Woodcock: CM, USR*
Common Snipe: CM, RWV
Whimbrel: RM
Spotted Sandpiper: CM, USR*
Solitary Sandpiper: RM
Willet: RM, AcWV
Greater Yellowlegs: AM, RWR
Lesser Yellowlegs: AM
Red Knot: CM, RWV
Pectoral Sandpiper: UM
White-rumped Sandpiper: RM
Least Sandpiper: AM
Dunlin: AM, CWV
Short-billed Dowitcher: CM
Semipalmated Sandpiper: AM
Western Sandpiper: RFM
Hudsonian Godwit: RFM
Sanderling: AM, RWV
Glaucous Gull: RWV
Iceland Gull: RWV
Great Black-backed Gull: AV
Herring Gull: AV
Ring-billed Gull: CV
Black-headed Gull: UWV
Laughing Gull: RSM, CFV
Bonaparte's Gull: AM, UWV
Forster's Tern: RFM
Common Tern: AM, CSuV
Arctic Tern: RSM
Roseate Tern: RSM, RFV
Least Tern: RM
Royal Tern: AcSu
Caspian Tern: RSM
Thick-billed Murre: AcW
Dovekie: AcW
Rock Dove: APR *
Mourning Dove: CPR*CWV f
Black-billed Cuckoo: RM* f
Barn Owl: RWV
Great Horned Owl: RWV
Snowy Owl: UWV
Barred Owl: RWV
Common Nighthawk: CM
Chimney Swift: CM, CSuV x
Ruby-throated Hummingbird: RSM
Belted Kingfisher: UM, UWV
Common Flicker: AM, CPR*
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker: UM
Hairy Woodpecker: UV
Downy Woodpecker: CPR*
Eastern Kingbird: CSR*
Great Crested Flycatcher: CSM
Eastern Phoebe: CM, CSR*
Yellow-bellied Flycatcher: UM
Least Flycatcher: CM
Eastern Wood Pewee: CM, fCSR
Olive-sided Flycatcher: RSM
Horned Lark: CWV
Tree Swallow: AM, f*
Bank Swallow: UM
Rough-winged Swallow: UM
Barn Swallow: AM, f*
Purple Martin: fCM

Blue Jay: AM, UPRf*, AWV
Common Crow: AV, CPR*
Black-capped Chickadee: CWV, CPR* *
Tufted Titmouse: UWV
White-breasted Nuthatch: UWV x f
Red-breasted Nuthatch: UWV
Brown Creeper: UM
House Wren: f Su *
Mockingbird: CPR*
Gray Catbird: CM, USR, *
Brown Thrasher: USR*
American Robin: AM, CSR*
Wood Thrush: CM f*
Hermit Thrush: CM
Swainson's Thrush: CM
Veery: CM
Eastern Bluebird: f M. f x
Golden-crowned Kinglet: CM
Ruby-crowned Kinglet: CM
Water Pipit: UM
Cedar Waxwing: CM f x
Northern Shrike: RWV
Starling: APR*
Solitary Vireo: CM
Red-eyed Vireo: CM, f*
Black and White Warbler: CM
Tennessee Warbler: CSM
Nashville Warbler: CM
Northern Parula Warbler: CM
Yellow Warbler: AM, f *
Magnolia Warbler: CM
Cape May Warbler: USM
Black-throated Blue Warbler: USM
Yellow-rumped Warbler: AM, UWV
Black-throated Green Warbler: CM
Blackburnian Warbler: UM
Chestnut-sided Warbler: CM, f*
Bay-breasted Warbler: CSM
Blackpoll Warbler: CM
Prairie Warbler: CM
Palm Warbler: CM
Ovenbird: CM
Northern Waterthrush: CM
Yellowthroat: CM, USR*
Wilson's Warbler: UM
Canada Warbler: CM
American Redstart: AM, f*
House Sparrow: APR*
Bobolink: USM fx
Eastern Meadowlark: UV, USR f*
Yellow-headed Blackbird: AcV
Redwinged Blackbird: CSR, RWV *
Northern Oriole: f CSR*
Common Grackle: ASR*
Brown-headed Cowbird: ASR* RWV
Scarlet Tanager: CSM
Cardinal: CPR*
Rose-breasted Grosbeak: CSM
Indigo Bunting: UM
Evening Grosbeak: RWV
Purple Finch: UV
House Finch: CSR x
Common Redpoll: RWV
Pine Siskin: RWV
Common Goldfinch: CV f *
Rufous-sided Towhee: CM *
Savannah Sparrow: AM, CWV
Sharp-tailed Sparrow: USR*
Dark-eyed Junco: AWR, AM
Tree Sparrow: AWV
Chipping Sparrow: AM, CSR *
Field Sparrow: CM, UWV
White-crowned Sparrow: CFM
White-throated Sparrow: AM, UWV
Fox Sparrow: USM
Swamp Sparrow: AM, CSR* UWR
Song Sparrow: APR, CM*
Snow Bunting: RWV

A REQUEST FOR SPRING HAWK RECORDS

by Blair Nikula, Harwich

It has become evident in the last couple of years that a significant spring hawk migration takes place on Cape Cod. The presence on this "water-locked" peninsula of a rather large number of birds that are known to avoid water raises a number of intriguing questions: How did they get here? Where do they go from here? Where do they cross the water? Why do peak numbers seem to occur 10-15 days later than the corresponding peak on the mainland?

I am interested in compiling and analyzing all spring hawk records from the Cape and hopefully a summary of these records can be published in a future issue of B.O.F.M. I would very much appreciate receiving all hawk reports from any birders visiting the Cape this spring (mid-March - early June). Also of great interest would be information from Nantucket, Martha's Vineyard and southeastern Massachusetts, particularly in the vicinity of the Cape Cod Canal. In addition to the date, location and number, notes on the direction the bird(s) were travelling would be especially valuable.

For those who do visit the Cape in search of raptors this spring, I would offer the following tips: Generally, the farther out the peninsula you go, the more hawks you'll see (i.e., the more concentrated they become). By far the largest numbers are recorded in the Truro - Provincetown area. Also, the higher you are, the more you will see. Some of the better vantage points are Highland Light in Truro, the Visitors Center parking lot in Provincetown (poor light here), and the high dunes in the Beech Forest. (The Pilgrim Monument has yet to be checked, but may prove to be an excellent observation point.) Finally, as at any hawk flyway, the weather is very important. While a few birds may be seen under almost any conditions, a clear sky and winds out of the southwesterly quadrant will produce by far the best results.

Please send any records to: Blair Nikula, Park Street, Harwich, MA 02645. Thank you.