

# FOGGI



## FRIENDS OF GREAT GULL ISLAND

Volume V

February 2014

### THE 2013 SEASON

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During a full moon on the night of October 29-30, 2012, Super Storm Sandy swept over Great Gull Island. Its strongest gust, 94 miles per hour, was hurricane force and recorded by Weather Flow equipment mounted on the island's central tower. Waves took out the connection between the landing platform at the end of the dock and the shore. When we arrived in the spring, two of the dock's fifty-foot spans lay in the high rocks on the north shore of the island. A third span hung uselessly, one end still attached to the dock, the other submerged in the water, an effective reminder of the power and devastation of the storm. The island was partially breached in two places and a chunk of the eastern end eroded away. Large blocks of asphalt comprising the western end paths were displaced and the bricks under them scattered over the remaining asphalt. This made it very difficult to walk on long stretches of the paths. This serious damage underlines the critical importance of raising funds to stabilize the shoreline in certain sections of the island, particularly the paths at the western end, to prevent further erosion.

In 2014 we will begin our 46<sup>th</sup> season on Great Gull Island. I thank the following people who have been our core group for many years, and have been instrumental in making our program run smoothly and be fun.



Grace Cormons who leads the Roseate Team began working on Great Gull Island in 1966. In the beginning we did not have as many Roseate and Common terns nesting as we do today and a single group checked the open sections of the island for Commons as well as the rock areas where Roseates nested. From 1975 to 1987, Grace took a break to raise a family. With the increase in Common Terns we could not continue to check the rocks where most of the Roseates nested. Fortunately, Grace brought her two sons to Great Gull in 1988 and undertook the Roseate check which she continues today. It is a challenging and

energetic check and is done by two to five people depending on the season. We are lucky that Grace has been able to continue her careful check of the rocks with a small crew to monitor the Roseate nesting population on Great Gull Island. She has wonderful endurance and loves the rocks and finding the Roseates nesting under them.



Joseph DiCostanzo, our data manager, began working on Great Gull Island in 1975. From the beginning he was in charge of the data, starting as a student/volunteer working in the office in New York in 1974 through the present. He is an excellent birder and kept his eyes open to see what was going over Great Gull Island and opened the nets in the spring and fall. Running the mist nets was a wonderful way for people on the island to learn about the birds migrating through. Joe had a keen eye for discrepancies in the data and as part of his background some statistics and knowledge of

computers. Joe wrote the programs for the volunteers in the office at the American Museum of Natural History, to use to computerize the field data. Later he put this data in a master file, initially designed by Janet Williams, as she worked from her home in Connecticut entering data. The master file includes: band numbers of birds banded on Great Gull 1966 – 2013, and birds banded in colonies near Great Gull during a twelve year period from 1972 -1984. It also includes recoveries of birds banded originally on Great Gull and recovered in the western hemisphere and band numbers from recent netting projects in Brazil, Argentina and the Azores. Tremendous thanks to Joe, who continues to work with the data, and to all of you who have either contributed or computerized field data, or recovered Great Gull birds and reported them to the banding office.

In 2009 Joe, working with Chuck McAlexander in Chuck's Brasslab shop, fastened geolocators to plastic bands which Joe later put on Common Terns on Great Gull. Many of the birds returned in 2010 and trappers on Great Gull, particularly the Argentinians, trapped these birds and gave them to Joe so he could download the data collected on the geolocators and trace the migration routes of the birds wearing them. A few more birds with geolocators were trapped in 2011 and the paper on the results of this work is almost ready to submit to a journal. We look forward to seeing it in print.

Matthew Male started working on Great Gull in 1976 and helps us today whenever we have a problem with structural things on the island, particularly until very recently, the dock. During his time on the island, in addition to helping with the regular monitoring work, Matthew built thirty observation blinds and organized the furnishing of our headquarters building with things he salvaged from Little Gull Light when the Coast Guard automated it and men were no longer required to live there. From 1979 through 1994 Matthew took crews from Great Gull to trap and band in near-by colonies. He had learned how to handle boats from his father and we were lucky that Matthew was willing to undertake our off-island banding program. Since leaving Great Gull, Matthew has returned each spring to disc harrow and then rake nesting areas for Common Terns. With the program for limiting invasive plants on Great Gull begun in 2012 Matthew worked around the edges of some of these areas with the tractor and in 2013 did not need to use the tractor. I hope Matthew will oversee building the new blinds on the island this spring and help expand the terraces to give Roseate Terns more nesting areas. I feel very lucky that Matthew has stayed in touch and has found time to continue to help us on Great Gull Island.





Dick Young comes from Naperville, Illinois and has helped us on Great Gull since 1981. He is an excellent field worker and very thorough in banding chicks and trapping adults. Throughout each season Dick often surprises us with things he brings to the island. For a few years he papered the outhouses with memorable quotes he found on a calendar. Dick does not do this anymore, but people still ask about the quotes. One year feet appeared in black paint crossing the ceiling of the banding room, presenting the problem of who did it and when? Students often find surprises that are fun in their cubbyholes where they keep their field gear or in their luggage after leaving the island. Each year there is an Elvis shrine somewhere



on the island where students can leave wishes – which are sometimes answered.

Dick has a world of information in his head and a few years ago won \$50,000 on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*. He has many talents which appear when his environment offers the opportunity for him to express them. I remember one season the students found a basketball hoop washed up on the beach and put it up. I watched the games and Dick could make baskets standing, what seemed to me, miles away from the basket. One year many of the students on the island did lots of exercises. They put up a chinning bar and many “did steps”, one girl led volunteers in stepping to music. There was often a flurry of exercising in the morning after trapping and before breakfast. I was doing the dishes one morning and Dick walked in carrying two five gallon

Jerry cans filled with water. As he passed me he looked up and said, “I find carrying water very good exercise.”

Jim Sorensen has been coming to Great Gull since 1981 for spring and fall work weekends. He has invited a number of his friends to come out with him and thank goodness they have. They are all good workers and accomplish a lot whenever they come. Brian Simpson came with Jim his first year and later Jim brought Cliff Bentsen, John Avallone, Bob Kane and most recently his son Michael. Jim and the men he brings always work hard at whatever there is to do: building, painting and repairing blinds, repairing the buildings or clearing sections of the island.

During the winter Jim and his wife Baerbel have hosted a number of trap making parties at their house in Connecticut. We usually assemble in the morning and work all day. Baerbel gives us a wonderful lunch and fantastic dinner. On one occasion the place we were working on the traps was suddenly absolutely empty. I went upstairs to see what had happened and found the UCONN Huskies were playing and no one wanted to miss the game. Gradually, people made their way back to the basement and we finished a good number of traps. The Sorensens have been wonderful too in letting us store much of our gear that we move off the island in their barn over the winter. They have been extremely generous in inviting me to stay overnight when we were making traps as well as on work weekends when our captain schedules an early departure time for leaving the dock. I love visiting them and their farm, of course, under Jim’s constant care is beautiful.



Loretta Stillman first came to Great Gull in 1982. She took one look at our hats and designed a new one using artificial flowers to keep the terns away from our heads. The terns hit the highest point as you move through the colony and if they make a hole in your hat, they continue to hit that spot and eventually reach your head. Loretta’s hats are great and she made some with cat tails instead of flowers for men who hesitated to wear a hat with flowers. Prior to Loretta’s design we had tried duct tape to hold sticks in our hats. It often took too much duct tape to hold the sticks and students ended up with the crown of their hats covered with duct tape. This worked but used a lot of tape. Instead, Loretta sews the plastic flowers on the hats.

Loretta leads the western end check and is an excellent chick bander. She traps in the area behind the headquarters building with Dick Young and together they do a very thorough job. Their area for the second year was representative of the colony as a whole, proving it to be an excellent sample area to determine the hatching pattern in the colony.

Loretta prepares rooms for people arriving each week and explains check procedures to new students. She is always ready to help with the cooking and prepares a wonderful dish with Swiss chard and sauerbraten.

Loretta has also undertaken a project sexing some of the captured birds using blood samples. She comes to the American Museum of Natural History each year after Christmas to do the lab work in the Ornithology lab over a five day period.

Melissa McClure came to Great Gull Island in 1990. The first year she came she rented a truck and drove our gear from New York to Niantic and in the fall did the reverse. She still moves our gear to and from Niantic and this is a tremendous help. Melissa has done a wonderful job landscaping a part of the area around the headquarters building. Recently she has planted cherry, plum and apple trees in different places on the island and lovely flowers which we enjoy when they blossom each spring. For the last two years Melissa has been trying to make her herb garden safe from the *Microtus*, a species which is quite ingenious in finding ways to get over and around the fences Melissa builds.



Melissa is a gourmet cook and in 2012 she and Dale Dancis gave the island a broiler for cooking meat outside. We worried that the Argentinians might not like the broiler, but when they tried it they loved it and thought we needed one twice as big for the period during the peak hatch.

At the end of the season Melissa collects everything that has been left in the dorms that needs washing. This includes shirts, sheets socks and sweaters. She takes them home, washes them, and brings them back to the island in the spring.

Our first work weekend in the spring of 2013, May 4-5, was calm and sunny. Glen Prushinski brought ten Boy Scouts to Great Gull. Landing on the island without a working dock is tricky. Once we reach the island everyone negotiates getting from the boat into a scow and Matty Poitras, our captain, takes us to shore. We all jump out on to the beach once the scow touches sand. After arriving, the scouts gathered and put in place Roseate Tern shelters that Sandy had blown across the western end of the island. Lottie Prushinski and her grandsons, Evan and Greg, stayed for a second day and helped clear sections of the island. When Matty arrived to take us to the mainland, we pulled ourselves on to the bow of the scow and Matty ferried us to his boat and took us to the mainland. Throughout the summer Matty landed people on the island in the same way, coming into either the south beach or the north side of the island, depending on the wind.

For those who volunteer on Great Gull in early May, life has become much easier. We are indebted to Mel Romani, who, for the last two years has numbered 10,000 tongue depressors during the winter. We use these tongue depressors to mark nests of Common Terns, and before Mel volunteered we used to try to number the tongue depressors ourselves in a short time in May. Mel's tongue depressors are beautiful, and the numbers are clear which is important because the nest number relates chicks as well as the adults to a particular nest in the records for each season. We still number 2000 tongue depressors in May to mark Roseate Tern nests, but 2000 is a manageable number.

On May 10 I moved to the island for the summer. Many helped with the move-out weekend and Bob Kane and Lottie Prushinski stayed for the week. Matty first checked the south side of the island, but there was too much wave action to land and unload the gear, so he turned and headed for the north side. After Matty turned we noticed two Common Terns flying over our wake, cocking their heads and looking down. I had not seen





Commons do this when we approached the island in other seasons, although I had seen this behavior in South America as Common Terns followed shrimp boats. The birds followed us for about 300 yards and then peeled off. A single bird also arrived and did the same thing. I wondered at the time if it might mean baitfish were in short supply.

Bob Kane, Stirling Danskin and Lisa Neild unloaded gear on the beach and then everyone helped carry it to the headquarters building. It was a lot to carry. Moving and carrying was made a little easier by tea breaks we took to eat some of the pies John Danskin had made, as well as the blueberry bread his sister Jillian baked. All gear had been carried up by the time eleven volunteers from AmeriCorps arrived late Friday afternoon. Once everything was stored, Melissa McClure cooked chicken for dinner on the new grill she and Dale Dancis had donated to the island. We devoured the chicken and ate brownies Lottie brought for dessert and then tumbled into bed.

The following morning the AmeriCorps volunteers began work immediately and put together twelve Roseate shelters, replacing some that had been lost. They set them all out at the western end of the island by 10:00 am. Four AmeriCorps volunteers then dug a compost pit, while others helped Lottie fence both large gun emplacements so chicks would not drop into them. Stirling and Bob shingled sections of the roofs of two student buildings laid bare by Sandy. In the afternoon Lottie, Stirling and students from AmeriCorps finished raking the coal area, a section of the island covered by coal left by the army, and Lisa Neild and Bob Kane finished fencing the Big Gun at the eastern end of the island. Melissa raked her garden and cleaned up around the headquarters building, then took a break and found a Spotted Sandpiper nest containing one egg in the asparagus patch above the coal area. She returned in time to cook hamburgers on the new grill for Saturday night dinner – cookies for dessert, bed by 9:00.

On Sunday, AmeriCorps set up small blinds at the eastern and western ends of the island. Stirling brought the tractor battery to Bob Kane who then started the tractor. Lottie cleared the path to the boat on the north side of the island, then cleared the old pokeberry on either side of the path to the dock; AmeriCorps helped. Matty arrived at about 1:10 pm. Everyone was ready with gear sitting on the north beach waiting. Matty motored by and headed south. I called him and he said: “South Beach!” Everybody gathered up their gear and headed across the island to the South Beach where they loaded the scow, working really efficiently. Matty took two groups to his boat anchored offshore, then headed for Niantic.

In the week that followed Lottie and Bob found lots of things that needed to be done. They expertly fitted one of our new tops on the M-11 dock blind. Lydia Thomas, who volunteers in the office, had double-checked the blind measurements and sent them to Bill Ginty, Vice-president of Durham Awning where the tops were made. Lottie finished raking the entire eastern end, an excellent preparation for the terns’ arrival. Bob checked all buildings to see that they were ready for spring. He replaced the banding room door and gave it a great new wooden handle. He also repaired the latch on the south door of the north building, Paight,

and remounted the oar for the weather vane. One windy, rainy day Bob labeled the nails in the storeroom of the headquarters building and discovered the cases of freeze-dried food stored near the refrigerator. Lottie cleared out the banding room, treated the johns and washed the floor in the headquarters building. During the week, Bob became an enthusiastic cook. He produced dinners in ten minutes all week, as we tried the different kinds of dried food that had come as a generous present and a welcome surprise from a neighbor.

On May 17 staff members from the American Museum of Natural History and representatives from FEMA examined the remains of the dock. Later that same day Melinda Billings, Jill Hamilton, Hu Plummer, and Judy and Don Estes arrived for the work weekend. The first morning, Judy numbered 500 Roseate tongue depressors, and Hue and Don cleared the last of the edges of the rock sites where Roseates nest. They also put out a few tires for Roseates the AmeriCorps team had picked up around the island. Melinda swept the thruway behind the headquarters



building. In the afternoon we walked around the western end of the island. Jill Hamilton found an oystercatcher nest with three eggs, and Melinda took some good pictures of it. Matty, because of his fishing trip schedule, picked up departing volunteers at 6:55 am on Sunday morning, May 19. Jill stayed for the week.

The ten day period May 19-28 was unseasonably cold and wet, with twenty-five knot winds gusting to thirty. I don't remember another spring on Gull when we needed daily fires in the headquarters building for most of a ten day period. Jill had brought cookies she had made and some made by Teresa Grimm, so teas during this cold week were quite festive! Our captain said on May 21 the baitfish had not yet come in. During the days Jill was on the island she had some rigorous work deadlines, so she spent much of her time, between bouts of nest marking, at the computer. At the end of her stay she typed the boat schedule, and it looked nicer than it has ever looked. I was delighted she found time to do it. Jill left Gull May 28. Two students, David Farris and Elsa Joseph, had stayed in Niantic and caught the May 28 boat out that took Jill to the mainland. High winds over the preceding weekend led to cancellation of the weekend boat



Our first egg appeared May 18, about a week later than first eggs in many recent seasons. Because of the weather and very few students on the island we were only able to check a few sections of the island the last two weeks of May, so it was with great excitement that we welcomed volunteers in June. The crew included Lottie Prushinski, Ryan Prushinski, Debbie, Paige, and Nicole Buzzard, Cheryl and Julie Blum, Lynne Hertzog, Anne Via McCollough, Jenny Freeman, Artie Morris and Dale Dancis. By June 2 we had marked 5802 nests – lots of deep knee bends!

I was very pleased when Debbie, Lottie, Jenny, Anne and Lynne decided to weed the Roseate terraces after marking all the Common nests they could find. They were excited to report that as soon as they finished weeding, Roseates landed to inspect the terraces and began exploring the nest boxes. This year seventy-four pairs of Roseates used the terraces, more than in any previous season. At the end of the weekend Paige led a tunnel tour for new arrivals. Matty picked weekend volunteers up at 6:00 am on Sunday, June 2.

Artie Morris and Dale Dancis joined David Farris for the week June 2-7. They marked 2000 nests bringing the total to over 7900 and doweled nests at both ends of the island that were in vegetation. Artie took beautiful photos of Roseates and helped with the check as well as with the cooking. Dale helped David, a recent graduate of the University of Connecticut, to find and take notes on Barn Swallow nests.



During and just after the first weekend in June the poppies in Melissa's garden were spectacular: four blossoms May 31, twenty-one June 2, and twenty-nine June 3. During most of June the white daisies on the island were striking, followed by contrasting patches of Black-eyed Susans, June 28.

On June 7 Loretta Stillman, Dick Young, Catherine Neal, Rilquer Mascarenhas and Nevada Trager arrived to begin working. It was the week before the beginning of the peak hatching period, so in addition to marking nests, Dick began fixing traps, and Loretta cleaned all the student rooms and made sure they were ready for occupants.

This year Grace joined Catherine and Rilquer June 12. Catherine monitored Roseates with Grace in 2011 and 2012. Rilquer, from Brazil, joined the team for the 2013 season. Sandy caused erosion which blocked a number of places around the edge of the island where Roseates formerly nested; however, Sandy also dropped sand in the rocks on which Roseates nested, somewhat alleviating their nesting difficulties. Sandy also broke up sections of the asphalt paths at the western end of the island. In many sections, broken pieces of asphalt covered by small rocks and bricks provided a substrate where Roseates as well Commons nested. Grace concluded that the numbers of Roseates nesting on Great Gull Island in 2013 were about the same as had nested in 2012. During nest marking she observed that former Roseate nesting sites in the rocks that



were clear were used first and new sites occupied later. Grace estimated that 1543 Roseate pairs nested on the island in 2013.

I take this opportunity to thank Steve Sinkevich, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Sr. Biologist Long Island Field Office, for his support of our Roseate Tern work from 2010 through 2013. With his help we have been able to continue to monitor our population of this endangered species, reimbursing members of the Roseate team for their travel expenses and time working on the island.



There was too much wind on June 13 and 14 for Matty to bring people out for the beginning of the Common peak hatch. Shepherded by Joe DiCostanzo, fifteen people stayed in Niantic for two nights, and Matty brought them out the morning of June 15. We had twenty-one people for the peak hatch, including four from Argentina led, as always, by Esteban Bremer. We were very glad to see them land without difficulty. People brought up their gear and had coffee. Ryan Prushinski prepared field aprons for everyone getting ready for check. Newcomers were instructed by Dick and Loretta and then everyone checked the island for both new and hatching nests. We finished the day by trapping adults. On June 16 Grace Josephson found the first Scarlet Pimpernel in blossom in the Sahara. On the same day she marked a Common Tern nest with red eggs at the far eastern

end of the island and also banded a leucistic Common chick that had pink eyes and very white down with only a few bits marked with brown. It is the first chick with pink eyes we have ever found on Great Gull Island.



During the two weeks of the peak hatch everyone worked very hard. Loretta led the western end check and Dick and I the eastern end. Everyone trapped nests in different sections of the island. Joe continued running Bingo, to check that what had been written in the field corresponded to that recorded in the banding room. He then computerizes the data and prepares “pair lists” for morning and evening trapping sessions. Trappers keep “pair cards” made from Joe’s lists with the numbers of “paired” nests crossed out. Trappers use the pair card during trapping sessions, checking the nest numbers of nests in the field that they are about to trap, to make sure the nest is not paired. The pair card is the most valuable piece of paper, other than the field notebook, trappers carry.

For peak, Aldo Hahn brought a large tin of biscotti that he and his mother (Francesca Grifo, a former Gull Islander), had made. The tin included more kinds of biscotti than I had ever seen before, all delicious! Catherine organized dinners during peak and, in addition, made lasagna from scratch for twenty-one on three occasions! Fernando Rubini made to order pizza one night – choose your toppings! It was a great success. Brittany Reidel organized lunches, using a different kind of freeze-dried food each day so that we could try them all.



By the end of June many of those who had worked during the peak left. Federico Carballo, his son Manuel, and Thomas Freund, a friend of Manuel's, Peter Paton and his daughter Emma arrived on Great Gull as the first volunteers to help with July checks and trapping. They arrived in time for an increase in hatching nests at the western end of the island, and did a good job keeping up with it. Between July 9 and July 18 there was another burst of hatching nests at the western end. By this time the island vegetation for the most part had reached its maximum height: with wild radish, pokeberry and mullein all four to six feet tall. As most trappers had left, just two trappers remained to cover the



western half of the island, not an easy task. Dick had pretty much finished trapping the nests in his area and volunteered to help David Farris and Ian Putnam trap at the western end. After most of the nests had hatched and just before Dick left I took a picture of them, the tallest team on the island with the tallest plants on the island. David Farris is 6'4"; the mullein in the picture is taller than he is. Here people and plants are our Western End Giants!

During his stay on the island at the end of the season, Michael Gruters did most of the heavy lifting of gear and Peapod boxes when the boat arrived and departed. This was a great help because both gear and the boxes seem to become heavier at the end of the season. It was really gratifying that so many people were able to help in July: Federico Carballo, Manuel Carballo, Thomas Freund, Peter Paton, Emma Paton, David Farris, Ania Grzesik, Michael Gruters, Elsa Joseph, Dena Steele and Ian Putnam did an excellent job, completing a good data set for birds nesting during July.

Totals for Great Gull Island Common Terns in 2013 were: adults trapped – 4130, pairs trapped – 1755, and young banded – 11,157. By mid-June the baitfish had come in and we had low mortality throughout the summer – 902 young picked up dead during the season. All these figures reflect and are a credit to the efforts of the crews monitoring the colony. Dick Young noted in the sign out book that it was the first season in which a single line on the pair card was completely marked off: nests 4821-4840.

Each year we try to collect bands from all the dead young and computerize them. We never find them all during the season so we like to check the island with a team of people on one or more of the work weekends to look for bands. I am always surprised at the number we find. The number includes bands from different years and, of course, some people are more adept at finding bands than others. Jim Sorensen is particularly good at finding bands and usually brings in thirty or more. We checked the island after Sandy, and although most people did not find many, Jim brought in his usual thirty!

In their spare time at the end of July, Dena Steele and David Farris attempted to identify a moth. Dena later consulted John Yrizzary, a friend interested in moths, who lives near her. He tentatively identified it as a Dejected Underwing (*Catocala dejecta*) and then he and Dena sent it to the American Museum of Natural History to double check the identification. I have given the moth to David Grimaldi in Entomology. He does not think it is an underwing, but has not identified it yet. This is a little disappointing. Thinking it was an underwing, Joe DiCostanzo and John Walsh sent me some of the names reflecting human feelings, relationships and personalities of a number of species in the underwing group: Widow Underwing, Inconsolable Underwing, Sad Underwing, Mourning Underwing, Beloved Underwing, Connubial Underwing, Sordid Underwing, Sappho Underwing and many more. The names were such fun I hoped Dena had found an underwing. Stay tuned!



Throughout August the dominant blossoms on Great Gull Island were those of the evening primrose. Their yellow flowers provided brilliant accents both on sunlit days as well as on those that were overcast. On August 1 we saw the first blossom of the sunflowers in Melissa's garden, and on that date the New York State Young Birders Club (NYSYBC) arrived to tour the island. I called them the "Intrepids" because, of five groups who had signed up to visit, they were the only ones who didn't cancel when they learned we did not have a dock. Sean Murtha and his son Brendan, who had worked on Great Gull in 2012, came on the boat with the NYSYBC and stayed for the week. We took the Young Birders on a tour of the island and by the time we finished Sean and Brendan had lined up the empty peapod boxes and gear so that they were ready to be put on the boat.

When I first saw Brendan Murtha I almost didn't recognize him. He is now 6'1" and taller than his father! Brendan's first question was: "How is



the food this year?" Last year he and his father had helped on Gull the week Melissa was on the island. When Melissa is present, we have gourmet meals. I told Brendan I thought the food would be fine but wondered if we would have enough. In the end it worked out that we did, because Matty took Sean and Brendan fishing early one morning, and they brought back enough fish for the week. Brendan introduced us to Asian Shore Crabs (*Hemigrapsus sanguineus*), a recent accidental introduction to the east coast. He would collect some and cook them so



we had them in time for tea each day during his stay. Brendan and David Farris checked the island daily and Sean painted. His paintings were outstanding, highlighting a number of places on the island that really come to life in his sketches. An unusual visitor for us, a Peregrine Falcon, landed on the island the next to last day of their stay. Sean raced to the tower to sketch it.

We did not have many predators living on the island during the summer. We had two resident Fish Crows at the beginning of the season, but they left before the end of May. A Red-tailed Hawk arrived July 4 and stayed though July 27, picking up some young terns from the gun emplacement near the pines where it roosted. A Turkey Vulture flew over a couple of times toward the end of July and took refuge in the railroad leading to the big gun emplacement, but did not stay.







Often during the summer a pigeon arrives on the island and stays a few days. This summer “Homer” or “Pidge”, as we name all pigeons that stay, arrived after a dense fog on June 20, stayed about a week and left. One day during Homer’s visit I heard a loud clattering outside. I looked out and Homer was tossing his empty water dish across the pavement. He would toss it walk over, pick it up and toss it again. I filled the dish with water. I think Homer drank, but there was definitely no more tossing.



I was happy that David Farris offered to stay through the first week in August. He had arrived on Great Gull Island May 19. It is always a great help to have experienced students on the island to work with new arrivals. David did a good job checking and was very helpful to the new students. He was a good trapper and in his free time kept track of the Barn Swallow nests. He certainly did his share of the chores, filling and starting generators, helping prepare meals, doing dishes. On August 8 he joined Sean and Brendan Murtha waiting on the beach for Matty to arrive. They climbed into

the scow at 6:00 pm and Matty took them to his boat and on to the mainland. Brendan had changed our tea menu forever, and Sean added to his outstanding sketches. It had been a very good week.



The boat taking David, Sean and Brendan to the mainland brought John Walsh and Jill Hamilton to the Island to help keep track of the final hatchlings and to trap the last adults. John was extremely energetic, made coffee every morning and did the dishes from the night before.

John and Jill checked the island for hatching chicks and the following week, August 15-22, John and Dale Dancis checked the island. John banded the last chick they found on August 22. The chick appeared to be a ten to fourteen days old. Dale and John also kept track of numbers of terns coming in at dusk and continued to count banded to unbanded in groups of Commons we saw during the day. Melissa McClure had come to the island with Dale August 15 and worked in her garden, and also cleared out the dorms. She packed clothes, sheets and towels to take to the mainland for laundering. Melissa also cooked marvelous meals which we all enjoyed. Alan Poole came to the island that week and tried to provide a fish dinner, which he always has been able to do in the past, but this year no luck. Alan thought the seals around the island looked in very good condition, almost too good! Before the end of the week the volunteers put shutters on most of the windows of

the two dorms because it was the last week when we would have enough strong people to finish the job.

I was very pleased on August 11 to see a Common chick, hatched June 17, that Dick Young had color-banded. The young stood on the roof of the middle building at fifty-five days of age. The parents of this chick had already started another nest. The male had been bringing in fish regularly and the female had laid an egg (July 13) which unfortunately had been broken on the weekend, July 18. With plenty of baitfish around the island it looked as if this young had done well and was independent of its parents. The age at which the young become independent





varies. I once saw a young nine weeks old on the Connecticut shore fed and have seen young eight weeks old still in their nest on Great Gull Island being fed regularly.

Melinda Billings arrived for the last week in August and continued her documentation of island phenomenon in excellent photos: Great Cormorant on the dock piling August 25 and a suffusion of small moths in the vegetation along the paths in a number of sections of the island. I sent her pictures of these moths to David Grimaldi in Entomology to be identified. She also took photos of oystercatchers, a young and an adult feeding in the rocks near the dock. We called the young "Glue" because it stayed so close to the adult shadowing it and was fed by the adult on occasion. On August 29 Melinda saw a group of



about twenty Barn Swallows fly east between 6:30 and 7:00 am. We did not see Barn Swallows on the island after that.

During the time Melinda was on the island terns coming into the dock area each day began leaving late in the day, with only a few remaining at the dock overnight. We did have groups gathering at the western and eastern ends of the island and Melinda kept track of them, counting them daily, morning and evening.

Doug Kopsco landed on Gull on August 29. He arrived just in time to help with the packing which we completed August 30-31. For a break from packing Doug cut bittersweet out of the bayberry by the burning barrel as well as from the shadbush east of Paight, the north dorm. Melinda, Doug and I continued to count groups of terns coming into the dock, as well as to the western and eastern ends of the island at dusk. Matty picked us up September 1. Twenty-one terns flew up from the dock as we walked to the beach when Matty approached the shore. There was a moment of excitement as the scow rested temporarily on a rock near shore. A wave lifted us off the rock, cheers! Matty pulled us to the anchor, pulled it up and we proceeded to his boat.

For the two September weekends Paul Mutta, a friend of Matty's met volunteers at the train in New London and drove them to the Stop and Shop for grocery shopping. He knew the supermarket well, so the trip went quickly. Lottie Prushinski and Bob Kane came to Gull for the last work weekend, September 6. They picked up all the traps left out on the island, all the dowels, and all the chick houses not collected previously. Bob cooked dinner the first night, using the freeze-dried food.

I am sad to write of three people associated with the Great Gull Island Project who died in 2013. Each of them made a strong contribution to the project and we miss them. A number of people have joined me in contributing the following paragraphs and I am grateful for their remarks.

John Haggerty was an enthusiastic volunteer for spring and fall work weekends on Great Gull. It was a shock to all of us to learn of his passing. He and his wife Margie, worked hard at any task that needed to be done. Putting the blinds together in the spring was one of the hardest jobs because the canvas tops would shrink and then last year's grommets would not align with the holes in the canvas to fasten the tops to the blind. Most people jury-rigged something with wire to fasten the tops. John never did this; he would move the grommets so the tops fitted perfectly. Margie writes: "John Haggerty, a long-time volunteer of Great Gull Island, died April 10, 2013. John was a biochemist doing post-doctoral work at Yale when he first heard about GGI from Ann Rubega. John and I first came to Great Gull Island on "fluffy" weekend, (a weekend when Gull Islanders grill a whole lamb after peak) in the late 80's. We were immediately hooked on the project and started volunteering for work weekends in the spring and fall.

"John loved the project and its people. He had a great respect and admiration for our leader, Helen Hays. He was willing to do anything – from putting up blinds, making chick boxes, marking nests, helping Parker and Michelle survey the island to carrying things on and off the dock. John was a scientist, a lover of opera, a voracious reader of history, science, antiquities (almost anything, really) and a lover of the natural world, most particularly birds. He could remember where and when he first saw a new species of bird. He



traveled near and far, (many specific to birding) and always had binoculars and guidebook handy. In the spring of 2012, we spent a week on the island with Helen, marking the first Roseate nests.

“Having done many years ‘at the bench’ as a researcher, he thought science students needed practical experience doing field work. He had started discussions with his department chair at Quinnipiac University about getting students involved with the island.”

Joan Arnold worked in the Great Gull Island Office checking computerized data. For the last few years it was not possible for Joan to come into the office and I would meet her for breakfast near her apartment and give her notebooks to check. In return she gave me the material she had checked during the week. Joan loved the theater and opera and kept up with the news. I looked forward to our breakfasts and miss our regular meetings.

Joan worked for Barnes and Noble from 1942 until her death in August 2013. She was 92. Len Riggio, Chairman of Barnes and Noble, wrote in *Community* a company paper: “One day some 25 years ago (Joan was about 65), I got up the nerve to ask her the obvious question: ‘When did she plan to retire?’ Her reply was not unexpected. No, she didn’t plan on retiring at all. Rather she planned to sell books until she drew her last breath, and she hoped I didn’t have a problem with any of this. etc., etc. Having once hired a man who was 92 years old, I told her I didn’t care if she worked until she was 100. I even challenged her to do it. She almost made it!”

Malcolm Coulter died January 2, 2013. Joe DiCostanzo has written about Malcolm in the November 2013 *Linnaean News-Letter*. Malcolm worked for two summers on Great Gull Island during the period he was a Chapman Fellow in Ornithology at the American Museum of Natural History. He helped many of the students as he did in his work all over the world. Long after he left the east coast he brought students to Great Gull from a number of other countries to help with the work. The Linnaean Society awarded Malcolm the Eisenmann Medal in 2008 and in 2013 the Pacific Seabird Group gave him their Lifetime Achievement Award, awarded posthumously.

I am happy to report that the villagers in Quixaba, Brazil, on the north coast of Ceara held their Tern Festival this year under the direction of Juaci Araujo, General Coordinator, Ana Jesus and Daniel Ferreira, Field Coordinators. The Festival took place November 29 – December 1, 2013. They have held the festival each year, with one exception since 2006 and it is a very popular event. The event celebrates terns. The fishermen no longer remove the tern’s bands to make necklaces and bracelets. Instead during the festival they celebrate conserving terns with races of model boats and rafts, music, dance and singing. One of the songs has been taught them by the oldest member of the village who remembers singing it long ago in celebration of the terns; birds that help the fishermen find fish. During the festival each year the villagers do a beach clean-up. This year Juaci Araujo appeared on television to talk about the terns and conservation and also did a radio interview. During the three day festival mural workshops were held under the direction of Luiz Freire.





Murals painted on the buildings remind people of species that needed their protection along the coast. A doctor came and assessed the health of the villagers as there is no health center in the village. Several workshops were held including one on percussion led by Juaci Araujo and one on capoeira. There was a theater presentation titled *Biodiversity and the Mangroves*. Prizes were awarded at the end of the festival to those who had won in the competitions. The Tern Festival celebrates the terns, but it also raises awareness of many conservation issues that are impor-



tant to the health of the village and the environment. Congratulations to the village of Quixaba and all of those who participated in the Tern Festival.

Volunteers are the backbone of the Great Gull Island Project. A total of 1,754 individuals have worked on Great Gull Island since the project began. Many have returned to work in a number of seasons. They have worked hard marking nests, banding chicks and trapping adults in dif-

ferent years. Their field notes comprise a unique data set. Volunteers in the Great Gull Island office in New York, using programs written by Joseph DiCostanzo, data manager, have computerized the field data of 669,670 records.

Gabriella Rosen, who has managed our office since Ivy Kuspit left, became the Administrative Assistant in Ornithology in March 2013. One of Gabriella's projects for us had been computerizing the nest data. Gabriella left everything in good order and I thank her for all the years she worked in the office and did such a good job. In 2012 and 2013 Lottie Prushinski computerized the nest data. This enabled us to catch up and have an up-to-date database for analysis. Lottie stepped up at a critical moment for us and I am most grateful that she could do it.

In 2013 Robert Rockwell, a population biologist at the Museum working with Snow Geese, referred us to a population biology statistician, Lise Aubry, who offered to help us with data analysis. Joe sent her a copy of his Great Gull Island master file. She looked at it and asked us to formulate questions we would like answered by the data. This is a whole new phase of the project and it will be interesting in the next few years to finally be able to analyze the data we have collected and publish the results.



The 2014 season promises to be an exciting one. We will implement the generous grants obtained by Suzanne Hoover Paton, Senior Biologist USFWS – Coastal Program Southern New England – NY Bight, to expand the terraces providing more nest sites for Roseate Terns and a grant obtained by Juliana Barrett, Associate Extension Educator in Residence, Connecticut Sea Grant College Program, University of Connecticut, to control invasive plants thereby expanding areas where Common Terns can nest. Both grants provide for blinds to overlook the modified areas. We will observe from the blinds to see how the terns use these areas. We expect to build twenty blinds in April and expand the terraces.



Juliana named Joel Stocker, Suzanne Hoover Paton and Nancy Balcom as Project Co-Managers for Vegetation. We will also work with Juliana to try to find plants which might be slow growing and work well as cover in areas where Commons nest. Juliana and Suzanne arranged in 2012 and 2013 for All Habitats Services, experts in invasive control, to limit invasive plants in certain sections of the island. This work has already provided more areas for Commons to nest and also made it easier for volunteers to check the island during the summer. Suzanne brought ground cover in 2011 and a crew of students from the University of Rhode Island put it down in one section of the western end. It worked quite well. Margaret Rubega, from the University of Connecticut, brought a crew to help put down ground cover in 2012. Alan Poole has offered to bring out rolls of burlap in 2014 to use as ground cover in certain sections of the island to discourage vegetation and compare its effectiveness with other ground covers.

As part of the vegetation study, Joel Stocker brought his model helicopter to Great Gull Island May 4, 2013 and flew it over the island taking pictures of the whole island after Sandy. Joel plans to take pictures annually for the next three years to document the results of work on invasive plants. I would like to thank Valerie Nassif, at Beauregard Corporation, who volunteered to work with Joel to find a way of reducing the map so that we could print it in this report. I thank Drew Bainbridge who helped Bob Kane make some of the Roseate shelters. I hope they both will join us in April when we take lumber to Great Gull Island to build blinds and expand the terraces for Roseates.



In 2014 we will continue monitoring the populations of Common and Roseate Terns on Great Gull Island. We will welcome two graduate students to follow the movements of the Great Gull Island terns during the nesting season using slightly different methods. Sam Urmey, a graduate student from Stony Brook, will set up a radar study on Gull to track fishing Common Terns near the island. Pam Loring, a doctoral candidate from the University of Rhode Island, would like to track Common Terns from Great Gull Island as part of her study of distribution of the species during the breeding season off southern New England and New York. She will put nanotags on Common Terns in order to follow them. These are exciting projects. We are looking forward to spring.





I thank our captain Matty Poitras for all he did during the 2013 season to get us to Great Gull. His piloting the scow to get passengers and gear from his boat to the Island was always skilled and on occasion definitely challenging. In spite of some of his misgivings he handled everything beautifully. I am keeping my fingers crossed that the weather in 2014 improves and we have a dock to make landings easier. On a few occasions during the season, Matty's colleagues, Bob Wadsworth and Ryan Berner, brought people to Gull Island. Both did excellent jobs. Thank you both!

I thank Lee Allen for editing three drafts of this manuscript and Mary Jane Arcady, Teresa Grimm and Lydia Thomas for their comments. Lydia also prepared the photographs and forwarded them to Joe DiCostanzo who made the final layout and provided editorial help.

The field season will be here before we know it. Grace has assembled her Roseate Team. We still, however, need volunteers to help with the check of Common Terns. Email me if you are interested. ([hays@amnh.org](mailto:hays@amnh.org)). It is always fun and we need at least twenty people! Look forward to hearing from you. Also check our website: [www.greatgullisland.org](http://www.greatgullisland.org).

I would like to thank all of you who have so generously supported our work in both hemispheres. Your substantial contributions have made it possible for us to monitor the populations of Roseates and Commons on Great Gull Island each year since 1969 when the project began, and supported our work in South America which began in 1995. That year we were lucky in discovering where Roseates spend the winter, information not known before our 1995 survey. More recently we have been able to initiate cooperative projects with researchers working in Puerto Rico, South America and the Azores, and build a new dock on Great Gull Island. I really appreciate the generosity of so many of you who made end of the year contributions and those of you who participated in or contributed to the Great Gull Island Birdathon. You have all kept us afloat! Replacing the dock on Great Gull Island, which washed away in 2007, was a tremendous challenge. Many of

you responded to our appeals and we were able to replace the dock for our 2010 season. This made it all the more heart breaking that Sandy took out our relatively new dock in 2012. I am applying for grants to repair the dock and will keep trying until we are able to do it. The Great Gull Island Project would not be possible without the support of many organizations and individuals who have contributed generously and substantially to the Project, many since its inception. Thank you all.



American Museum of Natural History  
 The Drumcliff Foundation  
 The Estate of Francis Goelet  
 Robert G. Goelet family  
 Charles W. Kitchings Fund of the Quebec-Labrador Foundation (formerly of the Sounds Conservancy)  
 Chester W. Kitchings Foundation  
 Linnaean Society of New York - members  
 The Manice family  
 Quebec-Labrador Foundation  
 New York State DEC and Federal contracts have supported work on Roseate Terns

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- p. 2 Joseph DiCostanzo – Ann Shaw
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- p. 3 Dick Young – Loretta Stillman
- p. 3 Loretta Stillman – John Walsh
- p. 4 Melissa McClure – John Walsh
- p. 4 Mel Romani – Kate Romani
- p. 5 Hu Plummer – Melinda Billings
- p. 6 American Oystercatcher on nest – Melinda Billings
- p. 6 poppy – Anne Via McCollough
- p. 7 red eggs – Dick Young
- p. 7 leucistic Common Tern chick – Dick Young
- p. 7 Emma Paton – Peter Paton
- p. 8 Dick Young, David Farris, Ian Putnam – Helen Hays
- p. 9 Evening Primrose – John Walsh
- p. 9 Asian Shore Crabs – John Walsh
- p. 9 cooking crabs – John Walsh
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- p. 15 aerial map of Great Gull Island – Joel Stocker
- p. 16 Common Terns – Thomas Freund

