



Volume 65, No. 3

May 2011

GREAT GULL ISLAND 2010 – PART III

Helen Hays

On September 2 we cleaned all the rooms in HQ. Just off the dock Laughing, Herring, and Great Black-backed gulls were dipping for invertebrates.

Because of the approach of Hurricane Earl, on September 3 Joe and Melissa raised the land end of the dock and put shutters on a broken window in the southeast room of the middle building. Afterwards, Joe pronounced Earl the most boring hurricane ever!

September 4, Melissa and I walked to the east end of the island and saw two Gray Seals swimming in the water off the South Beach. The wind was very strong and felt stronger than winds we experienced during the hurricane. On our way back to HQ we passed a Laughing Gull on the Bunker southeast of the dock. It was just sitting and did not look healthy. A little before noon Melissa came into HQ and reported she thought a Red-tailed Hawk might be eating a young Common Tern on the bunker. This was a spot Commons were still defending, but we had not found a young. We looked through a scope and the Red-tail was eating something on the Bunker. I asked Melissa to call Joe to see if he could get a picture through the scope. While Melissa was gone the Red-tail left and through the scope I could see what looked like the foot and leg of a Laughing Gull on the spot. When Melissa went to confirm the identity of the kill she was attacked by Common Terns. I decided it would not be much more of a disturbance if we checked the spot for a young tern. Three feet north of the kill, crouching in the grass, was a juvenal, unbanded, Common Tern. We banded it, weighed, and measured it – the last unfledged young Common that I knew of, still on the island. Its wing measured 181 mm and that afternoon it left the bunker flying strongly on its own. We did not see the Laughing Gull at all; it probably made a good meal for the Red-tail which arrived on Great Gull Island September 2 and stayed through September 5. In the afternoon Melissa cut and poisoned bittersweet and pokeberry by the back door of the middle building.

Though the winds were still strong at an estimated 20-30 knots September 6, Joe lowered the landward end of the dock. Melissa cleaned the NE window in the kitchen, secured the glass and caulked around the window. She also removed the old screen wire at the top of the window which improved its appearance. I weighed and measured the young in the gun emplacement NW of HQ. At 7:20 pm, I put down the curtain covering the window by my desk and as it fell a Carolina Wren appeared at the edge of the curtain, flew to the hole in the wall above the desk and went out. I felt badly because I knew the wrens sometimes roosted in this curtain and, since the terns were no longer roosting outside HQ, there was no reason to put the curtain down. I rolled the curtain up and hung it over a nail to the right of the window. In a few minutes a wren appeared and went into the fold in the curtain. Joe was working at his computer about six feet from the curtain, his light was on and the overhead light for the room was on. I was very glad the wren returned.

We all left the island September 7 at about 6:10 am leaving boxed gear to be moved off September 12 when there would be more people to help.



On the way the boat on September 10 we went to Lowes to purchase things for the island. At the store we met Jillian Danskin, who worked there and she whisked us around helping us find everything we needed in record time. Once we were on Great Gull, Joel Stocker, Melinda Billings, and Melissa McClure settled in. Joel flew a remote controlled, model plane he had built and equipped with a camera. This picture was taken as Joel guided the plane over the island.



On September 11 Melinda and I walked to the eastern end and heard Gray Seals calling. They sounded very much like the Little Gull Light fog horn, which was on at the time. At times we had to listen carefully to distinguish the seals from the fog horn. At 9:30 am I went to the gun emplacement NW of HQ and caught the Common young there. It could fly, but I cornered it after it flew out of the gun emplacement and returned. At about 12:00 it flew to the dock area, stayed for an hour or two and then moved west. This was the last young tern that I knew of that had not flown. Melissa and Melinda cut and poisoned pokeberry, Melinda at the eastern end and Melissa at the western end of the island. I pulled the last of the spiderwort out of the railroad and bagged it. Joel took down blinds M-11, M-15, and M-3A and then flew his plane. He gave me the names of people in Rhode Island and Connecticut who might be interested in helping us clear invasives. In the middle of the afternoon Melinda and I took down the plastic from the Habitat blind, bagged it and Melinda returned to pulling and poisoning pokeberry at the eastern end. Afterwards she watched the Gray Seals from the eastern end wall blind.

September 12 – move off day! We took things to the dock and loaded the boat when it arrived. Bob Kane came out on the boat to help. Just before we left a Harbor Seal surfaced in front of the dock, dove and continued west. Alistair and Smidgie Macphail met us at Captain John's dock in Waterford to help with the unloading. Alistair brought a trailer to the dock and we loaded things that were to go to New York as well as to Jim Sorensen's barn. Bob filled his truck with stuff to go to Jim's. Alistair led us to his house. At the house Bob picked up a few more boxes labeled for Jim's before leaving for Jim's. Smidgie invited us in for coffee, cookies, and melon which we accepted with enthusiasm before starting for New York. John Walsh and Tom Endrey met us at the Museum

to help unload the truck and take things to the Great Gull Island Project office for storage. Melissa dropped John, Tom and me off at my apartment building and left for home. Tom, John and I carried my gear to my apartment and then we had dinner at a Chinese restaurant on 3rd Avenue. With so many hands, moving the gear off went easily.



Friday, September 17 was the start of the first fall work weekend. Smidgie met me at the train; we picked up grinders and went to the Macphail's. Alistair and Smidgie went for a swim taking their grinders to eat on the beach. I washed my hair and sat on their patio to eat mine. Soon Alistair and Smidgie were back for cookies on the patio. We then left for the boat where we met Hu Plummer and Georgia Male and were off for Great Gull. On reaching the island we unloaded the boat and took everything up from the dock using Bob Kane's carts and then took Hu and Georgia on a "Tunnel Tour" to the "Big Gun". We took down the flaps in the

Ground Blind at the end of the tour. Smidgie and Alistair organized dinner – everything delicious. I heard Gray Seals calling from the eastern end as I went to bed about 9:30 pm.

On September 18 I went downstairs about 6:00 am to start coffee. Alistair came in and began boiling wash water for dishes and for shaving. I started the Spam while Georgia scrambled eggs and Smidgie made toast. After breakfast we took two carts to the top at the eastern end and gathered traps and chick houses for winter storage in the Ground Blind. Alistair, Smidgie and Georgia climbed down into the blind. Hu and I handed down the houses to Smidgie and Georgia who passed them to Alistair to stack in the stairwell. Mel Romani and Jon Fuller arrived on the island just before 10:00 am. They came to the top at the eastern end and helped gather the last traps which we then stored in the tunnels under the "Big Gun" emplacement. On the way back to HQ we brought in traps from the Coal Area and the E-9 platform.



After lunch we dragged the carts to the top of the gun emplacement at the center of the island and picked up all the traps and chick houses. Hu stacked the houses neatly in the shelves in the old lookout for the emplacement. Mel piled the traps beautifully on one side of the look out. These were the neatest piles of traps and houses we have ever had! When we finished clearing the top of the central gun emplacement we went to the western end and picked up any dowels, traps and houses we could find. Traps were put in the middle building and piled neatly by Mel and Jon.



It was an exceptional day for tea. Usually, we have tea between 3:00 and 4:00 each afternoon. On September 18, because of the rigorous work day, we had two teas, one after we finished clearing the central gun emplacement and one when we returned from the western end. Everyone helped cook dinner before falling into bed about 9:30 – actually, everyone except Jon who stayed up to burn a section of vegetation at the western end of the island. Mel observed the burning from the deck of his quarters, just in case.

September 19 was another wonderful day – broke a whole egg in the coffee to take the grounds down; Georgia made Spam and scrambled eggs while I made home fries from leftover potatoes. After breakfast Alistair, Hu, Jon, and Mel put the shutters on all the windows. Smidgie and Georgia scrubbed water troughs and piled them in a room in the tunnels. I washed dishes. After the shutters were put on Jon ran the tractor for a short time. After using it, Jon put WD-40 on all moving parts and Hu and Georgia greased it.

Hu folded the canvas blind tops that were out and stored them in Paight and then started clearing bittersweet from M-11A, the blind north of Paight. He even cleared down to bare dirt under the blind. This has not been done since the blind was built and will make assembling the blind next spring much easier. Smidgie divided the leftover food and packaged for people could take home. Mel gave the floor a final sweep, then Georgia, Mel and Smidgie took gear to the dock in the carts and we were ready to load the boat when Captain Matt arrived at 4:05 pm. The upper and lower levels of the dock were loaded with gear. There was quite a swell. The mate threw the rope and it landed in the lower rungs of the ladder. Jon climbed down and threw the rope to the mate, then boarded. Hu boarded the boat from the lower landing platform. Alistair threw the stern line to the mate on the boat, then Mel and Georgia passed gear to Hu. Smidgie and I threw gear to Jon Fuller from the upper level of the dock. One of the swells knocked the stern of Matt's boat against the dock, but we loaded quickly and after we boarded Matt left the pilot house and congratulated us on a very quick and efficient job. Captain Matt is particular about the speed with which we load and unload, especially in rough weather, and we considered this a rare compliment.

The last work weekend of the fall was scheduled for October 9- 12, but Captain Matt cancelled the trip out October 9 because of wind. Melissa McClure and I stayed overnight with Alistair and Smidgie Macphail and met Talvi Ansel, John and Sarah Avallone, Jim Sorensen, and Mike Sorensen at the boat the morning of October 10. On the island the next two days we all did pretty much the same thing both days. Jim and Mike repaired the wire around the Big Gun emplacement, Habitat and behind HQ. John set himself up to mend traps and Melissa, Talvi, Sara and I cut and poisoned pokeberry at the western end. After we had piled the pokeberry near where we cut it Jim and Mike helped move the piles to the paths where the plants could dry.

Loading the boat coming to and leaving the island went very easily with Mike standing on the dock. Mike could lift the Peapod boxes from the boat to the upper dock, skipping the loading dock entirely, and did the same thing in reverse when we left.

On November 3 Matthew Male went to Great Gull Island and raised the land connection of the dock, took off the hoist, locked the dock in place and stored the hoist on the island. It was low tide when Matthew was on the island. He counted about sixty seals on the South Beach. In the group were sixteen to eighteen Gray Seals. Matthew noticed one particularly large Gray Seal and one particularly large Harbor Seal. Matthew's November visit to Great Gull Island was the final one of the season. We hope the dock withstands the winter storms, making it easy to land at the end of next April.

The 2010 season was notable for the presence on the island of three second generation Great Gull Islanders. Nehuen Bremer arrived with his father Esteban and the Argentinean team June 11 and stayed through June 25. Nehuen worked with the team during peak. He kept up with the group, tried to band as many or more chicks than others in the group and closed his bands perfectly.

Georgia Male worked with us on the island July 1-14 and July 22-29 then came for a work weekend September 17-19. She is the youngest of Matthew Male's daughters and she did an excellent job working well with everyone as well as working independently.

Ben Walker came from London and is Cordie Grimm and Jay Grimm's nephew. Ben was a good sport about doing check and trapping





during the two weeks he was on the island. During his second week his uncle arrived and started him working on the marine radio. Ben propped up the support for the solar panels and connected them to the radio. He then mounted the antenna and connected it. At the end of the week the radio was working. His uncle and Dick Young cleared the hill below the solar panels of bayberry and Ben cut steps in the hill to make it easier to climb the hill to reach some of the equipment. I was very glad he was able to put the radio in working order.



In the 2010 season we made two trips to Little Gull Island and to the Fort Tyler ruins north of Gardiner's Island with volunteers from Groton/Long Point, Connecticut (GLP). We searched for bands of Common and Roseate Terns from birds that had presumably been eaten by Great Black-backed or Herring Gulls. On July 21 Captain Matt Poitras picked up Loretta Stillman, Dick Young and me from Gull Island and Bruce



Burrows, Nancy Congdon, Jon Fuller, and Rear Admiral Doug Volgenau from GLP, to scour Little Gull as well as Fort Tyler for bands.

On August 14 Jon Fuller arrived with Captain George Main from Noank bringing Nancy Congdon, Jane Fuller, Peter Fuller, Margaret Fuller, Rhea Fuller, Sarah Hanson, Mel Romani, Tony Soltys, and Rear Admiral Doug Volgenau. They picked up Doug Kopsco, Nancy Stevens, and me from Great Gull to go to Little Gull and Fort Tyler for a second survey. In the two trips we did not find as many bands as we had in 2009 in one August trip. We will check Little Gull in May 2011 to get an idea of the number of gulls nesting there.



favorite food of the Argentinians. In addition, on the two trips to Little Gull and Fort Tyler Jon brought food for everyone and gave Great Gull all the leftovers plus a few additions. We enjoyed all of them!

We are very lucky to have the support and help from the GLP group, who not only help us with surveys of Little Gull and Fort Tyler, but also come out on work weekends to help us in the spring and the fall on Great Gull Island. Special thanks to Jon Fuller who organizes work groups from GLP. Riding out with Lance Walker the last week in June he supplied us with emergency rations just before the group from Argentina left. The rations included steak, a rare food item on Great Gull, and ice cream, a



In late-July and early-August a few of those who contributed to the dock visited the island. I was very sorry that the first person to sign up, Jean Pettibone, sat at Captain John's dock from 3:00 to 6:00 pm on July 22. The captain could not bring her out because of very windy conditions at our dock. I hope Jean will be able to see the island in 2011. August 5 Lenore Swenson and Sandra Maury visited the island and on August 12 Fred Bunker Davis, Jean Dorman, Bob Gochfeld and Doug Gochfeld visited.

In 2010 I was saddened to lose a number of people who had helped with the Great Gull Island Project over the years. On February 14, 2010 John Thorbjarnarson died in New Delhi at the age of 52. In 1980 John worked on Great Gull as a student. After earning his Ph.D. he worked for the Wildlife Conservation Society becoming a world expert on crocodiles and alligators. He caught malaria while studying the Dwarf Caiman in Uganda and died of the disease after going to India to speak to a wildlife group. For a more detailed account of John's life and achievements see the obituary in the *New York Times*, March 9, 2010.

In November I was saddened to learn, through a letter from Janet Davis, wife of Fred (Fritz) Bunker Davis that Fritz died October 30, 2010. A fall down the cellar stairs in their house put him into a coma from which he never recovered. He had been enthusiastic when he visited Great Gull in August and I thought he might visit the island again in the future.

Fritz earned his undergraduate degree at Oberlin in 1954 and an LL.B. from Harvard Law School in 1957. After Law School he worked for more than eighteen months as a New York State Assistant Attorney General specializing in securities laws. He was a member of Cahill, Gordon & Reindel in New York when Robert Kutak, founder of the firm Kutak Rock, recruited him to join his that law firm and contribute his state securities law expertise there. Fritz retired in 1999, but returned to Kutak Rock in a part-time "of counsel" capacity until 2004. During his retirement he volunteered to teach English as a second language at Metropolitan Community College in Omaha, NE where he lived. Fritz had a long-time interest in birds, joining the Linnaean Society of New York in 1964. In Nebraska he took part in work at the Hitchcock banding station as well as volunteering for the Hitchcock Hawk Watches. Two who worked with Fritz, Ryan Evans, the official for the Hitchcock Hawk Watch counter, and Jerry Toll sent me reminiscences about him.

Ryan Evans writes: "Definitely one of a kind. Not only is he interesting to have on the tower, he is a very thoughtful and selfless man. When he showed up on the tower, he almost always had a treat for both me and Dog. Whether it was three o'clock cookies, or a sloppy sandwich for Dog to clean up whatever fell on the tower. Several times we would have spoken about something the previous time he was on the tower, and he would show up the next time with an item in response to that. Whether it was a recipe, raptor natural history print out, or anything in between, he was always thinking of others. Even though he had a full load himself, he would always try to carry some of my stuff down the tower as well. One Saturday, knowing I was a Huskers fan, he brought up a small portable radio. During the day he went out to the banding station and was able to see a Sharpie (I think) up close and personal. He had been at Hitchcock most of the day and around four he left the banding station. But he did not go home. He came back up on the tower, and the two of us listened to the rest of the Husker game. Even though they lost, it was great to be up there listening to the game as the last of the raptors came through for the day. I hope I will always remember that. A great man to share space with."

Jerry Toll, a friend and hawk-watcher writes: "I first became acquainted with Fritz in the fall of 2003. He had visited the hawk-watch a few times but was having trouble spotting the hawks; they were often just small dots in a gray or blue sky. One day in October we had a 'fallout' late in the afternoon. The sky was literally full of hawks everywhere one looked. I think it cemented Fritz's interest. In his younger years, he was an active birder in New York. Perhaps he missed that same thrill of discovery that birding can yield. I think he liked the hawk-watch because unlike birding

where you actively seek out the birds, the hawks come to you. It was birding he could do in his advanced years. He greatly enjoyed the camaraderie that a shared interest can bring. As exciting as hawk-watching can be, most of the time is spent looking for birds and not finding them. Great friendships are formed during the shared times of adversity...and boredom. He was very persistent at times. Late in the season the weather can be, shall we say, rather iffy. He would endure the cold and snow as long as he could before retreating to warm up. I am sure that the same doggedness served him well in his profession. He never really became good at identifying hawks unless they were close, but it didn't seem to discourage him. He was grateful for whatever came his way."

For these memories of Fritz I am indebted to Janet, his wife of fifty years, David Jacobson, managing partner of Kutak Rock, Patrick H. Brennan, a member Kutak Rock, and birders Ryan Evans and Jerry Toll.

Ann Gaylord first came to Great Gull Island in the late 1970's with Jonnie Fisk. Shortly after Ann visited she began inviting us to stay over night in spring and fall on our way to and from the island. Her house, where she and her husband Harvey lived, was on Old Black Point in Niantic, CT. This was a very generous offer and we regularly stopped in the spring for dinner, spent the night and had a hearty breakfast the following morning before leaving for Great Gull Island doing the reverse in the fall, with showers added. No meals were ever skipped even in crisis situations. Once when we arrived Ann and her friend Marie Grist were racing around her kitchen. All surfaces were covered with melting items. The freezer had broken and they were trying to save everything they could by cooking it. We had dinner as if nothing had happened. Ann also made allowances for our time of arrival, which helped, because it was hard to predict when we would reach her.

Ann had lived in Buffalo, then Texas, when her husband became head of Bell Helicopter, then Washington when Bell was acquired by Textron and finally she and Harvey settled in Old Black Point. Wherever she lived, Ann was active in the community. In Connecticut she worked to restore the Osprey population, putting up a number of Osprey nest stands. She encouraged importing eggs from Maryland where shells had not been as affected by DDT as they had been in Connecticut. She encouraged people to give marshland to the Nature Conservancy and sent teachers to Audubon camps. The Osprey population in Ann's area increased and her work was mentioned in a *NOVA* documentary on the return of the Osprey.

Ann was also an enthusiastic gardener and her gardens featured flowers throughout the year. After Ann moved to an assisted living facility in Essex, CT she drove by her old house at Old Black Point late the following spring. I asked her how it had looked; she said something noncommittal, but then straightened up and said, "But I am never going back!" "Why?" I asked, a little surprised her vehemence. "They never dead-headed the daffodils" she exploded. November 15, 2010 Ann died in her sleep at the age of 99. She had lived an active and full life and we will all miss her.

Finally, I want to talk a bit about some of the people who help the Project away from the island. From 1984 through 2010 Janet Williams, working at home on Long Island and later in Sharon, CT compiled data for a master file of all adults and young banded on Great Gull Island, using data computerized by Joe DiCostanzo and the volunteers in the Great Gull Island office. In addition she put together a nest data file for each year which included location, number of eggs laid, hatching dates, number of chicks banded and, of those, the number that returned to nest. These two files have been a tremendous undertaking and are very useful references.

In 2008 Leo Hollein checked the computerized 2008 nest data working at his house in New Jersey and is now working on summarizing some field data on Red-winged Blackbirds and Song Sparrows from Great Gull Island. Lottie Prushinski entered the 2008, 2009 and half of the 2010 nest data working at her house in CT. Joan Arnold, who worked with us in the Great Gull Island office, now checks data working in her apartment. We are very lucky to have people willing to do these projects at home.

It was a tremendous help when Chuck McAlexander of BrassLab helped Joe attach geolocators to Darvic plastic bands so that Joe could put them on Common Terns on Great Gull Island in 2009. Before the end of the season in 2010 we saw five birds wearing geolocators that we had not trapped. We are hoping some of these birds will return in 2011, wearing their geolocators, that the geolocators still work and that we can trap these birds and retrieve the geolocators.

Finally, I would like to thank Gabriella Rosen and the Great Gull office volunteers: Lee Allen, Joan Arnold, Tom Endrey, Teresa Grimm, Jim Hyland and Lydia Thomas who work with us at the Museum September-June each year. Gabriella manages the data input and does an excellent job. We have an enormous data set and are about to begin some statistical analysis. None of this would have been possible without the work of hundreds of volunteers working on Great Gull Island during summers for the last forty-two years as well as many volunteers returning week after week to the Great Gull office to help computerize and check data collected on the island. Often sunsets are used at the end of talks or articles. I prefer a sunrise with promise of a new day and of course more work, but also new observations and discoveries.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I thank Lydia B. Thomas for her work on layout and design of this report, Lee Allen for his editorial comments and Joseph DiCostanzo for his final editorial work. All three have exhibited great patience with me during the evolution of this report. And thank you to all the photographers for their wonderful pictures.

Photo Credits: Ned Barnard (p.4, p.6:upper right, p.12); Melinda Billings (p.7:upper right, p.10:middle right, lower left, p.11:upper right, middle right, p.13:bottom left, p.15:upper right, p.18:upper right); Joe DiCostanzo (p.2:bottom left, p.3:bottom right, p.6:lower right); Kenneth C. Parkes (p.3:middle left); Jack Nelson (p.24); Catherine Pessino (p.3:upper right); Hu Plummer (p.16:middle left, bottom right, p.19:upper left, middle right, p.20); Mel Romani (p.11:middle right, p.19::bottom left); Fernando Rubini (p.11:bottom right, p.13:upper middle); Tony Soltys (p.15:middle left, p.21:middle left, bottom right); Nancy Ruh Stevens (p.14:upper right, p.15:bottom right, p.16:upper right, p.21:bottom left); Loretta Stillman (p.5); Joel Stocker (p.18:right); Lydia B. Thomas ((p.7:lower right, p.9, p.11:upper left); John Walsh (p.2:upper right, middle left, bottom right, p.6:upper left, p.10:upper); Dick Young (p.14:bottom right, p.21:upper left)