



An adult American Golden-Plover takes refuge on the sand flats at East Pond.

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This week kicked off to a great start with a continued passage of migrant songbirds, which has been unusually strong, considering it is still relatively early in the season. The first **Bobolink** of the fall have arrived in some numbers, as well as **Blue-winged Warbler**, **Cape May Warbler**, **Canada Warbler**, **Warbling Vireo**, **Least Flycatcher**, and throngs of transient **Baltimore Oriole**.

All these birds and more have made up the first real signs of impending fall. Soon, hundreds, and not just a few handfuls, of these migrants will descend upon our shores, as islands like ours act as natural stopover points for many wayward travelers. What exactly are we looking for though in order to bring us these birds? Watch the weather channel for light Northwest winds (preferably with more West than North), and low-pressure systems as well as large cold fronts that may move through during the night and provide favorable conditions for these tiny six inch birds to take tremendous leaps out over the ocean.

Perhaps one of the more unusual finds from this weekend, however, involves an entirely different breed of bird. On Saturday, sandals were donned in order to make the sticky journey into the Reed Pond on the island's east end, as to perhaps be rewarded by a waterthrush or rail. Instead, the birds that so rushed to leave the pond were in the form of waterfowl - a type of bird that always gets birders' attention during the summer months, although this is definitely the time of year when they behave and look the least conspicuous. Low and behold, the first ducks to shoot out were: two **Green-winged Teal**, then four, then ten! Eleven of these teal made it out of the tiny Reed Pond, and finally, a totally random pair of **Northern Shoveler**.

Shovelers are perhaps a recent addition to the breeding birds of Nantucket, as we can now expect them to stay throughout the summer up at Great Point. We usually encounter them in the dead of winter, although they are certainly not one of our most common duck species. The specie nests on nearby Monomoy Island as well, and this may lead to speculation as to "why not here, too?" Maybe this latter place is where these birds came from, and it is certainly possible that they could have arrived here earlier in the season, rather than later. Either way, the Reed Pond will definitely become a necessary checking spot for me in the future.

In other events, juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** numbers on-island have reached dizzying new heights, and at least fourteen individual birds were counted at North Pond on the 21st alone. Distinguishing this species from the similarly plumaged **Black-crowned Night-Heron** (which has actually been outnumbered now despite being a presumed breeder here) may pose as an identification issue among some birders. Someone asked me about this last week, and I thought they hit the nail right on the head with their subjective description of the bird they saw. "Well, it had a plover-shaped bill... just kind of looked 'cute'". And with that, I couldn't agree more. Coupled with a long neck, the all-black stubby beak of the Yellow-crowned Night-Heron *does* give a remarkable plover-like impression. This was a new one for me, but a descriptor I will remember for a long time to come.

Something else I did this week was venture through the Slough to look for late-breeding or early-migrant rails, such as **Virginia Rail**. What I was truly taken aback by, however, was the sheer number of flowering **Marsh Fleabane** that literally formed a pink coat along the interior portions of this tiny glacial stream. This is a local plant (opposed to invasive), and actually has some medicinal uses as well. Inhabitants of the Greater Antilles for decades have used Fleabane leaves in a variety of tea-like beverages, used to act as a stimulant or as a diuretic. It relieves cramping, and when used as an eyewash, can relieve redness from eyes left stung by wind or dust.

Inhabiting a similar environment, **Seawort** has also been particularly prevalent. It too has some benevolent qualities, and can be crushed and used in the making of potash, and in Italy is oftentimes cooked and served as a vegetable - just be sure to remove the tiny spines on the leaves. Ashes of this plant are used in the production of both soap and glass. So many different applications for such a tiny and unassuming plant of marshy areas across the island.

I'll wrap up with another reminder about the ever-increasing numbers of **Lone Star Tick** nymphs throughout Tuckernuck. They're tiny, they're numerous, and they will seek you out if they can. Stay off of backwoods trails, and avoid taking shortcuts. It's just not worth it.

That's all for now. This has been another fantastic week on Tuckernuck!

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"When looked at through the lens of the ecosystem paradigm, the problem alters dramatically. John Muir said it best: 'When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe.' Ecosystems are comprehensively interconnected; everything affects everything else." - William Ashworth



A Warbling Vireo is an early migrant to our islands, while the Blue-winged Warbler, a scarce but regular transient, appears usually around this time in late August.



A ratty-looking Saltmarsh Sparrow peeks above the high tide brush at North Pond, while a young Short-billed Dowitcher sports a crisp, fresh juvenile plumage.



An Eastern Garter Snake of the phenotypically unique Tuckernuck race is caught while slithering across the road at dusk, and Marsh Fleabane in bloom at the Slough.



A Flat-clawed Hermit Crab encountered near East Pond, and a four-week old Barn Owl is banded by ornithologist Ginger Andrews at a private Tuckernuck residence on Sunday.

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