



*A female Gadwall flies over the Salt Hole on the island's east end. Five juveniles were also seen in the small reed pond, confirming the breeding success of this species.*

## Coastal Steward's Letter, July 29 - August 4, 2021.

This week, I received banding records for 35 **Roseate Terns** observed on the west side of the island in the past month. Of these birds, the overwhelming majority originated from Great Gull Island, NY. However, a few birds were banded as chicks in some of the offshore colonies in Maine, and several even came from the small colony on Faulkner's Island in Connecticut. Most of the birds were less than five years old, although a few long-lived individuals were mixed in. One bird, with the plastic field readable band "Red N42," was banded as a chick in New Hampshire in 2012. The first banded juveniles of the year also showed up recently. "Yellow AZ6" and "Yellow HT4" were both banded this year as unfledged chicks, and now, having survived the rigors of a precocial youth, these birds join adult Roseate Terns of all ages for staging on the shoals around Tuckernuck prior to their departure for South America.

Bird banding also took place this week in front of the firehouse. It is believed that the **Eastern Wood-Pewees** that are still calling in the area have nested; however, the discovery of a juvenile bird would confirm this long-standing suspicion. A **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** flew overhead early in the morning, and a **Baltimore Oriole** likely represents an early migrant as well. With several cold fronts this week, it is now an ideal time to look for early-dispersal songbirds. **Northern Waterthrush, Orchard Oriole, Baltimore Oriole,** and **Vermivora Warblers** are all known to be exceptionally early migrants, with some individuals arriving as early as late July. Wading bird species, such as **Snowy Egret, Little Blue Heron,** and **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** are also on the move, and juveniles of the latter species have already show up on Tuckernuck this year.

Shorebirds continue to move through in strong numbers. On Muskeget, **Stilt Sandpipers, Semipalmated Sandpipers,** and **Short-billed Dowitchers** have all been present within the last week. **Semipalmated Plovers,** close relatives to our familiar **Piping Plovers,** have also started arriving en masse. Every Piping Plover chick on Tuckernuck has fledged, making it a challenge to identify our resident juveniles among the migrant juveniles that originated elsewhere. Preliminary reproductive results for this species place Nantucket County as a whole just slightly higher than where it was last year in terms of productivity, with an average of approximately one bird per pair. Nearby Martha's Vineyard on the other hand, has suffered some of its worst losses for Piping Plover chicks in years. Productivity for our sister island is estimated at an average 0.48 chick per pair, which is down from 1.08 in 2020. Losses there are thought to result from large mammalian ground predators, something that Tuckernuck and Nantucket lack.

**Japanese Quail** might be the island's most recent avian introduction, after a local homeowner released several birds on the east end. Tuckernuck has a long and checkered history with gamebirds. At one time, the island even hosted an established population of **Sharp-tailed Grouse,** which led some speculative scientists to presume that the extinct **Heath Hen** had miraculously survived on Tuckernuck for years after the last known Heath Hen, known as "Booming Ben," died on Martha's Vineyard in 1932. Japanese Quail are a type of *Coturnix* quail, a close relative of the Common Quail hunted predominantly

in western Europe. This is a quintessentially cryptic species, that typically reveals itself only after being flushed from underfoot. At least one individual has stuck around the field station for the last week, and it seems to have a particular preference to the dense grass along the side of the road.

Another highlight from this week was a female **Hooded Merganser** that lingered around East Pond for a day. Most duck species, aside from the resident **Mallard**, **American Black Duck**, and **Gadwall**, are unusual on Tuckernuck during the summer months. This individual likely represents a failed breeder from somewhere nearby. They are not known to nest regularly on Cape Cod, so the question remains: Where did it come from?

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*"Without the flicker of a wing tip, the [albatross] would rise steeply from the water, and in a moment would be gliding right alongside us by the bridge, fifty feet high. And there, where we could have leaned out and touched it, we saw this bird, greater than the eagle, in its true dimension and grandeur... 'They're seamen's eyes,' Mark said."*

*— R. B. Robertson*



*Bird banding took place over the weekend, with several species caught for the purpose of aging, sexing, and determining breeding status. A molting Black-capped Chickadee and female Common Yellowthroat are shown above.*



*A Black-capped Chickadee was extracted on Saturday during a standard mist net operation at the firehouse. A juvenile Common Yellowthroat was released after being banded.*



*An island homeowner brought several Japanese Quails to the island this week. This one flushed nearly underfoot in the driveway of the field station. A Saltmarsh Moth Caterpillar was seen on Muskeget.*



*The sun set over Bigelow's Point with virtually no wind on Friday. Earlier that day, a rainbow appeared in the east over Whale Point, seemingly touching down right on the landing strip.*

**\*\*\*Tuckernuck Island is private property, accessed only by explicit permission by landowner(s).\*\*\***