



A Whimbrel flies high over Muskeget Island on a cloudy day, calling a high-pitched, rolling “ki-ki-ki” call.

Coastal Steward’s Letter, August 12 - August 18, 2021.

As my final week on Tuckernuck comes to an end, I am reflecting back on the summer of 2021 with joy and recounting all the wonderful experiences I had. **Piping Plovers** this year had an exceptional nesting season, with eight pairs breeding on Whale Point alone. Out of the eleven pairs in total that nested island-wide, thirteen chicks fledged. This is equivalent to a productivity rate of 1.18 chick per pair.

American Oystercatchers, on the other hand, did not fare as well with reproduction. Out of the nine pairs that nested on Tuckernuck this year, only four chicks managed to fledge. This is equivalent to a productivity rate of just 0.44 chick per pair. Out of the four chicks that fledged, two individuals from separate clutches were banded by Libby Buck and myself. Yellow-banded CHH and CHF were both banded as 25-day old chicks and have survived the trials of precocial existence. In total, 14 American Oystercatchers were observed this season as re-sighted individuals from previous banding years. Thirteen out of these fourteen birds were originally banded in Nantucket County.

Despite 2021 being an exceptional year for terns on Nantucket, no terns nested successfully on Tuckernuck this year. On nearby Smith’s Point, a colony of 500+ **Least Tern** pairs flourished for the duration of the summer. By mid-July, some of the failed nesters from Smith Point had presumably migrated out towards Whale Point, where a few scattered pairs erected several unsuccessful nests. A single **Common Tern** egg was found on Whale Point during this time as well, although it was cold to the touch and presumably abandoned. The tern colony on Muskeget proved unsuccessful as well, with both Common Terns and **Roseate Terns** failing to produce offspring. **Great Black-backed Gull** predation coupled with a local population of **Black-crowned Night Herons** are believed to be the primary underlying causes for nest failure for this modest-sized but significant colony. Over the course of the last month, I have had the privilege of visiting Muskeget with the Massachusetts Audubon team for the purpose of removing fencing and monitoring shorebirds. The southwest portion of the island has become a hotbed for sandpipers, curlews, and plover alike. On a trip earlier this month, two **Whimbrels** flew overhead and proceeded east towards Tuckernuck. Also worth noting, a **Turkey Vulture** was seen perching on the porch of the Crocker Snow, Jr., house, providing more evidence that this species successfully nested there this year.

On Tuckernuck this week, a juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** appeared on the island’s west end. Frequency of this species is on the rise in coastal Massachusetts, and now we can expect upwards of a dozen to reach our shores in the course of a calendar year. On Tuckernuck, the high count last year for Yellow-crowned Night-Herons was a whopping thirteen individuals. This year, there seem to be fewer around, although this could be a reflection of less focus on North Pond this year as a birding destination. East Pond continues to be the main attraction this summer for shorebirds and waders alike. The flats at low tide provide excellent habitat for **Red Knots** and **Black-bellied Plovers**. In the coming weeks, the focus will shift from the shore to the forest as passerine migration takes hold. Already, **Cedar Waxwings**, **Yellow Warblers**, and **Northern Waterthrush** are on the move.

Last week, the annual Tuckernuck scavenger hunt took place. A special recognition should be extended to William L' Écuyer, who found the most items on the list within a 45-minute period. This week, we will be finishing the season off with a traditional Bam's Ramble, where we will go out into the fields with nets and jars to collect and identify as many butterfly species as possible.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"In America we have impoverished our soil, overgrazed our prairies, killed our game more rapidly than nature can replace them. This is easily seen to be stupid folly if we stop to think that our food plant crops require fertile soil, and that our civilization absolutely requires timber and wood. Hence the modern efforts in money and talented man power to inculcate the principles of conservation before it is too late... everlasting vigilance is required." — Ludlow Griscom



A Turkey Vulture spreads its wings on Crocker Snow, Jr's porch on Muskeget. On the other side of the island, Great Black-backed Gulls loaf with Martha's Vineyard in the background.



A congregation of Black-bellied Plovers, Red Knots, and Short-billed Dowitchers gathers at East Pond during low tide. A juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron arrived this week.



A young Garter Snake was caught and injured by a dog this week. Views of a blade of grass through a microscope reveal minuscule ridges running parallel along the leaf.



Just before sunset, long shadows are cast over the road on the eastern end of the island. Tuckernuck viewed from the water: my last return to the island for the season.

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