



A colorful sunset on Tuckernuck, with Martha's Vineyard in the distance.

Coastal Steward's Letter, June 24 - June 30, 2021.

This week was characterized by both mild temperatures and cool winds coming in from the ocean. With Independence Day just around the corner, and with it the call of family cookouts on the beach and casual social gatherings, the weather seems anticlimactic. Steady southeast winds early in the week caused two dozen **Wilson's Storm-Petrels** to make an appearance close to shore. **Great Shearwaters** and **Sooty Shearwaters** also appeared close inshore during the wake of this blow. Wilson's Storm Petrels are bizarre, tiny sea-voyagers that nest in great numbers on both the Antarctic mainland and the small, rocky isles north to the Falklands. They show up in our waters during the austral winter but typically spend their time much farther out to sea. It is believed that, because of their circumpolar distribution, Wilson's Storm-Petrel is one of the most numerous birds on the planet.

On June 29, Libby Buck and Danielle O'Dell (both of the Nantucket Conservation Foundation) came over to Tuckernuck for the day in order to band American Oystercatcher chicks. Out of the ten birds that were old enough to band, we were able to capture only five. This is a difficult task, given that young oystercatchers are much more likely to crouch down and hide in one spot, than they are to running away from a potential predator. It is also possible that several of these birds were depredated by **Great Black-backed Gulls** before we had the opportunity to band them. Interestingly, one bird that we captured was too small to be banded, despite its being almost 22 days old. This bird was probably the runt of this clutch. Both of its siblings, however, were easily banded and appeared healthy for their age.

In other news, the **House Wrens** at the field station have been busy bringing food to their chicks inside the birdhouse. It is fascinating watching them come and go, while hearing the chicks whine incessantly from inside the box. Occasionally, one of the parents will stop to sing, but otherwise they are both kept very occupied. The House Wrens nesting on Tuckernuck may be the only pair to succeed in reproducing in Nantucket County. Although there have been several prospecting pairs on Nantucket, it is not believed that these chicks survive into fledgelings. House Wrens first nested on Tuckernuck three years ago, which is unusual considering that they are a regular breeder on Martha's Vineyard and a common breeder on mainland Cape Cod.

There has been a recent addition to Whale Point in the last week. **Least Terns**, which are believed to have arrived from a dwindling "super colony" on Smith's Point, Nantucket, after June 25, may now be breeding on Tuckernuck. Last year, 238+ pairs nested on Whale Point, although this year there has been only one confirmed nest. Least Terns are infamous for appearing quickly and then deserting a nest site, with even mild disturbances like thunder or an unusually high tide resulting in nest abandonment. Will these terns stick around? It is hard to say right now, but it will be important in the coming weeks to mind their presence and the symbolic fencing.

Black Terns have arrived this week as well. This is a freshwater species of tern that favors more sheltered environments than **Common** or **Roseate Terns**. With bizarre triangular wings, choppy wingbeats, and a uniformly black appearance, these terns are distinctive even from considerable distances. Nantucket and Tuckernuck may be two of the best places in New England to find this inland tern species

during migration. In late July and August, it is not unusual to have counts of 60+ individuals on the flats and shoals between the two islands. On Whale Point, the total number of terns has continued to increase, and now upwards of 600 “large terns” are staging along the south shore. These numbers are comprised of the endangered Roseate Tern as a slight majority, and many of these birds appear to be banded. The bands appear to be, from most common to least common, blue, yellow, and red. Birds with red bands are from colonies in Maine and Nova Scotia. In the coming weeks, perhaps the weather will allow more up-close, and accurate band readings.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

“In Massachusetts, as well as elsewhere in New England, the coast and offshore islands have consistently proven to be the places where the greatest number of vagrants are found. These areas serve as ‘land’s end’ to misguided birds, and some of the better known spots (e.g., Plum Island, Monomoy Island, Nantucket) have for many years been favorite places to seek unusual birds.” — Richard Veit, Wayne Peterson



Two separate bottled messages were found along Tuckernuck’s north shore on June 26 and June 27, respectively. Both came from Nantucket and were dated 6/22/21.



A Gray Seal comes ashore with two distinct lacerations in flank (likely due to boat propellers). Two Piping Plover chicks, at just two weeks old, scurry along the beach, unwary of passerby.



A 21-day-old American Oystercatcher chick is banded by Libby Buck, a shorebird technician for Nantucket Conservation Foundation. These yellow bands are marked with a three-digit code: CHF.



Libby puts a color band on one of CHF's siblings. A particularly shiny oyster shell from the beach serves as a reminder that these bivalves are famous for producing pearls.

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