



An adult Stilt Sandpiper flies over the slough, having likely returned from breeding grounds in Nunavut.

Coastal Steward's Letter, July 22 - July 29, 2020.

The Godwit, a distinctive shorebird with an upturned bill and two-part call-note, is an ephemeral thing characterized by an imposing and regal prowess; a bird that turns heads wherever and whenever it may make landfall along our shores. This week, an adult **Hudsonian Godwit** was seen gliding past East Pond within a pod of **American Oystercatcher**, alighting albeit briefly before taking to the Orient, perhaps o'er to Esther Island or Nantucket. In either case, the bird's presence on Tuckernuck was probably short-lived.

Out of the four Godwit species that persist over a cosmopolitan dominion today, the Hudsonian, or "Goose-bird", is by far the least known. Long thought of as one of our continent's rarest breeding birds, discoveries in the mid-20th century led to scientists believing that the true population of this High Arctic nester was actually much larger than previously estimated. Contemporary demographic analysis pegs this species at having a global population size of some 50,000 - 70,000 individuals, although much of the Hudsonian's true range in the Far North has yet to be described. Certainly, our knowledge of this mysterious and enigmatic denizen of the Channing's dwarf birch and string-hummocks remain fragmented at best.

Another addition to the island's avifauna this week comes in the form of a rare but regular visitor to this archipelago: the **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron**. Able to blend seamlessly into the busy background that the bank of North Pond provides, up to five birds were counted there this week, all fresh juveniles perhaps from the colony near Falmouth on Cape Cod. Interestingly, a bird found earlier this month on Muskeget and covered in last week's report, was also an immature. Perhaps one of the birds in North Pond has been doing some island-hopping.

Many rare or threatened flower species are in bloom right now, including **Carolina Sea Lavender**, and **Wood Lily**, which is predominantly encountered in the Eastern part of the island, within the grassland habitat there. Also known as Statice, Caspia, or Marsh-Rosemary, the former species is not actually closely related to either true lavenders or rosemaries, and is instead classified as a member of the leadwort family. In Quaker times, this delicate saltmarsh plant was plucked profusely, as it had a reputation for being an "everlasting flower" for bouquets and other floral arrangements. Although both plants are encountered in some abundance on Tuckernuck, it is important not to pick either species, despite their natural beauty and sweet-smelling fragrance.

For *Lepidoptera* news this week, both **Ultonia Underwing** and **Double-striped Scoparia Moth** came into a blacklight set up outside the field station for the sole purpose of attracting such nocturnal moths. Along with them, a **Common Green Lacewing** appeared, as did an invasive beetle species, the **Asian Garden Beetle**. Native to Japan and China, this nine millimeter-long insect is considered a leaf-eating pest here in the United States, and is most frequently encountered at night around porch lights. Be on the lookout for this unassuming villain the next time you enjoy a starry sky on the front deck!

Other unusual sightings from the past few days are mainly in the form of uncommon bird occurrences. Up to two **Stilt Sandpiper** continues to be seen within the south portion of the slough, allowing relatively close approach and careful studying of a species usually cited as being a textbook example of “nemesis bird”. **House Wren, Pine Warbler,** and **House Finch** have made up the majority of the land bird action for this week, although fairly soon these “twit birds” will become more exciting as post-breeding dispersal ramps up among more northerly warblers, sparrows, and flycatchers alike.

A female **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** has been infrequently noted at the field station feeders for the last two days, although this is a species that has the potential to be attracted anywhere on the island where ample nectar supplies are available. Specially-designed hummingbird feeders are a great way to attract these tiny migrants. Making a solution to put in these feeders is simple: just add one part sugar for every four parts water, and you're good to go. Regularly changing this faux-nectar solution is key to prevent fermentation that may hurt, or even kill your feathered visitors.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

*“There was a time in the dreams of the great-great grandfathers when the land was not here: no blade of grass nor reed, no corn nor tree, no nesting bird was on this place. There was nothing but the sea.” -
Meredith Marshall Brenizer, on Nantucket Indian lore.*



Common Terns congregating on Whale Point, as part of a staging group of mixed Least, Black, and Roseate Terns. A Semipalmated Sandpiper flies by on tired, seasoned wings.



A Broad-necked Root-Borer, with the author's hand for size comparison, or rather, visa-versa. A Wood Lily from the grasslands by the slough.



*The tiny "everlasting flowers" of the local Sea-Lavender along East Pond, and an intriguing specimen of Common Tern, perhaps of the subspecies *S. h. longipennis*.*



A Roseate Tern presumably in its second year of life, sporting a white forehead and dark carpal bar. An American Oystercatcher takes off from Whale Point.

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