



*The Pink Moon rises in the East on April 26, just as American Woodcock begins their evening displays.*

## **Coastal Steward's Letter, May 1 - May 7, 2021.**

We're bringing the newsletter back for another season! Every week, I'll be making sure to keep readers posted on the natural happenings of Tuckernuck Island, and the constantly changing forces that shape its shores and drive its biodiversity. Things are beginning to return somewhat to normalcy here, and I personally have been lucky to receive my first jab of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. For the most part, precautions that were put in place last year on-island regarding the library and Sunday walks will pretty much stay the same, but less masks outside means more fresh air and more smiles to share. As Massachusetts begins the reopening process, I look forward to the prospect of a safe and healthy summer ahead.

Local **Piping Plover** and **American Oystercatcher** pairs have been back for about a month now, and some are already on eggs which means my job gets a little more busy. Right now, we have two Oystercatcher nests with three eggs each on the island, with even more expected to be found in the coming week once weather clears. Although no Piping Plover nests have been found yet, several very promising scrapes are being closely monitored. There are five to six pairs at Whale Point, as well as two pairs on the West End. In the next few weeks, it will be important to respect all symbolic fencing and maintain considerate distance from known nest sites, as regular incubation is critical for hatch success.

Terns have begun to arrive as well, with the first birds appearing on May 3. **Least Tern**, **Common Tern**, and **Roseate Tern** have all been recorded since then, with the latter species being the earliest this year North of the Carolinas. Over the course of the next month, we'll see some of these terns stay with us to nest, while others will congregate by the hundreds at places like Whale Point or Bigelow's Point where more and more of these loafing birds spend the summer not breeding. With a poor reproductive season last season, it will be interesting to see in particular what numbers of Least Tern decide to nest this year, a species known for its habit of abandoning colonies following thunder storms, fireworks, or even just heavy rains.

Late April and early May can be a wonderful time for land birds on Tuckernuck. It can also be absolutely dead quiet. I think it is safe to say that I've encountered both kinds of days over the last few trips this month, but the number of good days so far have definitely outnumbered the poor ones. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology's migration forecast program, BirdCast, along with local NEXRAD radar can help with determining what days will be better than others, however, especially with the outer cape and islands, these methods can still prove unreliable. Even with an excellent prediction, early mornings can still be a bust. Good migration on the outer lands is the flip of a coin.

Regardless, several rarities have shown up in recent days, perhaps the most notable being a male **Evening Grosbeak**. This bird, first observed by Dick Veit and Ella Potenza on May 1, was seen again in subsequent days in the mid-island area. When I came over to the island on May 4, I was lucky to hear the bird (but not see it!) near the same spot where it had previously been seen. These are huge, stunning finches that have a unique House Sparrow-like call and only make it down into our neck of the woods during special irruption years. Luckily, the winter of 2020 - 2021 was a so-called "superflight" for these

boreal nomads, and many showed up in November and December, even on Muskeget! Now, we are beginning to see these birds head back North, although this one seems to be straggling. Other birds in the area have been **White-breasted Nuthatch**, **Brown Creeper**, and **Red-bellied Woodpecker**. These are all species more likely to be seen on the mainland than they are on the islands, so seeing them this far out to sea during migration is a definitely a testament to the flight capabilities of these comparatively sedentary birds.

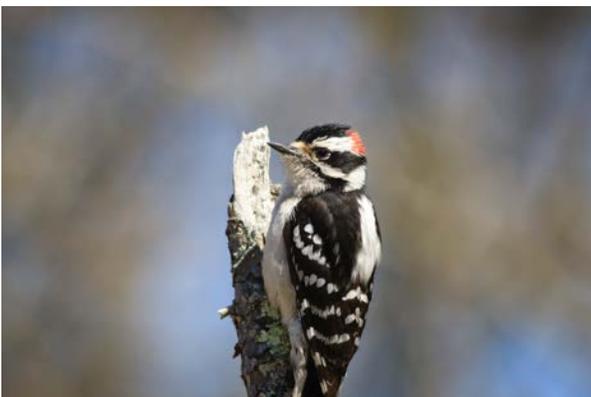
As of Wednesday, a few early arrivals have been **Magnolia Warbler**, **Northern Parula**, **Ovenbird**, and **Eastern Wood-Pewee**. The appearance of this latter species makes just the second record this year in New England, as they typically show up around Memorial Day. This next week will see the influx of many neotropical migrants currently working their way up the coast. Exciting times ahead for this little island in the Atlantic!

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*"Nature never 'fails.' Nature complies with her own laws. Nature is the law. When man lacks understanding of nature's laws and a man-contrived structure buckles unexpectedly, it does not fail. It only demonstrates that man did not understand Nature's laws and behaviors. Nothing failed. Man's knowledge or estimating was inadequate." - R. Buckminster Fuller*



*A male Downy Woodpecker pauses on a dead branch of pine tree, and a White-breasted Nuthatch forages in the maritime oak forest of the island's northwest corner.*



*Several Brown Thrasher were heard singing around the island this past month, and a Brown Creeper stayed for few days by the firehouse.*



*A Bronzed Tiger Beetle forages alongside the washover pond on Whale Point, and a male Yellow-bellied Sapsucker peeks out from behind an oak tree.*



*Black-and-white Warbler arrived this week, likely from the Southeastern United States where they winter. An Ipswich Savannah Sparrow rests on Whale Point before setting out for Sable Island, NS.*

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