



The Veery is perhaps our most delightful songster here in eastern North America; its song is truly ethereal.

Coastal Steward's Letter, August 26 - September 2, 2020.

There is a reason why this time of year holds a special place in my heart when it comes to birds and birding. Five years ago, on August 27th, I submitted my first eBird checklist, and in doing so, became a part of the largest citizen science database in the world. I have submitted hundreds of checklists since, and am even coming up close on submitting my 1000th complete checklist for Nantucket County. Quite simply, eBird has revolutionized the ever-expanding democratization of science. The “secrets” of birding, long having been safeguarded by an elitist group of intellectual researchers and ornithologists, are now available to amateur observers the world over, and from all walks of life, background, and ability. If you are unfamiliar with the site, check out www.ebird.org, or consider downloading the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's partner app, Merlin.

Without further ado, here are the highlights of this week on Tuckernuck. On August 27th, things got off to a great start with a few “first of season” birds - birds that are just being recorded on Tuckernuck for the first time this post-breeding season. Some of the notable highlights included big upticks in **Baltimore Oriole**, as well as **Cedar Waxwing**, and **Bobolink**. The latter two species are ones you mainly encounter on the wing, so to speak. The high-pitched trill calls of the Waxwing and the tinny “pink” calls of the Bobolink are some of the more ubiquitous noises of early autumn. Nevertheless, Thursday seemed to be alive with quite a number of other birds, such as **Canada Warbler**, **Black-throated Green Warbler**, and several **Least Flycatcher**.

It was the day after, however, Friday the 28th, that ended up being truly spectacular. Coming in at a whopping 95 species of bird, it was the first “real” day of fall migration, with an impressive fourteen wood-warbler species and six species of flycatcher. A few high counts were even broken, according to eBird. Three **Blue-winged Warbler**, three **Veery**, four **Chestnut-sided Warbler**, twenty-four Baltimore Oriole, and ten **Purple Martin** were considered “above average” numbers for this time of year.

The real prize of the show on Friday was a Western voyager, and a stray to our shores in some numbers every year: the **Lark Sparrow**, an adult which was seen briefly on that day and subsequently throughout the weekend. This is a species whose population has fluctuated tremendously since the first European settlers arrived. As the great ancient Beech forests of New England were cut down and converted into farmland, the Lark Sparrow, having an affinity towards ecotone edge habitat, proliferated immensely in the Northeast. Now that these country farmlands are becoming increasingly urbanized, however, the range of this chestnut-colored ground sparrow is contracting. The farthest east the Lark Sparrow now comes to breed is West Virginia.

From there, things did not really pick up again until the 31st, when a decent showing of wood-warblers appeared following a favorable northwest wind. Among these birds, a single **Common Nighthawk** appeared, and seemed to get into a scrimmage with a **Little Brown Bat** who also happened to be prowling above the Triangle Pines. Nighthawks are among my favorite birds, and

although their abundance on the mainland is far greater than here, it is always so quaint to admire the tiny squadrons that move through in late August and early September. Another common name for these birds are “goatsuckers”, which is actually a fairly broad term used to classify other members of that order as well, some of which we can also expect to find on Tuckernuck within a given calendar year. The name is a misnomer because members of the family Caprimulgidae do not actually suck on goats for sustenance, nor any other mammal for that matter. On the other hand, this aerial insectivore has been known to consume over fifty different species of bugs. Yuck!

Wrapping up for this week, some of the first migrant waterfowl have arrived to our ponds, and their presence here is easily detectable. Eleven individuals of the highly migratory **Blue-winged Teal** touched down in East Pond on Sunday. They join some of the local breeding ducks, both **Mallard** and **American Black Duck**. Upon flushing a flock of teal, one immediately notices the dainty pastel wing colors of an otherwise unassuming flock of brown ducks. Although I never encourage purposely disrupting bird life in any way, shape, or form - if you ever do get to witness the synchronized flight of a dozen-or-so teal, it is truly a sight to behold.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

“No one not in need / would think these gulls / sacred - instead / recognize in calls / something of the ruthless / something of the fierce / ‘what were we, then, / Before the being of ourselves began?’ / - lost and fierce! / indistinct / but that instinct: / Desire that remains Desire / No one not in need.” - David Giannini from “To The Wave”.



The Yellow-bellied Flycatcher is a colorful and flashy member of the otherwise unassuming and boring Empidonax genus. A Lark Sparrow is a rare visitor to our shores from out West.



A Brant scuttles by on the beach at Whale Point, and an early morning Common Nighthawk hones in on its flycatching abilities above the Triangle Pines.



This female Black-throated Blue Warbler was an early arrival last week, and is not usually seen before mid-September. A presumable Little Brown Bat flies over Bigelow's Point.



A female Blackburnian Warbler poses nicely on a branch a few feet away from the Firehouse Road, and a Cape May Warbler hops up into view for a brief moment.

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