



Roseate Terns have begun their descent onto our shoals, with many wearing the light pink wash on the breast that gives the bird its namesake.

Coastal Steward's Letter, May 8 - May 14, 2021.

It is an exciting day today because at 6:00 p.m. EST, the Massachusetts Audubon Society's annual Bird-a-Thon commences and birders across the state will be getting outside and begin searching for as many species possible within a 24-hour window. This event, the primary fundraiser for Mass Audubon since 1983, has been the catalyst for many other local non-profits and land conservation organizations to take part in such a storied tradition. This year the Tuckernuck Land Trust will also be hosting its own Bird-a-Thon, which we have scheduled for sometime between May 20 and May 25. Consider making a per species pledge or donating a flat amount at www.tuckernucklandtrust.org. We can expect to see anywhere from 80 to 100 species!

Vireos, warblers, and flycatchers have all arrived in numbers this week, but the best day by far was today, May 14. With warm temperatures overnight and a cool sou'westerly breeze, plenty of neotropical migrants arrived on Tuckernuck, most notably 15 species of wood-warbler, 2 species of oriole, and plenty of sparrows. Both **Bay-breasted Warblers** and **Blackpoll Warblers** arrived today. These are usually some of the later migrants to show up in the season, so it is unusual to find them here in numbers this early. **Blackburnian Warblers** and several **Nashville Warblers** also materialized and were singing up a storm in the northwest part of the island. **Orchard Oriole**, a diminutive and infrequently seen relative of the familiar **Baltimore Oriole**, has also been seen throughout the week but today was particularly gregarious, with one bird even going so far as to visit my suet feeder. Undoubtedly, many of these passage migrants are trying desperately to fill up on fuel for the departure flight out of here, and yet many still find the time to sing, interact, and preen.

Earlier in the week, three **Purple Martins** showed up in the mid-island area and actively investigating a bird box there. These large, musical swallows have never nested in the county, so the fact that three were collectively checking out a nest box is big news. Although it seems these birds have moved on, perhaps more will show up next spring and decide to stay longer. They are colonial nesters that often take advantage of man-made structures surrounded by open areas, so Tuckernuck seems like a good fit for them if they do decide to plop down. One can only hope.

Another good bird this week was a **Yellow-throated Vireo**, a rarity for the Cape and Islands, although an uncommon breeder in central and western parts of Massachusetts. According to eBird data, this is the first record in the area this year, of a species that is not always seen on the islands in the spring. A third **Summer Tanager** was also seen this week, though it is a species that does not typically breed farther north than southern coastal New Jersey. The number of individuals to have reached Massachusetts this year is unprecedented, and many records are concentrated on the islands off Cape Cod. The similar **Scarlet Tanager** has also made several appearances this week; however, the difference between these two species is most dramatic regarding the wings. While Scarlets have contrasting, jet black wings, Summers are a uniform shade of tomato-red and have a long banana-like bill.

On May 11, Edie Ray, Kirsten Stemmler from Mass Audubon, and I went over to Muskeget for the day to set up symbolic fencing for nesting **Piping Plovers** and **American Oystercatchers**. While

we found only one nest, we identified several areas with scrapes hinting at impending eggs. I also found time to duck into the cedars for a few minutes and look for songbird migrants, where I found a **White-eyed Vireo** and **Prairie Warbler** that were both understandably quite reluctant to come out of hiding with dozens of gulls gawking overhead. A surprising find came in the form of two **Northern Cardinals**, which we think of more as a sedentary forest inhabitant. Were these birds migrants or were they birds that overwintered? Hard to tell for certain. A single **Glossy Ibis** was also flushed from the island's makeshift airstrip, while another bird (perhaps a separate individual?) was later seen perched on top of some shrubbery with a few nesting gulls. It will be interesting to see if anything comes from this, as Ibis are known to breed amongst gulls on Penikese Island, which is at a similar geographical advantage to Muskeget.

The next few days are forecasted to be beautiful, so I plan on making the most of them. At least one **Ruby-throated Hummingbird** has been hanging around the field station and visiting my feeders, so another task will be to keep the sugar water flowing. It is amazing to think of the harrowing journey this tired, minuscule gem has endured to reach here: miles upon miles of open ocean.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"What should our aim be in environmental education? To educate for mastery of the environment: nothing less than that. We are in the early stages of moving from a formal democracy to a participatory democracy, in which people cherish their environment because it is theirs." - Colin Ward



A Yellow-throated Vireo (a first for the Cape & Islands this year) calls near the Triangle Pines, and a migrant Osprey flies over Muskeget.



A handsome male Black-throated Green Warbler reminds us that spring migration is reaching its climax, and an American Oystercatcher defends its nest against a crow.



A male Scarlet Tanager poses in an oak tree, and a young male Purple Martin pauses during some apartment shopping — it was accompanied by two females that were investigating a local bird box.



A metal banded Black-capped Chickadee exhibits a well-defined brood patch, indicating that it is a female with eggs, and a young male Chestnut-sided Warbler watches on tentatively from a perch.

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