



The remnants of the Holdgate house on Muskeget. We visited this tiny outpost in the Atlantic in order to catch and band Oystercatcher chicks.

Coastal Steward's Letter, June 30 - July 7, 2021.

This week I am feeling extremely thankful for the help I received during this holiday weekend. Edie Ray and Ella Potenza both volunteered their abilities and expertise to help safeguard nesting **Piping Plovers** and **American Oystercatchers** on Whale Point during the Fourth of July. With an estimated 70,000+ people on Nantucket for the celebration of our independence as a nation, the scene on Tuckernuck seemed refreshingly cool and quiet. This, in part, was made possible by the heavy cloud cover for most of the morning on Sunday, July 4. In the afternoon, we even experienced some unexpected rain showers. My thoughts going into this weekend were pessimistic at best. I knew that hundreds, if not thousands, of beachgoers would want to try to take advantage of this holiday since for many it was the first time since the start of COVID-19 that people were allowed to get outside in large numbers.

Tropical Storm Elsa arrived on Tuckernuck on July 9, bringing with it gusts of up to 60 mph out of the southeast. The fact that we were projected to be hit by the storm's eastern front, combined with its relatively fast track, provided a level of optimism for many birders in the Northeast. Hoping to see species of shearwater, jaeger, storm-petrel, and skua that usually spend the majority of their lives far out to sea, birders look for these extreme weather patterns in order to spare the cost of a pelagic trip out to the nearest continental shelf. Elsa, however, proved most unsatisfactory. A few intrepid birders sat at the top of Bigelow's Point for the duration of the storm's peak intensity. Although they put up a good fight through slanting rain and prevailing sou'easterlies, the birders were rewarded with only a few dozen **Great Shearwaters**, half a dozen **Cory's Shearwaters**, and one each of **Sooty Shearwater** and **Manx Shearwater**. A **Wilson's Storm-Petrel** early in the morning was a particular highlight for one observer. Later in the day, from the upstairs loft of the field station, I was able to look through my scope at Whale Point and see three adult **Black Terns**, likely also storm-driven birds.

A few familiar faces showed up this week. An immature **Arctic Tern**, not seen since June 22, was spotted at Whale Point on July 4. TLT president Jamey French also observed a (the?) **Black-bellied Whistling-Duck** at East Pond on July 6. Shortly after Mark Souza found the second county record of this species in his front yard on June 2, the same individual presumably wandered over to Nantucket, where it spent time at a private residence by the Lily Pond and at another private residence by Miacomet Pond. It is interesting to note, as well, that Martha's Vineyard also had reports of a Black-bellied Whistling-Duck in the last few weeks, which almost certainly represents a separate individual. The question remains whether this most recent Tuckernuck report pertains to the long-staying Nantucket bird, to the elusive and flighty Martha's Vineyard bird, or rather to a whole other individual entirely. It is impossible to know with certainty. The occurrence of this charismatic and unique duck species on the islands is always exciting.

A quick trip to Muskeget this week with Tucker Taylor and Libby Buck also provided a unique insight into the islands' avian summer residents. Although we went out to Muskeget with the primary intent to band oystercatcher chicks, the excursion also provided the opportunity for us to explore the interior of the island for nesting sparrows, wading birds, and gulls. **Saltmarsh Sparrows**, **Savannah**

Sparrows, and **Song Sparrows** all breed abundantly on Muskeget, along with **Gray Catbirds**, **Red-winged Blackbirds**, **European Starlings**, **Eastern Kingbirds**, and **Common Yellowthroats**. These are the only passerine species that nest regularly on this tiny outpost in the Atlantic. We were able to determine that several pairs of **Black-crowned Night-Herons** were present in the cedar wood habitat there, which strongly suggests that they are breeding this year. A **Turkey Vulture** was also flushed from a wet area nearby. If confirmed, this would represent the first breeding record for Muskeget.

In other news, the three **House Wren** chicks at the field station fledged, and are now causing quite the ruckus.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"I am the most unlearned man I know. I don't know anyone who has learned how little one knows as have I. But that does not belittle the little I seem to know, and I have confidence in the importance of remembering how little we know and one of the possible significance of the fact that we prosper, and at some times enjoy Life in universe despite the designed-in littleness that we have to 'get by with.'" — R. Buckminster Fuller



From the north shore of Tuckernuck, one can view fireworks displays on Nantucket, Cape Cod, and Martha's Vineyard. Terns, like this Arctic Tern, were present on the island during the holiday.



A Common Tern egg was spotted on Whale Point during the week, the first one to be found this season. Several Least Tern nests were also found over the last few days before the holiday.



TLT president Jamey French stands atop Bigelow's Point during Tropical Storm Elsa, scanning the horizon for shearwaters. A House Wren investigates the field station library.



A baby White-footed Mouse explores the world in its first few hours of life. Hydrangeas blooms by the field station.

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