



This Broad-winged Hawk, a rarity for our archipelago, was seen on Thursday and provided an unusual opportunity for close study while perched.

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Spring migration typically reaches its peak on the islands in this third week of May, but things for the most part have kept relatively quiet despite prevailing sou'westerlies. The dawn chorus on Tuckernuck, consisting mainly of the omnipresent **Eastern Towhee** and **Gray Catbird**, has been noticeably lacking vireo, wood-warbler, and thrush songs in its ranks. On Nantucket, too, the many colors of spring migration seem to be muted. As an avid record keeper of the birds I see, this change has been reflected in my "year list": a list of bird species I observe in the county over the course of a calendar year. At the time I am writing this, my list for this year stands at 203 species, which is on par for where I was last year at this time, with 204 species. However, this year I am doing a lot more birding than I was last year, which was my senior year of high school. Because of this, I really birded only on weekends in 2020, with the exception of a few school holidays and a spring break (and let's not forget March quarantine too). So keeping that in mind, I dig deeper to compare where I was last year for the month of May with where I am this year: 134 so far in 2021, compared to 159 by May 21 in 2020. That's a difference of 25 species. May of 2020 was also characterized by terrible north winds for much of New England, whereas this year we've seen many continuous days of sustained favorable conditions for migrants. What can account for this disparity? I can't help but think that the answer to this question lies in a loss of avian biodiversity across North America.

According to a study conducted by scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology published in 2019, one in four birds in North America has disappeared in the last 50 years — a net loss of almost three billion birds. Grassland species like **Bobolink**, **Eastern Kingbird**, and **Savannah Sparrow** have been hit the hardest, with a cumulative loss of 53% in total populations. Shorebirds like the **Red Knot**, **Piping Plover**, and **American Oystercatcher** have also received a blow in recent years, and a total population loss of 37% is estimated by the report. Birds that breed in temperate eastern forests have declined a marked 17%. This category comprises many wood-warblers, vireos, and thrushes that we are familiar with on Tuckernuck during migration.

I will list just a few specific examples from my own experience. One of the most noticeable differences this year is a lack of vireos. I have had only one **Red-eyed Vireo** this year, when at this time last year I was up to nearly a dozen, with a pair that had already established their territory in our backyard on Nantucket. **Warbling Vireo** and **Philadelphia Vireo** (the latter being a fairly unusual migrant here) have both been absent as well. **Bobolinks**, which I have seen in several locations on Nantucket over the last two springs, are similarly missing. **Swainson's Thrush**, a reliable neotropical migrant found in pine barrens on Nantucket's western moors, have also been nowhere to be seen. I could go on. At least for this observer, spring of 2021 has been anything but extraordinary.

That being said, there were several treats this week. First and foremost among them, a **Broad-winged Hawk**, believed to be just the eighth island record and the first photographed. I've only ever seen two in the county before, one in April of 2017 and the other just last May. Both were active migrants, cruising at an incredibly high altitude and riding the air thermals north. This bird, however, was much

more cooperative and was actually seen perched in a dead snag before flying west. I remember seeing these birds in the jungles of Costa Rica, most of them tucked away in the canopy and only occasionally making sudden, quick flights between branches. They migrate up from the tropics through Texas, avoiding the treacherous crossing of open ocean at all costs. Their animosity towards water is so great that some of these hawks will sometimes get trapped in Nova Scotia for the winter on their way south!

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds continue to grace the feeders at the field station, and there have been at least two, on and off, for the majority of the week. Sometimes in the afternoon, I will get back from beach duties to find both birds fighting over their food source. They have been very approachable, and my hope is perhaps to attract them to a small hummingbird “button” that would enable visitors to feed them by hand.

Two **White-eyed Vireos** appeared this week, and were singing up a storm on the island's west end. Wood-warblers in all shapes, colors, and sizes arrived over the weekend, with the ethereal **Blackburnian Warbler** being a true standout as always. **Bay-breasted Warblers**, **Chestnut-sided Warblers**, and **Blackpoll Warblers** all continued to come through in numbers, and a late **Palm Warbler** was a surprise on the day of Mass Audubon's Bird-a-Thon. This is a species that usually passes through in middle or late April.

That's all for now. This has been another fantastic week on Tuckernuck — despite less than stellar birds.

Best,

Skyler Kardell

“You cannot protect the environment unless you empower people, you inform them, and you help them understand that these resources are their own, that they must protect them.” - Wangari Maathai



Two female Ruby-throated Hummingbirds have been seen around the field station this week, attracted to a feeder I keep filled with a sugar water solution.



A White-eyed Vireo sings from a low perch on the island's west end, while a male Bay-breasted Warbler gleans from the upper branches of a sassafras tree.



This adult Broad-winged Hawk was a surprise on Thursday, and only my third ever for the county. A young male American Redstart keeps to itself in the hardwoods.



Two warblers both seen on Bird-a-Thon (May 15): an Eastern Palm Warbler and a male Blackburnian Warbler.

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