



*Bobolinks have been passing through our area in small numbers. During the non-breeding season, they congregate in high densities in the pampas of Argentina.*

## Coastal Steward's Letter, May 22 - May 26, 2021.

After several days of prevailing southwest winds, I planned to take my crack at the Tuckernuck Land Trust Bird-a-thon on the evening of Thursday, May 20th. Looking at the forecast for the rest of the week, I knew that the time was now or never. With the weekend likely to be occupied with other duties, and Monday and Tuesday seemingly a no-go because of wind, Friday had to be my day. As I made my way to Bigelow's Point for an underwhelming sunrise on account of the fog, an early morning **Ovenbird** chirped away from some unknown perch. Along the path leading up from North Pond, I flushed an **American Woodcock** a few paces in front of me. This would have been a new bird for the count, had I not heard a few birds twittering above me the previous night by the field station.

Overall, the day picked up with a slow burn. Seabirds were hard to come by, and songbirds were not as abundant as they had been in previous days. Nevertheless, I managed to clock in with a modest thirteen warbler species, my second best number for this season. With 21,700 steps on my tracker, it might be unsurprising that I had high numbers of both **Gray Catbird** (65) and **Eastern Towhee** (70). Aside from these notable mentions, highlights included my first **Black-billed Cuckoo** of the season, an early **Semipalmated Plover**, and two **Brown Thrashers** to boot. Overall, the birding was average but steady, and that seems to be the par this year.

All in all, the official total for this year's TLT Bird-a-thon stands at 81 species. There were no obvious "misses" apart from a **Red-throated Loon** I saw in the lagoon both the day before and the day after the event and **Barn Owl**, which seems to be a rather elusive resident for the time being. Flycatchers seem to have been in short supply that day too, with **Eastern Wood-Pewee** and **Least Flycatcher** noticeably absent. "Big days" are notoriously hit-or-miss, so even if you feel confident that you'll find that rarity you've been staking out for the past week — odds are it won't show up on the day of.

On Monday, May 24, I observed an odd **Brant** on the island's east end that seemed to recall a previous individual I had encountered earlier this spring. The belly is quite dark, and the flanks are not white like the east arctic subspecies with which we are familiar with in New England, *Branta bernicla hrota*. This left me questioning whether or not this bird belonged to a different population altogether, perhaps even from the nominate gene pool in the Western Palearctic, *Branta bernicla bernicla*. Tuckernuck actually has one other record of this subspecies, an adult observed by Dr. Richard Veit in March and April of 2005. A follow-up on this mysterious individual will be provided once the photos are circulated and more information is gathered.

As the season progresses, we now move into chick season with many of the island's local **Piping Plover** and **American Oystercatcher** pairs beginning to hatch their eggs. The week following Memorial Day is forecast to be a very busy week on Tuckernuck in terms of newly hatched chicks starting to roam the beaches. While this may mean more mobility for both the young and their parents, this freedom also makes them more susceptible to unsafe interactions with humans. Because of this, more fencing can be expected in areas that require it, and additional fencing may be added to encompass areas where unfledged chicks disperse.

Additionally, plenty of other critters are starting to take to the streets (where I have most of my creepy crawly encounters oddly enough) with **Fiery Searcher Beetles** and **Millipedes** appearing in numbers. **Juvenal's Duskywings** and **American Coppers** are also active now in many of the scrubbier areas of Tuckernuck, while **Spring Azures** and **Eastern Tailed-Blues** are sure to fly about the understorey of the island's maritime oak forest.

Trees here are just now beginning to leaf out, and everything is green and verdant. With summer just around the corner, I can hardly wait to find out what life on Tuckernuck is like without a global pandemic.

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*"Science, like proper literary studies, can be hard and challenging but science is — also like proper literary studies — wonderful. Science can pay its way but, like great art, it shouldn't have to. And we shouldn't need whacky personalities and fun explosions to persuade us of the value of a life spent finding out why we have life in the first place."*

*- Richard Dawkins*



*Wood Ducks have trickled in over the last week, while two Brant have lingered into an extended stay on Tuckernuck. The bird on the right may belong to one of the populations in Europe.*



*A gathering of shorebirds at East Pond: Black-bellied Plovers, Ruddy Turnstones, and Least Sandpipers. With the doors open, two Barn Swallows come to investigate the field station shed.*



*A one-egg Piping Plover nest blends in well with the coarse sand of the island's west end. A male Lone Star Tick adds to the dozens of ticks I have taken off my legs this season already.*



*A Fiery Searcher Beetle scurries across my hand. On Monday, Dick Veit and I set up tern "garages" and decoys for the nesting colony on Muskeget.*

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