



*This second-calendar-year Arctic Tern was a surprise find on Whale Point this Wednesday; this species has the longest annual migration of any bird.*

## Coastal Steward's Letter, June 17 - June 23, 2021.

Late June can often feel like the doldrums of the birdwatcher's calendar year. Spring migration has slowly waned to a mere trickle, and shorebirds have yet to begin their southbound exodus from the arctic tundra. With few exceptions, almost all of the birds observed on Tuckernuck right now are resident breeders. **Eastern Towhees**, **Gray Catbirds**, and **Common Yellowthroats** are among Tuckernuck's most abundant nesting species. During the biweekly banding operations that Dr. Richard Veit oversees at the fire house, the vast majority of birds caught in the mist nets are among these three species. **American Robins**, **Song Sparrows**, and both **Carolina** and **House Wrens** breed in the maritime oak forests on island as well. This year, it is believed that **Eastern Wood-Pewees** are nesting by the fire house. If confirmed, this would represent a first breeding record for the island, although they are a frequently encountered songster in the hardwood forests of nearby Nantucket.

This week, an **Arctic Tern** appeared on Whale Point. These terns, famous for their 40,000-kilometer annual migration, are true masters of flight. Traveling every year to the pack ice around Antarctica for the austral summer, this small tern species may feed alongside penguins, prions, and skuas on the islands of the Southern Ocean. This individual seen on Whale Point is in only its second year of life. Already, it has completed a miraculous migration that has taken it across the Atlantic towards western Europe, and along the African coastline towards the Cape of Good Hope. Although this bird may not breed this year, if it survives the perils of migration for another few seasons it will hopefully find a mate somewhere in the vast Canadian tundra. As far as we know, Tuckernuck could have been its first land-ho since flying north from Tierra del Fuego. In the last few days, a surprising number of both **Roseate** and **Common Terns** have shown up on that side of the island as well. This may be reflective of poor reproductive success in other colonies on the mainland.

The beaches around the island are ripe with baby birds. Most of these birds are less than three weeks old. Whale Point remains the busiest place on the island for these unfledged chicks, and 17 **Piping Plover** chicks and 3 **American Oystercatcher** chicks to be alive and healthy there at present. On the other end of the island, the majority flips. Although there are no Piping Plover chicks running around North Pond yet, there *are* a whopping 7 Oystercatcher chicks. This high level of productivity is surprising for several reasons, chiefly that, last year, no Oystercatcher chicks fledged from the island's west end. This was a result of the large number of **Great Black-backed Gulls** that nested there last year; these gulls are known to depredate oystercatcher nests and eat the unfledged nestlings.

Libby Buck, with the Nantucket Conservation Foundation, will be coming out to the island on Tuesday to band some of these young oystercatcher chicks. The optimal age to band oystercatchers is between 20 and 25 days old, which is old enough so that they are easy to capture but still young enough that they are not yet capable of flight. Re-sight data is relatively good for Oystercatchers, since there are many observers along the East Coast. Already this season, I have re-sighted 11 individual oystercatchers on Tuckernuck.

Oystercatcher and plover chicks also share the beach with gull chicks and staging terns. Roseate Terns also wear the same kind of plastic field readable (PFR) bands that many American Oystercatchers wear. So far this season, many of the resights on Tuckernuck have been of birds from the Buzzards Bay and Great Gull Island colonies. These are simple color-coded bands with a three-letter code that typically ends with a number.

This is also the time of year when other terns start showing up among the mixed staging flocks. Be on the lookout for **Royal Terns** and **Sandwich Terns** in the coming weeks!

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*"People ask: why should I care about the ocean? Because the ocean is the cornerstone of earth's life support system, it shapes climate and weather. It holds most of life on earth. 97% of earth's water is there. It's the blue heart of the planet—we should take care of our heart. It's what makes life possible for us. We still have a really good chance to make things better than they are. They won't get better unless we take the action and inspire others to do the same thing. No one is without power." — Sylvia Earle*



*Two American Oystercatcher chicks, both approximately two weeks old. They are usually banded when they are just 20-25 days old.*



*A Gray Seal swims in the waters off of Muskeget. A mixed flock of Roseate and Common Terns flies over Muskeget, where there have been several pairs nest-prospecting.*



*Common Terns, Roseate Terns, and Laughing Gulls congregate on the outer arm of Muskeget's east pond. A recently deceased Atlantic Horseshoe Crab was found on a nearby beach.*



*A Black-capped Chickadee was caught during banding operations at the firehouse this week. A young Great Black-backed Gull allows a rare close encounter for this observer.*

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