



Roseate Terns with Common Terns staging on Whale Point.

Coastal Steward's Letter, July 8 - July 15, 2020.

This week on Tuckernuck, the passing of tropical storm Fay took place on the night of July 10, leading into the morning hours of Saturday, July 11. Although the course of the storm ended up being more inland than previously thought, Tuckernuck still managed to take some peripheral damage, with some serious sou'easterlies reaching gust speeds of 35 knots. Birders up and down the East Coast look for these kind of weather events in late summer to potentially bring pelagic, sea-faring bird species (like shearwaters, storm-petrels, and boobies) closer to shore, where they can be scrutinized by binocular-wielding observers.

While this storm did bring some excitement to much of the New England coast (a Long-tailed Jaeger in Bristol County, and shearwaters in Long Island Sound), the showing of birds on Tuckernuck proved to be much less resounding. This was largely in part due to a pea-soup fog bank... one that lingered throughout the majority of the morning, and only lifted slightly at around lunch time. That being said, the visibility that morning was actually able to exceed more than 100 yards at a few instances, and it was clear that birds *were* in fact moving... of note being a dozen-or-so **Great Shearwater** and at least two **Manx Shearwater**.

This latter species, a breeder in seaside cliffs and crags throughout the upper latitudes of the North Atlantic, is a tiny black-and-white shearwater with a rapid, hurried flight style... quite different from that of the former species. The Great Shearwater actually spends its "winter" season in our waters, as it is a bird of the austral summer, and nests on only four remote islands in the Southern Atlantic, with the largest population existing on Tristan da Cunha, a sovereignty some 1,500 miles from South Africa with the bragging right of being "the most remote inhabited archipelago in the world".

While this mild excitement proved to be somewhat of a flat note, the real prize of this week was a **White-winged Dove**, found on Monday, July 13 by Zoë and William L'Écuyer. A native of the dry and arid scrublands of the continental Southwest, this species has crept northward since the 1980s, aided by an adapted lifestyle to an increasingly urbanized world. Interestingly, this is just one of a handful of far-flung records from this year alone, of a bird whose defined breeding range only just grazes the southwest corner of Arkansas. At the time I am writing this letter, White-winged Dove has been observed on the Avalon Peninsula in Newfoundland, the St. Lawrence region of Quebec, and twice within the lower Ontario area - all within the past month.

Shorebird migration is now officially underway, and I personally have been immersing myself fully in this wonderful annual phenomenon by reading Peter Matthiessen's *Wind Birds* (1967), which beautifully catalogs the members of the suborder Charadrii in exquisite literary prose and using the critical lens that natural history provides. This week, we have seen the arrival on Tuckernuck of several southbound migrants on track for reaching the Tierra del Fuego region of South America. These birds are: **White-rumped Sandpiper**, **Whimbrel**, and the ubiquitous denizen of the high-tide wrack, **Sanderling**.

While it is always incredible to see these long-distance voyagers in their assortment of different transitioning plumages, I would say that the best shorebird this week for me was a **Western Willet**, representing the first one I have observed this year. This is altogether a different looking bird than our resident Eastern Willet, however, according to the majority of taxonomical authority here within North America, the two taxa are considered conspecific for reasons that still remain controversial among the practical ornithologist and curious birder alike. On July 14, when I first encountered this bird, I happened to find it among a few Eastern Willets, which offered some excellent in-field comparisons of the two similar subspecies.

In brief, I will recount some of the other significant avian developments from this week on Tuckernuck. The number of **Black Tern** on Whale Point has seriously increased within the last few days, and this morning I tallied a total of thirty-two individuals - most of which are still retaining the majority of their exceedingly chic and mod alternate plumage. A **Black-billed Cuckoo** has been purring around the island, and the cousin of this bird, the **Yellow-billed Cuckoo**, can also be heard around the eastern half of the island especially. The arrival of juvenile **Least Tern**, **Common Tern**, and **Roseate Tern** (presumably from the colony on Muskeget) have all been welcome additions to the staging terns on Whale Point, which now holds somewhere around 700+ birds.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"The restlessness of shorebirds, their kinship and the distance and swift seasons, the wistful signal of their voices down the long coastlines of the world make them, for me, the most affecting of wild creatures." - Peter Matthiessen



The Tiny Wood Satyr emerged a few weeks ago, and is still in good abundance. Yellow Thistles, like the ones above, are at the North end of their range here, and are common in coastal heath.



A White-winged Dove found by Zoë and William L'Écuyer on 7/13, and a Black Tern in near-to-full alternate plumage.



Common Wood-Nymphs taken to a Yellow Thistle, and a Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle at Whale Point.



A Great Shearwater off of Whale Point, showing a close-up look at a typically far-out bird, and a Snapping Turtle by the Meeting House.