



An American Crow caws into civil dawn, as a harvest moon sets in the West.

Coastal Steward's Letter, September 31 - October 7, 2020.

This has truly been a phenomenal week of birding on Tuckernuck. Saturday and Sunday brought in a whole slew of birds from all across the continent, and several notable rarities. With Dr. Richard Veit on the island, no corner of Tuckernuck was left unchecked, and some 120 species in total were seen between the two days - several of which were added on a quick afternoon trip to Muskeget. The highlights were many, some of which I will be able to recount in the length of this newsletter.

Perhaps the most astounding record gained this week represents not just a first for Tuckernuck, but a first for the county as well. It is likely only the fifth or sixth record in the state, and the latest calendar record by a number of weeks. This bird, originally spotted just by the firehouse, was a **Swainson's Warbler** - an infamously elusive and difficult to see bird of southern floodplain forests, dubbed appropriately, "one of North America's most secretive bird species" by Birds of the World. Extensive field notes were taken, however, and uploaded onto eBird, and that report can be viewed here: <https://ebird.org/checklists/S74378976>, along with the 106 other species seen that day on Tuckernuck.

Some of the other notables seen on Saturday's unofficial big day include a juvenile **White-eyed Vireo**, an early morning **Gray-cheeked Thrush** (luckily picked up on my nocturnal flight mic!), a late **Wood Thrush**, two **Hooded Warbler**, and another secretive wood-warbler, the **Connecticut Warbler**. This latter species is by no means common in the state of Connecticut, although we do expect them to pass through coastal New England in some numbers. This is personally my second this year for Tuckernuck, a whopping total compared to the single individual I had observed in the county prior to coming out here.

Both **White-eyed Vireo** and **Hooded Warbler** have core ranges just south of us, and three more species seen this week, the **Yellow-throated Warbler**, **Cerulean Warbler**, and **Prothonotary Warbler** share this commonality. The **Cerulean Warbler**, observed on September 29, actually ties the state late date for this species in Massachusetts with two other records - one from 2009 and the other from 1969. It is a species that usually departs its nesting areas by late August. Indeed, it was a big week for southern breeders undergoing post-breeding dispersals, and it is likely that a lot of these vagrants are no more than a few months old. **Blue Grosbeak**, one of the more "regular" southern visitors, also made a stopover this week, both on Friday and on Tuesday.

Even though this week was heavily defined by birds that travel North to reach our sands, we also encountered some birds that were likely traveling East. Several individuals of **Clay-colored Sparrow** alighted onto the rolling moorlands and clear-cut areas that give Tuckernuck Island that distinctive Great Plains feel. These unobtrusive and diminutive ground-feeders rarely breed farther East than the Adirondacks, and do not typically winter East of South Texas. However, they are still somewhat uncommon along the Atlantic coastline in late Fall, and along with **Dickcissel** and **Lark Sparrow** (both of which were seen this week), make up the more expected of the Western vagrants we encounter over the course of the average year.

On Tuesday, rising thermals brought several diurnal migrants our way, including multiple **Turkey Vulture**, **Peregrine Falcon**, **Sharp-shinned Hawk**, and two **Common Raven**. This is not the first time that the raven family from Siasconset has ventured out past the channel, but one has to wonder, where are they going? So far this month, the family group has commuted to North Pond early in the day and then presumably returned to Nantucket in the afternoon, but the two birds seen on Tuesday (perhaps the juveniles?), seemed as though they were heart-set on soaring out past Muskeget, perhaps on to Chappy or Martha's Vineyard.

Two years ago, ravens could not be found anywhere in the county. Their breeding record on Nantucket this year was not only unprecedented, but almost next to unimaginable. We look forward to seeing more of them on our islands as their range increases along the coastal plains, but at the same time, we wonder how their increased abundance might affect the future reproductive success of some of our nesting shorebirds. Together, these pros and cons form the perpetual ebb and flow of avifauna on this broken archipelago.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"The experience of many decades has proved without exception that small islands lying off continental land masses are natural "traps" for an astonishing variety of birds throughout the northern hemisphere. The meager evidence available suggests that Nantucket is no exception to this rule. We are convinced that this series of small islands is the greatest remaining neglected ornithological opportunity in the northeast." - Ludlow Griscom, Edith Folger



A Yellow-throated Warbler of the coastal southeastern race was a surprise this far North, and a male Black-throated Blue Warbler yawns under the shade of oaken woodland.



A tailless Blackpoll Warbler makes one wonder what that bird's individual life story is, and a Ruby-crowned Kinglet peers right into the camera.



A male Cape May Warbler is a stunning and common neotropical migrant to our shores, and a Wood Thrush makes a very late appearance on October 3.



A Cerulean Warbler ties with the state late date of this species, and a female-type Blackburnian Warbler makes for a subtle and sometimes confusing identification for the beginning observer.

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