



This Eastern Wood-Pewee blends in well with the verdant background of the island's maritime oak forests.

Coastal Steward's Letter, June 3 - June 9, 2021.

This was a big week for nesting shorebirds on Tuckernuck. Since last I wrote, six **Piping Plover** nests and three **American Oystercatcher** nests have hatched, and so far the mortality rate seems low. Typically, these first few days of life for shorebirds are an extremely precarious time. Young Piping Plover chicks, often compared to a “cotton ball with toothpick legs,” are easily subdued and eaten by Great Black-backed Gulls. Similarly, American Oystercatcher chicks are particularly susceptible to this form of depredation. For the first time in at least three seasons though, there are no nesting terns on Tuckernuck. The colony of Least Terns that numbered up to 232 pairs last year has not yet returned in 2021. Larger tern species, like the elegant **Roseate Tern**, have also been missing from the shoreline this summer. For the last several years, the trend has been that several hundred of these birds would aggregate on Whale Point for the months of June and July in order to take advantage of the incredible numbers of schooling fish that congregate offshore in the early summer. This year, it is not so.

Some of Tuckernuck's nesting songbirds have also been observed over the last week. **House Wrens** have taken to a bird house at the field station now for the second year in a row, and **Brown Thrashers** have also been heard singing from the island's east end. **Great Crested Flycatchers** are nesting in the maritime oak forest, and a singing **Red-eyed Vireo** seems to be a continuing presence since this spring. **Turkey Vultures**, which were confirmed nesting on Tuckernuck for the first time in 2020, seem to be back in the same area that they were last year. Vulture chicks are a whole lot cuter than the adults: They appear almost like little white lambs wearing a matted coat of down feathers. Their call, however, can not be compared to a goat in any way. Before you even become aware of its presence, a baby Turkey Vulture will produce a low, harsh “hiss” noise that reminds one of a cartoon snake.

Dr. Allison Snow from the Ohio State University is on-island this week, studying the island's increasing population of **Lone Star Ticks**. We are at the very northern limits of their core range here on Tuckernuck, and this is unfortunate, since they are known to carry the alpha-gal meat allergy. The result is an anaphylactic and potentially life-threatening reaction to certain red meat products that can be transmitted through the tick's saliva. Other disease vectors include a number of pathogenic species that can cause tularemia, granulocytic ehrlichiosis, and southern tick-associated rash illness (STARI). Lone Star Ticks feed mainly on the blood of White-tailed Deer, although they have a reputation as a “turkey tick” in the south. We occasionally find Lone Star Ticks attached to birds we catch in the nets on Tuckernuck in May and June during MAPS banding. Interestingly, they seem to keep a careful distance away from the facial region. While **Deer Ticks** can often be found around the eyes and bill gape of smaller birds, Lone Star Ticks are almost always found on the main body of the bird. With nymph season just around the corner, it is important to wear light clothing that makes it easy to spot these incredibly tiny parasites.

On nearby Nantucket, it seems that people have already arrived in great numbers. It is projected that summer of 2021 could be one of the busiest on record for our islands. That being said, the arrivals here on Tuckernuck have trickled in slowly but surely. This past Sunday, the first real throngs of day-

trippers arrived in some numbers. This gave me the chance to check in with a lot of these folks, many of whom I have not seen since last summer. I am absolutely thrilled to be back on the beach duty this year without the virus threat that warranted awkwardly spaced walks and last-minute fumbling for masks. Understandably, many people will be wanting to take advantage of this new-found opportunity to congregate. Make sure to share the beach this summer with the other residents: plovers, gulls, oystercatchers and the like.

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

“What a stench modern civilization breathes, and how have we ever learned to endure that foul blue air? In the Seventeenth Century, the air about a city must have been much the same air as overhung a large village; to-day the town atmosphere is to be endured only by the new synthetic man.” — Henry Beston



With an Eastern Willet in hot pursuit, American Oystercatcher “Red (ACN)” staunchly defends his three young chicks. A male Piping Plover inspects his stretch of beach.



A Great Black-backed Gull chick just begins to hatch by chipping away at its egg shell. A highly unusual number of eggs for an American Oystercatcher nest - six! Usually a nest has just three.



Sometimes the easiest way to find a Piping Plover nest is by looking for the parents' tracks. The abraded primaries of this female Eastern Towhee testify to the wear that migration has on feathers.



The crime scene of a depredated Oystercatcher nest; the tracks leading up to the egg identify a Great Black-backed Gull as the perpetrator. A Hairy-necked Tiger Beetle scurries along the beach.

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