



An eight-point buck of White-tailed Deer makes great leaps into the sunset near the Slough.

Coastal Steward's Letter, September 9 - September 16, 2020.

This week, we saw the affect of wildfires burning hundreds of miles away reach Tuckernuck, proving that not even on our distant outpost in the Atlantic are we able to escape the consequences of a continental disaster. Haze from these fires rolled in thick on Sunday, creating a particularly eerie sunrise that was viewable island-wide. The sunset the night before had also been cast a particularly foreboding shade of orange, reminiscent of some hot, Sahara sun clouded by dust. As these conditions cleared over the course of the next few days, I found myself coming to truly appreciate the relative lack of air pollution we have here on our islands. The fires along the west coast, although receding in some areas, are still burning, and destroying homes and lives in their wake.

We saw the arrival of a few more Northernly species this week, including **Purple Finch**, which is undergoing a serious irruption into New England this year. The last time an event on this scale occurred was in 2018, however, it is yet to be seen whether this year will surpass other years in terms of general abundance of this tiny, mechanical-sounding finch. Listen for their unique “pip” calls overhead, but also look for them in areas frequented by other berry-loving birds such as **Cedar Waxwing** or **American Robin**. The first Purple Finch arrived on the 10th, and since then, we have continued to see a few scattered individuals trickling through.

With every arrival, however, there is another departure. **Eastern Kingbird** was on the move this week, and most had left the island by the 12th. One of the earlier breeding neotropical migrants to leave Massachusetts, it becomes unusual to see these handsome tyrant flycatchers after mid-September. Their core winter range is in South America, with the northernmost individuals wintering in the Amazon basin in southern Colombia. The true long-distance migrants will find their way all the way down to the northern pampas of Argentina. We'll be on the lookout for them again come April, as they tend to be on the early side of things when returning to nest.

With more migrant activity later in the week, North winds brought in a handful of goodies including **Ruby-crowned Kinglet**, **Tennessee Warbler**, **Cape May Warbler**, and **Black-throated Green Warbler**. The real star of the show came on Saturday when a male **Hooded Warbler** appeared in a shallow wet spot in the northwest part of the island. This is my second male Hooded Warbler this fall, with the first one appearing August 19 in relatively the same area. They are difficult to spot, these skulking yet striking birds of the undergrowth. Upon seeing one, the observer immediately jumps at the intense contrast of a yellow mask against a vantablack hood on this tiny wood-warbler.

On Wednesday, things really took off with an influx of some of the more unusual fall migrants. Six **Philadelphia Vireo** were recorded, and there is likely to have been more that I conservatively brushed off as “repeats”. These tend to be difficult birds to find in Massachusetts apart from the Cape and the islands. A single **Swainson's Thrush** was also of note, although we are not granted as many individuals per year as other places in Massachusetts, like Essex County, which saw significant numbers of

this dull-brown *Catharus* thrush pass through this week. Swainson's Thrush is also one of the easier songbird species to identify during nocturnal migration, as the call they give is unique and diagnostic if heard well enough. Next time a calm, cloudy night comes along, listen for their contact calls overhead - it sounds almost like a **Spring Peeper**, if not more fluty. If you hear one, it means you are listening to a bird partaking in active migration on a grand scale, as part of an annual movement that may bring birds as far south as Uruguay.

Several **Mourning Cloak**, a species of butterfly, have been seen this week around the island, especially in vine-tangled weedy areas. Along the beaches of the south shore, a dangerous but incredibly obvious creature has been washing up in some numbers: the **Portuguese Man-o-war**. They stick out like a sore thumb along the high tide rack, but just don't mistake them for a blue plastic bag!

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

Best,

Skyler Kardell

"Beyond its extraordinary explanatory powers, science has another trait in its favor: its worldliness. If music is the universal language of the soul, science has become the lingua franca of the intellect... yes, I love science, and I can't think of anything that is more worth writing about, or in greater need of good explanatory writing."

- Natalie Angier



A Mourning Cloak alights atop a branch over the weekend, and an orb-weaving spider makes its web across a narrow trail behind the Field Station.



Several Portuguese Man-o-war have washed up on Tuckernuck shores, most obviously on Whale Point. A Ruddy Turnstone haunts the stretch of beach between Bigelow's Point and N Pond.



Over the weekend, evidence of the wildfires along the west coast became apparent, with a particularly eerie sunrise on Sunday. An adult Lesser Black-backed Gull flies over Bigelow's.



An American Kestrel soars across the West End, prompting smaller birds below to disperse. A male Hooded Warbler was a surprise on 9/14.

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