



*Red-breasted Nuthatch has made an early appearance on Tuckernuck, signaling a good winter for this species ahead.*

## **Coastal Steward's Letter, August 12 - August 19, 2020.**

It was the Greek cartographer, Posidonius, who once sailed from Rhodes to Cadiz, just to find out if the sun actually dropped with a hiss into the sea. Of course, some two-thousand years after the death of Posidonius, we know that the earth is round, and that the sun is in fact a star some billions of miles away in space. However, this description has always fascinated me. What exactly does it sound like when a massive nuclear body like the sun sinks slowly beneath the waves?

I would liken such a hypothetical sound to the real-life song of the **Saltmarsh Sparrow**, which on calm August mornings like the ones we have had now for the last week, are heard from everywhere along the *Spartina*-covered shores of North Pond. If you find yourself over on the west side of the island in the next few days, listen for that unassuming sigh. If you've ever dropped water onto a wood stove before, you probably already know the tune by heart.

The focus for this week's report, however, involves a whole other breed of bird. The wood-warbler, a New World family of songbird called *Parulidae*, has about fifty of its members represented on the North American continent, and we can expect around thirty species to grace our shores within the course of a calendar year on these islands. As we begin to enter the thick of fall migration, a large number of these "butterflies of the bird world" will become observable on Tuckernuck, having ventured here from areas both North and South of us - as evidenced by this week's highlighted bird, the **Hooded Warbler**.

While most people view fall migration as a net movement of birds North to South in the Northern Hemisphere, the actual workings of such a large transition of avifauna is far more complex. For instance, the Hooded Warbler largely breeds south of us, and at the very northern part of its range, does not go past Rhode Island. So what brings this rare species our way, when it is most frequently encountered as an overshoot migrant in springtime?

It was a massive cold front that moved many birds, not just the Hooded Warbler, to Tuckernuck on the morning of August 19, and 73 species in total were tallied on this day. Other highlights of this early push of dispersed transient birds include a rare **Blue-winged Warbler**, multiple **American Redstart**, and a few **Black-and-white Warbler**, among passage versions of our resident breeders: both **Yellow Warbler** and **Prairie Warbler**.

An obvious addition to the "usual suspects" this week comes in the form of a tiny honker of the pine barrens, the **Red-breasted Nuthatch**. Multiple birds have been seen on-island in the past few days, and it will be very interesting to see whether this much activity so early on in the season is indicative of an "irruption" of other nomadic boreal species - particularly with winter finches. Interestingly, the majority of Nuthatch that I have encountered this August involve birds that are not at all associating with their characteristic pine habitat. In fact, it is mainly the mixed maritime oak forest and tupelo groves on Tuckernuck that have hosted the most numerous flocks.

This past weekend, a good-sized tropical storm moved slowly past us along the southern shore, bringing a strong Nor'easterly gale to our islands. Although not as exciting as some would have speculated,

these winds did bring a bird that usually migrates far out to sea on its southbound return to the pampas of Argentina, an **Upland Sandpiper**. The bird was caught just in the nick of time by my camera, as it ricocheted off Bigelow's Point in the strong wind, and out towards Muskeget where it disappeared into the haze.

This species is one of only a handful of North American breeders that have been recorded in Antarctica. In fact, the Upland Sandpiper tends to get sidetracked - a lot - on its way South, and has even shown up in New Zealand, the Falklands, and western Africa. According to eBird, some birds have already returned to their winter grounds from their four-month long visit to the United States and parts of Canada, and on August 12, some twenty birds were recorded just outside the interior Argentinian city of Jujuy.

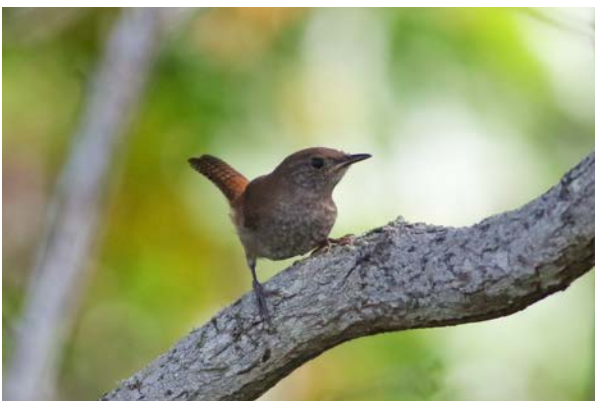
On a more serious note, it is nymph season on Tuckernuck, and for an already above-average tick year, these tiny insects are making an appearance in the hundreds, if not thousands. Avoid off-roading or taking uncleared trails, as the **Lone Star Tick** can transmit tularemia, among other diseases.

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*"The gulls which ten years ago made their appearance here in thousands are fast disappearing under the hands of gunners, agents who supply the milliners of the large cities with bird skins, wings, and feathers... these agents kill the gulls in the breeding season and leave the young to starve and the unhatched eggs to rot." - Maurice Gibbs (1886), on the avifauna of Nantucket and Muskeget.*



*A House Wren from one of two clutches raised on Tuckernuck this year, and an Upland Sandpiper that flew by Bigelow's Point and out towards Muskeget on 8/16.*

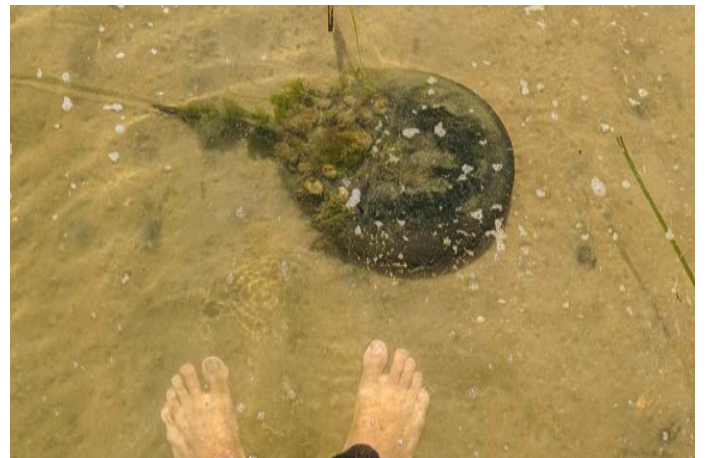




*A bright Red-spotted Admiral alights on a grape leaf; this color morph is the most common in eastern Massachusetts. Seaside Goldenrod becomes in bloom across the island.*



*A Hooded Warbler makes a rare and early appearance on the island's west end, while many immature American Redstart were also brought in by the cold front on 8/19.*



*Hundreds of nymph Lone Star Ticks found on the author's socks during an evening walkabout. A large female Atlantic Horseshoe crab scuttles past the author's feet in North Pond.*

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