



*A juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron hides in plain sight along the saltmarsh edge of North Pond.*

## **Coastal Steward's Letter, August 5 - August 12, 2020.**

For the first time in a long time, I found myself not at the seashore, but rather, in the maritime oak forest for my early morning outing. Now is the time of year when the bird observer must utilize all his skills and dexterous abilities in order to thoroughly reap the fruit of both landbird and shorebird migration. Indeed, it can be an extremely rewarding time of year for the bird observer, when the breadth of bird diversity, especially on these outer lands of ours, nears its climax.

Post-breeding passerines are starting to move through, and their nocturnal flight calls can be heard by simply sitting out and listening on your porch. On Tuckernuck, especially when there is low visibility and a favorable Northwest tailwind, listen for the quick contact notes of these hundreds of tiny woodland warblers, grosbeaks, tanagers, and thrushes that fly perilously into the dark. There were several still nights this week, and I found myself doing just that - listening. From all around me, I was able to make out the faint chit-chat of **Short-billed Dowitcher** and **Greater Yellowlegs**, while **Yellow Warbler** and perhaps a **Common Yellowthroat** all made lift off into the pitch black.

One of the more profound showings this week was of a **Cliff Swallow** at East Pond - a bird we seldom encounter on this archipelago, or at least, do not easily pick-out from the throngs of **Tree Swallow** and **Barn Swallow** that move through this time of year. Interestingly, this species only made its way east of the Great Plains as a breeder some 100-150 years ago, attracted by the industrial boom and expanding network of highway overpasses and tunnels that beckon this species to nest within.

In their core range west of the Rocky Mountains, the Cliff Swallow is known as an extremely abundant and social bird, leaving one man, William Dawson, in his 1923 book *The Birds of California*, to remark, "Doubtless the Lord - to paraphrase Lincoln's aphorism - must love the Cliff Swallows, else he would not have made so many of them." Indeed, in a single colony, as many as 6,000 active nests can coexist at one time.

Another good bird for this week was a **Marbled Godwit** at Whale Point, which joined the long-staying **Hudsonian Godwit** for a few hours before flying off to the North. This former species is a scarce but regular occurrence along our coasts, and their core range is located in the Great Plains south to northern Nebraska. Although both godwit species can be expected within the calendar year on the islands of Tuckernuck, Nantucket, and Muskeget - the Marbled Godwit only migrates to wintering grounds as close-by as Virginia or New Jersey, whereas the Hudsonian makes the trek all the way to Tierra del Fuego. Occasionally, Marbled Godwit will show up in December or January in Massachusetts, and one has even been recorded on the annual Tuckernuck Christmas Bird Count.

To wrap up on breeding business of our local nesting shorebirds, such as the **Piping Plover** and **American Oystercatcher**, this year proved to be a comparatively good one alongside success rates from previous seasons. In all, ten plover pairs plopped down on Tuckernuck, six of which were located on Whale Point. I for one feel especially grateful for the fact that fencing was well-respected and adhered to by both tourists and residents alike. If you've been down to Whale recently, you may realize that a lot of

the fencing has come down. That is because the nesting plovers and oystercatchers have fledged and dispersed... *however*, there is still the concern of disturbance towards staging (or loafing) terns, and this fencing should still be respected.

In more minor bird news this week, **Yellow-billed Cuckoo** and **Brown Thrasher** have both been heard around the field station, and the **House Wren** pair is now attempting to raise a second clutch of chicks in a different bird box there. Over by North Pond, up to eight juvenile **Yellow-crowned Night-Heron** have made an excellent treat, and at night their far-reaching “skioo” calls can be heard from around the island. One particularly unusual sighting this week comes in the form of a **Red-breasted Nuthatch**, a bird which is presumably having a good year as a breeder up North.

Included in the picture section of this newsletter this week, I have attached two pictures of different individual birds that happen to be the same species. Both are **Short-billed Dowitcher**, however, the bird on the left has travelled a lot farther to reach Tuckernuck than the other bird has. This is because the bird on the left is a member of the Alberta/Saskatchewan-breeding race of Short-billed Dowitcher, *Limnodramus griseus hendersonii*. Look at how much rufous there is in the underparts, reaching all the way back to the undertail coverts - this is just one way to tell the difference between these two subspecies.

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

Best,

*Skyler Kardell*

*“It follows that we live in a state of perpetual change and flux. As habitats are destroyed and replaced by others, one group of birds comes in and another goes out. Every decade some bird begins to fade out, some other bird learns to adapt itself to man, and begins to flourish and increase.” - Ludlow Griscom*



*A Cliff Swallow appears out of the fog at East Pond, and a Hudsonian Godwit shows its black “armpits” in flight - this bird was later seen on Esther Island and Eel Point this week.*



*A juvenile Yellow-crowned Night-Heron was one of eight birds at North Pond on 8/12, and a Marbled Godwit flies across Whale Point, off towards East Pond.*



*The long-staying Hudsonian Godwit flies across a yellow sky at Whale Point, and a Pale-bellied Brant makes a late appearance along the outer shore of East Pond.*



*A Short-billed Dowitcher from breeding grounds west of Hudson Bay (L.g. hendersonii), compared with a Short-billed Dowitcher from breeding grounds east of Hudson Bay (L.g. griseus).*

**\*\*\*Tuckernuck Island is private property, accessed only by explicit permission by landowner(s).\*\*\***