

# *Hunting? - Never on Sundays*

## *Birds I View*

Bill Montevecchi

As the adage goes - if it ain't broke, then don't fix it. So why has the government removed the ban on Sunday hunting? The long-standing tradition of sharing free weekend access to wilderness areas between hunters and others has worked very well for more than a century.

Was this decision made due influences from big game outfitters? Public pressure to retain the prohibition on Sunday hunting is forthcoming from hikers, cross-country skiers, berry pickers, and others who want to continue to enjoy unimpeded peace and tranquility of the outdoors during one day on the weekend.

ATV access to wilderness areas continues to increase throughout the province. Yet there is virtually no enforcement of these vehicles with regard to access to restricted areas, habitat destruction and illegal hunting activity. Consequently, every year wild animals have less and less refuge, as ATVs roar ever further on the landscapes.

Where have the formerly abundant ptarmigan or partridge gone? The way of the cod? The Sunday respite is important for wildlife, especially those species that are hunted, because the non-hunting day provides refuge in time that helps to buffer the loss of once remote wilderness refuges.

We have moved well beyond the former perspective that a "bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." Clearly, a bird in the bush is worth more than two in the hand.

So what can you do about Sunday hunting? How about enjoying a hike or ski and appreciating the wonderful outdoors in which we are immersed. Then contact Minister Tom Osbourne who made this decision. He's a reasonable man and deeply committed to environmental protection. Share your concerns him, and give him the opportunity and rationale to reverse a decision that will otherwise be regrettable for many reasons shared by hunters and non-hunters alike.

## Traps, snares, trails and dogs

The conflicts alluded to in the Sunday hunting issue are also evident in unfortunate interactions between trappers, snarers, hikers and family pets. The setting of snares and traps in the immediate vicinity of frequently used hiking trails and in residential areas is tolling some dire consequences. Reports of dogs being trapped, snared, injured and killed are unsettlingly more common. A family pup was recently, gruesomely and unnecessarily killed in a trap in Portugal Cove – St. Philips.

## Another first at Quidi Vidi Lake

Those rare birds just keep coming to Quidi Vidi Lake. The “out of range” Ross’s Gull from the Canadian Arctic and western flyways is still visiting. The brilliantly white and elegant small goose mixes in with the hoards of ducks and two Canada geese but stunningly stands out from the crowd. The goose is very tame as are many Arctic creatures and will approach people feeding ducks on the shoreline.



Ross's Goose at Quidi Vidi Lake in St. John's, February 2006

Next came the yellow-legged gulls forsaking their Mediterranean home waters for the attraction of the massive gull aggregations and reveries at Quidi Vidi Lake. These gull concentrations have also attracted the keen gazes of rare birds of prey, including peregrine and gyrfalcons and a golden eagle.

Lastly, but surely only for the moment, on 25 January, Dave Brown and Bruce Mactavish documented and photographed a slaty-backed gull. The gull tends to range from Japan to eastern Russia and at times Alaska and now Newfoundland!

Quidi Vidi Lake is globally well networked to the wonderful world of birds.

### **Birds in the area and around the province**

A pied-billed grebe was feeding beside the wharf in New Bridge, St. Mary's Bay on 15 January. A few great cormorants are skulking on the rocks in St. John's Harbour.

Eiders are abundant in coastal waters. Tony Power and Chris Mooney report about 4500 at Cape St. Mary's, 3000 at Cape Race, 1000 – 1500 at the Bull and Calf off of Branch, and another 500 at Virgin Rocks off the Cape Shore in Placentia Bay. A dense flock of about 300 eiders were feeding off Point LaHaye where flocks of purple sandpipers were flitting about the surf spray on the rocky outcrops in mid-January.

In Portugal Cove, Jon Garvin watched a red squirrel and an immature sharp-shinned hawk exchange greetings of sorts. When the squirrel approached the perched hawk from above, the hawk ruffed up its plumage and the squirrel retreated to higher ground.

On 31 January, Tony Power and Chris Mooney observed a light morph gyrfalcon on the North Harbour Road and a peregrine falcon and a snowy owl at Cape Race. A golden eagle is still soaring about Quidi Vidi Lake assessing dinner possibilities among the gull flocks.

The snowy egret that has been frequenting Virginia Lake and the Virginia River was found dead on 25 January on the river near Logy Bay Road. Dave Fifield and Greg Robertson were out on an attempted rescue of the weakened bird when they came upon the partially submerged carcass.

A magnificent complex of feeders at J. Coffey's property in Angel's Cove was just abuzz with white-winged crossbills, goldfinches, pine grosbeaks, house sparrows and chickadees in early January.

Lester Rees's feeders in Whitbourne are abuzz with American goldfinches, evening grosbeaks, white-winged crossbills, common redpolls, juncos, black-capped chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches and crows. Two white-throated sparrows are also over-wintering in the vicinity. The feeder activity has also attracted the attention of a couple of sharp-shinned hawks.

Lester also expressed concern about savage road construction and forest cutting that has damaged the Ripple Pond and Clam River sites. This area in the Colinet River watershed has also been of concern to the province's Wilderness and Ecological Reserves Advisory Council (WERAC). Lester is worried that the activity may be destroying habitat of the endangered Newfoundland Red Crossbill.

A couple of small flocks of red crossbills are at Bonavista (Jon Joy), and four red-winged blackbirds are visiting Tracy Crocker's feeder in Mount Pearl.

If you have any interesting observations or questions, you can contact me by email [mont@mun.ca](mailto:mont@mun.ca) or phone (895-2901).