

Developers' Paradise

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Juvenile Anna's hummingbird that been surviving the Newfoundland winter at a hummingbird feeder in Brownsville. (photo: Gene Herzberg)

*They took all the trees
Put them in a tree museum
And they charged the people
A dollar and a half just to see them*

*Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got until it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot*

Joni Mitchell, Big Yellow Taxi

Bring it on in Portugal Cove – St. Philips. Our rural community is being unsystematically deconstructed by a myopic town council. Housing development roar out wherever the eye can see.

And a new beach park is planned Neary's Pond. Just what's needed when we already have local access to nearby Healy's Pond and the marine park on the Bauline Line in the immediate vicinity.

What about the loons, osprey, ducks and trout? What about the forest that borders the pond and buffers and cleanses the waters of Neary's Pond? Archive the trees?

Rev it up – bring on the seadoos and waterslides. No worries about gravel bed sites at the stream outflow of the pond where the trout spawn. There are lots of trout anyway. Besides they are farmed, and it is easy enough to get “store-boughts”.

Let’s see we will also need a parking lot sealing the landscape with asphalt. Runoff of gas, oil and salt will seep into the pond and streams. But pond is large and the stream has a good flow, so it will wash the pollutants away.

What odds – we’ve got lots of ponds and lots trees and not nearly enough cleared landscapes, housing developments and asphalt – bring it on.

What about peaceful and idyllic Neary’s Pond that is a community gem? Stop being romantic, bye – get on with it. It’s progress. There’s money to be made, taxes to be raised and delusions of grandeur to be inflated for short-sighted town councilors.

There is terrific opportunity for Portugal Cove – St. Phillips to stand out as stunning rural community. Our town could be an attractive lifestyle alternative to the environmentally choking greenless development strategies of nearby Paradise and St. John’s. Is there any sane way that we can simply stop unrestrained development?

It’s the last Tango – let it blow.

Pesticides, herbicides and people

Recent concerted efforts to ban lawn pesticides deserve our support. Banning pesticides will promote health benefits in many ways including protection of ground water from contamination. You could even get wild birds and hares to enjoy your lawn as well.

Licensed herbicide use to kill vegetation is widespread along roadways and power lines throughout the province. It is time to question the extensive use of these environmental poisons and to seek safe alternatives.

Along long stretches of 50 to 60 km of the Burgeo Road, the sides are flagged with white flapping signs on stakes. The undated signs read – “ATTENTION – This Area Has Been Treated With The Registered Herbicide – Tordon 101 PC# 9007 - Licenced by Dept. of Environment”. This pesticide is also known as Picloram. Dead vegetation along the Burgeo Road attests to its effectiveness.

Here is some information that I found in a web search about this pesticide. “For pastures and rangelands: Do not permit lactating dairy animals to graze fields within 7 days after application. Do not harvest forage or cut hay within 30 days after application. Withdraw meat animals from treated fields at least 3 days before slaughter.”

You might want to think about this if you hunt moose or caribou in the vicinity of the long and winding Burgeo Road.

Birds in the area

Tony Power reports about 1000 eiders at Cape St. Mary's, and in mid-January he observed killdeer in Branch, St. Brides and Patrick's Cove. In late January, Owen Myers found 5 killdeer at St. Pats Ball Field. Following the heavy snows of late January, these birds that have been feeding on open ground have either moved on or perished.

Tony also reports ptarmigan in Branch, and on a recent trip through the southern shore barrens in the Chance Cove area, a group of students and I counted 9 willow ptarmigan along the road edges – picking up grit or salt. Great to see some partridge again.

A flock of up to 16 mourning doves has taken up residence at Linda Gaborko and Bruce Bennett's feeder in Manuals – Long Pond. Linda also had good success in rehabilitating then releasing a female American goldfinch that had apparently struck a window in their home. The Gavins have a single goldfinch visiting their feeder near Neary's Pond.

Bohemian waxwings are in town. Wilbur Furey had a flock of about 500 waxwings in some dogberry trees in Holyrood, and on Witch Hazel Road, Billy Matthews had a flock clean off his hollyberry trees in a couple of days. As go the berries so go the waxwings. But assistance is being offered. Serena Hancock in St. John's and Carolyn Mayo in Portugal Cove are provisioning waxwings with berries at their feeders.

When a lone and lonely robin showed up around Carolyn Mayo's feeder at Neary's Pond, she went to work. She boiled raisins, garlanded berries, diced apples, and hung suet for an appreciative murder of crows. I did see one robin St. Shotts barrens on 5 February.

Paul Regular and Emily Zimmerman discerned an American pipit among a flock of snow buntings at the beach in Biscay Bay. Darroch Whitaker has an out of season chipping sparrow at his feeder in Rocky Harbour.

Keep feeding.

Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 895-2901 (h), 737-7673 (w)