

Writing symphonies for the devil

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi

“As far as possible without surrender
be on good terms with all persons ...
the world is full of trickery but let this not blind you ...
many persons strive for high ideals
and everywhere life is full of heroism ...
you have a right to be here”

Max Ehrmann
The Desiderata



Saw-whet owl snoozing at a feeder on Tunis Court in St. John's.
(photo: Cynthia Boyd)

Keeping an environmental vigilance seems akin at times like writing symphonies for the devil. Sometimes it's a grind, oftentimes it's overwhelming and coldly depressing (or should I say over-heatedly frustrating). Yet it's always challenging. It's the challenging aspect along with a sense of grounding if it comes along that are the motivators.

Being the bearer of grim news or providing less than optimistic environmental prognoses does not necessarily engender enthusiasm. Yet many heedless developments create some truly evil consequences that are indeed crimes against nature and hence often against humanity. These have to be identified for what they are. If we don't do this, we feed into the creation of a different fabricated reality that is driven by externalizing responsibility for our birth places and our birth rights.

It makes no sense in the long run with a perspective of children and parents to delude ourselves, even if it is politically correct and economically beneficial to do so. Often it does feel

financially foolish and politically stunned to hold such ideals and to endear them for public consideration. But to turn away and to do otherwise is really sickening and creates a self-inflicted spiritual decay.

These matters are most basically about personal liberation. Indeed the world is full of heroism. As is so even in current global happenings, heroism is often if not usually at odds with the politic of day. Were it otherwise, we would be in desperate shape as a community, country and species. So onward.

Through it all, it is refreshing to experience everyday uplifting and compassionate acts of heroism. A smiling face and a door held open. Someone helping a stranger with a heavy load or on an icy walkway. Unsolicited roadside assistance. These are truly engendered in the character of Newfoundlanders. The opportunity to contribute to these acts of kindness and to be a part of the process is even more rewarding.

Nature and humanity have powerful capacities for resilience. And resilience may well be the most defining characteristic of both. Writing symphonies to stop or prevent unnecessary environmental destruction and human denigration is an act of beauty and courage in its own right - a worthy and noble refrain.

Every morning, upon rising I am greeted by our household cats and dogs. While the cats have an air of self-centered importance, the dogs especially are fully convinced that this day is truly the best day of their lives. And so it should be. Beyond that, today is the first day of the rest of your life, so use it well. Make a difference. Write your symphony. Carpo diem.

Birds in the area

About 5000 kittiwakes returned to Cape St. Mary's in late February and by 6 March Tony Power noted them occupying cliff ledges.

From January through March a flock of dovekies have been attracted to the lights on the wharves in Ramea, where Craig and Richard Northcott have seen them feeding on krill drawn to the illuminated surface at night. In mid-February, Craig picked up a weakened Eurasian green-winged teal. The Northcotts housed and fed the duck but despite these efforts it soon succumbed.

It's a good year for ptarmigan, and after so many years of desperation all seems right with the world once more. Hunters are having good fortunes, and in mid-January a trio of ravens was also having good fortune dining on one of the rare ptarmigan that venture to Ramea (Craig Northcott). Many ptarmigan are being seen along roadways. On 7 March, I had the pleasure of enjoying a very tame rock ptarmigan walk slowly in front of my car on a southern segment of the Burgeo Road.

Many people are seeing small owls near their feeders. A number of boreal owls are in the Branch area (Tony Power). Cynthia Boyd sent me some magnificent photos of a tame saw-whet owl that has been visiting her feeder on Tunis Place in St. John's.

Carolyn Mayo has American goldfinches at her feeder at Neary's Pond, where an adult eagle skimmed over the tree tops heading in my direction but somehow remained out of my detection. Goldfinches along with purple finches, redpolls and a fox sparrow that overwintered on Ramea are visiting Richard Northcott's feeder.

Keep looking. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 895-2901 (h), 737-7673 (o), 693-5305 (cell).