

Keep snowmobiles and ATVs out of our parks

Birds I View

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The Seabird Cliffs of Cape St. Mary's (photo: B. Montevecchi)

National parks, provincial parks and all reserves are created to protect the natural environment and wildlife. They are created for everyone. To be effective, human influences have to be as unobtrusive as possible. And though you might never go there, for example to the Torngat Mountains or Funk Island, those reserves are still an important part of your environmental heritage. Reserves are environmental archives for every one of us and for the generations to follow.

In order to meet their environmental requirements, parks and reserves have rules around what is allowed and what is not. We do not have complete freedom to do what we wish. If it were otherwise the qualities that a park is designed to preserve would very quickly be eroded by economic, developmental and user pressures. This is all straight-forward and simple enough.

Fast forward to the Charlottetown Heritage Rights Committee who insist that it their "right" and "heritage" to snowmobile through Terra Nova National Park. Living within the bounds of a national park is something that most people would cherish. Yet the members of the Charlottetown committee argue that they are trapped. Say what?

Like every other resident of Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada, the local residents have complete freedom to walk, snowshoe, ski and hike in the park whenever they wish. All they cannot do is drive noisy, exhaust spewing snowmobiles into the park. This is a modest price to pay for the many benefits that Terra Nova National Park creates for them. It is also a

wise investment in wildlife and environmental protection. Such a sanction is priceless with respect the rights of many others who enjoy and want to preserve the natural qualities of Terra Nova National Park without the disturbance that snowmobiles would create.

Excess noise like artificial night lighting is so pervasive in our everyday lives that we habituate to these changes. In doing so, we lose some basic aspects of our natural existence and perspective. This is no doubt why it is so mentally and physically refreshing to get away from it all and enjoy the peace and the quiet and the night sky of the great outdoors.

Besides enjoying these quality of life privileges, local residents owing to their community's location in Terra Nova National Park enjoy enormous economic, social and cultural benefits that flow directly from park adjacency. To ignore these privileges and benefits distorts their "rights and heritage" arguments. As is too often the case, their positions resort to base and baseless arguments of federal government bullying and discrimination. To not put too fine a point on it, what the Charlottetown Heritage Rights Committee is really pushing are selfish demands for recreational convenience.

We are living in a time when developments are radically changing our natural land and ocean scapes. In some cases, there is outright environmental destruction such as in Vale's plan to poison Sandy Pond with acidic toxic wastes from the hydromet facility in Long Harbour.

It's time to stop needless and selfish environmentally disruptive activities and destruction when and wherever possible. It's time to interact with the land and sea in respectful ways. It is time to respect the rights of others. It's time to put the snow machines on trailers and move them out of the park. Soon this too will be a part of the local heritage.

Birds in the area

At Cape St. Mary's, the murrelets are excited about reuniting with their mates but anxious about returning to land, as they flitter on and off the cliffs. The gannets are running a bit behind schedule with only about 75 flying about on 7 April (Tony Power). Considering recent pollution events and gannet mortality in the Gulf of Mexico, we will be keeping a close check on the gannets as they return to Newfoundland.

Bald eagles colonies are becoming increasingly evident at seabird colonies. Sharp-eyed eagles are scattering nervous kittiwakes from the cliffs at Cape St. Mary's (Tony Power). Bald Eagles have also been noted along Ragged Beach at the end of Gallows Cove Road in Witless Bay (Fred Jarvis). In recent years, the eagles have been harassing the murrelets on nearby Great Island where the murrelets have abandoned many of their nesting sites. Bald eagles are also cruising the skies over Neary's Pond, Beachy Cove Mountain and Portugal Cove.

The big herons are visiting. A great blue heron was seen in Burgeo on 11 April by Richard Northcott and on 13 April a great egret was in seen in Long Pond/Manuals by Linda Gaborko. There have also been great egret sightings at and around Long Pond in Pippy Park, and great blue herons have also been seen at Point LaHaye and Stephenville.

A very casually strutting ruffed grouse stalled traffic on Neary's Pond Road. Such apparently nonchalant behavior may bode well for the fox on nearby Beachy Cove Mountain (Janet Montevocchi).

Elegantly plumaged and paired off gulls and ducks signal the onset of spring avian mating rituals. The tree swallows are back in Pouch Cove (Jeannette Brennan), and the juncos are trilling juncos and the flickers are flickering. Robins and fox sparrows are returning, including the 4 April arrivals in Fred Jarvis's yard in Witless Bay. And as I send this column to the editor, a fox sparrow is slicing the silence with his spring tributes to the cycle, perpetuation and resiliency of life.

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