

Little Red Riding Hood and other tales of despair

Birds I View

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Wilson's snipe are returning from South American and southern US wintering areas. This one was by the roadside at Cape St. Mary's on 20 April.

Since the centuries-old fable of the little lass visiting her grandmother in the deep dark forest, the wolf has been getting bad press and lethal treatment. In 1839, owing to livestock destruction (much of which was also attributed to packs of wild dogs), the Newfoundland government legislated An Act to Encourage the Killing of Wolves. A very considerable bounty of 5 pounds British sterling was paid for each wolf. The bounty along with a precipitous decline in the caribou population secured the fate of the Newfoundland wolf.

Besides the most recent killing of an apparent wolf in Newfoundland, the last time that a wolf was shot in Newfoundland was about a century ago in Daniel's Harbour. The wolf on display in Natural History Exhibit at The Rooms was shot in 1894 on the Gaff Topsails by William Whiteway.

In 1930, the Newfoundland wolf was officially considered extinct. A few years later in 1937, two Harvard zoologists Grover Allen and Thomas Barbour formally designated Newfoundland wolf as a distinct subspecies. They used the scientific name *Canis lupus beothucus* after the Beothuck people who were also extinct.

Other wildlife annoyances

Why here in Newfoundland are wild animals such a problem for so many people? The Save Our People Action Committee worries that the Minister of Environment and Conservation's statements about a reduced moose population is giving people "false hope" as they drive on the highways.

Driving a car involves risk, and when you drive you accept that risk. Sometimes accidents occur – it could be a moose or it could be a trailer truck or a tree. By driving vigilantly and defensively, we can reduce risk but cannot eliminate it.

The removal of large wild creatures is very problematic. Even if all the moose were eliminated there would still be accidents because there will still be other cars (and more of them), large rocks, ditches and speed, that is - there will always be risks.

We lose something very precious about the wilderness when long stretches of the Trans Canada Highway are lined on both sides with chain link fences. New Brunswick highways are fenced from end to end, but here our environment has been less fragmented – giving terrestrial animals freedom to roam.

As more and more of the human population lives in urban centres and young people's contact and perceptions of wildlife are derived through video games and zoos, calls for environmental sterilization and fencing will increase.

Accommodating large predators

Negative perceptions that promote widespread wildlife and wilderness destruction will be its own demise as well as its own sadness. There is compelling biological and ecological evidence to protect habitat for large wild creatures. There is a place for wolves, cougars, grizzly bears, tigers, sharks and the like.

Wolves roam in southern Labrador just across the narrow Strait of Belle Isle that is currently jammed with ice as it often is in late winter and early spring. Wolves might move to the island of Newfoundland.

Yet the bad press for the wolf continues. A recent *Telegram* article about the large apparent wolf that was recently stalked and shot in the wilderness by a trophy hunter is referred to as a "brute". But who's to judge?

There are other perspectives, as John Maunder has written, "It does seem a terrible shame that Island Newfoundlanders, in all likelihood, will never again hear the mournful, eerie howl of the wolf echoing through the hills, and never again thrill at a glimpse of one of these magnificent, and much-maligned creatures ... Only lately are we realizing the true nature of these intelligent and essentially gentle animals. Perhaps wolves in other parts will be luckier than ours."

Dining on seal

Some of Newfoundland's top gourmet chefs are turning their culinary attention to seal. A fine dining experience will be held at Quidi Vidi Brewery on 26 April. Tickets for the event are very limited. The \$250 per person event will support the Home from the Sea Campaign to create a sealers' memorial and interpretation centre on the Bonavista Peninsula in Elliston. Hopefully, it will help kick-start a new seal-on-the-menu initiative that has been sorely lacking in the province to date and that could really help sealers in the longer term. Bring on blueberry seal oil booster juice.

Birds in the area and around the province

As the northern hemisphere tips toward the sun, spring life surges over the land and sea. The ducks have been courting and pairing for months on the open water areas on lakes and ponds. In early March, kittiwakes began their anxious flights of fancy to the cliffs at Cape St. Mary's (Tony Power). Then as is the St. Patrick's Day tradition, the first two gannets were seen off Cape St. Mary's.

Forest birds are singing and pairing. On the sunny Sunday morning of 18 March, the trilling juncos on Beachy Cove Mountain were exuberantly reclaiming vacated territories. A bursting spring arrival of fox sparrows in Gooseberry Cove on 24 March (Nora Lippa) was soon followed by fox sparrows were singing in Portugal Cove. Chickadees, purple finches and pine siskins have joined the sylvan chorus.

Expanses of Arctic sea ice along Labrador and Newfoundland coasts are moving birds around, including near-shore eider flocks in the Lumsden. An immature great cormorant has been fishing and life at Long Pond behind Memorial University (Gene Herzberg). In early March, Dick Whitaker scored a flock of about 150 bohemian waxwings in Portugal Cove, where David Artiss found a mottled partial albino robin with white black streaking. A male rose breasted grosbeak has been visiting Janice Powers' feeding station in Branch.

Birds seen during quick stops at Stephenville Crossing on 16-17 April included osprey, a pair of gadwalls, a pair of American wigeon, 6 common mergansers and about 150 greater scaup.

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