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Cross-Country Checkup, climate change and the classics

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Evening grosbeaks like this stunning male are visiting a few feeders in the area.
(Photo by Rick West)

“Has the environmental movement ever seen a collapse it didn’t want to be on the brink of?”
Rex Murphy, *National Post*

When I first heard the radio promo, it struck me as curiously refreshing that CBC Radio’s Cross-Country Checkup on 14 December was focused on classical music. Then it hit me like perversion of public broadcasting, that Mr. Murphy with his wealth of cognitive talents and political savvy would have overlooked the dismal results developing at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Lima.

Yet if one holds Mr. Murphy’s frozen perspectives on climate change and the environmental movement more generally, maybe it was indeed logical to default to the sensibility of the classics. This blind-eye perspective on climate change is one which Rex shares with Prime Minister Harper and hydrocarbon’s top tier.

The Arctic polar ice cap is in melt down. And for climate change deniers it signals the next big oil grab. God must be on side with oil-driven growth economics.

The answer to Mr. Murphy's stunningly negative query above is a resounding YES. Yet the deeper, more compelling question is – WHY? Why are we always on the brink of environmental and economic crises?

We know that proactive cautionary approaches offer the best strategy for avoiding crisis management. These strategies however gain little traction on the highways and byways of political expediency and quick cash grabs?

As the northern cod fishery has remained essentially closed [because there were no cod] for more than 20 years, this would this have been [and could still be] an excellent time to establish marine protected areas to help the rebuilding of cod and capelin stocks.

But where are the constructive actions that biologists and fishers have proposed to establish reserves on the Grand Banks and the Southeast Shoal? Where are the areas to protect crab fishing grounds from shrimp trawlers? There are none. Hence the brink of another environmental disaster is pending.

And who's fault will it be? The elected officials who failed to act [many of whom are now out of the picture] or the environmentalists who will have the integrity and courage to be there yet again on the brink?

Precautionary approaches are continually ignored in corporate give-aways by federal and provincial governments. How can the unnecessary destruction of Sandy Pond as a toxic dump for Vale and the pumping of pollutants into Placentia Bay be heading anywhere other than the brink of an environmental crisis?

The fore-warned options were clearly laid out. The challenges were hard-fought. They were disregarded.

On the northeast coast, hunters, fishers, biologists and local residents have been calling for the removal of the 500 tonnes of crude oil that is seeping from the deteriorating sunken bulk carrier *Manolis L* lying near rich fishing grounds and globally significant seabird colonies. The long-standing mantra of the Canadian Coast Guard in regard to oil spills is prevention, prevention, prevention. Where is? Without effective removal of the oil oozing from a vessel that is breaking apart on the ocean floor, the brink of yet another environmental crisis is a foregone conclusion.

But it doesn't have to be this way. We have to act, to debate and discuss. Cross-Country Checkup could help.

To further clarify the answer to Rex's query, it's not what we're against that matters as much as what we are for. We're for the realization that the natural life-support systems of the earth's biosphere have greater importance for the well-being of humanity than fossil fuel subsidies and other forms of corporate welfare.

We're for clean air, clean non-commercialized water, sustainable renewable resource use, ecosystem processes allowed to run their courses. No doubt Rex would support many of these things as well, but that doesn't mean that he would need to be labeled as an environmentalist. These benefits enhance the well-being of everyone including political pundits.

Canadians are the world's highest per capita consumers of oil, yet Canada holds one of the world's poorest records on reducing carbon emissions. Prime Minister Harper considers it crazy to regulate the oil industry on environmental standards that most of the world is asking for. Why? Because economics prevail over environmental conditions. How can such myopic ideology lead anywhere but to the brink of environmental, social and public health crises?

These are not merely cavalier suggestions as Mr. Murphy claims while providing a moral compass for the disenfranchised - "The world's poor don't do sit-ins; poverty is their padlock, and it is not — as on Burnaby Mountain, or an XL site — a theatrical toy for idle green moralists." This is simply not true.

Indeed the most effective means for the world's economically enslaved is to stand up and smash padlock of poverty. There are numerous examples of indigenous peoples throughout Central and South America resisting environmental and human rights abuses by Canadian mining companies [<http://www.miningwatch.ca/news/road-justice-speaking-tour-bring-attention-guatemala-mining-conflict-need-remedy-canada>]. The beat goes on.

So what can we do to improve environmental and economic circumstances? We can engage open public dialogues such as those offered on Cross-Country Checkup. It's time to get some answers to the question "Has the environmental movement ever seen a collapse it didn't want to be on the brink of?"

Indeed, that's exactly what the United Nations Conference on climate change was organized to do. To work cooperatively and proactively plan ahead for the avoidance of environmental, economic and health catastrophes. Without such planning that is shunned by Prime Minister Harper, we will always be on the brink of disaster.

Cross-Country Checkup could contribute to the conversation and considerations of individual, provincial, country and corporate options. But what odds – why not default to the classics in a hot debate. Heck Nero fiddled while Rome was heating up. By the way Rex - what was that sonata?

Birds in the area and around the province

A pair of common goldeneye have been frequenting Mitchell's Pond [Carole Peterson]. On and around Boxing Day, a ruffed grouse, a hairy woodpecker, flickers, nuthatches, mourning doves, goldfinches, pine and evening grosbeaks seen were at the Garvins', Mayos', Wests' and Whitakers' feeders in Portugal Cove and at the Roberts' feeder on Bell Island.

At the end of December and into the new year, a hearty and likely lonely fox sparrow has been visiting Marlene Create's feeder by Blast Hole Ponds.

The local Christmas Bird Count contingent included Seth Bennett, John Foster, Cameron Hedd, Tony Lang, Gioia, Katie, Marina and Nick Montevicchi. We recorded 25 species including a few fine eagles along the cliffs of Portugal Cove and immature male green-winged teal. With John's bird dog Nollie, we tried to flush a lingering snipe in the wetlands at the end of Mercer's Road Extension, by Murray's Farm and along Witch Hazel Road in Portugal Cove with no luck. It was enjoyable exploring some of the town's remaining wetlands.

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