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The curse of open-pen salmon farming

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Bald eagle on ice with bird remains. In winter eagles are attracted to salmon farms on the south coast [photo: Gene Herzberg]

So this is Christmas ... what have you done?

British Columbia biologist Alexandra Morton, an outspoken critic of open-pen aquaculture's destruction of wild salmon, told how Ram Myers had pointed out that "salmon farms" were misnamed and should be called "industrial pollution zones". The massive quantities of anti-biotics being dumped into these open water pens also qualify them as salmon pharms.

In Newfoundland and Labrador these marine pollution zones are very heavily subsidized. Many millions have been doled out for escapes and diseased fish. In 2013, the Barry Group garnered more than \$7,000,000 in compensation for "losses". No matter what happens, it's win-win for the industry and lose-lose for wild salmon.

The Norwegian aquaculture giant Grieg and the provincial government are collaborating on mega-aquaculture project for Placentia Bay that will more than double salmon aquaculture activity in the province. The provincial government is the responsible authority for environmental assessment, yet it has pledged \$45,000,000 in support of the proposed project. You don't need a lawyer to see the conflict of interest imbedded in this process.

I've been sent image of dead eagles and dead salmon at open pens on the south coast are sickening and not just to me. Bald eagles migrate to the south coast in winter and flocks of

eagles and gulls are attracted to the open-pens scavenging dead salmon and antibiotic-loaded food pellets. Oils from dead and diseased salmon and pellets adhere to the feathers of scavenging eagles and gulls. The Mi'kmaq hold the eagle a sacred bird. Yet we hear about any of this on CBC's The Broadcast or elsewhere in the media. Is money facilitating complicity?

Research indicates that open-pen aquaculture is imperiling wild salmon, pushing the species to an extinction trajectory. The scientific status of Atlantic salmon the south coast of Newfoundland is "Threatened" – that is "likely to become endangered if nothing is done to reverse the factors leading to its extirpation or extinction". Yet we continue to endanger the species by continually expanding industrial pollution zones in prime wild salmon spawning areas. We heed not the Cree saying – "When the last tree is cut down, the last fish eaten, and the last stream poisoned, you will realize that you cannot eat money." Unfortunately as evidenced by open-pen aquaculture and other money-makers like the destruction of Sandy Pond for a toxic dump, we do indeed eat money no matter what the cost. It just takes time for the indigestion from health, social, environmental and ethical problems to kick in.

Looking for something thoughtful for Christmas? Want to act immediately to protect the environment? Want to feel better? It's easy. Stop buying farmed Atlantic salmon. Consumer pressure could help move destructive salmon aquaculture from the bays to land-based sites where it can be more environmentally tolerable. Shop strategically and the ocean will be a cleaner safer place for all of us.

Standing tall

As evident with Donald Trump's leading position in the campaign for the US Presidency, legions of people condone, enjoy and vigorously support those who trash-talk others down. And those without the gumption to do it brazenly cut lose under the guise of anonymity. Fortunately, while the brash, arrogant and ignorant anonymous ones talk the loudest, there are other voices to be heard.

Local case in point - witness Lynelle Cantwell's courageous response to anonymous mindless cyber-bullies at Holy Trinity High School in Torbay. The ignorant ones who circulated and participated in the "ugliest girls" survey did so using a highly questionable social media site linked to bullying and bullying-induced suicides. Lynelle's direct positive response to the bullies affirmed her integrity and showed that by standing tall in the face of harassment, fear has no leverage and bullies no courage. When that beautiful heroic young woman stood her ground, Lynelle Cantwell stood for all of us.

Hello in there – hello

This season I have made some minor though out of the ordinary [for me] effort to contribute directly some folks sitting in quiet desperation on our cold sidewalks and wandering our roadways hoping [not always asking] for some spare change. I've had some interesting

conversations and gained perspectives. It's amazing what some spare change, warm coffee and a "hello in there" can provide.

Some of the men on the street have a resemblance to St. Nicholas and ... who knows. I've certainly received heartening gifts of insight and besides I am no longer searching for a New Year's resolution.

All the very best to you and yours for the holiday season and 2016, and if you're just out there on your own ... hold on ... hold on ... Godspeed

Forgive a sweet soul a desperate deed
His was a prison and he was freed
Godspeed Godspeed
Ron Hynes

Birds in the area

In mid-November, Canada geese, black ducks, teal and common mergansers were abundant on the Grand Codroy River where 6 mourning dove visited a nearby farm field [Nick Montevecchi]. At least one of the young swans that hatched at Mundy Pond is on the move and has been photographed on George's Pond below Signal Hill (Jeff Driscoll)

Gannet flocks were diving off Cape St. Mary's in mid-November when sand-lance and herring were abundant [Chris Mooney]. Two humpback whales were off Cape Race on 19 November [Cliff Doran].

Each year Peter Miller [former CBC Radio Morning Show host] and wife Edna set out a battery of hummingbird feeders around their property in Middleton, Nova Scotia. Peter recently sent me an interesting photo of a hairy woodpecker at a humming bird feeder. This is a new one on me, but then there aren't too many hummingbird feeders around here.

Small groups of pine grosbeaks were calling atop the heavily-coned spruce and fir in Portugal Cove in mid-November [Janet Montevecchi]. The snow storm of 4 December kept me constantly clearing our bird feeding area to keep the hordes of feisty hungry juncos provisioned. The first purple finches of the season showed up for the feed, while the chickadees sheltered in the forest.

Birds I View columns are available at <http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>

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