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**Every day is Valentine's Day in Newfoundland
Birds I View
Bill Montevecchi**



Perhaps more than any other bird, the dove is associated with lovers. This mourning dove was photographed in St. Philips. (photo: Pam Williams)

“Whan every foul cometh ther to choose his mate.”
Parliament of Foules
Geoffrey Chaucer (14th century)

In the moderate climate of the British Isles, St. Valentine's Day is taken as the date when birds come together to choose their mates. While it is a bit too early for spring song here, it is never too early to look for birds or to extend amorous feelings to loved ones. Indeed it is never too late either. And fortunately for us in Newfoundland every day is Valentine's Day.

“She loves me, she loves me not, she loves me, she loves me not.” What the hell am I thinking about? I'm just going to the corner store to pick up some bread, a newspaper and 6 pack.

“Thank you, dear.” “Don't forget your package, love.” What did I do to deserve this adoration? And where could I possibly be other than Newfoundland to be showered with such affectionate responses from older and young female cashiers alike. On any given day in almost any given convenience store, gas station, super market and even at times in the large impersonal box stores and home hardware outlets, we are often greeted with Valentine wishes as we collect our packages and receipts.

When such greetings are given, the noise and the haste are briefly interrupted. While not love messages per se, these courtesies are a refreshing break from the often reflexive “Have a good day” of US origins.

These endearing Newfoundland expressions never seem to dull. Could that be why we have them? For me there is no habituation to these uplifting lilts of varying cadence and intonation. These expressions are subtle affirmations of a shared social inclusiveness. Greetings and gestures that can be pivotal in breaking barriers. At times the courtesies extend beyond the verbal.

When my father from Massachusetts was staying with us, I remember his surprise and delight when he went shopping and was acknowledged in this way. During a trying day in a large home supply depot, a friendly cashier noted his weariness. She found him a chair so he could “rest a spell, my dear”. The gesture made and saved his day.

My most memorable encounter of such a considerate outreach occurred during a drive across the Island with my family. I had forgotten to gas up in Nova Scotia, but with a little fuel in the tank in Port au Basques and my long-term habit to keep running on empty, I decided to venture onward.

Soon it was evident that I had driven us into highly compromised circumstances. Without informing anyone though they quickly caught on, I was coasting the downhills. My target was a gas station that I had often frequented at Pinchgut Lake. After hyper-miling on fumes for what seemed like an extraordinarily long time, in the distance my target came into view. With a bone dry tank, we coasted in to the refuge.

My relief was short-lived. Where were the gas pumps? In minor panic I rushed into the store and blurted out “Wasn’t this a gas station?” In that instant, I was transported to a new dimension - “Don’t worry, Honey, you can take my car.”

The immediate response from the friendly helpful woman behind the counter whom I had never before laid eyes on silenced the confusion. “What did you say?” “Here’s the keys, you can fill the gas can in Corner Brook.” My anxiety evaporated like a morning mist in a rising sun.

Using her car I drove the 50 or so km to Corner Brook and back filling a gas can for us and a tank for her. Fully fuel we were again well on our way home. It was just another Valentine’s Day in Newfoundland.

Birds in the area

A flock of 17 red-breasted mergansers have been holding steady throughout January in North Harbour St. Mary’s Bay (Gerri Dalton). On the morning of 18 January, Sally Goddard got off to an invigorating start in Logy Bay when a bald eagle swooped her car and eyeballed her through the windshield before they both went their separate ways.

Anticipating St. Valentine the most touted bird of love, a dove arrived during the storms of January. A lone and lonely mourning dove has been visiting neighboring feeders and hoping

for a companion near Neary's Pond (Jon Garvin, George Mayo). Another or perhaps the same one (?) has been wintering by Kelly's Brook near Quidi Vidi Lake.

On 25 January, six magnificent bohemian waxwings were killed instantly when they slammed into the second floor windows of the Research and Development Corporation on Portugal Road. Melissa LeDrew (ne Langille) heard the collision picked up the birds hoping that some or maybe even one might have survived. The waxwings were likely fleeing a pursuing merlin or sharp-shinned hawk. Melissa delivered the specimens to MUN's Biology Department where they were gratefully received.

Our feeders have been brightened from time to time with irregular visits by American goldfinches and raspberry-colored male purple finches and the heavily striped females. And sharp-shinned hawk fly-bys have kept all alert.

Dick Whitaker noted a healthy distinctively plumaged junco that has shown up for three years in a row at the Rushmere Farm in Argentia. Some years ago I banded some juncos around our house and some reappeared for a couple of years but not much longer.

Junco do however have an amazing longevity record. One senior junco banded in West Virginia lived to the robust age of 11 years and 4 months! In Newfoundland junco years [say 20] this oldster would be about 225! No doubt this was an extremely rare individual living in more forgiving climate than ours. In the face of nature's indifference, perhaps Eling Lien could re-open Junco Café for winter guests.

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