

**Cats, birds and cat dreams
Birds I View
Bill Montevercchi**



In the clearing stands a boxer
And a fighter by his trade
And he carries the reminders
Of every glove that laid him down
And cut him till he cried out
In his anger and his shame
“I am leaving, I am leaving”
But the fighter still remains

The Boxer – Simon and Garfunkle

Cats and birds are a bad mix. Domestic cats have been such an integral component of human society it's difficult to see them as invasive, voracious and insatiable predators of native birds and wildlife. After all, they saved humanity from The Plague.

Of all causes of bird mortality, cat kills top the list by leaps and bounds. In the 1970s, a US study correlated decreased numbers of birds of prey with the increasing numbers of cats, and speculated that cats were removing the rodent prey base of the hawks and owls.

No doubt domestic and feral cats take massive tolls of birds on the island of Newfoundland where a reduced predator complex (e.g. no skunks, no raccoons) had provided the birds with more predator-free habitat than their mainland counterparts. To exacerbate problem, squirrels, another voracious nest and bird predator were also introduced to the island.

Reducing cat-induced bird mortality

Many actions reduce bird mortality by cats. Foremost could be to seek other pets. If you own a cat(s) however, many options can minimize risks for birds.

Felines can be reared as house pets with no outdoor time. Outdoor enclosures can be constructed where cats can enjoy open air and pose no risk to birds. Cats can also be collared with bells that can warn potential avian targets.

Cats should be neutered, and their populations controlled to prevent the burgeoning numbers of both domestic and feral felines. To save endangered native bird species in Australia, wildlife biologists are culling of 2,000,000 cats by 2020.

Pet cats

"I have lived with several Zen masters - all of them cats." [Eckhardt Tolle]. We always have cats in our household. Though often it is they that initiate the relationship.

Orange battled scarred Tiger showed up hungry one day at our doorstep. After a couple of bowls of milk and couple of visits, he moved in and was sleeping on the couch, switching life-styles from vagabond to yuppie. Next came Hubert – the pure tiny white kitten that had been discarded in the snow by Windsor Lake.

One of my last uncommonly exhausting tasks before I self-admitted myself to the Health Sciences Centre in May was digging a grave for our last cat. Bubbles was an SPCA special that Marina named to her tendency to bubble saliva when she purred.

The rescue – the gift

Driving home one evening son Nick and daughter-in-law Katie saw a mother cat and kittens attempting to cross a busy intersection near Higgins Line. The mother and some kittens made it, but one got stuck at the median strip. They picked up the kitten but could not locate the mother and litter, so kept the tiny straggler.

It was decided quickly that it would not be possible for Nick and Katie with their young daughter Aspen, cat and dog to keep the kitten, nor for daughters Marina or Gioia who are graced with Sheshatshiu huskies nor Janet who was encumbered with me. So off quickly to the SPCA before any bonding occurred.

My thought about this was different. I explained to Janet that this was really not a rescue at all but in fact a gift and that we needed to accept it. However being the one out of the loop in the HSC, I didn't push the matter.

The dream

The HSC has a way of precipitating intense dreams. My most vivid ones arose after I learned that I needed surgical intervention. Those dreams were regressive and took me back to my hometown in Massachusetts.

One stood out - I was walking home, a little animal was yelping incessantly at my feet. I was so irritated that I kicked it aside. On picking it up however I saw that it was an injured dark gray kitten. It looked me in the eye and said "I just wanted to be your friend."

When I explained this to Janet, her response like mine was rather visceral. The next day Janet called SPCA and the little dark gray kitten was now part of our family – and the name they had given it at the SPCA – Bubbles.

Birds in the area

Fisherman, Larry Easton considers that arctic ice is moving herring close to shore, and the gannets are close behind. In early June, gannets flocks have been plunging in St. Philips, Topsail, Manuels, Summerford, Loon Bay (Linda Gaborko, Rich Nugent, Paul Murphy).

Many birds are visiting Marlene Creates boreal garden including a trio of osprey, a hairy woodpecker, northern waterthrush, song sparrow and purple finches (Don McKay). Check out Marlene's summer boreal garden art/nature programs – awesome experiences.

Don Chubbs had a nice flock of about a dozen cedar waxwings feeding on his holly bushes in a "treed area in Paradise". On Ramea, Richard Northcott has seen mourning dove, a catbird, a male rose-breasted grosbeak, a 4-egg northern waterthrush nest in his garden and on 24 June an indigo bunting. In White Bear Bay, Richard saw a killdeer on 4 June, and a great blue heron 11 June.

On 11 June, a robin's nest with 4 eggs was found on the drain spout by our back deck (Marina Montevercchi). Likely it's the same lineage of robins has been nesting on our (their) property for many tens of generations.

Birds I View columns are at <http://play.psych.mun.ca/~mont/outreach.html>. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 695-5305 [c], 864-7673[w], 895-2901[h]