

# **Night lighting has gloomy environmental effects**

## **Birds I View**

### **Bill Montevecchi**

“Our diurnal bias has allowed us to ignore the obvious, that the world is different at night and that natural patterns of darkness are important as the light of day to the functioning of ecosystems.” So say Catherine Rich and Travis Longcore, editors of the interesting book, *Ecological Consequences of Artificial Night Lighting* published by the Island Press in 2006.

We are lighting up the earth in ways that have been unprecedented in the history of planet. This is happening globally, and it is happening in St. John’s and in Portugal Cove – St. Philips.

There are many effects of artificial night-lighting on nocturnal animals. The attraction of moths to outdoor lights is an obvious example. Some animals learn to use the lighting to their advantage, such as bats that hunt the moths that aggregate under street lights. Gulls at wharves and those roosting on the Hibernia platform hunt fishes attracted to the light on the water.

Many nocturnal birds are seemingly paradoxically attracted to light. Storm-petrels that visit their nest burrows on coastal islands at night are attracted to beams radiating from light-houses. Some possible explanations for their lure to artificial night lights have been related to their attraction to bioluminescent prey like lantern fish.

Leaving lights on in buildings throughout the night often wreaks havoc with nocturnal migrants like warblers and thrushes. Migrating birds are drawn to the light and often crash fatally into the windows.

#### **Lighting at offshore oil platforms**

The flare and other brilliant lighting on the Hibernia, Terra Nova and White Rose platforms have lit up the opaque ocean environment on the shelf edge of the Grand Banks. Storm-petrels, dovekies and other seabirds and landbirds are attracted to the flares and lights of the platform.

Many birds die through incineration, oiling and collisions. Much of the lighting on the platforms is needed for safety, but much is unnecessary and needlessly projected skyward. It is the skyward projection of light, both offshore and in town that creates the greatest problem for nocturnal birds and for our own ever-diminishing ability to view the night sky.

Avian attraction to light is greatest during foggy conditions that are common on the Grand Banks. Extraneous light is reflected and refracted by the airborne water molecules creating massive domes of illumination that attract nocturnal animals.

During a recent meeting on the effects of offshore developments on marine animal, an official from the U.S. Mines and mineral Service informed me that flaring is

not allowed on offshore rigs. Excess gases are re-injected for conservation purposes rather than flared. In Canada and in the offshore provincial – federation jurisdictions in Newfoundland and Labrador, we are working below U.S. environmental standards

The Williams' government plays hardball with the oil companies when dealing with economic issues. Yet with respect to environmental issues, it's not even softball in fact there is no game at all. Pity, actually "shameful" as the premier is fond of labeling others.

### **Iceland capelin fishery closed**

At noon on 21 February, Iceland closed their capelin fishery. The rationale was they could not find the 400,000 tonne biomass presumed to be needed to sustain their 100,000 tonne fishery.

Yet, six days later, the fishery was re-opened with laudatory declarations of effective conservations practices and location of a 470,000 tonne school. Five days later on 3 March, the quota was increased to 150,000 tonnes. The fishery is worth about \$100,000,000 US.

The real state of the capelin stock in Icelandic waters remains to be seen. We must hope for the best but there may be something tainted in the fishery statistics in Reykjavik. For more information and Owen Myers letter see [http://www.icelandreview.com/icelandreview/daily\\_news/?cat\\_id=16567&ew\\_0\\_a\\_id=301942](http://www.icelandreview.com/icelandreview/daily_news/?cat_id=16567&ew_0_a_id=301942).

### **Birds in the area and around the province**

A stunning male Eurasian wigeon and two female admirers were on Burtons Pond with the mallards and herring gulls in late February. One of the second winter herring gulls carried a metal band on its left leg and an orange identification band with the letters KC on its right leg.

This gull was banded last winter at Robin Hood when Greg Robertson of the Canadian Wildlife Service guided a class of mine in the fine arts of capturing and tagging gulls. The gull was seen at Burtons Pond in May and twice at Quidi Vidi last March. The bird appears to be a year-round resident of the capital city.

Immature bald eagles have been frequenting Beachy Cove (Kathryn Welbourne) and Cape Spear. A peregrine falcon has been taking pigeons at Quidi Lake, where an eagle was seen attempting to steal a pigeon from the falcon.

Murres and an offshore black guillemot have been seen near the Terra Nova floating platform by a Canadian Wildlife Service observer (Dave Fifield).

A belted kingfisher was perched on a wire on Western Gully Road near where stream from Neary's Pond crosses under the road (David Artiss). The kingfisher must have been searching for an bracing meal of sticklebacks (pricklies) and tiny trout in the icy water. Brrrrr...

Marlene Creates has female pine grosbeaks taking black oil sunflower seeds from her hand. Owing to tameness, pine grosbeaks carry the local name mopos, though I have not heard of anyone feeding them by hand before. Marlene also has a male downy woodpecker at her feeder with rich cast of other avian characters.

In Gros Morne National Park, Darroch Whitaker and Tina Leonard attracted six downy woodpeckers and black-backed woodpecker. They also had a northern shrike singing at Bakers Brook!

On 19 February, just as the rains had washed away the snow, I caught a glimpse of a large flock of birds flying across Portugal Cove Road near Meadow Heights. I followed. The flock of ever resourceful starlings were probing away in just recently uncovered meadow. A common grackle was seen in a starling flock in New Harbour (Pam Williams).

American goldfinches, siskins and white-winged crossbills are visiting our feeder in Portugal Cove (Janet Montevicchi). Goldfinches and purple finches are also elsewhere in the neighborhood (Jon Garvin, Kathryn Welbourne, Rita Anderson).

Red crossbills are visiting feeders in St. John's (Karen and Gene Herzberg), Clarenville (up to 20 Diane Burton) and Eastport (Bruce Bradbury). A substantial flock of 25 red crossbills was also seen in St. John's (Paul Linegar).

A male redwing among a flock of robins has been singing on the trail by Quidi Vidi Lake east of the boathouse (Gene Herzberg, John Wells).

### **Crow stripping weather-stripping**

A crow is removing the weather-stripping around windows at house on Indian Meal Line. Bob Codner, the mayor of Torbay, and I discussed the problem. Crows and ravens are very intelligent creatures but once they start to engage in an unusual behaviour like this, it is often difficult to break them of the habit.

The homeowners covered the weather stripping with board but the crow managed to circumvent this as well. My suggestion is that scaring the crow by surprise might deter the activity. Bursting a plastic or paper bag or a balloon when the crow is in the act might be effective. This tactic will require some concerted effort - it is not easy to surprise a crow.

### **Watch for conjunctivitis at bird feeders**

Lester Rees has a male and a female Evening Grosbeak at his feeders with conjunctivitis that has closed one eye on each bird. Lester is rightly concerned that warmer, damper weather could cause high infection rates.

Keep a watch at feeders. If the infection is spreading, it could be important to remove the feeders

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