

Birding and Outdoor Tidbits by Phil Krajewski

My high school physics teacher was adamant in conveying the value of developing a “train of thought” to his students. He felt that connecting one thought to another, *ad infinitum*, would help our brain’s ability to grasp esoteric concepts. As I recently finished reading *The Trouble with Physics* and *Incompleteness: The Proof and Paradox of Kurt Godel*, I realized that I should have cultivated his request with more gusto. My mind spun with visions of wavelengths hurtling into black holes, and collapsed while contemplating the logic behind “This very sentence is false”, so I reached for Roger Tory Peterson’s birding memoir *All Things Reconsidered* and drifted contentedly towards real flying objects.

Although I am a strong advocate of my physics teachers’ dictum, I offer the following seemingly unrelated birding and outdoor tidbits:

1. The beginning of the New Year is an excellent time to start a 2007 bird list. At about 7:30am on January 2nd, I looked out to our bird feeder with renewed interest and welcomed the Tufted Titmouse as the first bird of the year. The Black-capped Chickadee that flew in a short time later excited me more than the many seen on December 31st. Yearly and event bird lists have a way of revitalizing the spirit for routine feathered sightings.

2. January 1st is the traditional day for me to start a new yearly bird list, but a sojourn to New York City prevented me from doing this on time. In fact, on January 1st at 12 midnight, I was in Central Park beginning a four mile road race with 5,000 other runners. The experience of running in darkness, surrounded by large trees, fireworks, and the huge lighted buildings of the NYC skyline, is quite unique.

The morning before (December 31st), I had the highly enjoyable opportunity to watch birds in this archetypical city park. I have always been in awe of this remarkable habitat for birds, whether they are residents or migrants, and jumped at the chance to gauge their activity. The reservoir area was particularly abundant with water birds as Northern Shovelers and Buffleheads, and a Common Loon made an appearance.

While hanging over the fence on the south side of the reservoir with my binoculars up, I had a fortuitous encounter with a Sunday morning bird walk group and the pre-eminent ornithologist Dr. Robert DeCandido. In the ensuing conversation I learned that you can access his website at www.birdingbob.com and participate in bird walks each Wednesday and Sunday morning. If you are visiting NYC, I suggest that you take advantage of this “urban bird trap” and bird watch in Central Park.

3. As odd as it may seem, New York City played a prominent role in the life of Roger Tory Peterson. Not only did he continue to develop his artistic skills in NYC, but he was a founding member, with his other teenage friends, of the Bronx County Bird Club. To indicate the level of his passion for birds, he was involved with a group, led by Rosalie Edge, which secretly met many times in the city and organized ways to confront the National Audubon Society and their lack of enthusiasm in the protection of birds of prey. Years later, their efforts led to the purchase, by Ms. Edge, and the creation of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary in Pennsylvania.

Also, Peterson’s notes on the Ivory-billed Woodpecker are interesting when considering the present mania surrounding this bird. It takes six square miles to support a pair of these birds (Tanner), because their specialization in feeding is extremely acute. The bird not

only needs a virgin wilderness with its constantly decaying trees, but the grub on which it feeds must be just below the tight bark. Therefore, after two or three years of decay, the tree is too far along to support their feeding habits. It is not unusual then, that Peterson had only a single sighting when he made an extensive visit to the Singer Tract in Northeast Louisiana in 1942. This is before almost all of the 'old growth' trees were logged. He refers to this moment as his greatest bird watching experience. The present sightings have taken place just to the north in Arkansas.

4. As my last tidbit, I pose the following question: should birders, hunters, anglers, foresters, hikers, etc. seek to become complete outdoorspeople? While it is common for our enthusiasm to sometimes take a singular approach to our outdoor passion, it may be, as the natural world flattens, an appropriate time to accept our shared inherent reality, and visit more often the development of an accountable mentality towards all flora and fauna. We may view our outdoor interests as unrelated to this question, hence unworthy of discussion, *a fait accompli*. However, to continue with an enjoyment of the outdoors, either this question is addressed by all, or the burdens to develop full protection of 'nature' will unfairly fall on a few. Regardless of how many begin this inquiry, the realization of a complete treatment of the outdoors is the only solution available, or the path of 'nature shows no mercy' lurks ominously ahead.

As a starting point, a clearer perspective may be drawn from taking simple walks in the woods, over fields, or beside streams. This may help open ourselves to an appreciation of the myriad of creatures and plants, and begin to acknowledge that each of these entities has an equal right to exist and flourish. The survival of a particular species is dependent on the well being of all living organisms, however unrelated they may appear. When people lobby (or in many cases, whine) in an attempt to gather special standing for one or more life forms at the expense of others, their position demonstrates that they fall short as complete outdoorspeople. Large egos, habits, and ignorance are some of the obstacles that help prevent an attainment of this ideal.

Be courageous. Change can be difficult. The time has come to put one's love of nature on the table, take those walks, and begin to see and embrace the total picture.

Happy new beginning!

Birdwatch appears the second Wednesday of each month in the Outdoors Section of the *Wellsboro Gazette*. The Tiadaghton Audubon Society meets the third Wednesday at 7:30pm at the Gmeiner Cultural Center in Wellsboro, Pa. Our website is www.tiaudubon.org