

*Birdwatch* #27, May 2007

**Spring Migration -- Here I Go Again** by Philip Krajewski

As I contemplate the universe, infinity, and the endless possibilities of the various shapes and sizes that life may choose as its structure, I am thrilled that I can take a casual walk in the woods, lift a pair of binoculars to my eyes, and comprehend the brilliant colors of a delicate Blackburnian warbler flying freely from tree to tree. My amazement is compounded with the realization that I am probably upside down, hurtling and spinning through space, on a trillion billion zillion ton sphere. Luckily, I am conditioned to this cosmic predicament, and I stand upright on a soft bed of green moss, listening to the gentle signature sound of this bird calling for a partner.

Although I enjoy bird watching throughout the year, the spectacle of spring migration has a way of presenting the power of life in a simple yet revelatory manner. It is as if the story of life on Earth is in each of my cells and, consequently, there is an opening to the ability of not just merely watching birds, but of actually flying away with them. As my mind hovers momentarily, I am grounded by the call of a black-capped chickadee reminding me to fill the tube feeder after my morning walk. Unfinished business is a very strong attachment.

Reoriented, I hear action in the woods and walk more deeply in, half expecting to meet wizards and less docile wild things, rather than a blue-headed vireo or a yellow-bellied sapsucker. Suddenly activity in the upper branches catches my view. In the ensuing critical second of lifting the binoculars up to the commotion, I lose sight of the birds, as they fly completely out of the area. I like the “not this time, next time” aspect of bird observation. I have also grown accustomed to relaxing when a nondescript blending of striping and colors or poor lighting prevents a good look and hinders the identification of a bird altogether. I feel life’s great wheel turning in unison with this enormous wobbling planet, and feel content that I will know what bird it is the next time around. I guess that I am maturing as a bird watcher or just appreciate the free margin that comes with not knowing.

The subtle hues and pastels of an early spring landscape signal the beginning of movement and the bursting forth of animal and plant energy. Plant growth, though completely unobservable by the human eye, awakens the insect cycle as larvae devour the swelled buds and tiny leaves, thus providing fat crawlers for the resident and migratory avian hordes. The pileated woodpecker, unaware of this annual emergent feast, lands before me on a dead American beech and continues with its mining operation for hidden grubs.

Ovenbirds establishing territory and a distant wood thrush provide ample audio stimulation as higher pitched sounds beg to be recognized. The sight of a few black-throated green warblers precedes the combination of a black and

white warbler and a brown creeper unusually close to each other on the same tree.

The tranquility of the quiet morning is interrupted by my two dogs, Grace and Fum, barking like kettle drums, while staring down at the same place on the ground. They are either about to welcome Persephone back from the underworld, or are protecting me from the long arm of Hades. I imagine that *semper fidelis* was affectionately applied to dogs long before the marines adopted it as their motto.

I head for the meadow, so that the brown thrasher calling incessantly from a high tree won't feel neglected. The cover provided by the large, evenly spaced, *rosa floribunda* is ideal for surprising birds into an inquisitive stare. Screech owl tapes have a similar effect but are much more disruptive. Yellow warblers shrub hop while a catbird calling demonstrates through imitation its place low on the mimid ladder. After a number of song, chipping, and field sparrows, I hustle over to the narrow tree line and small stream winding down the hill hoping to see a Wilson's warbler like last year. Although unsuccessful, I am treated to scarlet tanagers and Baltimore orioles dancing and singing on the upper branches.

Bird walks differ from vacations in that the return trip can hold more excitement than either the journey to or the experience of the destination. Intensity of action or unusual sightings can happen just as you are about to close the car or house door. I have yet to feel a blue Monday or that I am back to the grindstone after a bird walk.

I must have willed an active finish to my morning walk as American redstarts start the beginning of the end. Another group of black-throated greens is quickly followed by the prolific yellow-rumped warblers. A rose-breasted grosbeak appears out of nowhere showing off its bright throat like a senior boy uniquely dressed for the prom with an ascot instead of a bowtie. Just as I am about to pet the dogs for protecting me from deep forested creatures or from somersaulting into outer space, the gem of the day materializes. On the top of a black cherry, a small, somewhat nondescript bird was fluttering out after moving around with its tail propped up. This profile, the long tail with white outer feathers, and distinct eye ring, confirms it as a blue-gray gnatcatcher. This has been an elusive bird for me, with only a few North American sightings.

Content with reacquainting myself with the avian world, I walk to the house. I am about to open the door, and turn to look at Grace and Fum. The communication is immediate with the wag of the tail and the lamenting doggy look transmitting a singular request. I look at them and say, "Okay, Mercury has delivered the message; I'll fill your bowls right away." The relaxing respite of bird watching has again revitalized me for the many responsibilities of life that I've chosen to fulfill. I go into the house for a quart of dog food and the black oil bird feed. And...who knows? Maybe a white-crowned

sparrow will be waiting for me as I go outside again. I dare not put the binoculars down with spring migration alive and in full expression.

Birdwatch appears the second Wednesday of the month in the Outdoor Section. The Tiadaghton Audubon Society (TAS) meets the third Wednesday of the month (Sept. – May) at 7:30PM at the Gmeiner Cultural Center, Wellsboro, Pa. Please visit the TAS website at [www.tiaudubon.org](http://www.tiaudubon.org)