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**Our history of annihilation is ongoing
Birds I View
Bill Montevecchi**



White-morph gyrfalcon on a gull kill at Quidi Lake (photo: Clyde Thornhill)

Before public lectures at Memorial University of Newfoundland, we read a Land Acknowledgment statement that recognizes the land tenure of the Beothuk and other indigenous people in Newfoundland and Labrador. Recently the statement has taken considerable criticism, being considered paternalistic pander that does nothing improve historical circumstances. The most intense criticism that was repeated many times on CBC Radio was that “someone from Memorial University considered it vulgar.”

I don't get it but here's what we should consider vulgar – our 500 year history of annihilation. Perhaps it all started with Gaspar de Corte Real, who came, claimed and took slaves back to Europe. Pursuing stocks that they had been decimated in the Bay of Biscay, Europe and Greenland, the Basques quickly obliterated the right whales. Walrus followed the same fate soon after. The tragedies are continuous over five centuries of our less than accommodating interactions with marine and terrestrial environments, their inhabitants and wildlife.

The Beothuk and great auks followed a similar extinction trajectory and were eradicated by the early 1800s. The Newfoundland wolf was gone by the early 1900s, and its last tangible specimen (subspecies *beothucus*) was retrieved as a skin on William Whiteway's wall in his St.

John's home. Through diligent effort the skin has been transformed into a stunning life-sized specimen in The Rooms.

Attitudes of wildlife annihilation remain manifesting themselves in so many ways. Our fundamental fishing strategy remains as always "fish to commercial extinction". While wild Atlantic salmon are in peril, government invests in ecological follies like open sea aquaculture that will only harm wild stocks all the more.

We devastated the northern cod stock, though seem blind to the travesty. We are the global example of the mismanagement and mistreatment of one of the largest and most productive fish stocks in the world's oceans. Yet our lack of vision or even concern can make one despair, as we fail to see or acknowledge our responsibility. When the northern cod fishery was closed, this presented itself as an optimal time in our province's history to consider marine protected areas to help ensure the rebuilding of the capelin and cod stocks. But what was heard from fishers and the FFAW ? Much blaming of foreigners, government and seals but little was heard about responsibility for desecrating the global fish stock and a renewable resource that could have reaped continuous economic benefit if only we gave it a chance. The calls for non-functional seal culls are foolish distractions from systemic conservation processes to tangential symptoms that are used to assuage guilt and are tainted with an underlining expression that can only be interpreted as hatred.

With the removal of cod, our fishery pursued the food of the cod - crab and shrimp. And as with cod it took a mere 20 years to drive these species to the brink of fishing viability. With an illogic that falls beyond the pale, we continue to fish capelin – targeting the large females with eggs. This purse-seining fishery is the most dangerous type of fishery, and it is aimed at the food base of the northern cod. Everyone knows this is an inappropriate and unsustainable, but if there is a pittance to be made and if there are fish that can be caught then we carry on. As was the case with the cod moratorium, we declare a closure when there are no fish left to catch. A conservation charade in its finest sense. With a smug self-serving attitude of entitlement we treat fish as "raw material" to be mined rather than harvested from the ocean.

Capelin pursue-seiners are a ravenous lot and reports of seiners fishing the mouths of scheduled Atlantic salmon rivers and netting salmon seems to provide yet another nail in the coffin of the capelin fishery. The sensibility of such closure is as an investment in northern cod. In Norway and Iceland spectacular recoveries of their devastated cod stocks followed capelin fishery closures.

Our wildlife annihilation philosophy extends in government's attitudes to offshore oil regulation. Praises are reaped on the "excellent" environmental and safety vigilance by the Canada–Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board (C-NLOPB), a lethally conflicted regulatory regime Inadequate monitoring over the past 20 years is ignored. The C-NLOPB must assume responsibility for the complete lack of scientifically justifiable seabird monitoring at platforms. This information is essential for understanding the disappearance of 2,300,000 Leach's storm-petrels, the most vulnerable seabird to offshore light attraction, flaring, collisions and oiling. This massive mortality likely represents 15 – 20 percent of the species' world population whose largest colony is on the Baccalieu Island Ecological Seabird Reserve. The International Union

for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) lists the species as Vulnerable, and we are the problem but ignore it while pledging allegiance to the oil cartels.

Wildlife and environmental destruction is taken as a necessary cost of our economic strategy whose basic “time is money” approach will chew up our renewable natural resources to the point where we will only have artificial production to sustain us. We know better but does it even matter?

Birds in the area

The large falcons of the Arctic - gyrfalcons have exploded birders' interests along the coasts. These large powerful birds of prey are moving south with the arctic pack ice that is moving along the northeast coast. On February 17-18, Michael Crummy and others observed a dark morph gyrfalcon just outside The Inn at Joe Batt's Arm on Fogo Island. On February 28, birders were treated to both a light and a dark morph gyrfalcon feasting on gulls on Quidi Vidi Lake. Clyde Thornhill captured impeccable images of both birds [see – <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/white-and-grey-morph-gyrfalcons-on-quidi-vidi-lake-1.4557251>]. And in early March a dark morph gyr was reportedly seen on Ramea Island on the southwest coast (Richard Northcott).

Two adult bald eagles were flying over Beach Cove Mountain in late February (Janet Montevecchi). A belted kingfisher and an otter were at Quidi Vidi Gut on the morning of 9 March. Courtship feeding by a pair of blue jays at our feeders suggested that something other than winter was on their mind. A solo robin and sharp-shinned hawk added some spice to the Garvin's feeders by Neary's Pond in early March.

A Snowy owl with a broken wing was report in Burnt Point where a local resident was trying with little luck to get some government agency to attend to it. Sad tale.

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