

The gift of maternal love and world peace

Birds I View

Bill Montevercchi



Black-tailed Gull that nests in Japan enjoying the shores of Quidi Vidi Lake! (photo: Gene Herzberg)

Dear Santa

Apologies for the late letter. I didn't have time to write in December and besides you mightn't have had the time to read. Your job while hectic at times (but what isn't) must be terrific. Presumably things have eased up for you, and this may be a good time to write after all. Besides I don't want anything for Christmas (next one) – at least nothing tangible.

I don't know if you and Mrs. Claus have any children, but I trust that your mother must have instilled in you a deep sense of benevolence and generosity. My mother was like that.

You must have to focus on the positive aspects of people and their circumstances. How do you deal with bad guys like the Taliban? Is this ever difficult? Is this the hardest part of the job? Do you ignore them?

Do you rely on your experiences with your mother? We all share maternal bonding and care. Every mother has brought new life into the world and has nurtured their survival and well-being. The image of the Madonna and child is truly a universal one.

This basic biological and caring relationship is a powerful sacred feature that binds all of us of different races, religions, beliefs. Presumably the mother of a Taliban insurgent, as they are called, and the mother of a Canadian soldier share much in common in terms of compassion and at times bitter grief and despair. This commonality of care and love for their sons and daughters is manifest in commitments for their well-being.

Mothers here are making considerable efforts to keep drunk drivers off the road. Couldn't we benefit by looking to mothers for assistance in solving what appear to be intractable warring situations? Might we not constructively explore this dimension of humanity rather than simply pitting offspring against offspring in blood-letting, carnage and maiming contests to see which side quits first?

A usual outcome in these conflicts is that after a great deal of death, suffering and tragedy, protests and disgust about the killing and costs in human lives overwhelm the aims of the politicians who cheerlead and bolster illusions of righteousness and victory. Opposing sides then proclaim they won, and the conflict dissipates much less dramatically than it began and escalated and escalated.

Nothing that I am writing is new, and my guess is that you know all of this.

So my Christmas request is a simple one – a reaffirmation and universal celebration of maternal love. The benefits for the resolution of local, regional and global conflicts will certainly be immense. If you gave motherhood a boost, it could help a lot.

And Santa, if it's not too much trouble, can we just start now? It doesn't seem to make much sense to wait until next December.

Thanks so much, I know that your mother will be proud of you. Mine will too, and likely every other mother on the planet Earth.

Merry Christmas, Bill

p.s. In your deliberations, you might want to consider what Jody Williams has to say about the roles of women in creating world peace

http://www.ted.com/talks/jody_williams_a_realistic_vision_for_world_peace.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2011-01-11&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email

NW Passage transits

Black-tailed and Slaty-backed Gulls that breed and winter in Japan and the western Pacific are in St. John's! These gulls are not even common in the eastern Pacific, so what on earth are they doing in Newfoundland?

One very interesting possibility is that they moving through the Northwest Passage following recently opened water in the melting Arctic sea ice. Previously ice-covered areas are becoming more accessible for animal movements and also for shipping.

Atlantic seabirds are showing up in the Pacific as well. In August 2010, for instance, a northern gannet was recorded in Alaska. This bird may have ventured there from Newfoundland and Labrador or perhaps from a colony in Northern Norway *via* the Russian Northern Sea route. 2010 was the first time in recent history that this ocean region was ice-free.

Climate change is a reality, and it is now. Novel “out of range” seabird occurrences are documenting the tip of the iceberg consequences of a shifting ecosystem.

Birds in the area

The Portugal Cove – St. Philips component of the greater St. John’s Christmas Bird Count was a slow and relatively uneventful one. The participants – Darroch and Dick Whitaker, Bobbi Mayer, Marina, Nick and Bill Montevicchi – were keen and enthusiastic but could only muster a total of 21 common species. Clearly, the mild weather and open ground did little to concentrate birds or bring them out in the open.

Ironically (as birding experiences often are) the very first bird that I saw the following morning at our suet feeder was a male hairy woodpecker – a species that was not seen during the previous day’s count. Flickers are also about, Kathryn Welbourne and family had two flickers pecking at a bit of rotten wood on their shed.

Being forced northeastward by severe winter storms in New England, killdeer had a major fallout in Newfoundland. Tens of killdeer were reported on the Avalon Peninsula during December. They were elsewhere as well. On Dec. 9, a flock of dozen or so was in Ramea (Richard Northcott). Two others were seen at Grey River, and another remained in Rose Blanche until at least 10 January (Nicole Lights).

Tony Power reported American kestrel and northern shrike in early December on the road to Cape St. Mary’s. My daughter Marina Wren scored our first sharp-shinned hawk of the season, when an immature bird buzzed our feeder on 2 January. Kathryn Welbourne had a close view of an eagle over the open water over Windsor Lake and a very special gift of an eye to eye contact with an eagle in Bauline South on her milestone 40th birthday.

A partial albino white-headed junco has returned to Pam Williams’ feeder in St. Philips for the second year in a row. It is interesting that just as birds have nesting territories during spring and summer, they also have winter feeding areas that they use in successive years. On the first day of 2011, a flock of about 30 evening grosbeaks stopped by the Mayos’ feeder by Neary’s Pond.

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