

## Separate environmental realities – it's just the way it is

### Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Seabird researcher Paul Regular working on Murre Cliff on Gull Island in the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve across from Ragged Beach. (photo: Bill Montevecchi)

Neil Young lamented that Mother Nature was on the run in the 1970s. Surely, She has been sprinting since then. Some threats in our area keep Mother Nature in retreat.

The Witless Bay Town Council received about 1,400 letters, faxes and emails of concern about the proposed development at Ragged Beach. This is likely more reaction than anything that the council will address during their term in office. Yet, it took the council but a few minutes to pass the process up the bureaucratic line rather than listening to the concerns of town citizens and many others who oppose the development. This is local politics of the most appalling kind.

The provincial government charged CNLOPB (Canada Newfoundland and Labrador Offshore Petroleum Board) with a review of the regulator's independence from the

corporate oil consortium. The board appointed a hydro-carbon developer who did not interview any biologists or environmental organization and who sang praises of CNLOPB. For years, even the provincial Auditor General, like everyone else, cannot obtain key information from the CNLOPB. The CEO of the board says it is not their fault – the legislation entitles the oil magnates to secrecy about their environmental interactions. That's just the way it is.

On Earth Day, the Director of recently newly named Suncor Fluvarium, at the direction of the Chairman of their Board of Directors, expelled Dr. John Gibson and Mike Manning. It was Dr. Gibson and Mike Manning who along with others initiated the establishment of the fluvarium. The rationale for their expulsion was that the Earth Day educational environmental table that they wanted to set up for the Sandy Pond Alliance was too political. Since when is environmental protection about native trout ecosystems too political for fluvarium?

The Quidi Vidi/Rennie's River Development Foundation that runs the Suncor Fluvarium claims to promotes education, advocacy and stewardship to inspire the protection, conservation and enhancement of freshwater ecosystems. This is what the Sandy Pond Alliance for the Protection of Canada's Water is all about. The Suncor Fluvarium has a battery of corporate resource extraction sponsors as well as Suncor that include Vale. Things change – not always for the better.

With respect to Sandy Pond, the federal and provincial governments have given this ancient lake and its trout centered ecosystem to Vale to use as a toxic pollution dump at the nickel processing development in Long Harbour. The logical alternative is to compel the company to be responsible for its own pollution rather than destroying a pristine pond.

While the destruction of Sandy Pond and eradication of it ecosystem is being planned, the corporation is setting up the Vale Living With Lakes Centre at Laurentian University - A Global Centre of Excellence for Freshwater Protection and Restoration. Say what? It's just the way it is.

Money has a powerful way of creating believers. The MIT linguist and political analyst, Noam Chomsky referred to this process of corporate and economic influence as "manufacturing consent". Consent of this nature, while potentially creating a lot superficial agreement, can prevent getting to the truth of a matter.

We are losing touch with what is right. Overwhelming, self-aggrandizing corporate and economic influence forces corrupted choices between the lesser of evils. The choice to do what is right is being eroded. The best environmental, social and even economical decisions are being pushed to the wayside by more immediate and excessive destruction in the name of development. The Earth's life support systems are too valuable and too sacred for this ravenous approach.

**Birds in the area**

Capelin are in, and so are the gulls, whales and eagles. In mid-June, gannets were foraging off Burgeo. They had likely traveled from the breeding colony on Great Bird Rock on the Magdalen Islands – more than 300 km distance - a long way to wing it for a feed of capelin or herring.

A pair of Caspian Terns in the Lewisporte area (Bruce Porter) and a trio in Noggin Cove Harbour in early June bodes well for a potential breeding colony to be found on the northeast coast. Linda Gaborko reports that the black tern is back again this year at Manuals – Long Pond breakwater looking for a mate among the local common and arctic terns.

A dozen Canada geese also in Noggin Cove Harbour is part of the rich diversity of waterfowl in the Carmanville area. Breeding plumaged black-headed gulls at Stephenville Crossing reflect nesting activity in the area.

A male American kestrel was flitting about the town and wind turbines in Ramea (Gloria Northcott) in mid-June, and a female northern harrier was seen crossing the outer reaches of the harbor in Burgeo.

Common grackles are now indeed common birds in Ramea, Burgeo, Corner Brook and the entire west coast of the island. We can anticipate a continuing eastward expansion.

### **Art and the environment**

For a glimpse of other environmental realities and celebration, there are a couple of terrific events this week that you might want to take in.

Local artist and nature cherisher, Marlene Creates is running a series of events that celebrate the wonders of the boreal forest. Her program begins on Saturday (16 July).

On the music scene, a concert of Music and Songs to Right the Wrongs will be held at St. Patrick's Street Church at 8 p.m. Saturday (July 16). The concert is a celebration of Canada's Ancient Lakes and Living Waters and will feature organist Robin Williams on the recently restored Casavant pipe organ and the Mercy Centre for Ecology and Justice Youth Choir and Guests.

Keep looking up – it's just the way it is.

Contacts = [mont@mun.ca](mailto:mont@mun.ca), 895-2901 (h), 864-7673 (w).