

The good journalists and the bad ones

Birds I View

Bill Montevecchi



Eye to eye. Juliana Coffey and an injured short-eared owl that was picked up in Goose Bay and sent to Salmonier Nature Park for rehab. (photo: Gioia Montevecchi)

*It's coming from the silence
on the dock of the bay,
from the brave, the bold, the battered
heart of Chevrolet:
Democracy is coming ...*

Leonard Cohen, Democracy

I am not a journalist. Yet having participated in the exercise a bit, I am inspired by the expression of ideas and by free and open debate. For me, writing and speaking publicly present challenges that can be agonizingly disappointing though at times deeply rewarding and grounding.

These are reasons why I have great respect for journalists, particularly those who use their skills to try to cut through the spin and smoke to the essence of an issue. They delve into and beyond the rosy no worries press releases and public assurances to raise questions that are vitally essential for a free, informed and engaged society.

It seems however that in Newfoundland and Labrador, we do not have to concern ourselves about these matters. The premier of the province tells us who are the good journalists that we should heed and read and who are the bad ones who are always negative and critical that we should pay no mind to. The premier has helped us further by differentiating good criticism that is constructive and helpful from bad criticism that has the local populace acting against one another.

Without thinking, we can also learn who are the good Newfoundlanders and who are the traitors to the race and not “pulling on the same oar”. The “pulling on the same oar” strategy is usually encouraged by respectful interactions, because negativity tends to destroy cooperative ventures.

Lots of hearty oarsmen thrown overboard

Assuming that this is best way to move forward together, one must question why so many hearty and inspiring oarsmen have been ignored, denigrated or outright thrown overboard by the premier.

In the journalism sphere, these include David Cochrane, Bob Wakeham and Russell Wangersky and others at the CBC and the Telegram. In the political realm, the collateral damage has been massive in all parties at both provincial and federal levels. And in the academic and medical spheres, the disparagement and badgering has been intense, unwarranted and totally disrespectful.

There are other loses as well. Many too many oarsmen who have, can and will make important contributions to the province have been cast off or simply jumped ship.

There are different strokes for different folks, and different strokes are needed to contribute power and diversity to the greater societal good. We need to encourage and keep all the world class oarsmen among us and to bring others on board.

Stop bullying on all levels

We have to ask ourselves in what types of societies are journalists beleaguered, belittled and bullied for their opinions and attitudes? Those societies don't allow a great deal of open expression of opinion or freedom, not to mention democracy.

Democracy is a much more of a responsibility than it is a privilege. We have to be ever vigilant to nurture and protect it.

We do not accept bullying in the school yard. We do not accept bullying in the workplace. We should not accept bullying emanating out of the highest political office in the province. There are times when one has to stand up and face the bullies. It's time to stand up - to stand up and stand on guard for thee.

Birds in the area and around the province

On 23 October, Terrance Hounsell saw three northern fulmars in St. John's Harbour just before dark near the container dock. Might the fulmars like the gulls be attracted to the lights at night?

A September report from Heather Chaffey had some interesting ducks in Torbay and Flat Rock. Heather saw Hooded Mergansers, Blue Winged Teal and also a wood duck among the

black ducks. In early November, Tony Power counted about 150 harlequin ducks near Cape St. Mary's and at Point Lance. He also observed about 250 eiders and 25 long-tailed ducks.

In early November, I made a quick stop at Stephenville Crossing that turned up many hundreds of black ducks, flocks of Canada geese and red-breasted mergansers and lots of sanderlings, some golden plovers, and a willet.

As reported by Darroch Whitaker, Gary Bakie of Nain photographed a great blue heron on Rose Island in Saglek Fiord, Labrador on August 20.

During October, Richard Northcott watched a small whimbrel on Ramea. After discussing this with Richard, I did some googling about whimbrels, and it seems that birds in the eastern part of their Canadian Arctic breeding range may be smaller than those in the west. Interesting.

Arctic birds are arriving in Newfoundland waters for their winter vacations, immature Iceland gulls were in Ramea Harbor, and there lots of dovebies along the ferry route between Ramea and Burgeo on 4 November.

Mourning doves are making a good showing this autumn. Linda Gaborko has had 6 mourning doves coming around her property In Manuals-Long Pond, and in nearby Killigrews, Sharon Peach reports 3 doves coming to her feeders. A funky partially albino starling has also been visited Linda's place.

David Artiss reported a possible yellow-billed cuckoo near Neary's Pond Road in Portugal Cove on 28 October. There have been a couple of other sightings of yellow-billed cuckoo in the St. John's area since late September.

Always looking up, Carolyn Mayo-Seeley was enchanted by a Snow Bunting as she crested Beachy Cove Mountain.

Onward. Contacts = mont@mun.ca, 737-7673(w), 895-2901(h)