

A Bird's Eye View

BY RAM NAMBIAR

Those incredible Killdeer Plovers

(*Charadrius vociferus*)

'Hard to see, easy to hear'. Simply stated, it amply justifies the visual and auditory display profiles of our familiar double banded plover -the Killdeer that comes from Venezuela and Peru to Halton region's ploughed fields cultivated lands, golf courses and all, in spring, to start a family anew.

Hard to see? Yes, its dark brown above white below, cryptic plumage colouration conceals the bird. Standing motionless or sitting on the eggs against its chosen background, Killdeer is virtually invisible to us or to beasts of prey.

Further more, two black bands on white chest, two more across the head etc of Killdeer, according to Cornell's late Pettingill Jr, serve as 'ruptive patterns', or marks, which break up and disrupt the true image of the bird into some shapeless form. From a distance, therefore, the intruder sees those bands but not the Killdeer itself.

Easy to hear, refers to Killdeer's last name -vociferus. The bird's nonmusical repetitive and piercing 'killdee' 'killdee' call from dawn to dusk or even at night, is familiar to us. Ornithologist P.A.Taverner, once addressing its strident vocalization, called Killdeer the 'noisiest of noisy'.



Noisy, maybe. But it is quite a handsome and a delightful plover. It is also an amazing species if not a puzzling one. Bizarre, but I never get tired of watching them.

Killdeer returns often to its previous year's breeding haunt in Halton region mostly by 2nd week of March. Males arrive before females. Killdeer call, at this time, heralds the arrival of a warmer spring.

A monomorphic species, Killdeer male and female are hard to tell apart in appearance. Only in rival encounters or while mounting the mate will we know the difference. Rather long, broad pointed wings and long legs, yes; they are swift flyers and fast runners, if not racers.

Killdeer are predominantly insect eaters. Their voracious appetite for grasshoppers, armyworms, beetles and the like, has to be helping farmers everywhere.

'Killdeer' call in circling flights above and also from the ground is more frequent during territorial and pair formation period. Two or three males may contest for days in winning a mate. To entice the female, the dominant male scrapes the ground, as if he is making the nest for her. Mating posture may look clumsy in which the long tarsus kept flat on the back of female and then tilting her tail to contact his cloaca with hers.

The nest is a shallow depression on the open ground made by male often lined with plant material or pebbles. Female lays 4 cryptically coloured eggs. Both partners share the incubation and the eggs are hatched in 25 days. The precocial downy young have their eyes open at hatching and can run and hide. The young look like parents but have only one chest band. The parents don't feed them but with their guidance and protection they jointly search and are capable of feeding themselves. Killdeer often raise a second brood.

No writing on Killdeer is complete without mentioning its age-old 'broken-wing' distraction display.

When the vulnerable young are threatened by a coyote or dog, one of the parents leaves the spot and runs some distance away. It starts to flutter along with one wing dragging, the other flapping on the floor. With legs trailing, it cries piteously as if injured badly and unable to fly. More dramatic still, the bird bends its tail down and shows the orange red rump as if covered with blood. Mouth watering, the beast darts out to the likely snack. The Killdeer runs few more feet away each time and decoys its enemy far away from its young. Then the Killdeer takes to wings and is gone. No blood, no injuries, not even a band-aid. The hungry predator goes empty handed, perhaps never to waste its energy on this pesky species again.

Once, at Erindale Park in Mississauga, I watched a drama unfolding. This time a Killdeer against an American Crow.

The crow was eagerly walking towards a tree. Suddenly there it was, the Killdeer in its theatrical with frantic cries from behind. The Crow turned back and started going after the Killdeer. While the crow was being lured farther and farther away, I, who knew better, walked on the opposite direction.

Lo and behold! Under the maple tree, among the mulch, there were 4 beautiful, heavily marked and camouflaged Killdeer eggs. Then, from nowhere came the other, parent to be, Killdeer and started the ploy in front of me. I videotaped both shows as quickly as I could and left the scene.

Campbellville artists hold outdoor show

By JANIS HODGINS

They call themselves the Triptych Painters. Doug Elliot, Linda Shantz and Terry Rammell joined together to celebrate their art in Campbellville this past weekend.

All three are long-time residents of Campbellville and members of the Fine Art Society of Milton (FASM). Each has a distinct art interest and style that portrays 'character' on their canvasses.

With the warm, sunny summer weather on Saturday and Sunday, the artists were able to set up shop at the corner of Main Street and Crawford Crescent and work outdoors on their paintings.

Doug Elliot's fascination for painting faces is seen in his collection of familiar faces from Mohawk Racetrack. Working in oils, he captures their personality through the use of bold colours and clean brush strokes. The facial expressions of his paintings are distinctive and personify the individualistic nature of his people.

For Linda Shantz, the subject matter was, shall we say, less human. Shantz' passion for horses was evident in her pencil, oil, and pastel paintings. Having 2 thoroughbreds of her own and a "bed & breakfast" (short-term lay ups) for horses keeps her close to her subject matter.

"Horses have been recognized in art throughout history. Their depiction is most often characterized by a gentle power, gracefulness and tenderness, which I like to depict in my pieces". Shantz's love for animals is also seen in some of her commissioned pet portraits on display.

Rammell on the other hand, favours the likes of painting homes with character, particularly old, limestone quarry homes built in the 1800s. It was interesting to note one of her paintings turned out to be a home where one of her viewers was born-a fun coincidence Rammell reminisces.

You may have seen Rammell parked at the side of a country road with painting gear set up on the tailgate of her old pickup, in spring, summer, fall and winter.

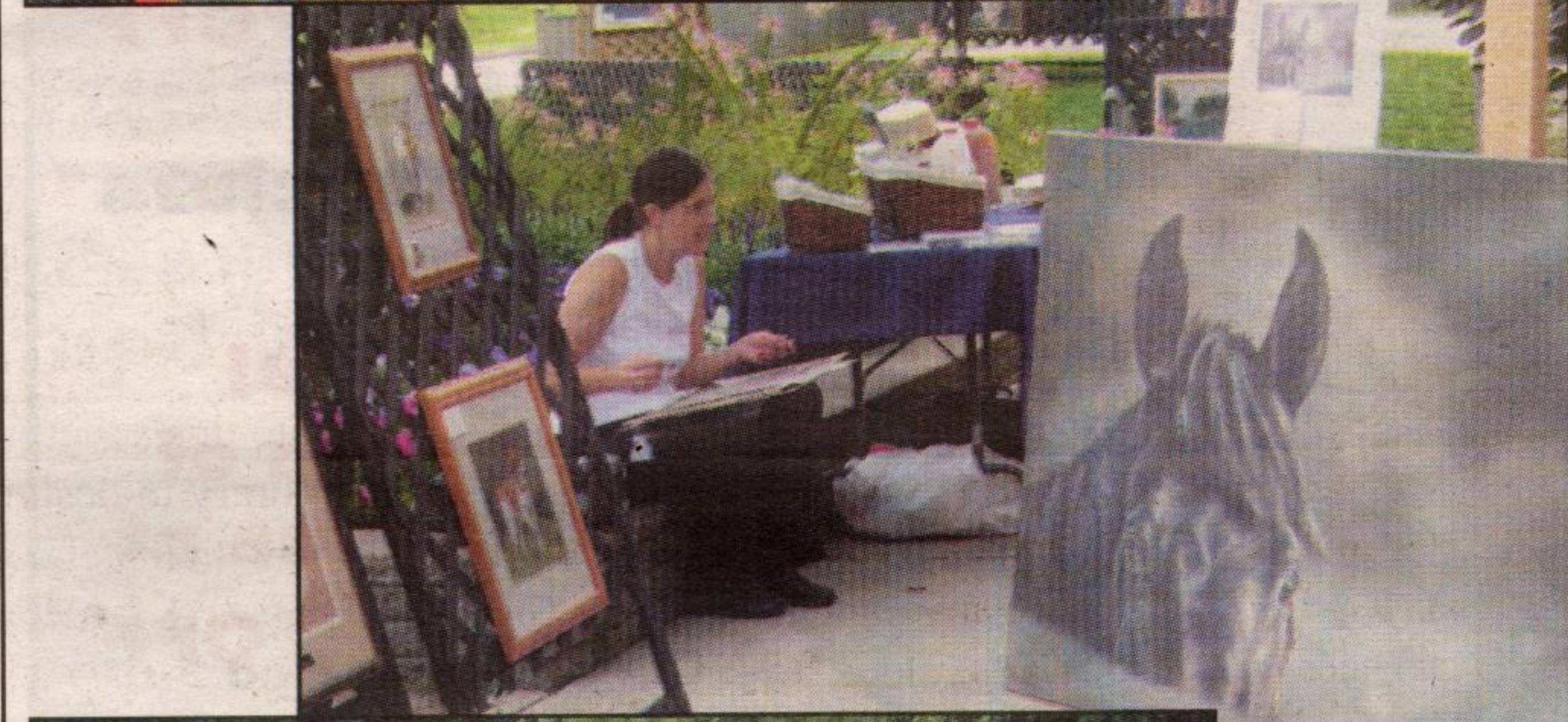
"I love to be outside painting. There's so much beauty in and around the escarpment - time escapes me when I paint outdoors", said Rammell.

Elliot, Shantz and Rammell would like to thank Robin of The Hairitage Salon for the use of their corner location and Campbellville's community for their support and successful 2-day art show.

"It's great that people are purchasing originals to decorate their homes. With so many choices in art decorations, it's refreshing to know that original art is still appreciated", commented Elliot.



Terry Rammell



Linda Shantz



Doug Elliott

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