

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

He was a quiet boy, so his excitement was not apparent to those who did not know him well. But excited he was, for he had been looking forward to this week in the country for almost four years. His older brother had been here on his own, and so had his young sister, but something had always stood in his way, and he had had to wait.

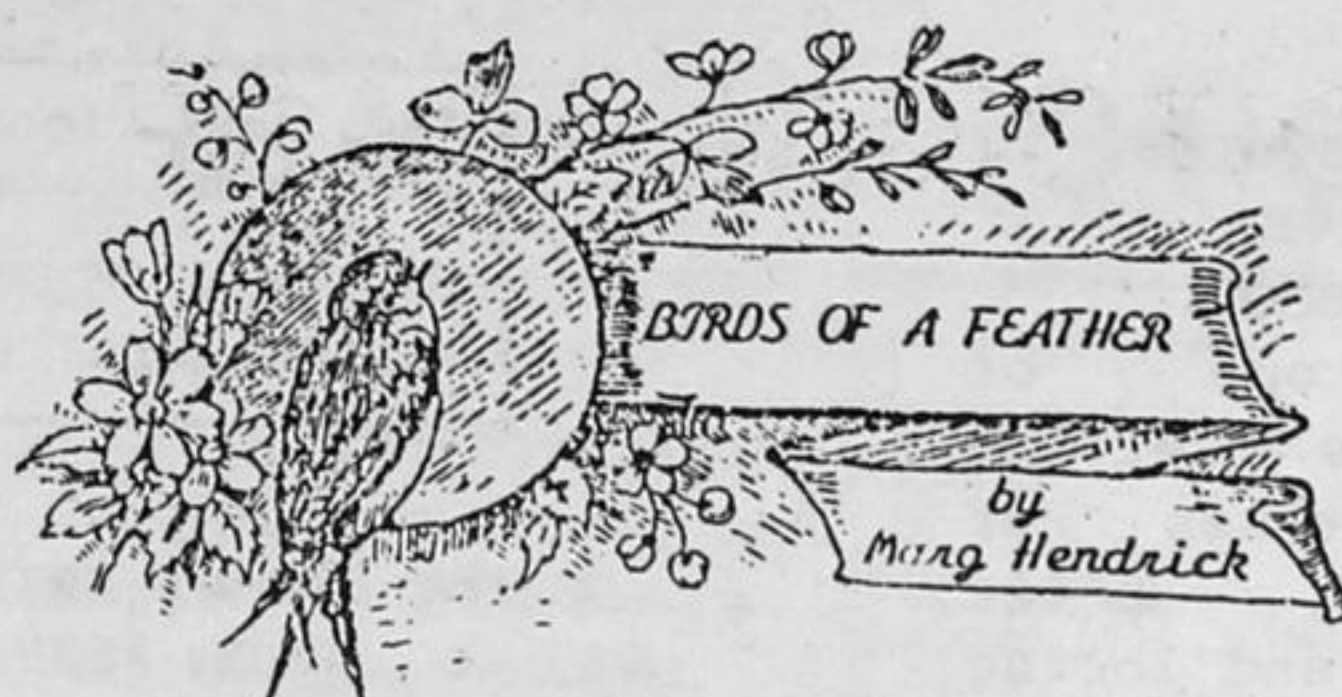
Now he was fortunate enough to be birdwatching with the North Leeds Birdwatchers. Both his brother and sister had good bird lists, but he was starting almost from 'scratch'; for him nearly every bird would be a lifer.

What luck! He was not only driving in Bill Cutfield's car but he was also in the coveted front seat. His siblings had told him how much fun it was to bird with Bill, though, mind you, he had been warned, (by someone who shall remain nameless) not to take any of Bill's somewhat colourful language home to Mom! (Sorry Bill).

It was a lovely day, sunny and warm and the destination for this field trip was Wolfe Island. Neither the lad's brother or sister had ever been there, and he had been told that even though it was July - a poor month for birding - there could be good birding on the island.

By the time the group reached Wolfe Island, the bird list had begun to grow. The boy was glad to add new species to his list, even though he knew his siblings already had them on theirs. However, he secretly hoped we would find some species that was unique to his.

A trip to the sewage lagoon proved exciting. There he had good looks at Blue-winged Teal and a Spotted Sandpiper. A Gadwall with young swam quietly as he watched through the telescope. Suddenly, what excitement, a Wilsons Phalarope flew in - a bird unique to his list!



Moreover, it is a species that is difficult to find here.

The field trip continued. Interesting birds such as Double-crested Cormorant, Caspian Tern, Upland Sandpiper, Red-eyed Vireo, Northern Cardinal and Northern Harrier were seen.

Lunch by the water tasted good and the banter among the other birders was enjoyed. After lunch the driving trip continued, when suddenly, a large owl was seen on the ground by the road. It was soon evident that the bird, identified as a Great Horned Owl, was injured. The only thing to do was to capture it and take it to Kit Chubb at the Avian Care and Research Foundation in Verona. Kit and her husband Robin, care for injured birds.

Upon arrival Kit immediately gave the owl an injection, naming the medication. Douglas whispered, "That's one of my medications". Kit explained that it appeared that the bird had been brain damaged, and she fixed a 'bed' for it in a box of pine needles.

Birding was over for the day, and Pauline Hockey asked Douglas what was the bird of the day for him. It was the Great Horned Owl and it was also a species which neither his brother or sister had on their lists! The next morning saw my grandson Douglas, up bright and early. He worked hard to get a good look at a Common Yellowthroat which was chucking and skulking in the bushes. I knew then that a true birder had been born! "We'll have you for a visit soon again, Douglas" I said, "and you'll get some more new species for your list."

But it was not to be shortly thereafter it

was discovered, that, in spite of a successful bone-marrow transplant, Douglas' leukemia had returned. His little sister Elizabeth (8) had bravely donated the marrow that would have saved his life, had not some cancer cells survived the radiation treatment given before the transplant. Douglas, who was only 12 years old, was well aware that he was going to die, and he faced that fact with the same "maturity, determination, and a well documented streak of stubbornness" with which he had faced the ups and downs of his four year illness.

On September 30, from time-to-time Douglas watched the birds at the feeder from his hospital bed, which had been set up in the family TV room. He died early in the morning on October 1 enveloped by the love of his family. His older brother Andrew (14), exhibiting a maturity beyond his years, helped his parents cope with the seizures that came at the end.

Each child in the family chose something that Douglas treasured, to go with him to his final resting place. Andrew's choice was the Peterson bird book which I had given to him.

I am sure that when Elizabeth and Andrew get their first Great Horned Owl, they will remember how excited Douglas was to tell about his. As for me, I will always be grateful that Douglas had the chance to visit us on his own, as he had always wanted to do. It is a happy memory that will be ours forever.

Margaret Youldon phoned to say that a young Common Loon had been taken to the biological station

at Chaffey's Lock with a fish hook in its neck. After being treated, it was returned to the area where it had been found. The parent birds appeared to reject their returned offspring. Margaret felt the fact that fishermen were feeding the young bird did not help matters and the loon eventually disappeared. Margaret believes that there are times when nature should be left alone, and that the above-mentioned feeding was perhaps one of those times.

On September 22, Shirley Wimperis saw 5 flocks of loons within a mile and she also had Red-necked Grebes in her bay on October 5. Her last Ruby-throated Hummingbird left on September 16.

John Goodman saw a large skein of Canada Geese on September 28, Annette Mess saw about 60 on September 30 and Shirley Wimperis observed about 500 in her bay on October 4.

Eastern Bluebirds were seen on October 2 by Shirley Wimperis, October 11 by Elsie Goodman and on October 12 by Jansje Keates.

Dave Willison had a long list of interesting birds but because space is running out, I'll only mention a couple. He had Pine Siskins on September 29 as did Annette Mess on September 30. Dave also had a Common Redpoll on September 30. It would be nice for a change if we were to have a big winter finch year.

I hope that my readers have not found this month's column too much of a 'downer'. To be truthful, it was difficult to think of anything else, and it has served as a catharsis for me.

Please call 359-5178 with your sightings. I should be more available this month. Until next month.

GOOD BIRDING!

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