

A BIRDING CONVERSION

BY EVELYN MEADER

For years a casual interest in our feathered friends has prompted me to set up a feeder in winter. It is only since our move to an old farmhouse in the fields outside Charlottetown that we have been bitten by the binocular bearing, fieldguide leafing, eye-stripe, wing-bar, undulating flight, tail bobbing all seasonal bird watching bug.

The transformation from sporadic observer to daily bird brain can be credited to the booping bobolinks, and naturalist, Geoff Hogan. We moved to the Kinlock Rd. homestead two years ago in April. The chaos, clutter and confusion of uprooting a family and twenty years of accumulated treasures, had barely subsided when flocks of "boop-ee, boop-oo" computer burds turned our long entry way into a video chirping arcade. With their state of the art songs our long lane became Bobolink Row (long or short 'o' pronunciation). At the same time an ad for the course "Birdlife of P.E.I. appeared in the Guardian. Our bobolink buddies provided the motivation and Geoff's fascinating fact-filled lectures hooked me on this avian hobby.



Even curious Georgie, our P.E.I. spud dog, has learned to wait quietly when I stop and peer through the binoculars at yet another of Nature's marvels. "Wow! Look at that, Georgie!"

"Aroooo," she prances and gives a little howl of approval. Georgie also vigorously convinces the crows that they should leave when I feel they've had their share of feeder offerings. She's a pseudo-ferocious canine scarecrow.

The fields, the woods and the shore nearby keep my binoculars like a battery, ever ready. Swallows often energetically wheel and pirouette by on their endless bug safari. By contrast, one sunny morning, we happened upon a hundred bank swallows sunbathing on a warm black asphalt road in an uninhabited subdivision across the road. We quietly left them to their well deserved rest in road surface comfort.

Then there was the day I was focusing on a small sparrow on the feeder. What species was it? Suddenly a giant filled the focus range - my glasses overflowed with bird. It was a greater black backed gull soaring in to use the feeder as an observation post. It was quite the sighting, by gully!

The topper of my observation highlights, so far, occurred on the night of a full moon, close to Hallowe'en. I went out, with the dog, to savour the silver landscape. As I stood drinking in the heavenly scene a black shape winged quietly past the lantern moon. Thoughts of season inspired vampires shivered down my spine. As I stood in awe and watched, the silent shape flew closer, made a complete circle around us and disappeared into the distant shadows. An owl! The Great Pumpkin himself couldn't have created a better atmosphere. I floated home with nary a broomstick.

In Southport about 25 little girls, who call me "Brown Owl", have become pretty keen birders this spring. One of them, Megan Stubbs, returned from Ont. recently, just bursting. "Hi, Brown Owl. I visited my grannie and I saw bluejays, crows, hawks and cardinals!" Even the kids give a hoot over feathered findings.

As those screeching black-capped fellows, who inhabit the old bridge piers, might say, "Ornithological life has definitely taken a "tern" for the better at the Meaders.