

Sobering Signs of Troubles to Come

A few weeks back I wrote of my concern that many of the roadside birds I loved to observe on my late-afternoon drives seemed to be absent. I had gotten used to the diminishing numbers of meadowlarks and bobolinks, albeit during the spring migration quite a few of the more desirable species passed through for a week or two, but now that summer has nearly arrived, the usually dependable numbers of killdeers, song sparrows, vesper and field sparrows along the country roadsides are shockingly gone.

The real shocker is the absence of killdeers which I used to see in abundance especially wherever side roads or trails offered suitable habitat like stretches of gravel suitable for their nests of a few pebbles selected and placed in a sort of circle. In my youth the killdeer held a position of sacredness nearly equal to my totem, the meadowlark. Both were angels heralding the of the miracle of Spring.

I even scratched out the beginnings of a poem: “Dakota spring above the killdeer cove/ Comes like a resurrection of lost love/ A new sun has escaped the tomb of night/ Blessing the waking land with life and healing light.”

We took a trip down old hwy 81 to Fargo a few days ago and I was horrified: not a single killdeer, sparrow hawk, kingbird, bobolink, or field sparrow showed up on the entire trip. That can only mean that either nature or man is killing our birds at an alarming rate. I’ve already rued the paucity of bees for pollination. Soon, when we bring up “the birds and the bees,” our kids will be clueless as to what we’re going to tell them about.

My suspicions have always tilted toward over-spraying of pesticides and herbicides. Our drive to spray and/or mow any plant or insect we deem undesirable has always seemed over the top.

We once left enough natural “weed” growth in the ditches for lots of different birds to nest, some more than once. But now we give the birds a scant month to get their first hatch over with, and then it seems we have to mow. If so, why not just mow the roadside slant and leave the wide bottoms and field side slants for wildlife?

I used to ride the country gravel roads with my Honda Trail 90 just to inhale the glorious bouquet of aromas issuing from sweet clover, alfalfa, and wild roses. Now I can’t remember the last time I smelled, much less, saw wild roses.

Once many farmers confined their cosmetic mowing to their immediate farm yards, but now some mow miles of adjacent ditches. No wonder our birds and fragrant wild flowers are dwindling. I like the idea of letting some ditches grow up and making hay of them later. That seems sensible. As for fall burning, I’m not really against that as it’s delayed as long as possible.

Warren, Pat, and I used to road-hunt those ditches for pheasants, and the weedier the ditch the more birds we saw. Now we must seek out public hunting plots where you need a brace of Labradors to have much success. Nearly everything else is posted and one needs to go on line for permission. Those not on line can forget about it. All this is called progress by the tidyers, but for us slobs who love thick cover, it’s reason enough to quit the hunting game all together; that or move to South Dakota, or out west to Jesse Vedder country. She’s the eloquent Forum champion of western Dakota.

Lately, the natural cycles of climatic fluctuation have brought us wild fires, and the smoke from Canada. The alarmists are crying “climate change,” but I doubt that. “What is now, has been before of olden times, and there is no new thing under the sun,” says Solomon.

Ironically the foresters wanting to set backfires along the northern border to keep the Canadian fires from spreading our way, are being opposed by politicized environmentalists claiming danger to some handy, new-found endangered species. I think their motives are highly suspect, and I doubt that many even give a rat's pitoot about true conservation.

They claim they want to save the planet. But I have a hunch opportunistic politicians really want another crisis they can manipulate to get elected. They don't seem interested in sitting down with impartial scientists to seek out workable solutions.

But whatever is destroying so many varieties of birds we used to see and hear, Rachel Carson's prophecy of a coming "silent spring" is happening, and as the miners say when their canary dies, "Let's move; we could be next."

My deeper sense sees all this as the fulfillment of Bible prophecy spoken by Jesus, Paul, and others of the coming of very dark and "perilous times worse than anything the world has ever seen." Still I miss my birds, and hope they are still alive and singing somewhere. We need to pray that God will bring forth new leaders with a genuine love for the planet, and the wisdom to see her saved.

Gene Pinkney/ 23-06-12- For The Daily News