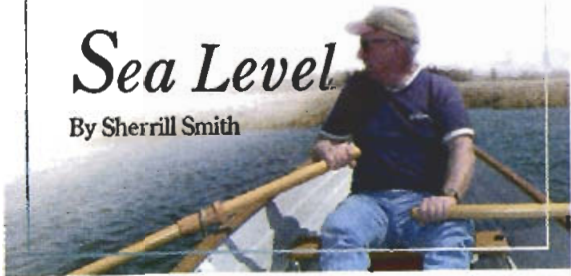


Sea Level

By Sherrill Smith



February Markers are not all good, not all bad.

"February 2 will be remembered as the date when uncertainty was removed as to whether humans had anything to do with climate change on this planet. The evidence is on the table." So saith Achim Steiner, executive director of United Nations Environment Program.

Commercial fishing continues to be the most dangerous career. Two weeks ago we read of New England fishermen lost at sea in two horrible sinkings. Scientists were warning us of rising sea levels and stronger storms and Cape real estate could go off the market in generations to come. Maybe the killer tornado that struck in Florida foretold future frights.

Day after day we search for an exit from the Middle East, where we had no business killing and getting killed. Bill Richardson is our most successful and respected international negotiator, surely our best qualified presidential candidate with his sensible non-military

answers, but who's listening? This, too, is a mid-winter sadness. We better listen up if we want the very best.

We've been sad too long. We need therapy. Birds and animals to nurse us, perhaps.

Did our hearts not go out to a two-year-old German shepherd who was the only witness of a car that careened off the road and crashed down the slope? The dog saw the woman thrown through the rear window and spread atop the trunk, grabbed the lady by her collar and dragged her through briars and branches to the edge of the road and stayed until someone stopped. The victim weighed almost twice as much as the dog.

This wonderful animal, like your dog and mine, knows nothing about Iraq or rising tides or the disappearance of fishing vessels gone to the seabed with all hands.

We need to table our accumulated sadnesses for a while, perhaps, to watch from the kitchen window a backyard

Birds to the rescue



STILL LIFE: A cedar waxwing, set to rest in Cape Cod style.

been doing birds forever, an artist who could not complete his bird before painting a yellow bar across the ends of his tail feathers. It was either Stephen Vincent Benet or William, his brother – both poets – who offered a tribute to James Audubon and included the cedar waxwing along with the artist:

*Some men live for warlike
deeds,*

Some for women's words.

John James Audubon

Lived to look at birds.

Pretty birds, and funny birds,

All our native fowl

From the little cedar waxwing

To the Great Horned Owl.

According to robins, hard frozen earth is not welcoming to worm lovers. In the coldest times they gather in flocks from wherever they have been in hiding and with great wisdom move into berry bushes. We are pleased that our large holly bush offered more berries than ever before this winter. We had what we needed and shared with others at Christmas and even now a flock of birds can easily fill their stomachs.

society of birds performing as healers for many shut-ins. I have seen this often and I know how days are brightened by birds. When no one else calls, birds do.

A few mornings ago I left the house early but stopped short at the discovery of a dead bird beneath a bedroom window, a cedar waxwing, an extraordinarily beautiful work of art. He had struck the glass, landing on the frozen garden bed.

When a small flock of waxwings clog a berry bush the visit is quick. "Here today, gone tomorrow" is how they are described. Our dead bird was left behind like a calling card.

I put our visitor in a clamshell. So beautiful a creature should not be carelessly tossed aside. He represented the work of a brilliant artist who has

For the robin meat-eaters, red berries are not as delicious as worms, but berried bushes will save their lives when the soil is unbreakable. Feeding stations, long before our arrival on earth, have been in place to keep wildlife alive through winter. The beauty of the berries is a bonus.

We are victims of too much bad news and need a break now and then to appreciate the good that surrounds hard times. May the birds grab us by our collars and drag us from the briars to a higher ground.