

# editorials & commentary

## When We Watch Wildlife

Why are we so interested in the ways of wildlife?

Is it a mere fascination with different creatures below the evolutionary level of human beings? I wonder if we really know. At any rate, the subject is well expounded in perhaps thousands of publications throughout the world.

Maybe it is just because we like to look at ourselves in reverse. Maybe it is a kind of self-analysis. We talk about animals in a way that we can not always talk about people, although we have them in mind. For surely, how we view the doings of wildlife are not always animal ways but simply what an observer thinks are its ways. Among ourselves this is called gossip. With nothing more than specs of dubious information the actions of other people are grossly misinterpreted by malicious chatters.

There is a lot of gossiping about birds at the feeder, squirrels in the yard, pigeons on the roof and crows in the fields. This is usually done in good faith, however, to point out the unusual incidents that we notice and consider worth reporting. Sometimes it is like saying we know a person simply by his or her outstanding feats in life.

More than just a genuine interest is needed to interpret the doings of wildlife. One needs a kind of sustaining devotion to observation under varying conditions throughout the year. Summer observations are not enough to supply the information for matching conclusions as to why animals do this or that at such and such a time and not at another. The beaver, for example, is a rather different kind of animal in the summer than it is in the fall. The October beaver is a busy timberjack cutting and hauling aspen and maple branches to its backyard feed pile which will serve as its winter food supply. One who only observes the fall beaver might be misled into thinking it to be a constant lodge and dam builder and repair worker and timberjack, whereas in the summer it does relatively little tree cutting and in the winter it is almost in a state of retirement where its ponds are entombed by ice.

Normally, wild animals have very little interest in people other than what we might provide in the way of food and shelter. Mainly, they keep an eye on us to avoid us and when we are

not looking to pilfer from us. This is so from camp mice to dump bears. Their natural elusiveness, however, is corrupted when they develop a sense of dependence on the food and shelter which they have found is easier to get from man than nature, if the instinct to flee from what is man-scented is ignored. So your camp in the woods may be shared by deer mice, flying squirrels, bats, hornets, swallows and robins, ants and now and then a raccoon, skunk or porcupine.

Perhaps the real fascination about wildlife is that each creature lives a life for which it is physically adapted. There is no overlapping. The goshawk has its hooked beak and sharp talons, the merganser its paddle feet and long, serrated beak, the beaver its ever-growing chisel-sharp teeth and

NORTH COUNTRY



EDWIN REID

the bobcat its long, pointed incisors and retractable claws. Each animal knows its way of life and no other. It has no alternatives as does man. It is man who is confused as to which way is best for him, and how far he should go this way or that way. Wildlife has no such problem. Each creature lives the way given it and makes the best of it. Maybe we envy them. Maybe some of this purposefulness rubs off on us when we observe wildlife with a sensitivity toward simple beings. Maybe we just like making contact for a little while with the ancient and set currents of life from which we have been removed for so long, or so it seems.

To add to the intrigue we ask all the questions. We think the animals give us the answers, but that is often

debatable. And no matter what is learned by scores of naturalists and recorded in print only what one actually observes has authenticity. Too often one is simply out to vouch for what he has read. The fault here is that this habit may cloud one's mind and cause us to miss much of what is to be seen. It might be compared to a person looking for a lost friend who isn't in the crowd. On the other hand, all the other faces though seen are quickly forgotten as though they were never seen.

And since animals cannot talk back and criticize us for our erroneous conclusions or sue us for libel or slander all goes smoothly. Nice to talk so authoritatively about creatures who have not said a word in their own defense or ever will. For example, suppose you were to suddenly witness a family quarrel or street fight between two people you did not know, would you promptly take sides? Would you know what was the right side, or just conclude which is the right side as you interpret the action. You might be right, but then you might also be wrong. But there was no time for a true evaluation. The fast action demanded a quick decision and you reacted accordingly. Too often this is how nature deals with us. What is really the correct interpretation of a split-second observation? Why did that little brown vole suddenly emerge from the safety of its hole and scamper back and forth over the leaves in broad daylight like a mechanical toy gone berserk and then disappear in the brush? Must I know?

We should know better than to think we must always come up with a specific conclusion as to the meaning of what we have seen in the wilds. It would be better to stay home than go afield to collect material on which to base false and hasty conclusions. Better to go simply to see and to gather a store of observations from which on another day a conclusion will arise like the sun coming over the hill.

Why such caution? For one thing, a conclusion is not an admission of one's limitation, a summing up of one's knowledge. It says, this is as far as I have gone or expect to go. It is your end, not the subjects. On the other hand, it may indicate that you have reached a wrong conclusion and landed at a lonely dead end. Go afield to refresh your mind with the joy of seeing and watching what is wild and free.

## Separator Explosion Recounted

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following accounts from the April 25 and May 2, 1980 Courier and Freeman and from St. Lawrence County court records describe an explosion at an area milk receiving station. Gideon Ellis, an employee of the station, was injured and later died. Earl Pattison compiled the information for the Courier.

From the April 25 Courier: "About eight o'clock Tuesday morning, a separator in the Parishville Center Receiver exploded, wrecking the factory and nearly killing a man."

"Daniel and Gideon Ellis were working there and Gideon was oiling the separator, which was apparently running smoothly, when, without a moment's warning it exploded. Gideon was hurled about ten feet into a vat of sour milk and was badly bruised."

"He was at once taken home and Dr. Botsford summoned. His wounds were dressed and he appeared fairly comfortable, but internal injuries of a serious nature may have been sustained. Dan Ellis was struck by one of the pieces which passed through one of his

legs, but he is not seriously injured.

"The separator had a capacity of 2,000 pounds of milk an hour. In addition to wrecking the building, another separator nearby was destroyed."

"Charles Holden, who was delivering milk at the receiver and was on his wagon outside, was struck by a piece of the flying separator and hurled a distance of seven or eight feet but was not seriously injured."

And from the May 2 Courier: "On Tuesday morning our neighborhood was shocked by the news of the calamity at the separating station."

"Gideon Ellis received injuries which resulted in his death on Friday morning about five o'clock. He leaves a wife, formerly Miss Clara Champney. Mr. Ellis was about thirty-five years of age and his life was spent in this and the adjoining district."

"Since he was fourteen, he worked for farmers until he settled on a place where he has lived since his marriage and from which his funeral was attended on Sunday by the Rev. M. Rowley of Parishville.

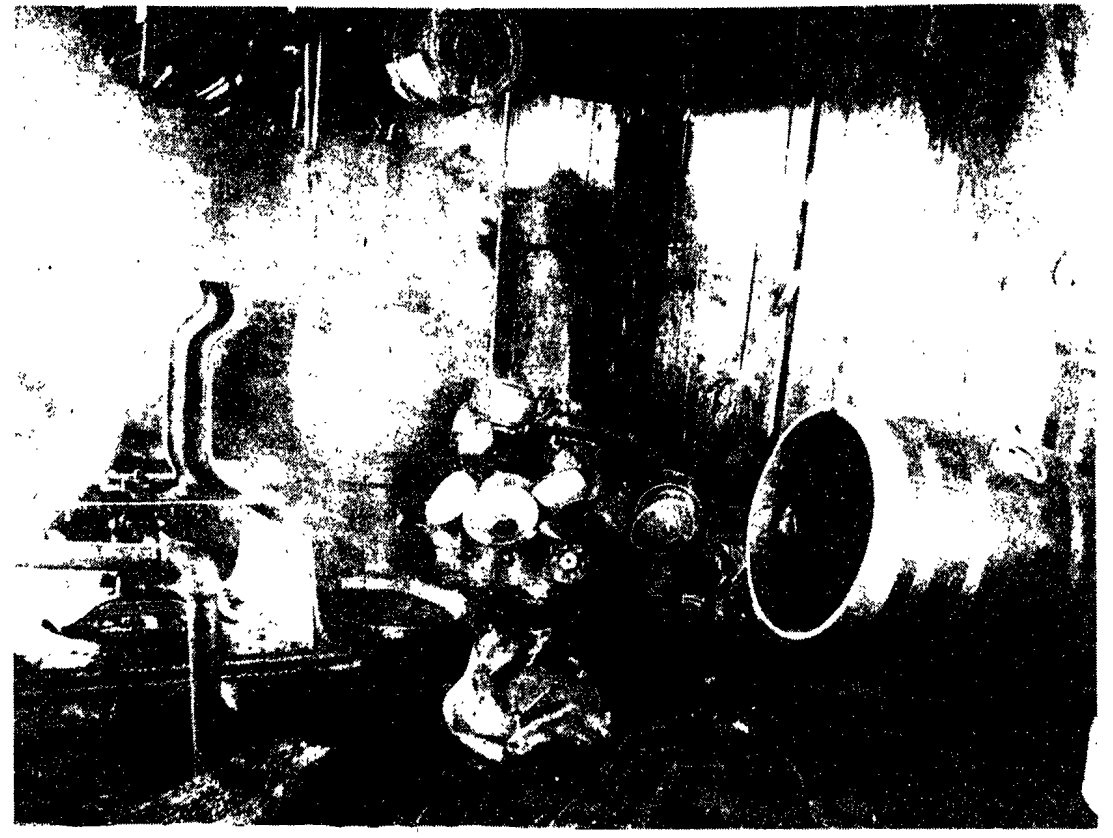
"Excellent music was rendered by Elmer Mitchell and wife. The West

Parishville Grange attended in a body and conducted the services at the grave in Garfield Cemetery."

"Daniel Ellis, who was very seriously hurt, is able to get about on crutches."

From county court records: "Re: Gideon W. Ellis, Jr., file 3444, surrogate's office, Canton. On 24th of April, 1906, G.W. Ellis, Jr., in the employ of Era Converse, Herbert Nelson and Fred Trash, who were conducting a creamery business, among other places at Parishville Center, on which date a milk separating machine exploded, from which he died three days later. He lost his life through a defective machine improperly installed. The owners agreed to pay and Mrs. Ellis accepted an award of \$500."

"An inventory of his estate included the following: 2 stoves, \$25; 1 bedroom set, \$15; clothing, \$5; one set transfer sleigh, \$2; one seeder, \$3; one horse, \$10; cash, \$100; 1 set double harness, \$10; 1 lumber wagon, \$10; 6 two-year-old heifers, \$90; 1 set sleds, \$10; forks and shovels, \$1; chain, \$1; buggy, \$8; spring tooth harrow, \$6; total \$386."



SEPARATOR EXPLOSION — On April 24, 1906 a milk separator in the Parishville Center receiving station exploded, wrecking the station and causing injuries to

several persons, one of whom later died. The above photo shows the interior of the station after the explosion.

## IN NATURE: Mysteries Of Migration

BY ELIZABETH VOGT  
Coordinator

**Indian Creek Nature Center**  
The seasonal movements of birds have been observed by man for thousands of years. The most casual observer cannot help noticing a honking flight of geese as it fills the sky on a crisp fall day.

Many of our large birds, such as hawks and geese, make their move during the day and are easily seen. Many smaller birds, however, seek the protection of darkness to avoid predation and to save the daylight hours for feeding. These little birds seem to disappear overnight and it is not surprising that these sudden evacuations gave rise to a variety of early theories about bird behavior.

Aristotle maintained that certain birds transformed into other species for the winter and changed back in the spring and that swallows flew to the mountain tops where they shed their feathers and hibernated. Until the 1700's it was generally accepted that swallows hibernated in the mud bottoms of ponds and lakes. It was not until man became more mobile himself and was able to observe birds around the globe, that some understanding of seasonal bird migration began to develop.

In our area, southerly migration is associated with the approach of cold weather, but it is not cold weather itself which drives birds south for they are well adapted to withstand frigid temperatures. It is the decreased food supply caused by cold weather which drives them away. Food is of primary importance to a bird. In recent years with the popularity of winter bird feeding, man has actually affected the migratory behavior of some birds. Insect eaters (except for woodpeckers which are adapted for excavating bugs from beneath tree bark) are naturally the ones most disrupted by

Nov. 8, 1944 — Potsdam wins final football tilt with Canton 19-6. Final game for Albert Sellers, Robert Jacob, Carl Rowe, captain Deid Towne, Joe Adams, Allan Gschwind, Lloyd Wilcox, Jack Whalen and Richard Decouric.

Nov. 8, 1944 — Rialto, Wed., Thurs., Friday: Charles Boyer, Ingrid Bergman and Joseph Cotten in "Gas Light".

Nov. 8, 1944 — Sensational reading bargains. True Story, 1 year; Pathfinder, 1 year; Silver Screen, six months; Household, 1 year; Poultry Tribune and Farm Journal, 2 years. All seven for only \$3.50.

SINCLAIR CORNERS, Nov. 8, 1944 — A farewell party was held Friday for Lindsay Treise by the 4-H Club. He will enter Cornell University.

1944 - St. Lawrence Creamery sets world record of a million pounds annually.

circa 1847 — Why genealogy gets baffling? Webster, Col. William, aged 67, to Martha Winslow, Kingston, N.H., aged 19. The bridegroom married his sister's granddaughter, which makes the bride a wife to her great-uncle, sister-in-law to her grandfather and grandmother, aunt to her father and mother, a great aunt to her brothers and sisters. She is also step-mother to five children, fourteen grandchildren and one great-grandchild. —copied from Vermont Branches and Twigs," newsletter of Genealogical Society of Vermont, summer 1980, vol. 9, no. 3.

compiled by Earl Pattison

## From Our Files

Sept. 5, 1878 — Nearly 500 tubs of butter shipped from this village on Monday to the New York and Eastern Markets. Price paid here, 12-18 cents.

1878 — So many counterfeit one and two dollar Canada notes are in circulation that the government is having new plates prepared.

1878 — We are requested to tell the street commissioner that there is an annoying amount of small stones in our streets, caused by the heavy rain. The hills near the Fairgrounds is in bad shape.

1878 — Two men and a bear attracted the attention of the boys on our streets. A muzzle and a chain on one of the three indicated the bear. After a few antics, the hat was passed around, with such poor success that the party wandered off to greener pastures.

WEST POTSDAM, March 1, 1911 — At the auction sale of the property of Nettie Sells at Slab City last Thursday, J.L. Hazen bought the house and lot. E.L. Hazen has since bo't the farm.

March 1, 1911 — Perplexed. "Your daughter's brain, Madam, appears to be normal."

"Dear, dear. We've never had anything of that kind in the family before."

WEST POTSDAM, March 1, 1911 — B.R. Hazleton has rented the J.K. Sells farm recently purchased by E.M. Hazen for a term of three years. The town well has been drilled to a depth of 64 feet and has 15 feet of water, which it is hoped, will prove sufficient for all needs.

March 15, 1911 — Miss Grace Pease opened her school on the turnpike last

week. Master Clarence and Miss Florence Wright are attending her school.

WARM BROOK, March 22, 1911 — School opened here Monday with J. Conrad Elliott as teacher.

POTSDAM, April 5, 1911 — The Philpot place, corner Bay and Water Street, was sold Wednesday at auction to F.L. Cubley Esq. for \$1,075.

HANNAWA FALLS, March 12, 1911 — John Doe has been looking up the whiskey traffic in this place the past week.

Choir rehearsal Thursday eve at the home of Martin Manley.

April 26, 1911 — The Parker homestead on Upper Leroy Street has been purchased by John A. May, considering \$3,000. There are about 16 acres in the tract with good buildings.

Oct. 13, 1915 — Masons buy Reynolds Lot. Pay \$4,750 for Elm Street Property. Temple will be built at future time, alteration to be made. Masons have been considering purchase of property for erection of Temple for some time and had in mind the Wright lot on lower Elm Street. The building will be remodeled somewhat and fitted up for the usages to which it will be placed.

POTSDAM, Sept. 5, 1928 — New Front on Masonic Temple. Work started by W.H. Rice of Lowville on contract to remodel the front of the building. Workmen are busy removing the tower at the southeast of the property and the old piazza.

The iron will be Colonial type with four Corinthian pillars supporting the pediment. There will be two smaller columns with a Doric top, fronting the main entrance. Work will

take six weeks a cost between \$6,000-\$7,000.

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the cold weather, while many of the seed eaters can fulfill most of their dietary needs in your backyard.

Generally a bird will go no further than necessary to find an adequate food supply. Ducks and geese will seek open water and robins a reasonably thawed piece of earth. The arctic tern however, demands a diet of crustaceans and travels 10,000 miles one way to find a suitable site.

There are a number of popular routes or flyways which birds follow, often along such geographical landmarks as mountain ridges or stream valleys. Birds will take advantage of wind currents to give them a natural air lift, a practice for which hawks are particularly well known. Some large birds seek a head-wind to help support

their body weight and many smaller birds prefer a tail-wind to give them a boost.

The ability of birds to navigate, often in the dark and often in flocks of previously uninitiated "first-year birds," seems incredible and is still not fully understood. Other than geographical landmarks, it is believed that birds use the sun, moon, and stars to orient themselves. When these are obscured, they may resort to wind currents, water sounds, and animal noises.

It is no surprise that many birds will never reach their destinations. With all the hazards and demands of migration, the remarkable thing seems to be that so many manage to return to our yards each spring.

## letters

### Thanks Voters

To the Editor:  
I wish to thank everyone who voted for and supported me in any way during the recent campaign and election in the Town of Stockton.

It was such a pleasure to renew many old friendships and establish new ones during my door to door campaign. People were most gracious to invite me into their homes and I was very gratified by their interests in town matters.

Citizens of Stockton — keep up the interest in your town affairs and what better way to see your elected town officials in action than by attending the monthly town board meetings? I'll see you there.

Thank you  
Daniel E. Chambers

### Thoughts On A Bridge

To the Editor:  
THOUGHTS ON A BRIDGE ... In the yellow glare of sodium lights, one enters Potsdam's backyard over four magnificent lanes of superhighway ... to a grumbling halt on old Market Street. Alas, any time saved on the four-lane is more than lost in the maze of traffic lights at either end. Some 17 at the Pine-Clarkson-Maple angle alone Guinness records, where are you? I recall 25 years ago we had only one. This is progress?

I think of the definition of an elephant ... "A mouse built to government specifications." One more example of Richard's Rule, or "The Principle of Least Efficiency." "Any tax-paid organization tends to grow without limit, which growth is the main goal of the organization." Or, alternatively, "Given several choices of action, a government agency will always choose the most expensive and least efficient one in order to justify further growth of the agency and its budget."

Some lines kept running through my head as I waited interminably for the lights to change:

"By the wide bridge that arched the food. Here the embattled taxpayers stood. Their bills November's breeze uncurled. As they uttered a groan heard round the world." (Sorry, Waldo)

Dick Sanford  
West Potsdam

### Poetry Corner

"Twas the week before Thanksgiving, When in the Village center; One-way traffic was still scurrying, In prelude to fender bender;

Signs were hung with all new hardware, The DOT way to signal beware; Residents have watched with such interest, Some in favor and others -voicing protest;

And travelers in cars and heavy-laden truck, Try to understand painted lines without much luck.

In a few days the traffic flow will change, And we'll all be exposed to two-way lanes;

Rapidly our streets will not be the same, Village officials will call brands by name;

"On Dasher! now Aspen! Calical and Seville!, On Mustang! On Chevette! on Cutlass! and Regal! To the corner of Elm and Market! To the confusion at Route 11 and Pine! Now drive with caution and watch the double yellow line!"

The Rescue Squad is ready with poise, Their sirens to whirl and create a sad noise; Pray that all of us drivers will be lively and quick, So we can avoid another auto's nick;

As we watch the DOT go out of sight, Pray it too will look back at our plight.

A Resident of Potsdam

# Courier & Freeman

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