

A winter afield: Always more than meets the eye

As my colleague Gretchen Whitman so persuasively penned in her first contribution to this column, winter represents a period when us humans can and should rest, reset and recharge ahead of the warm, daylight-packed days to come.

For the Cape May naturalist, winter is also a slower time, one when we tend to move more slowly on our daily walks, spend more time appreciating everyday sights and ponder more on the natural world's mysteries.

However, this doesn't mean there is nothing afoot.

On the whole, we like tidiness and organization. Humans have always wanted to place things and ideas into boxes, categories, frameworks, all with well-defined borders.

When we think of animal migration, we often assign it a particular season. We know that, in our hemisphere, birds fly north in the spring and south in the fall.

And while in an overarching sense this is true, birds and other animals don't necessarily adhere to our own version of the calendar; there's myriad strategies for movement and survival among the 350 or so species of birds that spend some amount of time in Cape May each year.

For some, their migrations span thousands of miles each year, as in the case of many of our insect-eating songbirds.

Cues in day length, sun angle and no doubt others tell these birds when to be where in their annual travels. Many know nothing of winter in Cape May; they may share their Central or South American wintering grounds with toucans, quetzals and parrots.

For others, the path is at least somewhat shorter. They have adapted to the winter conditions of the Northeast or Mid-Atlantic, such as in many of our waterfowl and birds of prey. Many of these shorter-distance migrants also exhibit a fair amount of elasticity when it comes to their winter homes.

A perfect example? The snow goose, a common cold-season denizen of southern New Jersey's farm fields and salt marshes. When true winter conditions hit areas where the geese are wintering, they simply get up and head elsewhere.

When conditions improve a few days or weeks later, the geese often return to their original area. It's something we can



NATURE TALKS

By Tom Reed

see play out here several times a season, as snow geese suddenly leave a snow-filled marsh or ice-choked creek along Delaware Bay to seek refuge a bit farther south, likely on the Delmarva Peninsula.

When the next thaw arrives, flocks can be seen arriving from the southwest, plopping down almost exactly where they had been.

Sometimes, it's Cape May that serves as a temporary refuge. During the most classic of nor'easters, warmer air from the ocean often results in a rainy outcome for Cape May, while areas not far to our north and west can be buried under a foot of snow.

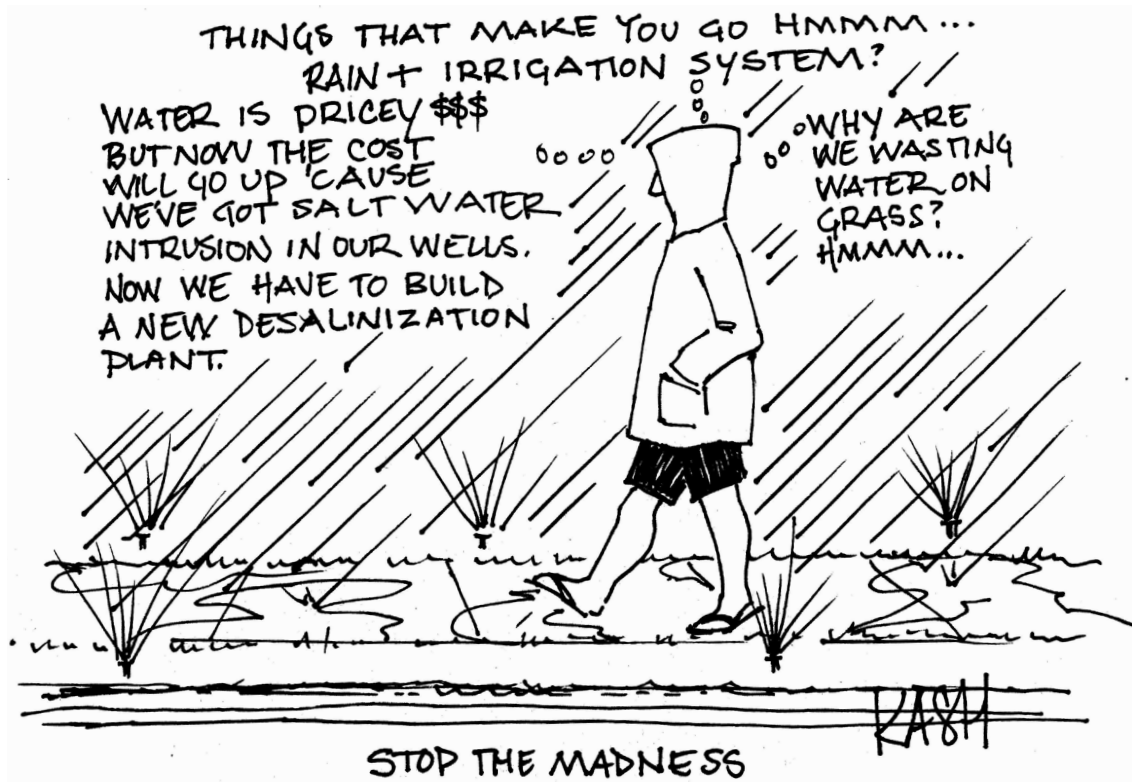
When this scenario plays out, we frequently see a facultative movement of open-country species that flee the interior and take a vacation to the coastal plain.

Sometimes these spur-of-the-moment migrations become evident in our backyards, especially if we maintain bird feeders through the season.

The flock of a thousand blackbirds and grackles that appeared from nowhere and went through \$75 worth of birdseed? They might have just arrived from somewhere in central Pennsylvania, inland Connecticut or even farther afield.

In Cape May, there is rarely a single day in a calendar year when some sort of bird migration isn't happening, and one of

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Biden always intended to pardon his son

To the Editor:

Did anyone ever really believe President Joe Biden when he maintained not only once, but three times that he would not pardon his son Hunter Biden for the crimes that Hunter had been found guilty of in a Delaware Court, in addition to crimes that he hadn't been prosecuted for yet?

Ever since reading about President Biden and watching press conferences where he spoke, it had always been obvious to me that President Biden was one of those politicians who was always reckless when it came to the truth.

President Biden would never have allowed his son Hunter to go

to do a prison stretch if there was anything that he could do about it. I'm inclined to believe that Hunter knew full well that his father would never have allowed him to do a stretch of prison no matter how short it would be.

Then when you think about it and read all the activities Hunter had engaged in with foreign countries, you would have to wonder what the product was that Hunter was selling to these foreign countries.

It's obvious to me he was selling the Biden name. So what does a country that did business with Hunter Biden expect to get for the millions that they were paying him? The only thing that the Bidens had to offer with the family name was favorable influence

when it came to their country's dealings with the United States government.

I have no doubt that Joe Biden benefited personally from his son's foreign country business dealings. But you have to realize that if Joe Biden would have allowed his son to go to jail, his son obviously had and could provide information against his father that would likely be criminal in nature. Would Joe Biden have trusted his son to be quiet as he sat in jail? Probably not.

Joe Biden had to protect himself as well as his son when it came to issuing the presidential pardon.

Hugh E. McGee
Williamsport, Pa.

OTHER SIDE

Lighthouse group to meet in Cape May

By MARK ALLEN

Angelo Rigazio was the very last. Stepping out onto the breakwater one cold, windy winter afternoon, he closed and locked the door behind him; it was December 1973, and that year, Rigazio would be home for Christmas.

That spring, after the U.S. Coast Guard had automated the Harbor of Refuge Lighthouse, it was decided that a crew was no longer required. Thus, the era of manned Delaware Bay lighthouses had come to an end.

The era had commenced in 1769 with the construction of the Cape Henlopen Lighthouse, the second-oldest beacon in what would become the United States.

Within 50 years of their creation, commerce had advanced to a point where a need was identified for a safe harbor of refuge between the deep-water ports of New York and Norfolk, Va., a place where shipping could duck-in and find solace from raging Atlantic storms.

Since such a harbor did not exist, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was tasked with building one. Hence the Harbor of Refuge located just across Delaware Bay from Cape May's Other Side in Lewes.

Actually, the Army Corps would construct two harbors. The first was composed of a 2,100-foot-long breakwater completed in 1869. Consisting of 900,000 tons of granite stone from nearby New Castle, Del., a 56-foot-tall iron lighthouse topped with a fourth-order Fresnel lens marked the eastern end of the breakwater.

An immediate success, more than 200 vessels could be found inside that first breakwater dur-

ing storms. But it was too small and so a second, much larger breakwater harbor was commenced in 1892. Completed in 1901, the second was more than 1.25 miles in length and could accommodate many more vessels of even the deepest draft.

It, too, had a lighthouse positioned on its eastern most point. First lit Nov. 15, 1926, the Harbor of Refuge Lighthouse was a 76-foot-tall iron caisson-type lighthouse, also topped by a fourth-order Fresnel lens that could be seen as far as 19 miles away. That was Rigazio's lighthouse.

Rigazio is president of the Delaware Bay Lighthouse Keepers and Friends Association, which will be holding its winter meeting at 11 a.m. Jan. 25 at the Nature Center of Cape May. It was during a meeting a few years ago that Rigazio shared his experiences as a Coast Guardsman living at the Harbor of Refuge Lighthouse.

He had photographs — some of them mundane, depicting accommodations that were spartan at best, while others show how crews passed the time by fishing for flounder and bluefish, polishing the Fresnel lens, scraping rust and repainting the lighthouse exterior.

Other images are frightening, depicting raging storm waves engulfing the breakwater and crashing against the lighthouse. Lore has it that during Hurricane Donna in 1960 and again during the Ash Wednesday storm of 1962, seas were so monstrous that they actually smashed out the windows high up on the second level of the five-level structure.

According to Rigazio, storms

were a way of life at the Harbor of Refuge Light, and during these frequent storms, sleep was impossible due to the screeching wind and constant pounding of the surf. The duration of some storms was such that food, water and even fuel had to be delivered by helicopter.

Anyone who has ever crossed the bay aboard the Cape May-Lewes Ferry has sailed right by the Harbor of Refuge Light. While on that same journey and about halfway across the bay, most people also notice another lighthouse, a solitary white structure that rises just 60 feet above the water known as the Brandywine Shoal Lighthouse.

Most Delaware Bay lighthouses are named for "shoals," or shallow areas, since they were built to help prevent vessels from running aground on those shoals. As the ferry passes the Brandywine Light, sharp-eyed passengers, or those with binoculars, might pick out another lighthouse farther to the north.

Fourteen Foot Bank Lighthouse was so-called since it rests on a shoal 14 feet below the surface, a shoal that is a grounding threat for most large vessels.

"Every young man should spend time as a lighthouse keeper — in order to have time to think," Albert Einstein once remarked.

Supposedly, he made this remark while aboard an oceanliner as it passed this very light. A young Coastie saw it differently when he described his stint at Fourteen Foot Bank as one of boredom and isolation that made him feel like a stranded sailor.

Altogether, 16 Delaware Bay
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ANOTHER VIEW

Nesting season has begun for some species in N.J.

By ALISON MITCHELL

New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Mothers and fathers work hard all year round. In the natural world, parents are constantly laboring to keep their young healthy and safe.

This time of year in New Jersey, eggs are already on the way for some species of raptors. Great horned owls and bald eagles are diligently refurbishing nests, coddling eggs and then keeping their hatched babies warm and fed — no small feat.

Great horned owls are busy nesting and laying eggs now; January through early February is mating time. On quiet, still winter nights, after great horned owls have successfully hooted their mating calls to each other from the tops of tall trees, it is time to lay eggs.

A female great horned owl lays anywhere from one to four eggs, with typically one brood (or set of eggs/chicks) per year, although some pairs might nest if their eggs fail before hatching.

The eggs are incubated by the female for about five weeks. While she is on the nest, the male hunts in the night and delivers

her food. Only rarely do males pitch in with incubation duty.

Juvenile great horned owls will depend on their parents for food until autumn, when they are fully independent and can safely leave the nest and home territory. Before that time, great horned owls will protect the juvenile birds fiercely from predators by bill-clapping, hissing or making guttural noises. If that does not scare the threat away, protective adults will strike with their talons.

Like most other owls, great horned owls do not build their own nests but instead use the abandoned nests of other birds — most commonly those of the red-tailed hawk. If there are no abandoned nests for the taking in the forest, sometimes tree cavities, cliffs or ledges can become home.

Bald eagles are the earliest nesting birds in the state. Since December, pairs have been gathering materials to build and repair their nests, many of which are used by the same birds for years.

Mostly made of sticks, nests are built in tall trees in close

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WAVES FROM THE PAST

War Ration Book 2 distributed

By KAREN BRUNO
For the Star and Wave

On March 4, 1943, the Cape May Star and Wave informed readers that 6,724 copies of War Ration Book 2 were distributed in the southern section of Cape May County, which included Cape May, West Cape May, Lower Township and Cape May Point.

Rationing first became necessary after Japan cut off the main source for sugar to the United States following the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Next, civilian cargo ships were put into service as military transport vessels, making it

almost impossible to ship supplies.

Enemy submarines in the Atlantic further limited shipping and cut off the supply of coffee. A shortage of labor and agricultural workers brought about by people enlisting in the military contributed further to the food problem and by March 1943, restricted foods included meats, cheese, canned fish, canned milk, biscuits, tomatoes, peas, dried fruit, rice, cooking fat and eggs.

Gasoline rationing began in May 1942. Travelers were prohibited from driving to the shore, although most found their way by train, crowding lo-

cal resorts and further complicating rationing. People were even sanctioned for driving to Florida.

Distribution of ration books that March was made possible by volunteers who worked for four days registering consumers and distributing the books. Dr. L.C. Ashburn, board chairman of local War Price and Rationing Board No. 2, praised volunteers, saying "the tremendous job of registering consumers for their second ration books was handled perfectly by the school teachers and others who volunteered." He added that this was "the American way."

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