

Letter from the Editor

The Art of Zen Birding

Perhaps you'd prefer not getting philosophical about birds — you'd rather be birding. But I've decided to wax philosophic about birds for a moment. Now seems an appropriate time considering the Sept. 11 tragedies, economic woes and the way we Americans so easily fall into the societal traps of doing much, too much, and then not even remembering what we did.

Even when we bird, we're running around. Have to get that bird. Have to get that lifer. Don't have that on my year list yet. Hey, he's got 314 on his Illinois list — better go get another one so he doesn't catch up.

Yes, it's fun getting lifers and keeping lists. And I'm not trying to spoil your good time.

But have you ever gone birding with absolutely no agenda? Call it "Zen" birding or "living-in-the-moment" birding.

Take a walk in the woods without any preconceived notions of what you had better or should see while you are there or what someone else saw that you had better not miss. Is there a White-breasted Nuthatch calling? Find it. Watch it. Revel in the fact that this is a creature with wings and it can fly without the aid of human technology. Consider this: avian species were plying the skies long before *Homo sapiens* entered the scene.

Look at the color of the nuthatch's head. What does it remind you of? A navy blue dress you wore as a girl? Look at the bird's undertail coverts. Feast on that rich, warm, startling, brownish red, which reminds me of a crayon I once had called burnt sienna.

Look at the thin, rather lengthy bill and how it slightly curves upward and gets ever so slightly thinner at the end. Have you ever noticed that before?

Watch how the bird slides down the tree bark moving its head jerkily, intent only on finding food and avoiding predators.

Just for a moment forget you're a birder and remember that you're a human, endowed with the incredible ability to find birds to watch.

— Sheryl De Vore, sdevore@voyager.net

MEADOWLARK

A Journal of Illinois Birds

Volume 10, Number 4-2001

ISSN 1065-2043

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About our cover

David J. Athans created the cover art depicting an Anhinga, which was seen near Pere Marquette State Park in Jersey County during the Illinois Ornithological Society's Annual Meeting in May 2001. See seasonal highlights for details on this bird.

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