

SUPREME

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Last Word

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Lawyers Doin' Stuff Other Than Lawyer'n – Learning About Our Natural Environment From Birds

A coupla weeks ago our *Supreme Advocacy* newsletter featured a 'Last Word' re *Canada Geese Comin' Home* and bird migration. Louise Campbell, Q.C. is a lawyer in Calgary, and an avid "birder" (birdwatcher) in her own right. She emailed me information she has learnt over many decades from her father William Campbell*. With Louise's permission, here's what she wrote.

"Eugene,

I am not the family birder; my Dad was. So if I have an interest in watching and being aware of birds, it is because of him.

As a boy, he was a junior member, and then one of the leaders of the *Hamilton Naturalist Club*. During WWII, when he was in *Lancaster Bombers* in England, he and his buddy in the Coast Guard, stationed in the Caribbean, would exchange letters about what new birds they saw. His buddy actually got interrogated for a day, because intelligence thought these were coded messages. My grandparents also got a knock on the door, asking if the names described in the letters really were birds. In university in the 1940's and early 50's, he had summer jobs with the *Canadian Wildlife Service*, in the high arctic, and Newfoundland/Labrador, counting birds, among other things. He told us about those experiences all his life.

For many years, in addition to leading hikes, he would participate in the *Christmas Bird Count*. When I was a teenager, I would go with him. Not my brothers. Just he and I tramping through the deep snow of southern Ontario, watching and listening for birds, large and small. I can identify most common birds by seeing them. My Dad could do it by listening. In the quiet winter woodlands he would say "Shhh, listen..." and then tell me what birds he was hearing, and where they likely were, by the vegetation they like to be in. It was magic.

As a high school teacher, he would not put lesson plans in his brief case, but his binoculars. From his classroom in Waterdown Ontario, he could look out from atop the Niagara escarpment, and see all of Hamilton, and some days all the way to Niagara, always seeing what birds there might be.

When we went camping, same thing, always watching for birds, even if we were playing on a beach, or taking an evening stroll. Always watching and listening for the birds. It was like 2nd nature (no pun intended) and not something you ignore; more than just a habit, like an extraordinary appreciation.

So it's a habit I have everywhere I go, always. When I moved to western Canada in 1979, I became familiar with different birds.

In 1992, my parents, who were then retired, moved here. I took my Dad to join *the Calgary Field Naturalists Club*. When we went to sign up for the *Christmas Bird Count*, the fellow with the clipboard said "Bill Campbell! from Hamilton! – you taught me to bird in 1947!" I couldn't have asked for a better welcome.

It was shortly after that that Peter Sherrington literally "looked up" in to the sky when he was in *Kananaskis Country*, just west of Calgary, and discovered a *Golden Eagle "Flyway"*. My Dad became part of his early team of birders, spotting and counting raptors as they came blasting up or down the valley, in spring or fall. I don't know if you can imagine a group of post-middle-aged guys, mostly retired, some with English accents, all with binoculars, in lawn chairs, (sometimes in the snow), just below the *Nakiska ski hill*, watching the skies for eagles and hawks a mile high. And the excitement when they spotted one or several, gliding up in the thermals, and then diving down across the valley. I am not one of those guys, but I know them.

Nowadays, my birding is usually from the car, or backyard, or on a short hike. I am annoying to my husband, demanding we stop at *Lac Des Arcs* near Canmore, to see the swans when they stop there on their way to or from the Arctic, in fall or summer. Last summer, for some reason there were 5 or 6 big hawks circling *Central Memorial Park* in downtown Calgary. I have no idea why. And I was probably the only crazy one walking down the street looking up, not ahead. If I golf with my husband, (and I am not a golfer) I annoy everyone by bringing my binoculars. Why waste a good walk when we can see a Bald Eagle or Great Blue Heron?

There is something about birds that makes you think about broader horizons. Even now that we have airplanes, there is still something unattainable to us, watching animals that fly. And so many people don't even notice. So I guess my point of view is how can one not be a bird-watcher? Maybe they're also watching us?"

[*Obituary of William Campbell](#)

Thank you: Louise Campbell, Q.C. (*Campbell O'Hara, Calgary*), campbell@campbellohara.com

Website of the Week

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Websites From Louise

Below is the link to a story in the current *Canadian Geographic* magazine. It is about amateur ornithologist Peter Sherrington, who, in spring 1992, by looking up, noticed 100's of Golden Eagles travelling north, via the *Rocky Mountains*. He set up a volunteer-staffed group, initially at *Mount Lorette*, near *Nakiska* ski area, to count the birds migrating. They are still doing it, 26 years later, in the spring and fall, every year, now at several locations. The reports come out daily: [Click Here](#)

The Golden Eagles number in the 1000's each year; a fly-way no one knew was there until Peter looked up.

I had the fortune to join these birders in 1993 or so, just after my parents joined me in Calgary. My father had never seen Eagles in these kinds of numbers. He was so thrilled!

The birds fly like gliders, floating up on the thermals in high circles, and then putting their wings back and powering across the valley on to the next mountain, where they catch the next thermal. The birds are all very high, so the people identifying them are doing so with high-power binoculars, and very good identification skills. Also, check out a few more websites:

[Christmas Bird Count](#) (by Audubon)

[Wings Over the Rockies](#) (birdwatching festival)

The "[Eagle Watch](#)" group:

Peter Sherrington is the organizer, and data compiler for this group of birders. He is (I think) a retired geologist from the oil industry. He is the primary watcher at *Beaver Mines*, where he lives. It is in the SE corner of Alberta, just south of Hwy 3, east of the *Crowsnest Pass*. There is another team at *Mount Lorette*, in *Kananaskis Country*. That is the *Nakiska Ski Hill* site. The *Steeple* site is 25 km NE of *Cranbrook BC*, to count Eagles flying up the *Columbia Valley*.

Yes, the teams do this every spring and fall, all day, every day, for about 6 weeks or more, to count the birds.

The report codes on the birds refer to "adult, sub-adult, and unknown". The birds have slightly different plumage if they are a year old or less. The birders are so good, even when the birds are specs that they can usually tell the difference.

And here's a link to their most recent Report from yesterday: [Click Here](#). In some daily reports the group is counting (and mostly identifying) over 2000 eagles/hawks/raptors.

And last (Eugene writing here), birding is an ancient study (going back to the ancients). The April 14, 2018 issue of *The Wall Street Journal*: [Click Here](#) for a book review of a birding book derived from information gathered in 1622 (it was a particularly good year for birds apparently, wars and plagues in Europe not so much). Recently translated from Italian to English: "*Pasta for Nightingales*" by Giovanni Pietro Olina.

Thank you again: Louise Campbell, Q.C. for sharing all this fascinating information.