

BOREAL BITS

PHIL BURKE



JUNE TALES – Part 1

'Beauty is a form of genius--is higher, indeed, than genius, as it needs no explanation. It is of the great facts in the world like sunlight, or springtime, or the reflection in dark water of that silver shell we call the moon.' Oscar Wilde (1856-1900)

June! Cheated of spring throughout most of May leaves us hungering for green leaves and new life. A heavy snowfall on May 11, 2004, ripped any hope of an early summer but that event did have an advantage. Anyone with an active feeder will attest to the great variety of bird species that stayed around to wait out the snow. Our prizes were a pair of rose breasted grosbeaks and a pair of orioles. But all of that is behind us now and the crown of the year is here. There was a time when September-October were my favourite months but no longer; their position has been usurped by May-June. June, particularly, is filled with stories and as we walk through the month we will recall a few of the more memorable ones.

Ant wars. A few years ago an event in the insect world caught my attention. On a grassy hill behind our garage I happened across two ants

that, for our purposes here, we will name A and B. The two ants were fighting, their mandibles locked in a push-pull match. I ceased my lawn mowing responsibilities and lay down to observe. The two were quite evenly matched but then ant C arrived who joined in the fray and locked his mandibles onto those of the other two. Another ant arrived and grasping B's leg in its jaws began to pull. It was now three against one but B was holding its own; Then yet another ant arrived and scurried to join the fight. This ant climbed onto B and began chewing the area between the head and the thorax. Suddenly B went limp and curled into a ball. The four attackers released their grip and went on their way leaving the interloper twitching on the ground. I'm assuming that B intruded onto the territory of the other ants and paid the ultimate price. The ants were all of the same species, medium-size with reddish tinge to their abdomens.



photo Wm Burke

Glenn Reynard is a keen naturalist who called to relate a rescue story. On his way out to play golf one morning he came across a hummingbird lying on his steps. He assumes it was a window casualty. He placed the bird into a paper bag and on his return some hours later found it to be still alive but lying on its side. He then placed it in a larger bag with a hummingbird feeder. Because the bird couldn't feed itself, Glenn pushed its beak into one of the feeder ports. The little bird lapped the sugar water so Glenn did it again, and again. The story ends happily with

the hummer reviving enough to fly away and join seven of its kind that frequented Glenn's feeders that year.

June is a time for rebirth and birth. Lorraine Wedel called near the beginning of another June to tell of witnessing the birth of a fawn. The doe walked into a clearing within view of their house and began hunching its back as if were defecating. However, it stayed in this position too long and that caught Lorraine's attention. Then the fawn, "about the size of our old beagle" dropped to the ground. The mother turned and immediately began ministering to her offspring by licking it. In a short time the fawn struggled to its feet, Bambi fashion, walked under the mother and tried to suckle. When this happened, the mother and her fawn walked into the bush. The total time was less than an hour.



Photo Phil Burke

One of June's more interesting natural events is the mobbing (pestering, chasing) of larger birds by smaller birds. Eagles and other raptors are often on the receiving end of this activity and crows, singly or in groups are inveterate mobbers. One June as I was observing an eagle nest that held an unfledged eaglet, a lone crow happened to spot an adult eagle resting in its favourite perch near its nest. The crow took immediate

exception to the presence of the eagle and swooped at the raptor, pendulum fashion, twenty times before coming to rest in a treetop about 15 metres away. Five minutes later the crow was at it again, this time swooping at the eagle 19 times before resting. This was repeated three more times before the eagle flew off with the crow in hot pursuit. When the crow—it never actually made contact—came too close to the eagle, the huge raptor would flip over in the air exposing its talons to its pesky pursuer. At times the crow performed perfect barrel rolls. Finally they flew out of sight but I am sure the eagle would not have wandered too far with a young one in the nest.

A June 6 journal entry reads; “The pin cherries are in glorious blossom, the birch catkin flowers have fallen, littering the sidewalk with dead ‘caterpillars’, and the dandelions are past their prime but still with us... Amphibian music delights the night.’