

# HAWK & WHIP POOR- WILL

NEW SERIES



*poems of nature & humankind* | Volume 6, No. 1: Summer 2021

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

The road between Fitchburg and Boston passes through the Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. Every spring, migratory Great Blue Herons return there to repair their nests in the leafless snag trees that rise out of the marsh. Then they roost, with one member of each pair settled on the eggs while the other flies out to spear bluegill, perch, or the occasional bullfrog. In ordinary years, traffic along this stretch habitually slows to a crawl during rush hour, giving commuters plenty of time — twice a day — to watch the colony and its reproductive dramas. Pre-pandemic, I made that drive daily and came to measure the progress of the season by silhouettes: first the paired shapes of the adults, and then, suddenly, the appearance of a third smaller form in the nest — the new hatchling.

For more than a year, the usual buzz and activity of our civilization have slowed. So many of us were shut up at home for so long that the commuter traffic vanished, leaving the herons to nest and hunt and fledge their young without the disturbance of the old traffic noise. When I have reason to drive past the rookery these days, there are still more nests than I have ever seen.

Reports from around the world suggest the same pattern. In the temporary quiet of the COVID era, wildlife tentatively expanded into spaces humans had withdrawn from. It is a bittersweet kind of consolation. Several poems in this issue zero in on that tension between stillness and disturbance. They look closely at the creatures who share our landscapes and at the fragile conditions under which they persist; they document how the lives of wild creatures can proceed with complete indifference to human anxieties about distancing and contagion; they eulogize creatures who are gone forever.

Though lockdown restrictions in Massachusetts have begun to be lifted, we remain suspended in the strange stillness of the pandemic, the world made weird and slightly unreal, as though we had crossed beneath the shadow of a dangerous eclipse. Accordingly, we've decided to place the magazine on hiatus after this issue. Like many projects (most much more important than this!) our editorial work has been challenged by the pandemic, with its dispersal of collaborators, uncertainty of schedules, and shifting of priorities. Rather than rush imperfectly forward, we choose to pause. There is other work to be doing just now. Nature, meanwhile, carries on.

I expect we will publish again in the future. Certainly, I *hope* we do. In the meantime, I wish health & safety for you and yours, dear reader.

— Zachary Bos, Editor



JEFFERSON NAVICKY

## Storm Chasers

The hurricane spit white water and a wicked wind that seemed like the brutal friend I needed. We waited for it to come ashore huddled together and hiding around the corner of the hotel, watching with a gallon of wine, the cork shoved down into the bottle, but it ceased to be romantic when the roof of the hotel ripped off and rolled like the top of a sardine tin. We made for your station wagon big as a tank, but barely, thankfully, we made it out on the last road off the Cape. You dropped me at a gas station in Lynn. I said I had to pee and call my boyfriend. I knew you wouldn't like that, even though it wasn't true, so I wasn't surprised you were gone when I came back out. A relief to see you go, and I know you won't remember my name just like I won't remember yours.

## Encounter in Orange

My dog and I looped the forest in the wet morning shooshing leaves, scuffled along through good smells half asleep. She was not half asleep – afoot on everything, straining leash over creek and creek and the rusted car or whatever it is or was, left

on this old road, tired of being a road, but a road  
must always be a road, and this one lead us back  
to owl.

I thought the flap and feathered spread  
at first some mottled fish unleashed  
upon the limbs above my head, I thought  
the forest sliced, some sharp hook set for my face,  
such a slow fast tear sent me low.

My dog barked, lunged, pointed at the perched  
bird beyond us, twenty feet or so. So  
close, so high, so much. We watched  
the limb, the tree, the forest where owl,  
back to us, sat like some other world watcher,  
like a loaf of bread on end, silent  
above us, pliant and neck spun,  
neck ruffled, really really, I remembered  
the dead one I found on the river bed.

I turned her over on her back,  
eyes closed as napping – was I making this up? –  
I remembered eye lashes. That can't be right,  
her soul just beyond that flap of sash.

Orange felt white. Owl dropped down  
to forest floor death floor quiet, took something  
that belonged to her. I thanked her  
for her theft. I wrote the loss on leaves.  
I burned the trees to make this poem.

ANN CHANDONNET

## Buzzard Song

Like lightning, I stoop to conquer —  
diving from cloud to ground,  
waving to commuters at 20,000 feet.

Road-kill can fill me up.

Squirrel

Possum

Gulp

Swallow.

House cat doesn't make you fat.

Maine coon in rigor  
is good for the figure.

Ground hog pork chop  
is my truck stop.

Indigestion  
is out of the question.

In Eden, I shared the serpent's tree.

A hiss or three,  
and we drank deep by firefly's flitting lamp.

Lacking carrion,  
I sipped insipid nectar.

Then we escaped,  
and menus improved.

After a cutting kiss,  
my beak drips blood  
like a pirate's dirk.

In entrails no secrets — only succulence.

No standing on ceremony  
in my business.  
I dive right in,  
then wipe my plate with fate.

In my book death is a treasure —  
my reward for sitting watch.  
Corruption is an anodyne.

## Marginalia

The dark and stormy morning  
swirled closer, roaring like thunder,  
like the pounding hooves of a runaway hack.  
Choking down black waves of nausea,  
she addressed her chores,  
until the others pinned on hats  
and left on errands.

Then she marched to the pantry  
where the purring calico  
rested on an old shawl.  
Gathering the four smallest kits  
into her starched apron,  
she descended to the cellar.

The brine was last year's,  
all the pickles eaten.  
“We come from the sea;  
why not return?”  
she mused.

She gentled each superfluous bit  
into the dark salt  
as if slipping croquettes  
into hot lard.

No splatters on her white foulard.  
There were too many cats already,  
visiting from next door,  
seeding her daisy beds  
with foulness,  
clawing up tender plants.

The four mewled bitterly  
as she searched for the heavy cover;  
soon topped it with a brick  
for good measure.  
She did not hover,  
but strode upstairs at once.

Lovely Salem, Sweet Salem  
would chide,  
she knew, as she went out to weed.  
But fat bumblebees were humming,  
the first robins trilling.  
No reticent volcano,  
she whistled back.



of the laughing red runner  
of the waver of his own redbanner  
of the ah zorro o *redfox* dead

the bones' white mouths open now  
to admit *moss* or musgo, to each sing  
silently a single unchanging note  
vocalizing a dirge for the body

the sign says *The park closes after dark*  
El parque cierra después del anochecer  
o o o but it's dark now isn't it

the mushrooms ( who know everything  
about turning endings into softness  
*intomulch*  
*intomemorial*  
*intorecuerdo* )

ring the gravesite

w( o )rshipful & w( o )nderful  
sin miedo ('fearless, fearing  
nothing') because the earth (*theirs, ours*) is always spelling  
out (*spilling, spoiling*) otra historia  
in the high speech of eulogy

always writing unfinished stories on pages we walk upon or  
lay upon, on paper of hierba mora, the nightshade; trébol,  
the clover; diente de león, the clockweed, blowball,  
lion's tooth. Paper of soil, of grama, of *crabgrass*;  
subtext of white bones sinking in black earth.

TR POULSON

## Cain Did Not Kill First

*And the Lord God made for Adam  
and for his wife garments of skins  
— Genesis 3:21*

Eden must have felt hot to the creature, lured by God from her mate, his ribs aching, still. She romped on black paws, down paths lined with stones and snags, to the naked man for her name. She must have brushed his ribs when she leaped into his lap — he, surprised to touch her golden-brown fur, so smooth even when pushed against the grain. Sable, he breathed, and allowed his hands to linger on her silky sides, before letting her go.

Later the man brought the woman fig leaves to sew, his chin, and hers, stained with nectar, knowing nothing of flesh, except living.

Did the sable even survive the trip home?  
Or did her Creator follow her, atoning blade  
in hand, to corner her in stones and take her skin?

SASSAN TABATABAI

## Spring in Griggs Park

The helmeted woodpecker  
single-minded  
in its mission  
to penetrate  
the armored bark  
raps its percussion  
on the trunk  
of the sturdy oak.

The territorial blue jay  
— a Herod cloaked in violet —  
screeches its authority  
at the crimson-breasted robin  
who thinks of nothing  
but the blind earthen worm  
carelessly sticking its head  
out of the cool mud.

In pursuit of his mate  
the fiery cardinal  
streaks across the blue sky  
like a blazing comet.  
The pair disappear together  
into the drape of tender green  
that hangs from the willow.

The mourning dove  
sighs its melancholy song  
for any who listen.

The industrious squirrel  
busy with its gatherings  
ignores them all.

They know nothing  
of social distancing.

They avoid  
the two-legged creature  
by instinct.

– *Brookline, Massachusetts*

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*This poem is being simultaneously published in The Journal of the  
Core Curriculum, a campus publication at Boston University.*

## A Plethora of Punch-drunk Crows Roosting in the Venerable Ash

A murder of crows  
the size of fryer chickens,  
boisterous hooligans rioting  
in the venerable ash in my  
backyard, have chosen this  
place unwisely to power up  
their cacophony of song.

A hunting permit is required  
to silence them — something  
I do not hold — could never use  
in an attempt to shoot a seemingly  
inordinate number of scavengers  
roosting above the lawn swing  
beneath the tree.

The deafening noise of these  
songbirds attracts my neighbor,  
dairy farmer, Tex, who has taken  
upon himself the task of silencing  
the colossal crows with a solitary  
gunshot from his dilapidated  
1875 Remington rifle.

The punch-drunk fowl having  
most likely feasted throughout  
the night on the holly berries

out front while most of us slept,  
flee from their roost, besmirching  
the sky with a smudge the size of  
Kenosha, Wisconsin.

The constancy of their screech,  
recedes into the heavens blotting  
out the sun — day morphs into night.  
I ride out the darkness in a chilly haze  
as they leave for greener pastures,  
a morsel of roadkill, perhaps the  
old man's cornfield.

ERICA FLETCHER

## The Swans

The swans are on the pond  
necks bowed, perfect confections  
holding court over the dripping Victorian sugar egg of this  
willow-clad park

Mute swans aren't silent at all  
they just rasp and sputter in a most  
unbecoming manner

Perhaps I have put too much stock in these silly birds  
broad beating wings, bodies tipped ass-up  
pulling breakfast from the muddy bottoms

Waddling on the banks ungainly croaking  
vintage cartoon washerwoman grotesque  
have I startled them in a state of undress

CHLOE HITE

## Crocuses

We bloom first violent, violet and plum-blue-black before, a bilious jaundice cream-yellow with healing, purple with zeal. In early March I venture out to pinch so delectably delicate the fresh heads of crocuses and violets electric bruise-blue and yellow hue from the passage by the creek, the unleaved vines of winter hardy ivy concealing my quarry — the straggling ferns just perking to fresh green and lolling in ice cold sewage-tainted runoff. And I sincerely nip my way through bramble beds and straw laid down last fall to pluck the pearl-flesh snowdrops from the bank I pick my way back out to where greenway grimes to grey to concrete to stone spirals draining to the center of this swamp city; the tender hold meant to cradle begins to clutch perilously to calcify to crush the nosegay so carefully made of crocus so carefully gathered, of snowdrops torn at the joint where the stem leaps from the earth. Why can I not stay soft and let the world work on me, bending me and bruising but never breaking my head off my body to tumble and be trampled.

ZACHARY BOS

## *In memoriam*, the Bramble Cay Melomys

*never cute enough to rate  
much of a conservation effort  
– James Purtill, 19 Feb 2019, abc.au.net*

You foraged wind-blown grass and seeds  
under the moonlight from the coral sand  
until the Anthropocene cleared you off the map  
the way a hand sweeps crumbs from the table:

some stray wave or storm surge edged with foam  
rising up to scrape your beachcomber nation of  
small ears and paws and salt-scented fur into  
the sea. There the last of you drowned. But,

erasure made you historic! The first  
mammal species whose disappearance  
is unambiguously the result of climate  
change. Of warming earth, riding tides.

Being first won't bring you back, alas. Our  
banquet carries on. You won't be the last.

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*The Bramble Cay mosaic-tailed rat, Melomys rubicola, was found only on a single island in the Torres Strait between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The species was declared extinct in 2019.*

## Some Relevant Headlines *published during COVID*

WILD ANIMALS ARE  
EXPLORING CITIES DURING  
THE CORONAVIRUS  
LOCKDOWNS 🐾 OVER 100K  
FLAMINGOS REPORTEDLY  
DESCEND ON MUMBAI AMID  
STRICT CORONAVIRUS  
LOCKDOWN 🐾 THE URBAN  
WILD: ANIMALS TAKE OVER  
STREETS AMID LOCKDOWN  
🐾 THE BLISS OF A QUIET  
PERIOD: LOCKDOWN IS A  
UNIQUE CHANCE TO STUDY  
THE NATURE OF CITIES 🐾  
AFTER THE ANTHROPAUSE:  
LOCKDOWN LESSONS  
FOR MORE-THAN-HUMAN  
GEOGRAPHIES 🐾 WILD  
GOATS TAKE OVER STREETS  
OF WELSH TOWN AS  
RESIDENTS STAY INSIDE

*Sources in order: NY Post, 23 Mar '20 | TIME, 2 May '20 | The Guardian, 22 Apr and 27 Apr '20 | Geographical Journal, Mar '21 | CBS, 3 Mar '20*

*“When I write  
about nature,  
I am writing about  
loss. I am writing  
about discovering home  
where home has been  
replaced by structures  
I do not want to  
recognize. The place  
I was born into no  
longer exists. I don’t  
have a town I can call  
home. Unless language  
is home.”*

*// from Guidebook to Relative  
Strangers by Camille T.  
Dungy, published in 2017*

*In this issue:*

ZACHARY BOS

ANN CHANDONNET

ERICA FLETCHER

CHLOE HITE

JEFFERSON NAVICKY

TR POULSON

SASSAN TABATABAI

DARBY THOMPSON

CONSTANCE WRZESNIEWSKI



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One Wood Place  
Fitchburg, Mass. 01420  
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