

What happens for viewing when birds feel safe

Most birds don't regard humans as threats. Maybe they would if we were still baking four and twenty blackbirds in a pie.

Game birds look at us with suspicion, as they obviously should, but even they know our limits. For instance, mallards are tasty. But they quickly learn that we can't shoot them in urban parks. They not only run up to us, looking for handouts, they also bring their kids. The truth is: Birds figured us out long before we figured them out.

We could learn a thing or two from Sackville, New Brunswick. Fifty years ago, Sackville had a thriving economy. It was a rail hub. It had a robust manufacturing base. Slowly, these assets disappeared. The town was dying, surrounded by duck-filled wetlands that constricted new development. So local officials made use of what they had and built a boardwalk over the wetland in 1988, creating a waterfowl park. Success was immediate and stunning. Waterfowl congregated along the board-

walk in astonishing numbers.

There is now a reason for tourists to get off the highway and visit Sackville, and they do. I just did.

Sackville's birds quickly became accustomed to people being confined to the boardwalk. Human presence also discouraged raptors and other predators from coming near. The 55-acre wetland became the safest of safe havens. The birds quickly figured it out, and a variety of ducks began raising families right under the noses of people watching from the boardwalk. Not even dogs discouraged the ducks, since they also were confined to the boardwalk. You could walk a honey badger on a leash, and the ducks wouldn't even bother to look up.

Think of it as a reverse zoo. The animals roam free, and the people are locked up. Humans fear tigers, but when tigers are confined to a cage, we could sleep outside the bars without a second thought. That's what the birds do when we're the ones confined. Humans become a safe part of their daily routine, and they take no notice unless something breaks the routine.

You can see this effect in Maine, too. Bangor's wetland next to the interstate, Essex Woods, is home to



Pied-billed grebe.

many breeding waterfowl. Birds understand they are safe there, and snooze right next to the walking path. Mallards even collect on the path, often begging for handouts. Passing birds observe all this safety, and drop in for a stay.

Collins Pond in Caribou is renowned. Every autumn, Canada geese visit the nearby fields to forage for leftover grain. Out there, they are fair game for hunters. But as soon as they are nourished, the geese flood into

town, flocking to this inner city pond by the thousands. They know they are safe there, and they routinely ignore people on the walking paths next to the pond, despite the fact that humans were mortal enemies just hours before. Other waterfowl and shorebirds see this collection of geese, intuit that it is a safe place, and join the party. Next month, Collins Pond will be a hopping place.

Across North America, some of the best wetlands

are actually wastewater treatment plants. In the final stages of purification, treated water is released into ponds, where any remaining organics create great habitat. Waterfowl and wading birds collect in these ponds, and some famous boardwalks have been built over and around them. Here in Maine, the Sanford Sewage Lagoons are awesome. Birds are instinctively aware that no one not going to walk into a sewage lagoon.

You can see this effect with non-ducks, too. Crows on the highway learn that traffic stays in the travel lane, and they are relatively safe in the breakdown lane. Instant death whizzes by just 5 feet away, and they don't even flinch. Unfortunately, it takes a few mishaps to learn this. There is a period in midsummer when dead crows line the highway. These poor youngsters didn't discover the safe zone quickly enough.

While I was in Sackville, I spotted a well-concealed nest along the walking path. It was so close you could touch it. Three babies and one adult cedar waxwing stood on the nest, watching me watch them. They were so accustomed to humans walking by that they didn't even twitch.

Birds get used to people quickly. Relax in a lawn chair next to the bird feeder, and it isn't long before the birds resume their feeding routines. If we don't act threateningly, we're just scenery.

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Report: 'Confusion at every level' of the National Park Service

BY JOE DAVIDSON
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — Years of sacred- and ceremonial-ground desecration at the Effigy Mounds National Monument in northeast Iowa disgraced the National Park Service, as did a recently sentenced former park manager who stole ancient human remains and hid them in his garage for more than two decades.

A review team of Park Service officials from outside the monument's region examined the defilement and pronounced themselves "astonished" in an "after action" report released last week.

Its piercing conclusions go well beyond the Effigy Mounds scandals and cut right to the Park Service's culture.

Given the critical issues the report found throughout the NPS, which celebrates its centennial next week, perhaps it is more surprising that shameful stories like Effigy Mounds aren't more common.

In addition to the bone thefts, at least 78 projects on the grounds à " costing almost \$3.4 million from 1999 to 2010 à " did not follow National Historic Preservation Act or National Environmental Policy Act provisions. A former superintendent, Phyllis Ewing, lost her job because of that. The projects included "an extensive system of boardwalks throughout the more than 200 American Indian sacred mounds," according to the report. The mounds are over 1,200 years old.

NPS Midwest Regional Director Cam Sholly said the wrongdoing not only "violated the law and damaged resources" but also compromised "our valuable trib-

al relationships and the public trust."

The report describes a confused agency beset with weak management of the nation's cultural resources that it is charged with safeguarding.

"As the National Park Service is responsible for resources stewardship, we are also responsible for the damage and destruction of the resources entrusted to us," the report says. "Sometimes it seems as if we hold visitors, concessioners, and contractors to a higher standard than we do ourselves when it comes to resources stewardship."

Among the problems outlined in the report:

— "Lack of staff knowledgeable and skilled in cultural resources management results in inappropriate collateral duties assigned to staff not qualified to complete the task."

— Employees "consistently reported that they had no authority to report concerns or to follow up on concerns reported in their chain of command."

— "Law enforcement rangers and solicitors are not well enough versed in cultural resources laws and policies."

The problems infect the agency from top to bottom, from Washington to the local parks.

"The internal role of the park, regional office, and Washington Support Office in cultural resources management is neither well defined nor consistent. What work we should be doing and where it should take place to be most effective is not clear" the report said. "There is confusion at every level, uncertainty as to span of responsibility, authority, and accountability. While this confusion has to do



A National Park Service employee uses a pressure hose to help clean the Lincoln Memorial in Washington in July 2013.

with who does what at each level of the agency, there is no understanding as to roles, responsibilities, and authorities regarding risk, mismanagement of or impacts to cultural resources."

Three "overarching recommendations" were offered: "educate and empower all employees as stewards" of cultural resources; increase awareness of cultural resource laws, regulations and penalties; and "resolve the confusion of what work cultural resources professionals should be doing."

Although the report provides a sharp agency critique and specific recommendations, the document amounts to "a bucket of mush on Effigy Mounds scandal," says Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

"This new report epitomizes

what is wrong with the current Park Service leadership, which never takes direct responsibility for screw-ups no matter how flagrant or preventable," said PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch. "Tellingly, this report preaches transparency and accountability but illustrates precisely the opposite, gauzing over critical facts and offering not a single meaningful reform."

Thomas A. Munson is a former Effigy Mounds superintendent who has been held accountable, albeit long after his criminal deeds. In 1990, he stole remains of 41 Native Americans, more than 2,100 individual pieces, then concealed them in garbage bags in cardboard boxes in his garage. He was sentenced last month to 10 weekends in jail, 12 months of home confinement, plus proba-

tion and more than \$100,000 in restitution.

Munson's sentencing, reliving the Effigy Mounds lawlessness, and the frank after-action report are just the latest in a string of bad news that has muddied the agency's 100th-anniversary year. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell has complained about a Park Service culture that "allows" sexual harassment. The NPS has been criticized for confusing park promotion with corporate commercialism. And NPS Director Jonathan B. Jarvis had to apologize for his ethical lapses.

The after-action report into Effigy Mounds said it was done because of a "deep concern" by agency officials that "this never happen again."

That should apply to a range of National Park Service problems.

Acadia

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settled by William and Hannah Gilley, the descendants of whom remained on the island year-round through the 1920s. The original Gilley family homestead still exists on the island, boarded up to prevent entry. A lighthouse that was automated in the 1950s stands on the high point at the island's center.

Aside from the dwellings, a few gravestones mark where members of the Gilley family or those of lightkeepers stationed on the island were buried decades ago.

Like most islands, Baker is accessible only by boat. There is a rocky bar connecting Baker to Little Cranberry Island that is exposed at low tide but it's wet and slippery. Walking across the bar between the islands is ill-advised.

On Trotter family picnic excursions to Baker, we would tow a dinghy behind our motor boat to the island and then drop anchor off the island's north shore.



Baker Island is seen as the Cranberry Isles and Acadia loom in the background in October 2009.

From there, we would row to a nearby cobblestone beach, making several short trips back and forth to get everyone on dry land.

From there, we would walk up

the path through the meadow that was the focal point of the fragile hamlet. We'd stroll past the three remaining houses, past the lighthouse and into the

woods, following the trail to the south-facing beach of boulders known as "The Dance Floor," so named because of the broad spans of flat granite where pic-

nicking rusticators reportedly held summer dances in the 1800s.

My family and I did not dance. We ate and got wet. The swells crashing on the south side of the island sprayed water over the rocks, soaking some of us and creating a mist for others that would cool us off from the summer heat as we digested our sandwiches and cookies. I remember crawling under some of the large boulders strewn along the shore, sheltering from the sun in the shady, cave-like nooks between the massive stones.

After we decided we had enough, we'd hike back across the island, row out to our anchored boat and motor back home to the other side of Little Cranberry.

It has been several years since I last journeyed out to Baker Island, and I'm overdue for another visit. The park completed a tree-removal project on the island a few years ago, but I am sure it remains the way I remember it — remote, scenic and carefully preserved to give its visitors a hint of what life once was like on the rocky edge of civilization.