



## About the Art in the November/December 2007 *Birding*

by Ray Nelson

This issue of *Birding* includes anecdotes from birders of many stripes, or should I say birders of different feathers. Researchers, life-listing international travelers, backyard birders, photographers, and dancing Puffineers have contributed clever, well-written, in-

teresting pieces that reflect the varied interests of many birders.

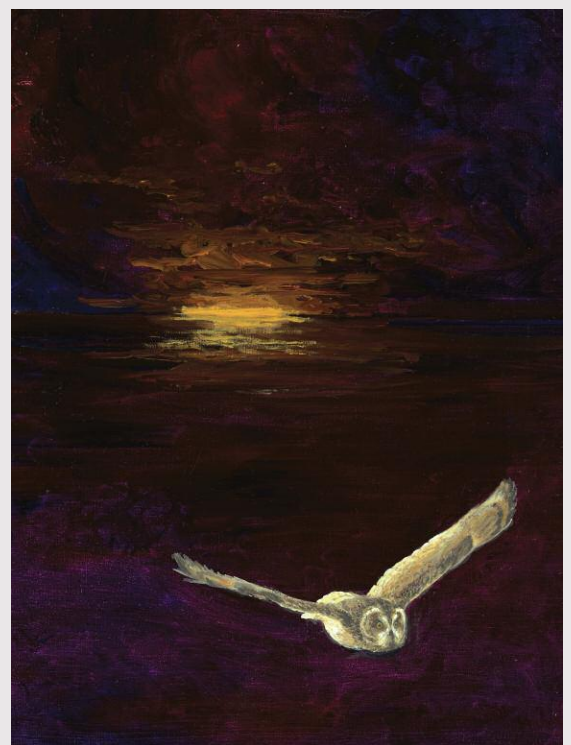
Each piece presents a different creative challenge for me as the illustrator to develop images that enhance the story line and mood of the articles. Sometimes I take passages directly from the text to create an image and sometimes I invoke artistic license. Regardless of how I use the text, I always draw on my own experience as a long time birder.



Although I have been birding for many years, I am not a great birder in any of the more traditional molds. I tend to be absentminded, and my undisciplined approach sometimes causes me to miss the rarity in a mixed flock. Field marks and other diagnostic traits and behaviors do not readily capture my attention. I do

not tune in to bird songs. I was recently fitted with hearing aids, but my hearing has been impaired for years, and the concept of even listening for birds is somewhat foreign to me.

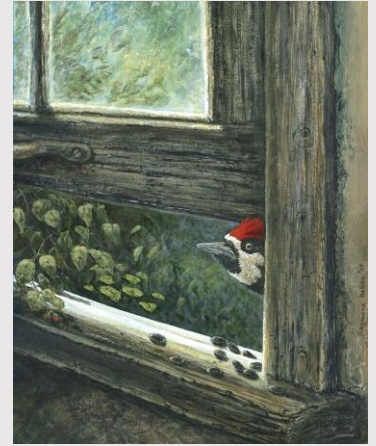
It is not that my extensive time in the presence of wild birds is idled away. I am intensely observant, just not terribly attuned to the same things that many birders are. I see the complexity in the overlap of feather tracts but sometimes miss what species I am looking at. I see the tilt or rotation of the head and the dip of the wing as the bird peers back over its shoulder. I see the shadow cast from the overhanging brow onto the eye of a raptor. I see the





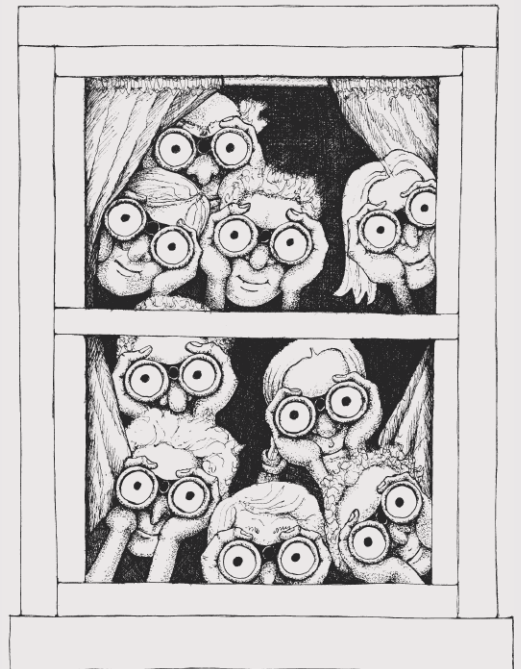
sun backlight a wing and rake through extended translucent primaries.

I see abstract brushstrokes in a dramatic sunset and consider the day I can use the technique in a painting (p. 49). I consider what complementary adjacent colors will intensify the clownish overstatement of the Toucan Barbet's plumage (p. 59). I usually paint very isolated areas of detail and I tend to focus on things that interest me relative to the compositions forming in my mind, as I would see a small flock of yellowlegs in shallow water at eye level (p. 41).



An image I have seen and used a variation of many times in a cartoon is the congregation of birders packed tight, like the Keystone Cops each

attempting to share the best possible view (p. 64). Another cartoon based on observation and experience is the ever-expanding collection of gadgetry in the hands of birders (p. 42). Although I have never danced the Puffin, I have experienced the camaraderie that develops from volunteering for many years as a bird bander. A well-run bird banding site is usually a good-natured experience and sometimes a scene of whimsy and inspiration for an artist (p. 54).



The cover for this issue is the

view from my front deck, looking west over Bellingham Bay in north-west Washington state. One of my favorite birds, the Glaucous-winged Gull, frequents the street lamp that lights the intersection below our house. What you see is what we see. Even with my hearing limitations, unaided I can enjoy their sweet shrill call when it punctuates the air. Only a demented birder would suggest that their call is sweet.