



A weekend in the life of a park interpreter... May long weekend, 2006

Just some notes about the May long weekend...

Friday Night - Spring Fever - we had about 60 people show up to partake of the abundant fruits and cheeses of the earth at the Nature Centre. It was a breezy evening - so the coffee went well and the cold beverages did not (except for my son Lawrence who decided to combine coffee with decaffeinated root beer to get his buzz - he did!!!). Kevin Van Tighem gave a warm welcome to all and reflected briefly on how much he treasured his experience as a Park Interpreter and how meaningful it is to be part of a community that for multiple generations has invested so much of its heart and soul into this national park. The new Boreal Partners interactivity worked well - and Brad was able to get most folks to try it out.

Saturday - The weather was cool with a mix of sun and cloud - mostly cloud.

In the morning Duty Warden Fiona Moreland came over to ask me if I knew anything about the Interp canoes chained to the dock by the breakwater. Someone had reported a third canoe floating out on the lake - apparently with no one in it. We weren't sure if that "phantom canoe" - which we couldn't find any trace of - was in fact the third Interp Canoe. So we went over to the compound to check out our canoe trailer - but the third Interp canoe was there (along with two VS canoes). Maybe that third canoe got picked up by whoever owned it. I was starting to wonder if the Interps had been having a huge party at the beach to which I had not been invited. Anyway - I found out shortly that the two canoes on the dock had been used by the warden recruits - and assumed that they would be returned shortly.

Nature Centre on Saturday was busy - I had 175 folks come through.

About 3:00 PM someone pointed out to me that there was a hummingbird (ruby-throated - the only kind we get here - male as it turned out) hovering from one end to the other of the peaked roof of the main exhibit hall. I hadn't seen him fly in. But how was I to get him out? The bird seemed quite confused - and I didn't blame it one bit. After all, what kind of a 'Nature Centre' is it if it is full of people, dead animals and synthetic materials. I thought I would wait until I closed up and then try and open some windows and hopefully it would fly out.

However, the bird somehow made its way out into the front entrance and perched on the edge of the blanket overhanging the entrance to the main exhibit area. Good - I thought!! Just a few metres more and he'll be out. However, his internal GPS must have been somewhat ratched - because he flew EVERYWHERE but out the door. He landed on the wing of the white pelican - he perched on the back of the broad-winged hawk. He suspended himself from the nylon lines that held the aforementioned bird mounts to the





ceiling. He would fly backwards, forwards, right side up and upside down. People were getting quite a show and not a few of them had their cameras or cell phones trained on this aerial acrobat. But I was getting worried - I could see the little fella was getting tired - sometimes he would perch on the edge of the wall with his wings outstretched - obviously running out of energy. I pointed out to the people how vulnerable these birds are at this time of year to literally running out of fuel and crashing for good, and periodically I asked people to clear the entrance and maybe the hummingbird would feel encouraged to fly through the open doorway. But it was pretty tough because new groups of people kept coming in - and I could hardly blame folks for being thrilled by this aeronautical display.

However - at four o'clock everyone (but the hummingbird and I) left the Nature Centre. Now - what do I do? I left the doors opened and also pried loose one of the windows. The bird just stayed put. I decided that maybe some "encouragement" was in order - so I did my "Broom Hilda" routine - but the hummingbird just flew east and west instead of north. Well - this was going over as well as the the World War II raid on Dieppe. Maybe I should just cut my losses and head back to base. If I just left the bird there overnight - it might go into torpor and survive to the next day. Then what? I decided to try the broom thing some more - and then - tragedy. The 'feathered helicopter' hit some cobwebs, got tangled and - PLOP - crashed head first on top of a hard stool. And lay there. As I approached it, I noticed that it was still quivering - its heart just pulsating. It was pretty badly tangled. The web had basically strait-jacketed the bird - and web material was in its mouth and on its tiny feet. I worked carefully to try and remove most of the web materials from its feathers, bill and feet and carried it gently outside. I could see clearly the disheveled feathers on the top of its head - obviously the point of contact with the stool. I suspected some neurological damage - I wasn't sure about the wings. He just lay still - breathing - but making no attempt to fly off.

Somehow - I didn't want to just put him under a bush - although that's nature's way. His death would be nourishment to other, equally significant life-forms that are struggling to achieve ecological fitness. I didn't think that he would survive, anyway. However - as I reflected that I now held in my palm a living being that had endured - among other things - an 800 km flight across the Gulf of Mexico just to get here; somehow this bird deserved a more respectful exit from this life - at least from me. So, I found a container - with a lid that could be left partially open - put in some paper toweling and placed the bird on it. My intention was to leave it over night - maybe put in some sugar/water solution for it - and if it died, well, that's life.

I went about closing up operations at the Nature Centre, and as I was about to leave the building, I heard a 'thump-thump' in the container. Sure enough, the hummingbird was propped up against one of the sides, its wings stretched out, and appeared to want to get out. Well, this was even better than I expected. So I carried the bird out in the container - fully opened the lid - and waited. Nothing. Mr. Ruby-Throat remained still with his wings folded tightly. I gently picked up the bird, held it in my hand while gently stroking its



back. And in a blink of an eye - WHIRRRR - it was off and had alighted onto a nearby tree branch, seemingly none the worse for the experience. It was nice to see the little fellow off and flying. Maybe he will even survive the bigger challenges of the boreal forest.

Sunday - was cloudy and cool - I had 236 people in to the Nature Centre. The place was rocking. There was more coffee than ice-cream sold in Waskesiu.

Monday - sunny and warm - almost hot. I only had 76 people in to the Nature Centre. Made perfect sense - everybody should be out on such a day.

Anyway - that's more or less it. We had over 600 visitors to the Nature Centre over the weekend - and that's good.

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