

Introduction

By Jim Wright

Just after my wife Patty and I fell in love with the Celery Farm but before we moved to a house a frog's jump away, I knew I had to write a book about this incredible place. The trouble was, I didn't know any nature photographers who frequented the 107-acre natural area.

When I asked around, I got one answer and one answer only: Jerry Barrack! (Yes, always with an exclamation mark). I didn't realize then, but Jerry, a Ho-Ho-Kus dentist, was *the* Celery Farm photographer in those days. Many excellent photographers have clicked a shutter or two in the preserve since then, but first came Jerry.

On Labor Day 2000, I bumped into a guy with a fancy 35 mm SLR on the Warden's Watch. I had a hunch who the photographer might be. After we introduced ourselves, my first words were, "Boy, am I glad to meet you."

I said I wanted to write a book about the Celery Farm. Jerry said he'd think about it. He had just asked the marsh warden, Stiles Thomas, about doing a book, and Stiles had turned him down. I figured I was the consolation prize.

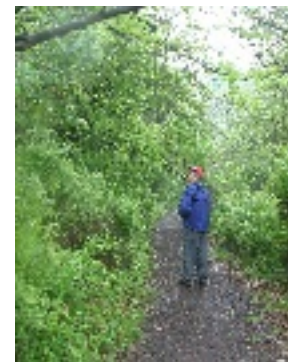
Long story short, Jerry and I collaborated on the book. With Doug Goodell's help, we produced *In the Presence of Nature*, better known as simply "the Celery Farm book."

In the intervening two decades, Jerry and I collaborated on projects near and far, and Jerry kept taking captivating pictures at the Celery Farm.

This book is packed with striking images of all sorts--birds and insects, reptiles and amphibians, landscapes and close-ups, action shots and aerials. Among my favorites: that Great Blue Heron eating a jumbo-sized carp, the Wood Ducklings leaving the nest box, the shots of the Red-shouldered Hawks and their young, the Belted Kingfishers, all those enchanting warblers...

I like to think of this book as the classic Celery Farm album--"Jerry Barrack's Greatest Hits."

Jim Wright has collaborated with Jerry for more than two decades on books that include Jungle of the Maya, In the Presence of Nature, Duck Enough to Fly, Icky the Hungry Heron, and Swan Babies.



The Celery Farm

When Jim Wright and I published *In the Presence of Nature* in 2002, I never could have imagined that more than 20 years later I would be working on another book on the Celery Farm. While Jim did such a beautiful job writing about the history, the importance and the "sense" of the Farm, I continued with my obsession to photograph from pre-dawn to post-sunset at all times of the year.

The development of digital photography gave all photographers the ability to capture images that were nearly impossible with film. Although digital cameras were available in the late 1990s, I didn't purchase one until 2003 when I felt the quality had improved to the point where it was equal to film. The idea of not running out of film at a crucial time in the action was just one of the many advances that were to come.

One situation that immediately comes to mind is the photograph on page 61, from *Icky, the Hungry Heron*, a children's book that Jim, Doug Goodell and I did. When I came upon this Great Blue Heron on the other side of the stream on the path to the Warden's Watch, he had just caught a giant carp and was positioning it for swallowing. I quickly put my camera and "big lens" (600mm) on the tripod and started shooting.

The conditions were perfect, with the sun shining through the trees on the bird and the fish. I realized what a great opportunity this was, and my heart was pounding. Before I knew it, the roll was full and had to be changed. As I really wanted to get him swallowing that fish, I changed rolls as quickly as possible and when I refocused I was relieved to see he was still playing with it.

Each time he repositioned the fish, I shot off a burst of 5 or 6 shots. My camera fired off 5 frames per second and before I knew it, I only had 4 frames left on the new roll. Now I had a tough decision to make: to wait until he started to swallow it and shoot off the 4 remaining shots or use up the roll and hope that he didn't swallow it while I was changing rolls.

I decided on the latter and was lucky enough to capture him swallowing the carp on that third roll. Talk about stress! That same situation occurred often over the years until switching to digital. Photographers are aware of this benefit and the many other advantages that digital cameras have such as amazing focusing. Non-photographers probably don't care.



Searching through my old back-up hard drives for images that I might want to consider for this book has been a daunting but exciting task. Unfortunately, I had not been very systematic in storing my old pictures and that made it even more difficult. That--combined with the fact that hard drives crash over time and everything is lost if not backed-up, and old slides were misplaced and not scanned that gave me more reasons to delay. Despite all these obstacles, and having to check out tens of thousands of images, I had a great desire to move forward with this book.

Of all of the thousands of hours I have spent at the Farm over these 32 years, and all of the exciting things I have had the pleasure to watch and photograph, none stands out more than the good fortune I have had on three separate occasions to see wood duck babies jumping out of their box into the water on their first day of life.

Jim and I were on the Warden's Watch on May 11, 2004 at 8:10 am when the female flew towards the box, looked into the opening for a moment and then hopped up to the top. A few seconds later we were shocked to see a little head pop out! (page 15.) To say that we were excited would be an understatement. Over the next minute or two nine babies had jumped into the water and mom led them away to safety. It was one of those events that is etched into your brain forever.

Realizing the significance of what we had just seen, Jim walked back to his house (a two minute walk) and immediately started writing. I, unfortunately had to go to work. Needless to say, I had a very hard time concentrating on my patients. I recall going over to my friend Doug Goodell's house immediately after work to review the images. Fortunately I had switched to digital so we could look at them immediately.

As Doug was a master at Photoshop, I trusted him completely to help me make the best images possible. A few months later we published the first of three children's books, entitled *Duck Enough to Fly*. The second book was the aforementioned *Icky, the Hungry Heron*. The third children's book that we published was entitled *Swan Babies* and came about when a pair of swans decided to conveniently build a nest at the edge of the Lake Appert 15 yards in front of Pirie Platform.

The view of the nest was perfect. One amazing thing happened after the eggs had been laid. A heavy rainstorm raised the water level on the lake, and the water started to rise around the bottom of the nest. If the eggs got wet, they would cool and the embryos would no longer be viable. Somehow the female knew that and pushed the eggs higher up near the sides so the water never reached the eggs. Truly remarkable behavior.

While swans are not very popular among birders because of their aggressive and territorial nature, the babies sure were cute! (pages 115-121.)



There are memories and stories behind so many of the images on the following pages that I couldn't begin to write about all of them. Strange as it may seem, I can recall taking a lot of these pictures. I'm sure that after all these years my memory is clouded but I would like to let you know how, at least some of them came to be selected.

One thing I can say for certain is that many were taken because so many birders and a few photographers helped me find the birds. Almost all of those people were members of the Fyke Nature Association. More information on that organization and its history and importance in preserving the Celery Farm can be gotten from the Celery Farm & Beyond blog and our book *In the Presence of Nature*.

I joined the group shortly after discovering the Farm and Stiles in 1990. Their monthly meetings became a fixture in my busy schedule and I learned a great deal from the presentations and talking with many of the members who soon became good friends. I was amazed at how much knowledge about birds and nature that these wonderful people had and how generous they all were about sharing and teaching me.

While I always considered myself a photographer and never a true "birder", I learned enough to help me get better images of these beautiful creatures. I can't recall exactly when I was asked to give my first "slide show", probably around 1994-95, but I was honored and very nervous about it. I had a great deal of experience lecturing in my dental profession as I had been teaching for 20 years at that point, but this would be my first nature talk. As I had learned from prior experience, the better prepared you are, the less nervous you will be so I worked on that first one for an entire year. I guess it went well enough as I was invited back many times after that. Jim and I started giving talks together around 2002.

I mentioned before how indebted I am to so many of the birders for going out of their way to find me and let me know that there was a great bird at the Farm and taking me to it. I can still picture Stiles running down the path to the Warden's Watch to tell me that a Goldeneye was on Phair's Pond and that I had to hurry there ASAP to take a picture of it. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I didn't know what a Goldeneye was but figured I would find out when we got there. We drove over and there was this beautiful, very rare duck hanging out with some Hooded Mergansers (which I could ID). Thank you Stiles.



One of my earliest recollections of a birder helping me out was when I was on the Warden's Watch and I spotted a little bird with some yellow on the back/tail. Since I was very new at this game of finding let alone photographing these small creatures I was not having much success and was a little frustrated.

Along comes this young, red-headed fellow and within a few seconds, tells me that it is a Yellow-rumped Warbler, but not a very good specimen. OK, I guess I won't bother with that bird! He introduced himself as Andy Egan and I got to know him as one of the "super birders". He later married Jen Crusco and we became close friends. I was even honored to be asked to be the photographer at their wedding. The only time I have ever done that but it worked out OK.

Another time that I will always remember was when a few of us were done photographing for the day and were talking in the parking lot when Barbara Dilger came running down the path from the spillway to tell us that there was a Chestnut-sided Warbler up high in the trees near the bridge. While I had never seen one before, by this time I at least knew what a warbler was! We rushed down and she spotted it for us. Eventually it came down a little and I managed to get a few good shots off before it flew away. The fact that she was willing to risk not getting any good shots herself so we would have the opportunity was extraordinarily generous and I have never forgotten it.

So many birders helped me, from Charlie West pointing out a Eurasian Wigeon among a flock of American Wigeons, to Fred Weber walking with me to show me the rare Horned Grebe way out on the pond. Of course there was always Rob Fanning and Stiles pointing out birds all the time.

So many others aided me in finding and photographing all these beautiful birds that I cannot remember everyone,, but I thank all of you.



A better specimen, Andy?







The Celery Farm 2002



A peaceful morning at the Farm

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Wood Ducks with fall reflections





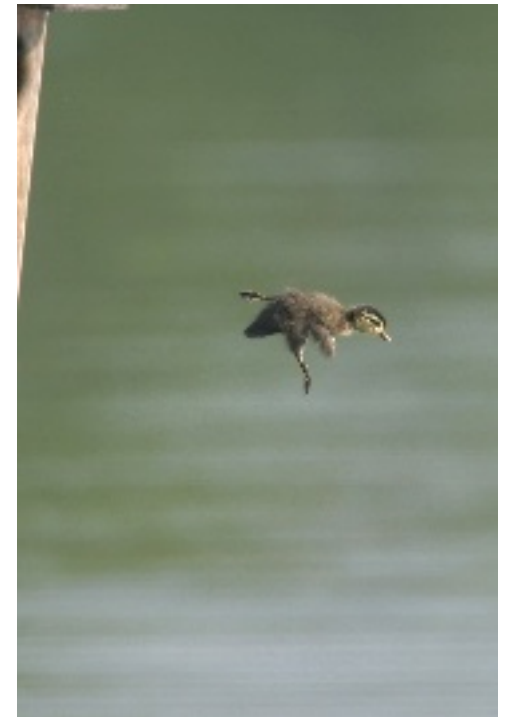
14 We had seen mom fly in like this many times but were shocked by what happened next.



This was the moment when Jim and I saw the first duckling stick its head out and see daylight for the first time. The next few minutes were magical.



16 The chick jumped down to the water, quickly followed by mom



"One, then another, then another, they took their first giant baby step"

Jim Wright - *Duck Enough to Fly*



"In the blink of a wood duck's eye, they splashed down. Mom did a head count: Nine ducklings¹⁸ had faced the test, and passed with flying colors." Jim Wright *Duck Enough to Fly*



Ten years later to the day, the magic happened again.





Mom signaling the rest to come on down



A proud mom





Unbelievable luck two weeks later, even if it was at the far wood duck box, 13 ducklings this time!





Great Blue Heron with beautiful but invasive Loosestrife







Mallard (f)









Ring-necked Duck





Eurasian Wigeon





Horned Grebe





Common Mergansers









Hooded Merganser with Goldeneye





Bufflehead













Gadwalls





Mallard with Redhead



Green-winged Teals









Black-crowned Night Heron--juvenile



Black-crowned Night Heron









Icky the Hungry Heron





I was three feet away from this Great Blue Heron taken with a wide angle lens





Great Blue Herons courting







Halloween Pennant



Blue Dasher



68 Hummingbird Clearwing Moth



Eastern Amberwing



Monarch Butterfly



Spicebush Swallowtail



Orange Sulphur Butterfly



Eastern Tiger Swallowtail Butterfly 69













Immature Cooper's Hawk (?)





Red-shouldered Hawks and Stiles releasing Laura

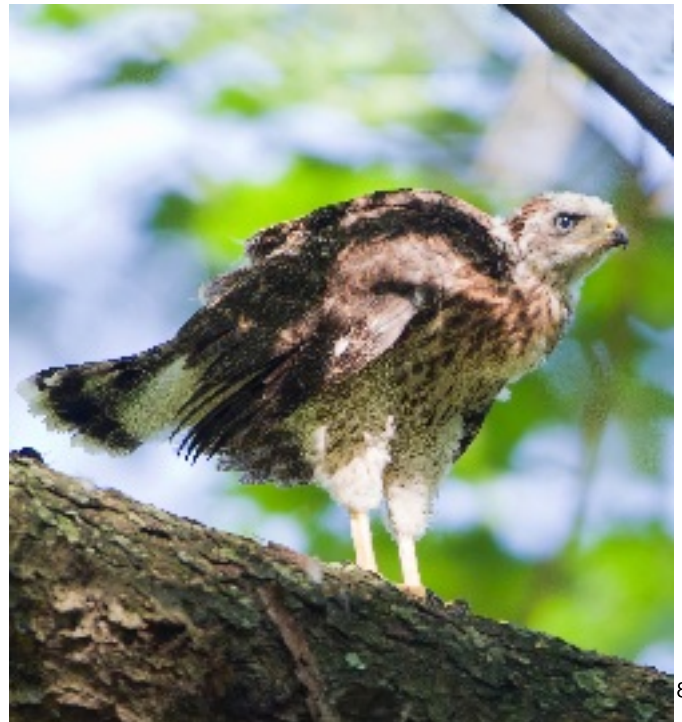










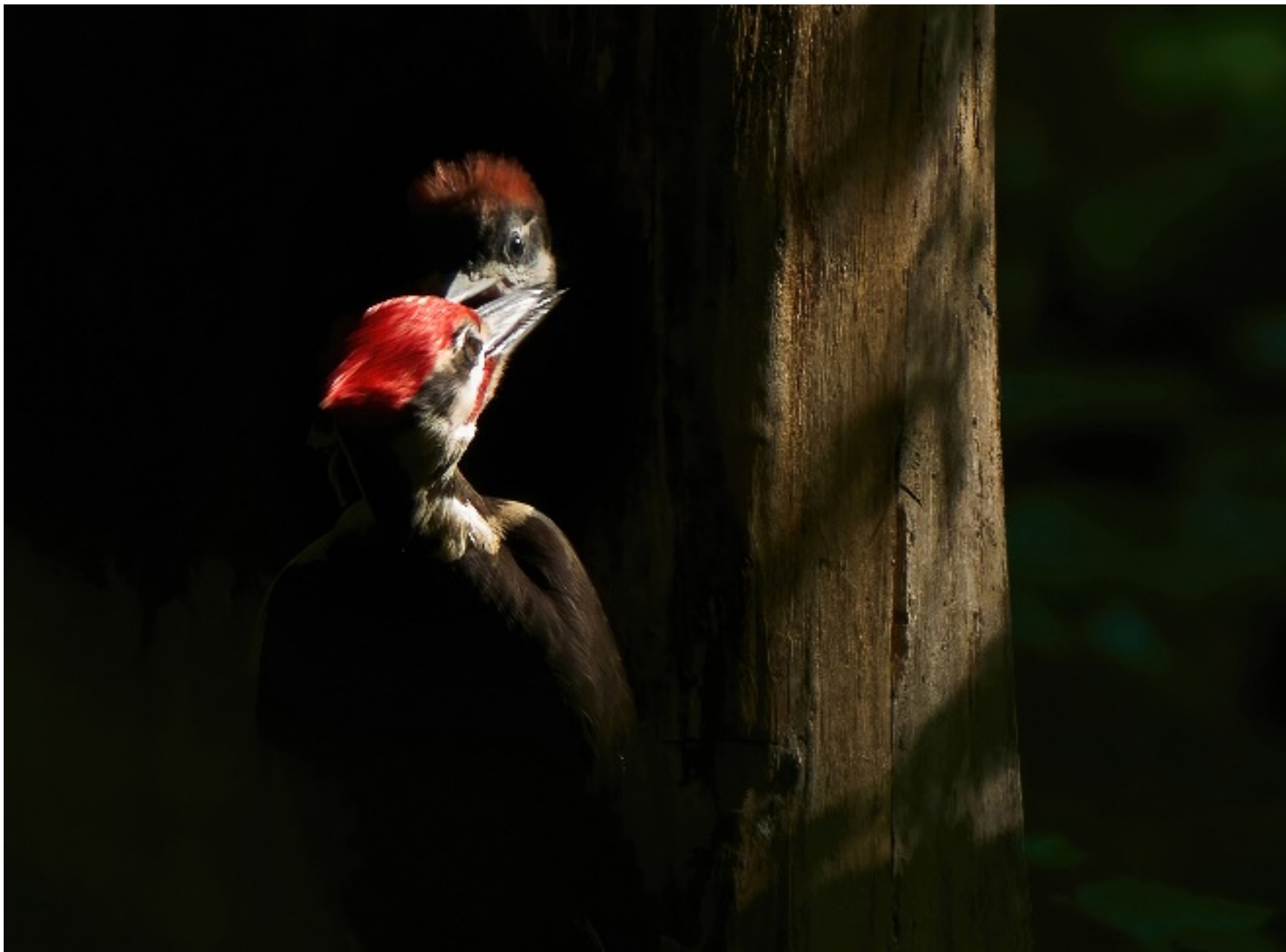






Red-tailed Hawk









American Kestrel



Spectacular sunrise at the Celery Farm







Screech owl nestling





First morning out of the nest





Willow Flycatcher (?)





Golden-crowned Kinglet











Fall at the Celery Farm

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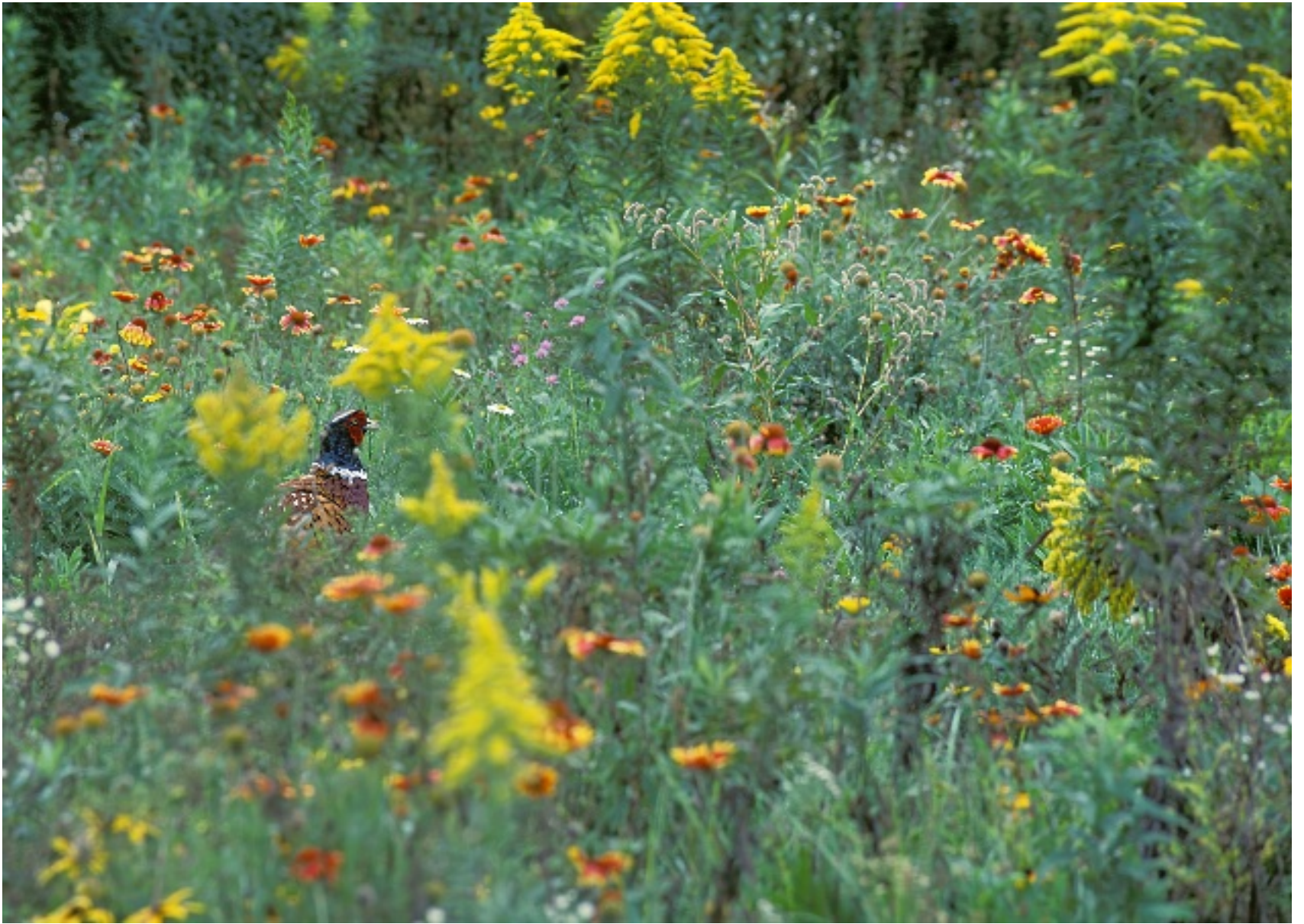


Wood Ducks in the mist

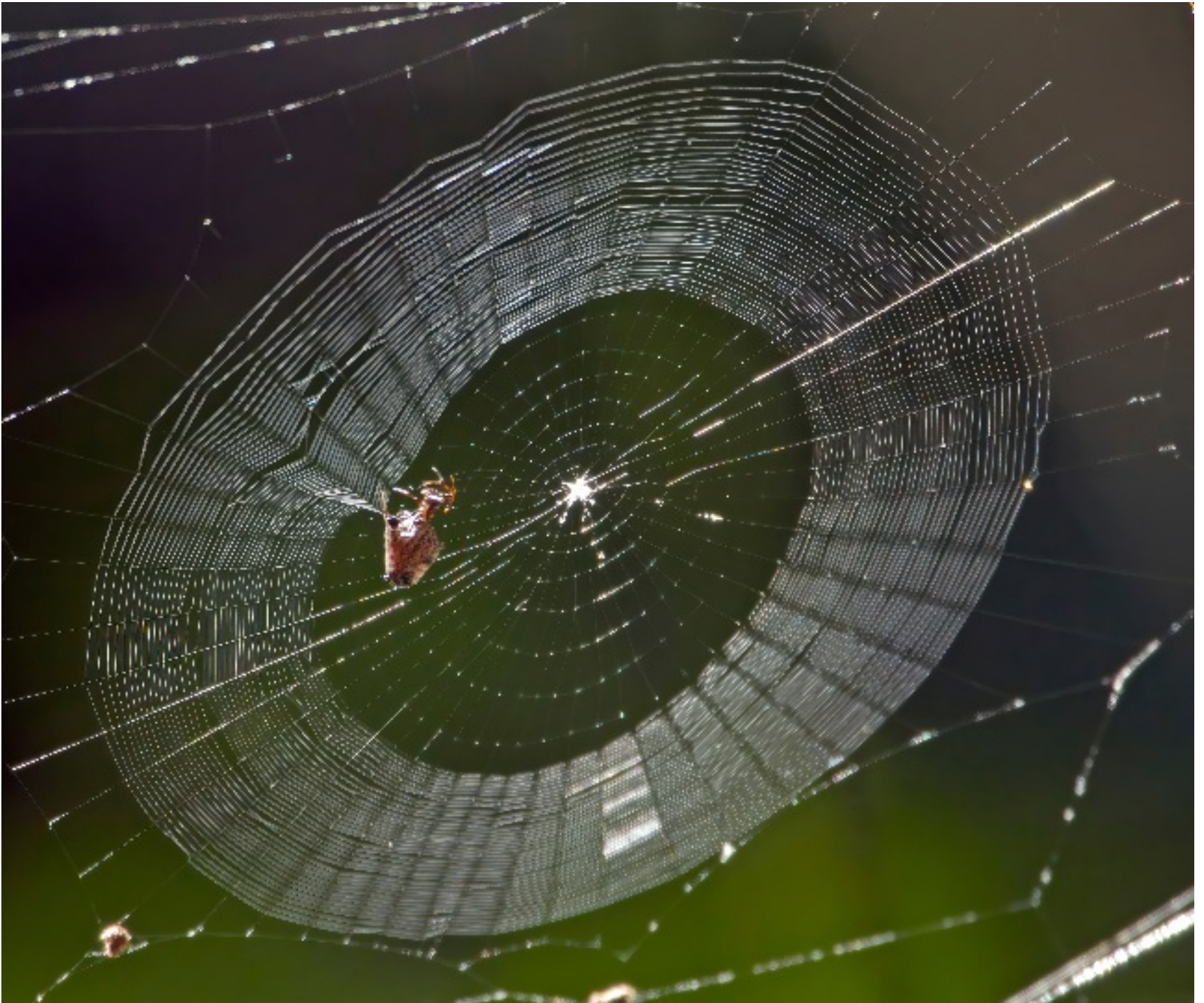




Kingfishers













Mute Swan with juvenile at sunrise





Awww!







Swan cygnets out for a swim





Cautious Red Fox at den. Although I was sitting behind a tree about 40 yards from the den, the fox heard the click of the shutter and became very alert.



Curious Red Fox kit





Mink



Snapping Turtle



Green Frog



Painted Turtle



Bull Frog



Carp



Sucker



Catfish



Carp





Fairly rare to see one at the Farm in breeding plumage















Yellow Warbler feeding chick



Red-eyed Vireo



Indigo Bunting



Tree-Swallows mating



Ring-billed Gull



House Wren



Virginia Rail



Red-winged Blackbird



Reflections on Lake Appert







Downy Woodpecker





Fish Crow





Blue-gray Gnatcatcher





American Bittern





Wilson's Snipe





Red-winged Blackbird (m)





Tufted Titmouse





Fox Sparrow





baby Warbling Vireo (?)



Sunrise on Lake Appert







Cerulean Warbler





Blackpoll Warbler





Black-throated Blue Warbler





Common Yellowthroat





Black-throated Green Warbler





Pine Warbler





Northern Parula





Palm Warbler





Black and White Warbler



Sunrise on Lake Appert







Cedar Waxwing





Northern Cardinal





Black-capped Chickadee



Fall at the Celery Farm







Eastern Kingbird





Gray Catbird





Baltimore Oriole





Northern Waterthrush





Ruby-throated Hummingbird





Leucistic Catbird



View from Pirie Platform in the fall





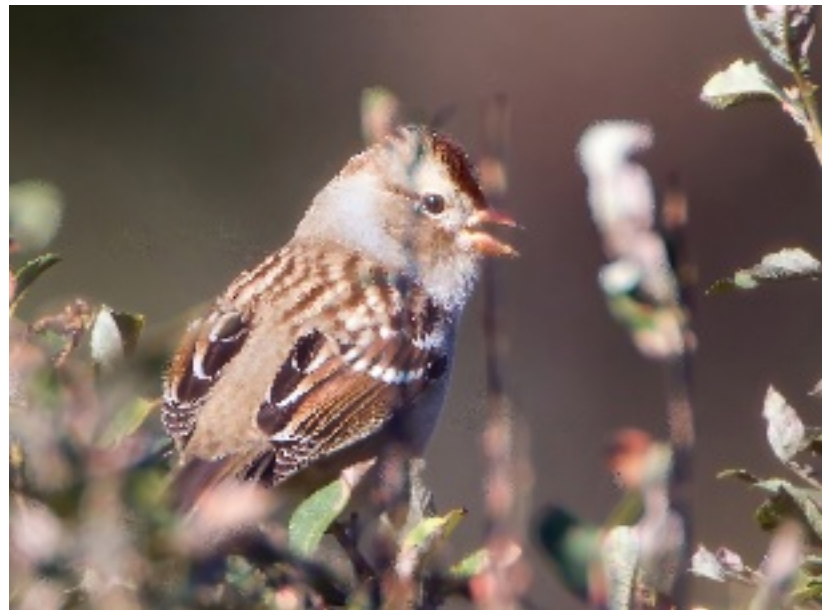
Song Sparrow



House Sparrow



Savannah Sparrow



Juvenile White-crowned Sparrow



Barn Swallow



Barn Swallows mating



Rough-winged Swallows



Rough-winged Swallows





House Finch





Yellow-rumped Warbler catching insect





Tundra Swan with Ring-necked Ducks



Bajor barn in fall







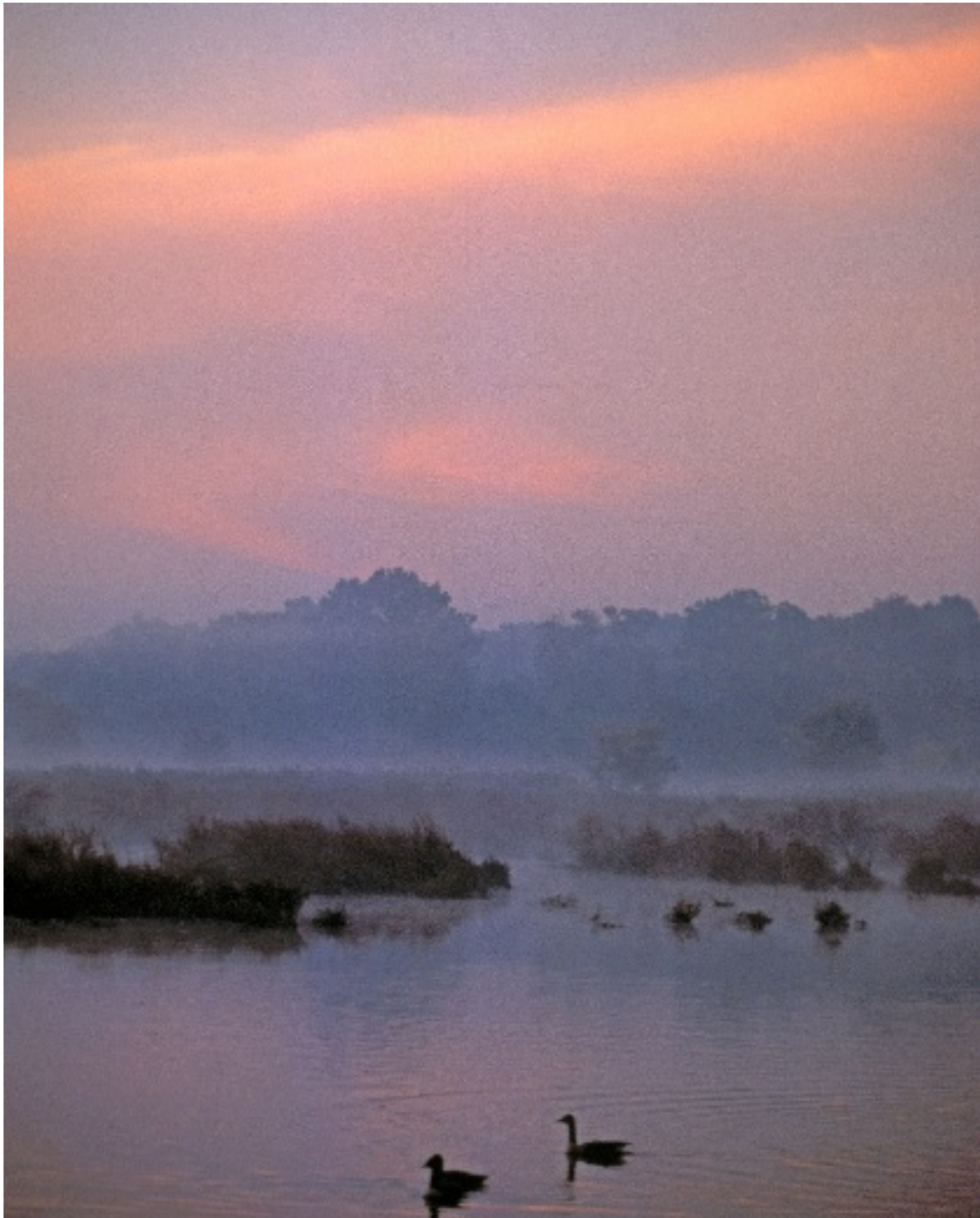






Canada Geese blur









Great Blue Heron on Lake Appert with Loosestrife





Jewelweed



Syphid Fly on Black-eyed Susan



Crabapple blossom



Purple Loosestrife (invasive)



Two-spotted Bumblebee on Buttonbush



Silver Spotted Skipper on Black Knapweed



Common Eastern Bumblebee



Wineberry (invasive)





Jim and Patty on their morning walk





Tracks across the ice



Cleaning out the Wood Duck boxes



Red Foxes at play on the ice





Why aren't I in Florida?



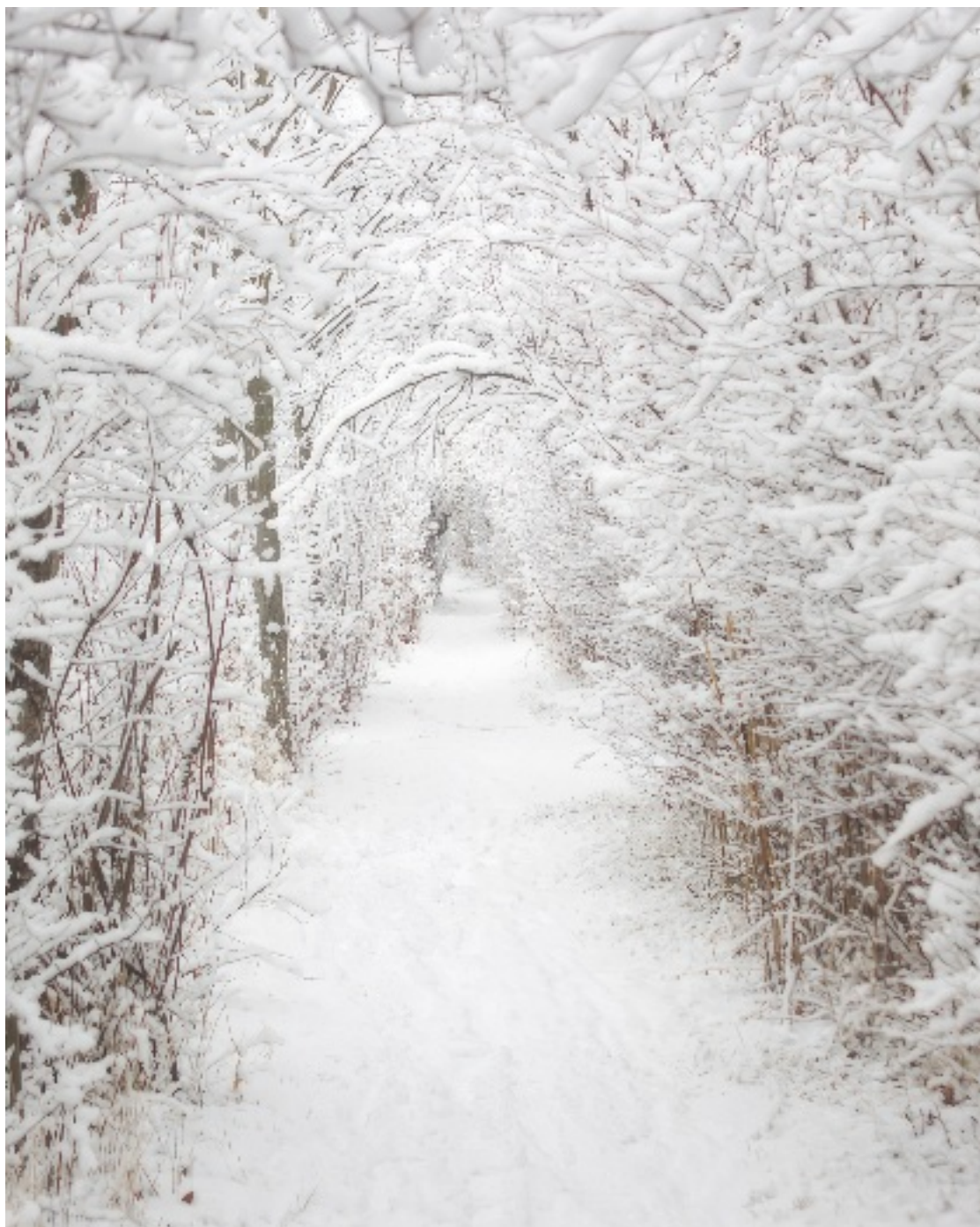
Wild Turkey

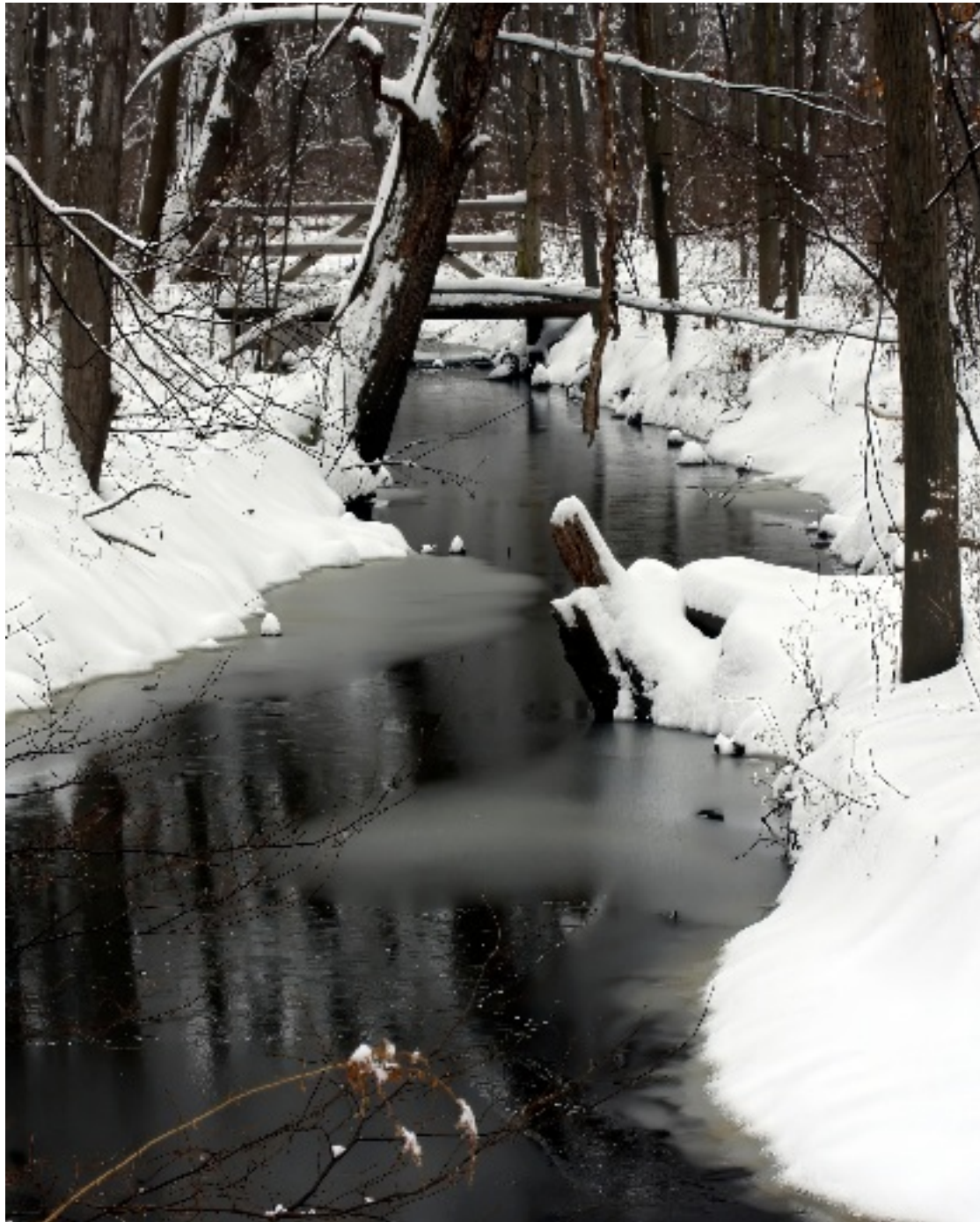


Dark-eyed Junco



Wilson's Snipe







Bajor barn in winter









Lake Appert by moonlight





A full house for the "hour on the tower" including a Mallard. Chances are not too many birds would be missed by this stellar group.

This project has been a labor of love that has brought back so many memories. First I would like to thank Jim for his guidance and editing of this project and for his friendship and also to Patty. To DeeDee Burnside Fred Weber and Rob Fanning for helping with the ID's. To the photographers and friends: Patrick Sparkman, Kevin Watson, Doug Goodell, and Bob Kane for contributing to my photography education. And for the friendships made that will never be forgotten: Carol Flanagan, Ken Buxton, John Workman, Charlie West, Charlie Mayhood, Mike Limatola, Pat and John Brotherton, Kumar Patel, Barbara Dilger, Rob Fanning, Gaby Schmitt, Kurt Muenz, Jen Crusco and Andy Egan, and Gordon Shultze .