



Writing Sample - Dana Kester-McCabe

Confessions Of A Drive By Birder

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I am relatively new to birding. I don't know whether to call it a new hobby - my latest form of art - my current obsession - or even possibly my present form of meditation. I only know that now I carry my camera with me most of the time. And, that my favorite Sunday afternoon pass times, reading the paper and watching a good movie have been replaced by a leisurely ride home from church meandering through the country side, stopping along the way at some of my favorite birding spots.

For many, birding is about keeping score. How many birds are on my life list? Well, I actually don't have one. That isn't really what does it for me. I admit there is some satisfaction in being able to identify a wide variety of birds, say - knowing the difference between a laughing gull and a Forester's tern; or better yet the difference between a great white egret and a snowy egret. However, I am more interested in simply being in the presence of these beautiful creatures.

Most of the time, this is a fairly lazy endeavor which involves driving along quiet country roads. If I see something birdlike on a wire or branch, after a quick check of the rear view mirror for cars behind me, I slow down and pull over to get a shot. I've gotten some pretty interesting pictures this way. Though parking and actually getting out of the car and staying awhile yields even better results. But being a "drive by birder" isn't just about whether I get out of the car or even whether I get a good photo. It is being aware all the time of the birds around me; whether it is on the feeder outside my window, or roosting on the signs and canopies of a convenience store.

I am trying to be more intentional about my birding. Recently, one early foggy morning, my husband and I visited a spot in Libertytown, Maryland where I got some nice pictures including a charming downy woodpecker. But because of the weather conditions the pictures were more art than identification. Yet those are some of the best pictures. It isn't about merely getting a crisp clear image in one split second. It is about saying something about the relationship we have with these creatures who are, after all, our neighbors.

I suppose birding for me is one part art, one part meditation, and one part connection to all of creation's blessed community.