



The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 562, New Paltz, NY 12561

SPRING/SUMMER 2025

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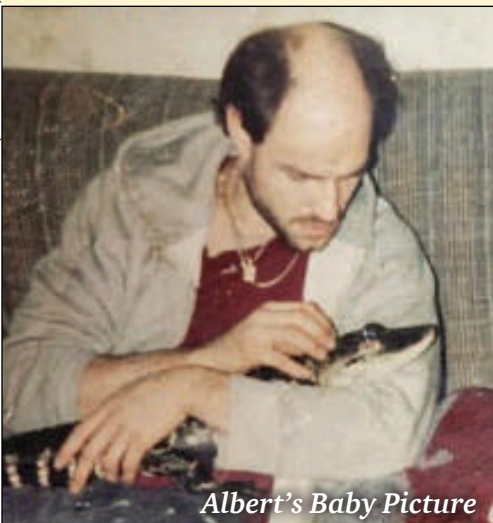
Part Two: An Update on Albert the Alligator Who Was Seized Without Warning by NY State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

By Maureen Schiener

Please visit this [LINK](#) to read Part One.

Background: The alligator's guardian, Tony Cavallaro of Hamburg, NY, had for many years held a special permit to possess Albert. He invested thousands of dollars to enhance Albert's living quarters, including a specially built swimming pool. According to Tony, the DEC then informed him that double-doors were a new requirement so Albert wouldn't be able to escape. Tony contacted the DEC to request Albert's home

PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY CAVALLARO (ALBERT'S DAD)



Albert's Baby Picture

Continued on Page 2

KOKKAREBELLUR—A VILLAGE

A PERFECT EXAMPLE OF LIVING IN HARMONY WITH NATURE

By Bindu Gopal Rao



PHOTO © BINDU GOPAL RAO

Painted Stork

A small hamlet located about 75 kilometers from Bengaluru, India, is Kokkarebellur, which ensures birds like painted storks and pelicans can breed in peace.

Did you know that there is a village in Karnataka's Mandya District that is not a bird sanctuary and yet sees hundreds of migratory birds that come to breed? Well, this is Kokkarebellur, a village that is named after the painted stork (*Ibis leucocephalus*), locally called 'kokkare' in Kannada.

EXEMPLARY HUMAN-ANIMAL COEXISTENCE

The first ever historical mention of Kokkarebellur and its pelicanry was made by British naturalist T.C. Jerdon. An outbreak of plague forced the villagers, pelicans, and storks to move from the old location on the banks of River Shimsha to a new site 800 meters away. Interestingly, this is the only community reserve in Karnataka and one of the 45 across the country and one of the 21 breeding sites of the spot-billed pelican in South India (listed by IUCN as Near Threatened).

Continued on Page 3

An Update on Albert the Alligator Who Was Seized Without Warning By NY State's Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) *Continued from Page 1*



PHOTO COURTESY OF TONY CAVALLARO (ALBERT'S DAD)

situation to be grandfathered in as there was little chance he could escape. Tony received no response and no communication after Covid in 2021.

Then, in March 2024, Tony was blindsided by an onslaught of vehicles in his driveway from local law enforcement, fire dept., the DEC, and local SPCA—invading his home to take Albert away.

Since then, Tony has been fighting in the courts to bring back Albert, who had lived with him for over 30 years. Tony reports he had contacted the DEC multiple times receiving no response. In December 2024, Tony sued the DEC, calling the seizure of Albert “excessive” and his license to possess Albert unreasonably denied. **This past February a judge ruled in Tony’s favor: the DEC was in error and must process Tony’s application for a permit to possess Albert. If approved, it would allow Albert to return to Tony’s home.**

In March the DEC appealed the decision and has from 6-9 months to present its’ case. **In the meantime, Albert is living in a Texas theme**

park, away from the only home he has ever known. Tony believes he’s not being taken care of properly but won’t visit because he feels it might upset Albert. Tony obviously cares deeply for Albert—he never displayed him for money or exploited him in any way. Friends would visit; one even swam in the pool with Albert. Tony’s determined to keep fighting for Albert; he’s spent \$15,000 thus far in legal fees. **Perhaps the new acting Commissioner of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation will be more empathetic to our neighbors who try to do right by the animals.**

Albert remains somewhere in this amusement park in Beaumont, Texas:
gatorrescue.com/about

To express your opinion, please contact the NYS DEC, Attn: Amanda Lefton, Acting Commissioner, DEC. contact@dec.ny.gov

ASK THEM TO RETURN ALBERT!

Maureen Schiener is on the board of the League of Humane Voters/NY



Recovering birds

PHOTO © BINDU GOPAL RAO

At a time when there is a lot of noise around man-animal conflict, the villagers here work in tandem to ensure that the birds can breed safely. This is a bond that goes back centuries and is deeply embedded in the culture of the local communities and in the unique behavior of the birds that prefer proximity to people. Viewed as harbingers of good fortune, the birds are welcomed each season as they set up nests in the tree canopies of banyan and tamarind. This relationship nurtures both, demonstrating an example of how living so closely with nature can benefit the health of the ecosystem. In fact, even the children of the village have been taught that it is their duty to take care of the birds and not disturb them or their nests. This is why the tamarind is not harvested, as the birds prefer to roost on specific trees only. The bird droppings are a source of 'guano' that is used as manure for farming, and this is exactly why there is a symbiotic sustenance seen here. Venkatesh, a resident of the village, says, "These birds are harbingers of good fortune, and we believe that by coming here each year, they are doing us a good turn."



PHOTOS © BINDU GOPAL RAO



Photos of nature center

MAKING AN IMPACT

The village now has a nature interpretation center that is open to visitors who can come here and learn all about the place. Hejjarle Balaga (Friends of the Pelicans), local communities Gram Panchayat, CHESCOM, the Forest Department, and WWF-India have come together to conserve the biodiversity and natural resources of Kokkarebellur. K. Sri Krishna, a member of Hejjarle Balaga who also looks after the center, says, "I have been here since 2008, and I am working on educating the community as well on the need for conservation here. As birds are declining, we need this interpretation center, as we have several infographics here that serve to educate and create awareness of this area." He also runs small camps for the locals to reinforce conservation methods as well.

Continued on page 4



A needy bird who will soon be taken in.

PHOTO © BINDU GOPAL RAO

KOKKAREBELLUR—A VILLAGE *Continued from page 3*

HELPING HANDS

Located near the Nature Interpretation Centre is a place where **Lokesh P, a forest watcher, takes care of injured birds.** As Kokkarebellur is not really a formal bird sanctuary, there are cases when birds fall off the nest or sustain injuries, and Lokesh works tirelessly to help them get back on their feet. “If the bird is on the ground, it is abandoned by the family. This is when we take care by rescuing and feeding them. Once they are fit, they are released so that they can live a regular life,” says Lokesh. At the center, I saw him apply medicine on an injured foot of a pelican, and as a visitor, you can also contribute (it is completely voluntary) for the food (fish feed) for these injured birds. “Some birds cannot survive in the wild, as their injury has crippled them, and that is why we keep them in an enclosure here,” adds Lokesh.



PHOTO © BINDU GOPAL RAO



Lokesh helping an injured pelican.

COMMUNITY CONNECT

Hejjarle Balaga, in association with local communities, conducts periodic awareness programs to educate community members, schoolchildren, and the youth on the significance of this ecosystem and the means to protect it. They have also intervened successfully to stop the felling of trees by people, reduce the chemical and water use, and provide financial compensation to the owner of the tree where the birds nest.

Electrical cables throughout Kokkarebellur were insulated at a cost of Rs. 45 lakh (approximately USD 52K) by the Chamundeshwari Electricity Supply Company, which has resulted in the prevention of accidental electrocution of the birds. Sustainable agricultural practices like the use of organic manure and biopesticides are being adopted in this village as well. Various initiatives have been undertaken by local communities in association with the Forest Department and WWF-India to plant trees in the area.

CHALLENGES GALORE

However, there are several issues that are behind the steady decline in the number of birds. Large trees such as *Ficus religiosa*, *Ficus Bengalensis*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Acacia nilotica*, and *Thespesia populenea* have been preferred by the birds for roosting and nesting. With the increase in the opportunity cost of land occupied by such trees, there is an increased tendency towards tree felling. Widening of roads and other construction activities have also resulted in a reduction in the number of trees in the area. With frequent failures in monsoon and changes in the land use patterns, natural drainage to wetlands has been altered. These wetlands, including Kokkarebellur tank and other smaller wetlands, do not receive sufficient surface runoff. Increased incidence of sand mining in the riverbed has aggravated habitat degradation. Fishing is one of the traditional livelihood activities carried out in the Shimsha River, Tailur Kere, Sole Kere, and Maddur Kere (lakes in and around the region), which are the sources of fish for the birds. Indiscriminate commercial fishing and the presence of invasive species like catfish are leading to a rapid decline in the native species. However, with proper intervention, many of these challenges can be and are being mitigated. **There is more to be done, and one hopes that this unique habitat and relationship between man and bird withstands the test of time.**

BINDU GOPAL RAO is a freelance writer and photographer from Bengaluru. She enjoys birdwatching and environment, as well as taking the offbeat path when traveling. You can follow her on Instagram @bindugopalrao and find her work on bindugopalrao.com

R.O.C.K. - Rehabbers Offer Care and Kindness

The Wildlife Watch Hotline - 877-WILDHELP receives hundreds of calls every year from across the country, and a few from Canada. Police departments, conservation agencies, SPCAs, veterinary offices, and federal, state, and municipal offices have referred callers to Wildlife Watch for help.

Your contribution to Wildlife Watch will help us to expand our volunteer service by allowing us to cover phones 24/7 and update our lists as new wildlife rehabilitators come on the scene.



Injured mother goose

By Anne Muller

As soon as the weather warms up, more folks are outside hiking and biking, strolling, and encountering wild animals who need help! Wildlife Watch's national mnemonic number, 877 WILDHELP, is given out by game agencies, veterinary offices, police, and folks who find it online.

This year has been no exception. As always, fawns, Canada geese, turtles, fledglings and bunnies have been the species we've had the most calls about.

Much injury and death of wildlife is caused *accidentally* by drivers. While it's upsetting when it happens accidentally, it's infuriating when it happens intentionally.

Normally, youngsters follow their moms onto the roads, so the mother is likely the first to be struck, leaving the surviving young ones without direction. Unfortunately, speed limits increase significantly in areas where it's more likely that wildlife will be killed. Have you noticed that the more rural the area, the higher the speed limit?

One caller said she witnessed a Canada goose being struck on the road by a driver who indifferently hit the goose. She sent this photo and report:

A car driving by hit the mother as the babies were following her across the road. The driver just drove off. The goose is alive, but bleeding from the beak and can't walk. I have her in my car.

Wildlife Watch provided several numbers of wildlife rehabbers, but in a short time, a veterinary hospital said they would take the goose.

We're following up with the caller and hoping that this particular goose can have a chance at life again and be reunited with her family. Sadly, in a follow-up text we learned the mom will never fly again.

The heavy flooding in May in the Mid-Hudson Valley, which is where we're located, caused the rivers to rise with strong currents. It put water where it hadn't been before. Calls came in about disoriented goslings that had become separated from their parents and siblings and found themselves far from water when the water receded.

The good news is that Canada geese are magnanimous and they will adopt the goslings of other adults. We suggested that they find a flock and let the goslings go to them. That explains why you see so many goslings with two adults.



PHOTO: FLOODING IN MAY IN THE MID-HUDSON VALLEY UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER.

COONEY'S MESSAGE TO AVA

By Ava Barcelona

In the 1970s, I was driving around Wisconsin and came across a farm where they were raising baby raccoons in cages for the pelt.

After weeks of sleepless nights, I returned to buy one to save, and I adopted many more over the next 35 years.

Cooney, one of my adopted raccoons led me to the world of naturalist Henry Beston and his masterpiece, "The Outermost House," published in 1928. A paragraph in Chapter 2 set the tone. Beston wrote:

We need another and a wiser and perhaps a more mystical concept of animals. Remote from universal nature, and living by complicated artifice, man in civilization surveys the creature through the glass of his knowledge and sees thereby a feather magnified and the whole image in distortion. We patronize them for their incompleteness, for their tragic fate of having taken form so far below ourselves. And therein we err, and greatly err. For the animal shall not be measured by man. In a world older and more complete than ours they move finished and complete, gifted with extensions of the senses we have lost or never attained, living by voices we shall never hear. They are not brethren, they are not underlings; they are other nations, caught with ourselves in the net of life and time, fellow prisoners of the splendour and travail of the earth.

[The book can be read free of charge at this website: https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/73328/pg73328-images.html#Chapter_I]

After reading this paragraph, I couldn't imagine living the rest of my life without the knowledge of what I've learned from these lines.

I no longer could accept people's narrow-minded description of raccoons as "trouble makers, a nuisance." The raccoons lived in my arms, on top of my head, for 35 years. I knew their DNA! Their intellect dictates that they boomerang the mistreatment, injustice back to the sender.



Cooney and her beloved statue.

Cooney was 15 when Noelle, 9 years old, had kidney failure. I had her euthanized. When I returned home, the accusatory look in Cooney's eyes was horrifying. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? The next 47 days were indescribable. She curled up in Noelle's bed and "tuned me out" in the most brutal way. She looked through me, no acknowledgement of my existence. She did the absolute minimum of getting up to eat. On the 48th day, she came up to me, intense eye contact, "OK mom, I'm ready to move on." Forty-seven days of pure agony I couldn't quell, it had to be on her terms!

Cooney fell in love with a garden statue. You could not force, teach, bribe a pose like this. It comes from a beautiful heart, mirroring my emotional investment in them.

Artists have captured the beauty of wildlife since time immemorial. It is far more challenging to capture EMOTIONS. That is what Cooney offers in this photo, the beautiful side of a raccoon.

Ava Barcelona asks, "How can society tolerate 'coon' hunting?"

AVA BARCELONA is a longtime Wildlife Watch member who has rescued and nurtured both wild and domestic animals.

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Anne Muller, Editor

We welcome letters/articles/
photos for consideration.

Contributions are
tax-deductible.

WILDLIFE WATCH NEEDS YOU!

Wildlife Watch needs your help more than ever to continue providing our vital wildlife hotline service to the public. We receive calls from across the country, and occasionally from Canada, from people needing help with injured and orphaned wildlife. Our easy to remember number **877WILDHELP** is recommended by veterinary offices, SPCAs, and law enforcement agencies. Additionally, we publish the **Wildlife Watch Binocular** to inform the public about environmental impacts on wild animals, to highlight people who help them, to promote wildlife watching, and to engender understanding that all animals are individuals deserving of kinder treatment.

**Will you help our
work? YES**

wildwatch.org/join/contrib

LET'S GO WILDLIFE WATCHING AT THE Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport, MA

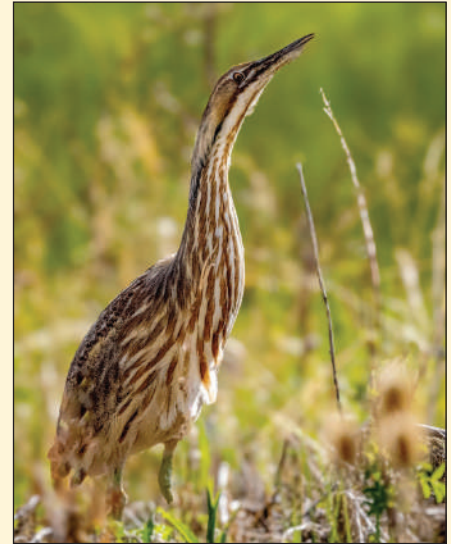
By Joe Anderson

Spring is in the air and while we all start to get outside and enjoy the warmer, longer days, the wildlife around us is hard at work capitalizing on this time of abundance. That is why this is the best time of the year to get out and look for wild animals. Spring is your best chance to catch a hungry black bear searching for food after sleeping through the winter. This is also when most species give birth and you may see juveniles trying to get a head start in life. For birdwatchers, spring is the season we have been waiting for all year. Don't blink.

If you are looking for migrating birds in the Northeast, there are not many better places to go than the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge (PRNWR). This refuge, located on Plum Island in Newburyport, Massachusetts, is great for a wide variety of wildlife viewing opportunities. It's home to sandy dunes, salt marsh, pine forest, and freshwater ponds with trails, boardwalks, and bird blinds offering easy access to each habitat. Whether you prefer to walk into the woods or just get out of the car to see what's around, PRNWR makes it easy to access nature and see wild animals.

Plum Island is a great place to visit without any specific target species in mind. But if you want to see Snowy Owls, the massive salt marshes and sandy dunes on the island are the best places to look in the winter. While these majestic birds can be elusive, and surprisingly hard to spot (given their bright white feathers), they are actually among the few diurnal owls, meaning they are active during the day.

Besides Snowy Owls, there are a few other hard-to-find birds that can be seen more easily at PRNWR. One



example is the American and Least Bitterns which hide in tall grasses of marshes and ponds. Searching for these species in the freshwater ponds on Plum Island might be your best bet to actually see one anywhere around the Northeast. These ponds are also home to a wide variety of ducks, wading birds, and other species that prefer to stay close to water.

But if you are going to Plum Island in spring, you are probably going to look for the warblers, vireos, flycatchers, and other migrating birds that can only be seen at certain times of the year. While these species can be found throughout the refuge, there is nowhere better to see them than the Hellcat boardwalks. Raised a few feet from the ground and going through a habitat that is great for bird viewing, these boardwalks give you the chance to see these beautiful birds up close and often at eye-level.

Hellcat, and the rest of PRNWR, can be crowded with birdwatchers during the spring migration but there is good reason for it. It's because Parker River National Wildlife Refuge is known to many as the best birdwatching spot in all of Massachusetts.

Joe Anderson is an avid bird watcher and enjoys sharing his favorite birding locations with others.

Wildlife Watch
PO Box 562,
New Paltz, NY 12561



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INJURED OR ORPHANED
WILDLIFE?**

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1-877-WILDHEL(P)
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Wildlife Watch maintains current lists of wildlife rehabilitators around the country. Our hotline helps us to help hundreds of people and animals annually. Please help us by becoming a Wildlife Watch member for \$25 annually and please make an additional contribution for the R.O.C.K. Project that will be put into a fund and used to help a rehabber help wild animals. R.O.C.K. Project funds will be distributed at our discretion up to the amount available.

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COMMON RAVEN (*Corvus corax*)

The Common Raven, also known as the Northern Raven (*Corvus corax*) is tied with Africa's Thick-billed Raven (*C. crassirostris*) as the world's largest species of songbird and is often considered to probably be the most intelligent of any bird species, or at least tied for that distinction with other members of the genus, *Corvus*. They also have an enormous range across much of the northern hemisphere, north to above the arctic circle and south into the tropics and subtropics of the Americas, Africa and Asia.

Therefore, Common Ravens inhabit a wide range of habitats and since they are not particularly migratory (and one of the few bird species to be found above the arctic circle even in winter) they have diverged into about a dozen distinctive geographic variations. I have shown *C. c. principalis*, found throughout most of North America. But therein lies a mystery from my youth. I live in the Greater Toronto Area, between the boreal forests of the Precambrian Shield, just a few hundred kilometers to the north, and the Appalachian Mountains, just a few hundred kilometers to the south and east, as the raven flies. But while ravens were common in both those regions, we had no ravens where I lived.



PAINTING BY BARRY KENT MACKAY

Now we do. They have filled the gap and moved into my area, still far from abundant but the day I started this painting, late last year, two flew over my head as I was thinking about my painting while I filled my garden bird feeders. I looked up when I heard them call. I chose to deem their appearance to be a good omen. Their low croaking call, very different from that of crows, is oddly pleasing to me...I am not sure why. Maybe it is just because I am so fond of them.

This painting, which took months to do, is life size, and is 38 by 26 inches, in oils, on wood. Ravens mate for life and I have shown the female above her mate.

For the full text, please contact: **Barry Kent MacKay**, Bird Artist, Illustrator
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