

# Gillespie Creek Journal

*Happy Holidays!*

The cold of the season brings the Winter Solstice and special celebrations. Enjoy my favorite Christmas morning memory. I title it

## *Christmas Bird Count*

Sophomore in college, my boyfriend and I dated with **Roger Tory Peterson's** bird taxonomy key at our side as he drove on deserted country roads looking for rare birds, a requirement for the ornithology class Ray needed to complete his biology degree. Trying to bird watch when you are cuddled, distracted college kids together on the bench seat of a 1949 Mercury sedan gets pretty intense! That spring cardinals, orioles, gold and purple finches, flickers, hawks, Downey, Harry, red headed woodpeckers, sandpipers, grebes, herons, egrets and gnat catchers were eventually checked on his assigned "life list." Ray got an A in the class. 52 years later married with children, we still reminisced about the day we saw an **Indigo Bunting**. This iridescent blue finch captured our attention in a flash and remained with us literally into eternity!

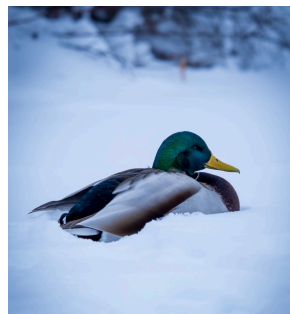
Bicentennial year, 1976 we built the home of our dreams on a sidehill overlooking a small lake on an abandoned corn field.. Composting, passive solar heating, recycling, insulating, wood burning and conserving were the buzz words that guided our home design. A deck overlooked the lake. We wanted to live in harmony with the natural world.



Slate Colored Junco



Northern Cardinal



Mallard Duck



Indigo Bunting

*The sun rose May 31, 2013, a day following Ray's death . An Indigo Bunting flew to our deck feeder. In our sadness, it seemed a Natural World message, "Forever Partners."*

We expected to lounge about watching birds to our heart's content. Pheasants and geese, robins and a few finches were the only birds about that first year. Spring brought gulls, loons, and ducks to the lake. Over time as our trees grew, cardinals, flycatchers and orioles called, but only juncos seemed interested in the food we put out in feeders near the house. Juncos scavenge food off the ground. We tried nectar, thistle, sunflower seeds and cracked corn. Our rabbits, squirrels and raccoons got fat and bold. Downy, Harry and an occasional pileated woodpecker would hang out in our back yard warily stealing bites of the suet. Most birds remained aloof and illusive, visible only through our binoculars.

**One especially beautiful Christmas morning that all changed.**

A snow storm had struck during the night. It began with rain. Soon the air cooled to below freezing. Sleet fell. Tree branches and tall grasses became shrouded with ice. A half a foot of light snow followed. Snow drifted over our fence and across our driveway. West wind howled sweeping and polishing a clear ice patch beneath the front yard bird feeder. Early morning we cuddled together before the fireplace watching our four children open Santa's gifts. Suddenly our older son stopped and pointed, "Look Outside!" There through the steaming frame our our living room window, a diamond sparked fairy land appeared. In the center the rising sun's spotlight was focused upon the ice tray beneath the feeder tree. **A cardinal pair, pheasant, a mallard duck, a slate colored junco family, a squirrel and a rabbit were all peacefully eating their Christmas feast. All right before our wondering eyes.**

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