

Watchers enjoy seeing distant birds

By Timothy Nowicki
Special writer

I SAT at my desk the other night recalling some of the birds I had seen during this fall's migration.

Most birds that nest in northern Canada pass by the Detroit area twice a year on their way to and from their southern wintering grounds.

Their southward migration is not quite as rushed as the spring movement north, and some birds may remain in an area for a few days.

A FRIEND and I went birding near Monroe in early September and saw three interesting species.

We identified three red knots, which is a sandpiper that nests in the Arctic and winters on the shores of Argentina. Though their red plumage had turned to gray at this time of the year, their medium size and characteristic

nature

shape helped us to identify them.

But what was even more intriguing, was the fact that one bird had an aluminum Fish and Wildlife Service band on its leg. At one time during that bird's life, it had been netted by a researcher measured, weighed, aged, and sent on its way with a new piece of jewelry.

WITHOUT THE actual number from the band, it is impossible to determine where the bird was banded. Chances are, though, that he was caught by researchers from the Manomet Bird Observatory in Massachusetts.

For several years now, the observatory has been banding migrating knots in order to learn more about their migration patterns.

In the same flooded field where we saw the red knots, we also saw a marbled godwit. Marbled godwits do not usually pass through southeastern Michigan on their way south for the winter. But this large female, with her slightly upturned 4-inch-long bill, found a productive place to feed and rest before heading south again.

BOTH SPECIES of shorebirds and other birds along the shoreline were all being surveyed by a juvenile bald eagle, and later by an adult.

Each bird flew low over the water's edge looking for a potential meal. Compared to even the large gulls and ducks in the area, the eagle's size dwarfed the other birds.

My friend and I had a very productive day, compared to many times when we have spent long hours in the field and seen little or nothing.

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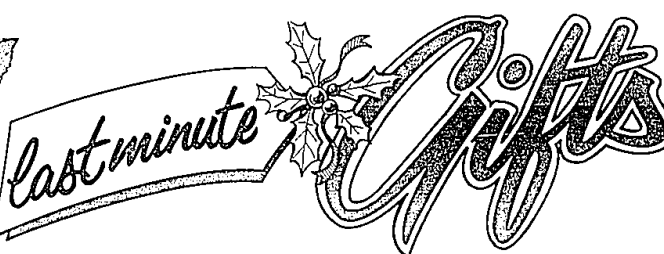
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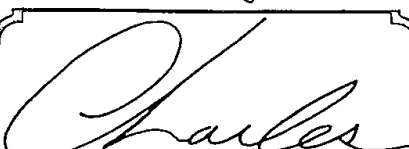
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