



Gulls in a feeding-frenzy on Ocracoke's cedar berries

PHOTO BY KEN MOORE

FLORA
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beautiful blue-gray berries. But this was the first year we've observed such frenzied feeding on cedar berries. We are accustomed to seeing cedar waxwings feeding on cedar berries, but gulls – wow!

I quickly sought a definitive explanation from the numerous birders present for the annual Portsmouth and Ocracoke Island bird counts. The general response was that such frenzied gull-feeding on juniper berries had not been particularly noted before. By contrast, some full-time island residents remembered such gull activity in some years. Some remarked that gulls went after juniper ber-

ries when they were starving. Other residents noted that gulls always seem to be starving and will eat anything, anytime.

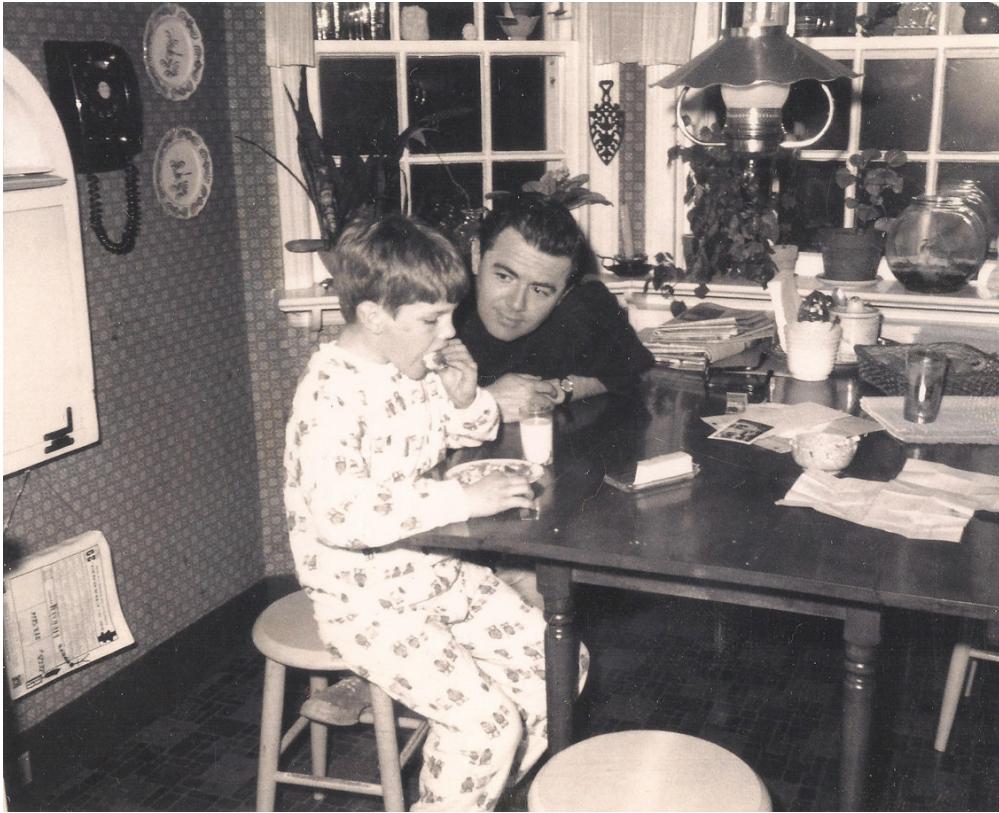
My need for a specific explanation led me to seek out birder Jeannie Kraus, botanist/ecologist and author of *A Guide to Ocean Dune Plants Common to North Carolina*. Jeannie had not made particular note of such gull activity, but was definite on the fact that gulls are omnivores. She further inquired of noted expert birder John Fussell III, author of *A Birder's Guide to Coastal North Carolina*. John related that ring-billed and laughing gulls in particular occasionally eat berries as well as insects. John Fussell's birding associate Jack Fennell added that when the gulls'

favorite food, menhaden, is scarce, they go after berries, human food and garbage.

So there you have it. For whatever reason, the gulls are outcompeting cedar waxwings on Ocracoke's cedar trees this winter.

As for me, I'm still in disbelief after seeing dozens of gulls trying to perch on cedar branches. In the context of the many noted medicinal properties of cedar berries, as well as their use to flavor gin, I'm imagining Ocracoke's population of gulls being very healthy, or at least very happy, for a few days.

Email Ken Moore at flora@carrborocitizen.com. Find previous Ken Moore Citizen columns at *The Annotated Flora* (carrborocitizen.com/flora).



The dad bite, 1968

I'm of the opinion that the humble snapshot, given enough time, becomes a piece of priceless documentary photography. Here's a perfect example. Tom Carson of Chapel Hill sends in this father-son "slice-of-life" photograph along with the following narrative: "Did your dad ever ask you for a bite of your favorite sandwich, cookie or brownie? Did he ever hand back anything that resembled what you handed him? Mine never did. A dad bite was invariably beyond huge and you only handed your treat over with a great deal of regret. He always handed back the little crescent of remains with the biggest of grins. Here I am, age 9, in 1968. I'm about to get worked over good. My dad took his last bite in 2010." And Tom adds, "I think my mother did take the photo, no doubt with her trusty Kodak Instamatic, or perhaps a Brownie. This was taken in the kitchen of our house in Haddonfield, N.J. My father was Ned Carson. He was 43 at the time."

WATER WATCH OUR RESERVOIRS ARE 70.30% FULL

PRECIP THIS MONTH: .26" PAST 12 MONTHS: 39.62"

CUSTOMER DEMAND TUES: 6.647 million gallons / Monthly avg: 5.86 million gallons

ESTIMATED SUPPLY: 428 days worth

OCCUPY
FROM PAGE 1

Nomadic occupation is a concept in which at various places and times around town, occupiers and their tents will pop up.

"Occupy is going everywhere," said Maria Rowan, coordinator for the nomadic occupation.

"Not only is this movement too big to fail, it is bigger than this postage stamp of concrete," she added.

While critics of the movement may look at its voluntary departure from the plaza as a sign of getting tired and giving up, Occupy Chapel Hill/Carrboro doesn't see it that way.

Although movement members said that one reason for leaving the plaza was to allow them to be more effective in the community, Ashley, who has been with the movement since its inception on Oct. 15, said the encampment became hard to sustain.

"Because Occupy offers shelter to dispossessed people, it has become a problem to sustain those needs," Ashley said. "It was like running a small city."

Other hardships occupiers encountered included getting people to commit to staying at the plaza, security and dealing with students leaving Franklin Street bars at early-morning hours.

"Our biggest problem has been the drunk students," she said, "not the police."

Stephanie Daugherty, who also has been with Occupy since day one, echoed Ashley's sentiments about problems they have faced with drunken students and the homeless.

"Unfortunately, some people were just here to take advantage of us," she said, adding that there were some displaced people who they helped who were able to help the Occupy movement in return when needed.

Ashley said Occupy Chapel Hill will maintain a presence at the plaza by hosting general assemblies, teach-ins and discussion circles. Members are also trying to ensure that during the day there will be someone from Occupy manning an information table.

"Occupy will be here past the camp and past the tents," Ashley said. "The tents have made their point, and we are moving on to more meaningful things."

"Anyway, we can always come back if we want to."



A THOUSAND WORDS
BY JOCK LAUTERER

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