

60,000 acres of wetlands each year. As we turn more and more wild places into homes only meant for ourselves, previous occupants of the land suffer. They continue to quietly disappear.

Cache Valley's Bridgerland Audubon Society, in its own small, sincere way, has purchased and now maintains for wildlife a hidden treasure along Clay Slough.



The general wisdom of western water conservation involves slowing down the flow of water from its journey from mountain snowpack to the ocean. In the Intermountain West, water's journey ends, or begins, in a rapidly diminishing Great Salt Lake. Most human activities, such as cropping, deforestation, development and pavement, work against slowing this flow. Still, wherever water makes a path, life blossoms.

Wetlands slow and store water. By spreading out and absorbing the power of flowing water they diminish the destructiveness of floodwaters. The water in wetlands is usually shallow. It warms early and becomes a living soup of nutrition-packed invertebrates; an essential way-stop for migrating birds that burn untold calories on their monumental, semi-annual wayfaring. It is our most productive ecosystem, hosting winged odysseys that quite literally thread the planet in wholeness. Wetlands are water. Water is life. Ba nadukembai-n-debia.

Kayo Robertson, April 2023



The Bridgerland Audubon Society Amalga Barrens Sanctuary, Ba nadukembai-n-debia
We acknowledge this Shorebird Sanctuary land as the ancestral territories in the Sihivigoi
(Willow Valley) of the Northwestern Band of the Shoshone Nation.
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THE BARRENS BRIDGERLAND AUDUBON SOCIETY SANCTUARY

Ba nadukembai-n-debia

water – all living beings who gather here – homeplace of sustenance (Shoshone)

When winter's teeth have sent the last of the water birds south, wetlands can have a barren look. Here and there among the dried yellow-ochre stems of Cattails and Bulrush a Marsh Wren might flit about. A few Gulls and Starlings, attracted by a nearby feedlot, fly overhead. What water remains is frozen and snow-covered. Beneath the ice Muskrats slumber and quietly move about in their conical dens. Mouse and Vole tracks wind across the frozen flatness followed by those who hunt such rodents; Coyote, Raccoon, Fox, Skunk, Mink and Weasel. Perhaps a Redtail or Rough-leg Hawk perches upon a fence post like a frozen sentinel of wintertime's hungry hardships. Other than a few scraps of life and dried, broken vegetation, the Barrens, like most temperate wetlands, might truly seem barren.

And then it happens. It happens, as it has happened twice a year for many tens of thousands of years. It happens as it has happened since the time before time we call the Pleistocene. As a warming sun balances temperatures of day and night towards freezing, it happens.

It might start when a distant, wavering, coronet-like call floats through the grey winter sky. A duet of sound, high/low, fills the cold stillness with excitement and energy. It begins with the songs of northbound Canada Geese. Chevron shapes carried upon powerful wings pull northward the promise of spring. Suddenly skies are filled with skeins of large birds. Birds



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that fly 1500 miles in a single day and night have much to say. Slanting left and right they drop the air from their huge wings and descend from the sky. Flock after flock, they set their wings and settle to earth.

The wetlands soon become a very busy, very exciting place. The news of an entire winter away all at once is recounted by many voices. Here and there new grass emerges from the snow and ice. Forgotten corn from last autumn's harvest appears from once snowbound fields. The marsh fills with birds feeding and replenishing the energy required for continental migration. The geese, busy with the demands of courtship and travel, splash and fuss. They wing from one place of food, meeting and refuge to another. With much ado they share the news of the day, of the season. The wetland has become the very signature of life.



The geese are soon followed by Sandhill Cranes. Famous dancers, who paint themselves red with iron clays, they glide earthward from flights as high as 12,000 feet. Then come the ducks who are always in a hurry. Skies fill with whistling Pintails, Teals and Mallards. The males sport feathers of unbelievable iridescent color, patterns, brightness and beauty.

Along with them, like earthbound angels, come the Tundra Swans. Their wingspans over six feet. Their songs quaver like choirs of sky-born flutes. With nary a graceless move the swans softly settle their snow-white wings upon the newly thawed waters.

Then come flocks of shorebirds in their finest plumage and low, twisting flights. Home come the Gulls, songbirds, Avocets, Terns. Then the fierce-eyed raptors, birds that eat birds, Falcons and Eagles. With keen lookout they scan the marsh for those weakened by the long journey. A single momentary lack of awareness or simple mistake can turn life into a meal.



So it goes, all spring long, wave after wave of winged miracles. What is called "barren" becomes a place of the most wonderful symphony of renewed life on the planet.



The word "barrens" conjures a rather dismal image. Something that is devoid of worth. The history of the Euro-American immigration and subsequent conquest of North America is very recent. Before this wave Humans lived here for more than 20,000 years. Many languages were spoken. Nonetheless, nearly every place and every creature in this "New World" was renamed in the language of the conquerors. The new names reflect the values of the early, largely European, immigrants.

The Amalga "Barrens" is a landscape that to its namers contained nothing of worth. Water experts consider wetlands priceless. In a market driven economy priceless often means worthless.

Can our view of a place shape its destiny? In the past few hundred years, 85% of North America's wetlands have been drained cropped or developed. Currently North America is losing some