

Confessions of a Bird Freak

Hey Arnold!

I have returned, bearing gifts.*

* birds

My previous email went to some people's spam folders—or worse, was blocked by their email platform entirely—and I have returned with vengeance and a bitter heart. I now consider Gmail one of the many institutions that systematically oppress and silence me, including capitalism, patriarchy, and my genetic predisposition to irritable bowel syndrome. Imagine! Trying to silence the good word of the bird...

But we carry on. After a horrendous day on Tuesday, I compensated with an aggressively good Wednesday. The sun was singing, the birds were shining, and I continued having no money so I took myself on a free little trip to the Arnold Arboretum in Jamaica Plain, Boston. And boy, was it fruitful. Buckle your seatbelts and tighten your socks for the wildlife adventure to come!

March 29, 2023

Arnold Arboretum



"What kind of bird is this, Ashley?" you might ask. Nice try, but this is actually a frog! Don't be discouraged; it happens to the best of us and doesn't mean you're stupid.

Like you, I wasn't expecting this frog. In fact, the only time someone expects a frog is when they have made prior arrangements with said frog, such as meeting up for lunch. This Northern Green Frog and I had a long conversation, during which I said lots and it said little.¹ However, it stayed completely present while I spoke and maintained unblinking eye contact with me for the entire 20 minutes, not checking its phone once. Inspiring or intimidating?



This Canada Goose was displeased when I came too close,² even though I was doing it a favor by taking free professional headshots for its LinkedIn. Funemployment is less fun when you have little Ryan Goslings on the way, you know.



It's always discouraging to meet a bird who is more fashionable than you; I experience this every time I leave my home, so just imagine the pain I endure. This male Northern Flicker managed to pull off stripes and polka dots without them clashing, his bold choice complemented by a striking black mustache and red headscarf.³ His unique ensemble and nonchalance made him a true standout on the runway, evoking feelings of envy and admiration from the crowd (me).



I wanted to climb atop this tree and scream into the void alongside this Song Sparrow. However, I feared that would cause the sparrow undue stress⁴ and possibly result in James Arnold emerging from his grave to personally ban me from

the Arnold Arboretum, bringing shame upon my entire family for generations to come. I remained rooted in the ground (and reality) for James's sake.

During this trip, I photographed a few other species of real birds, and some fake birds: a Ribbon Snake, a Red-Eared Slider, and a strange, smelly plant I like to call Swamp Lettuce. See the fruits and vegetables of my labor in this [Flickr album](#).

Brain snacks

1. Most frogs, including the Northern Green Frog, are nocturnal (active at night) or crepuscular (active at dawn and dusk) and croak during dark hours. Yes, they're *that* neighbor. [What do they have to say?](#)
2. Geese are protective of their nests, goslings and mates during breeding season in the spring. I could tell this goose was unhappy with me because it began straightening its neck and nodding, so I retreated—just as I would do if any other stranger in public suddenly straightened their one-foot-long neck at me and nodded. For some nature therapy, check out this video footage of [Canada Geese and their babies](#).
3. In addition to being fashionable, Northern Flickers (and all other woodpeckers) have an elongated tongue that wraps around their skull. For research purposes, I learned how to do this myself, and I don't recommend you do the same. If you're brave, [here's what that structure looks like!](#)
4. When dealing with both wildlife and introverts like me, it is important to maintain enough physical (and emotional) distance to avoid stressing us out. All jokes aside, birdwatching etiquette is critical. A clear sign that you are too close to a bird is if it changes its behavior, such as by making warning calls. Before your next birding outing, check out this [ethical birding checklist](#) and this cool free virtual event coming up, [Birding with Kindness](#)! I'll be there

Send your bird questions my way by replying to this email!

Much love,

Bird Freak

p.s. Know someone who would like receiving these emails? [Add them here!](#) Missed my first email? [Read it here!](#)

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