



Cold Ears and Worn Moccasins

November 1, 2019



One great memory of climbing up the watch tower just North of the main entrance to Bombay Hook National Wild Life Refuge, beside the whipping wind in our ears, was the sighting of a heavy-antlered, dark-coated, old stag who came out of nowhere with seemingly no where to go. “We scared up those two does hidden in the marsh grass. The stag was following them, but then he just stood there in plain view,” reminisced Henry Gould, Jr. “He stood there watching us for so long, you had to wonder if he was mocking us, like, ‘I know you can’t have a gun on a National Wildlife Refuge, so go ahead and shoot away with your fancy cameras!’ It was great!”

After a quick stop in the visitor’s center to pick up more binoculars, a bird guide book, and a list of birds that have been seen on the 16,000 acre refuge West of Route 9 in Kent County, Delaware, our caravan of four cars and a truck took off for the stretch of road between two waters. “It’s a unique place where fresh water meets brackish,” explained the front desk volunteer. “Tidal, or salty water, is on the East side of the road and fresh water on the West. That’s a great place to see a lot of wildlife.”

Professor, Jon Cox brought his son, Jesse, who was an enormous fan of Harry J’s osprey talons, and RuthAnn Purchase was exuberant to receive the gift of Red Tailed Hawk feathers. Harry J. named many other feathers as we walked along the water ways, even explaining what part of the bird the feather came from. “You can bring any feathers you have and I will identify them, or I will research till I can,” he promised. But one floating flock, baffled everyone. Paintings of many birds were on a sign standing beside the fresh water lagoon, yet one bird did not appear on it. Someone suggested we look it up in the birding guide book. It

showed pictures of the one we were observing, explaining that the Avocet changes coats like a snowshoe hare!

One in the group saw a marsh rabbit, some call muskrat, bobbing in and out of floating bits of rushes topped with feathers. Someone else recognized a stand of dog-bane along the road, remembering our fishing net workshops last spring, wondering if we’ll get to re-establish that art form. Someone in the groups was heard saying, “This place is alive with past, present, and future lessons for all to learn.”

Warming up back at the visitors center, Jon Cox shared the Ocean Observer phone app and explained how valuable it is to document changes in the shore line. Alysa Ridgeway, a Tribal Artist and entrepreneur, described what a unique day we had had, “I never knew this place was here, and it’s so close! Some people never get to see what it was like when only the Lenape lived here. Today we really got to feel how it was.” Chief agreed that this was a very unique day and a good way to begin National Native American Heritage Month in this place once called “The Place that Wears Out Moccasins’. I love to brave the wind on the water. It makes me feel alive and it puts me in my place. “It is my hope that local Tribal youth will be inspired to lead such walks one day, teaching others how we once lived with honor for ‘All Our Relations,’ never taking more than we need, and grateful for everything we take.”

