

‘Twas the Night Before the Bird Count

An almost original poem by Stuart Kenn, Pickering Naturalist

‘Twas the night before the bird count, and through the forest house
Not a bird was stirring, not even a titmouse;
The binoculars were hung by the staircase with care,
In hopes that the sunrise soon would be there;

The bird guides were nestled all snug in my pack,
My lunch was all ready including a snack;
My wife in her nightie, as I had my night cap,
Had just passed out for a short winter’s nap,

When up from the horizon, there rose a bright ball,
The bird count was here, I had no time to stall.
Away to my truck I flew like a flash,
Threw it in drive for the Pickering dash.

The ice on the surface of the new-fallen snow
I knew would be crunchy where I had to go,
When, what to my wondering eyes should appear,
But a flock of lost and shivering killdeer,

With my scope and binoculars, I had to be quick,
I knew in a moment it was a red-shafted flick.
More rapid than eagles, the birds they all came,
And I whistled, and shouted, and called them by name;

“Now, Bunting! now, Bobolink! now, Vulture and Vireo!
A nuthatch, a nighthawk, and even an Ipswich Sparrow!
To the top of the tree! with no time to call!
Now fly away! fly away! fly away all!”

As snowflakes that before the wild blizzard fly,
When they meet with my binoculars, mount to the sky,
So up to the house-top the birds they all flew,
With a flock of golden eagles, as I ate my beef stew.

And then, in a moment I looked on the roof
As I fell in a snow bank, I felt like a goof.
When I pulled out my head, and was turning around,
Down from the tree the snow came with a bound.

I was dressed all in Gortex, from my head to my foot,
So it didn't really bother me except in my boot;
The bundle of guides that I had flung on my back,
Got soggy and wet, it was time for a snack.

My eyes -- how bloodshot! My cheeks were fruzzen!
My fingers were numb, but the list was six dozen!
My dry little mouth was drawn up like a raisin,
It was time for hot coffee and a donut I was cravin'.

The stump of a pencil I held tight in my teeth,
As a murder of crows circled my head like a wreath;
I sighted a broadwing and a little piping plover,
I had to keep going before the day was over.

I was tired and worn, as I wrote on the list,
Six-thousand eight-hundred, now what have I missed?
With the scope in my eye, I had nothing to dread,
Out on the lake I sight a thousand bufflehead;

I spoke not a word, but searched far and wider,
And filled up the duck list with some scaup and an eider,
And laying my finger on the focus of my bins,
I checked off a cowbird and two lovely robins ;

I sprang to my truck, to my home I could go,
The bird count was over, for chocolate cocoa.
But I heard out my window as I left for the day,
One more bird call "Jay, Jay, Jay, Jay."