Harbor Island, Naturally

SOME PERILS OF MIGRATION

DANGEROUS PASSAGE

The first sign of spring arrived last Sunday. I spotted an Osprey on a nesting platform.   For the past six years friend Mary Ann and I have participated in Osprey Watch,

a program conducted by the College of William and Mary. We watch and record four Opsrey nests on Harbor and Hunting Islands. This early arrival got me thinking about migrations and the dangers of such a long trip.

A great number of migrating birds die each year. Many species prefer to move after dark. This may be because predators are not as active at night. However many fly into buildings and other structures. I recall when I taught at a school where most of the walls were windows. In the morning we would often find dead or stuned birds.

For many years ornithologists have recommended that the lights of tall buildings be turned off at night. This would keep birds from being attracted and disoriented by the lights. Storms also cause a large number of birds to lose their lives due to exhaustion or to getting lost.

Awhile back I got a call from some folks who had spotted a strange looking bird staggering on the beach. When I arrived I found that they had been correct. Since the bird was large it was unwise to handle it.

So in a while it staggered into the water and swam into deeper water.   The mystery of what bird it was remained until that evening when my wife Sarah determined it to be a juvenile Northern Gannet that had been blown to shore by a recent storm. The staggering came from the fact that Gannets live mainly at sea. Their legs are placed further back on their bodies than birds that spend time on land. They cannot balance out of water.

Spring migration is a great time to go birding. You never know what you might see.

Sources
Lives of North American Birds
by Kenn Kaufman
South Carolina Bird Life
by Alexander Sprunt