

Perspectives

The Perquimans Weekly

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Peaceful pond

Over ten years ago, my husband and I dug a small goldfish pond in our backyard near the house where I could observe it from the window. It soon became the most enjoyable spot in our yard, as word of water spreads



Nature in a Nutshell

Gail Roberson

like magic among wildlife. We chose to cement the small pond, add water lilies and a few other aquatic plants, a small log and a lovely fountain in the center whose recirculating, cascading water can be heard from all corners of our acre lot. Within just hours after its completion, the pond was already home to mosquitoes and dragonflies. We added goldfish to the decor of the water to complete the magical pool effect. Having the little pond just off the patio means we enjoy it all the time, all seasons.

The fish and other pond life control the mosquitoes. I looked out the window the other day to see a black ring around the top of the pond and knew the millions of tadpoles that composed it would soon be splashing in the pond, bringing even more natural predators to investigate. There are always frogs croaking and leaping here, and box turtles sunning on the log. This month I discovered a large box turtle crawling into the pond that appeared to have two heads. When I picked it up to examine it, I finally decided it had been bitten, probably by a poisonous snake, and had swollen so large that it could no longer draw its head into the shell for protection. I fed the turtle bits of apple and put it back in the pond. Here, I hope it will be safe and protected while it heals.

Once a small blue heron found our little man-made pond and helped himself each morning to a daily diet of the largest goldfish. While I didn't particularly want this predator on my pond, he was so stately and beautiful and provided such a rare opportunity to observe his stalking methods that I almost lost all the fish to him before scaring him off for good. The pond became so natural so quickly that the goldfish population quickly increased, and this morning I counted at least a dozen new babies swimming at the surface. I originally put just a small amount, a handful, of aquatic weed in the pond, and now the thickened growth provides both ample food for the fish as well as a cushiony area to spawn.

I've looked out the window to see raccoons wading in the pool, probably after the fish and frogs for a meal. There are always water beetles and

newts in this little water wonderland, and once a magnificent great-horned owl perched on the log, snatched a large fish and flew off with it. The food web of my little hand-dug pond is amazing. Crayfish, mayflies and snails are among

the many lifeforms of the pond today, and each morning as I stand by its edge I am never certain what new life I will see there.

I have, on occasion, sprinkled sand around the edges of the pond before dark, and gone out the next morning to see, from the tell-tale tracks left in it, what came there the night before. I've observed, from the window, squirrels drinking from the pond. All my cats go there for liquid refreshment. And once the neighbor's big dog was found standing half submerged in the pool, cooling himself from the hot August heat. His big feet upset the pots holding the plants and muddied the water badly. A severe scolding sent him away, but I suspect he has sneaked back again from the looks of things now and then.

Of all wildlife the pond attracts, I enjoy the birds the most. Most different species are drawn by the sound of the cascading water head, and often I stand at the window and watch butter-colored goldfinches splash in the fountain or with firmly planted feet, stand directly in line of the hard rush of falling water to shower and preen their feathers. The edges of the pond are slanted so as to allow birds to skinny dip without fear of deep water, and those I've seen doing this include jays, wrens, sparrows, juncos, cardinals, finches, warblers, buntings and even doves. I have to force myself away from the window and back to the typewriter, the observations of the pool are just so appealing and time-consuming.

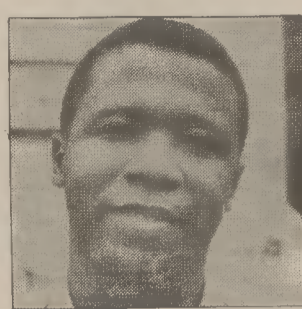
In winter, there is often a half-inch of frozen ice on the pool's surface, while below swim the goldfish, contented in their wintry wonderland. The cats slip and slide across the surface, trying to catch the fish below, confused, playful expressions on their furry faces.

The pond lights at night attract moths, which attract the bat that lives in the bat box on a nearby tree. There is always something going on here, day or night, at any season. Even an old bathtub, galvanized bucket or wooden barrel filled with water, a fish and plant, can provide hours of pleasure for you by bringing nature right to your own porch step.

Affirmative action is the least of it

Picture this: You're Dean of Admissions for a small, yet prestigious college in North Carolina. You've got spaces for 300 qualified freshman applicants but have received over 700 inquiries. Over 500 applicants are "all A" students; all of these are white. The remainder are a mixture of "A-B" or "B+" students; all of these are minority students. Who gets in?

Do you just admit the top 300 with the highest Grade Point Average? That'd frost the heck out of the remaining 200 "A" students. Should you consider qualifications other than GPA, like the ability to



All over the map

Tony Key

work experience, community service or extra curricular activities? Those should count for something! Uh, oh: now the children of wealthier parents will feel they're being slighted on account of their folks' financial success. You've probably noticed how deep into the thicket we've gone and we haven't even started discussing the minority students or affirmative action yet. Remember that when some political talking head starts spouting simple solutions to complicated issues.

Eliminating affirmative action won't eliminate the problem of too many people chasing after too few spaces in

a college classroom, or on a job site. As long as we have a surplus of people, we'll find ways to pick and choose, to discriminate. Affirmative action is the least of it.

Fun with math

1. What is the surface area of a cube whose sides are all five inches squared?
2. An eighteen-wheeler hauling a 62,000 pound load is pulling how many tons?
3. If the "d" is 72 and the "r" is 9, what is the "t"?

(Answers: 1. 150 sq. inches, 2. thirty-one and 3. eight)

On the cooler side

No, it was not a joke. Those of you who called in to question our weather map on page 1 last week know it was not a joke. This weather we're having is anything but funny!



Ramblin' with Susan

Susan Harris

Believe me, we were just as surprised as you were when the temperatures for Saturday in our weather box were called to our attention. Highs in the 50s, lows in the 30s? Yeah, right!

Our weather box is generated by computer in Elizabeth City. When it is to appear in color, as it did last week, we only see a negative of the map. Because all the information comes from people who are supposed to know much more about weather than we do, we just take it for granted that the predictions will be somewhere in the range of the truth. Boy, were we wrong!

I suppose that's what happens when we become too dependent on our good friends of the modern era, the computer, like Matilda here. While I have become accustomed to her moods and nuances over the past year, I still have the greatest respect for old Matilda. Every now and again she still throws me for a loop.

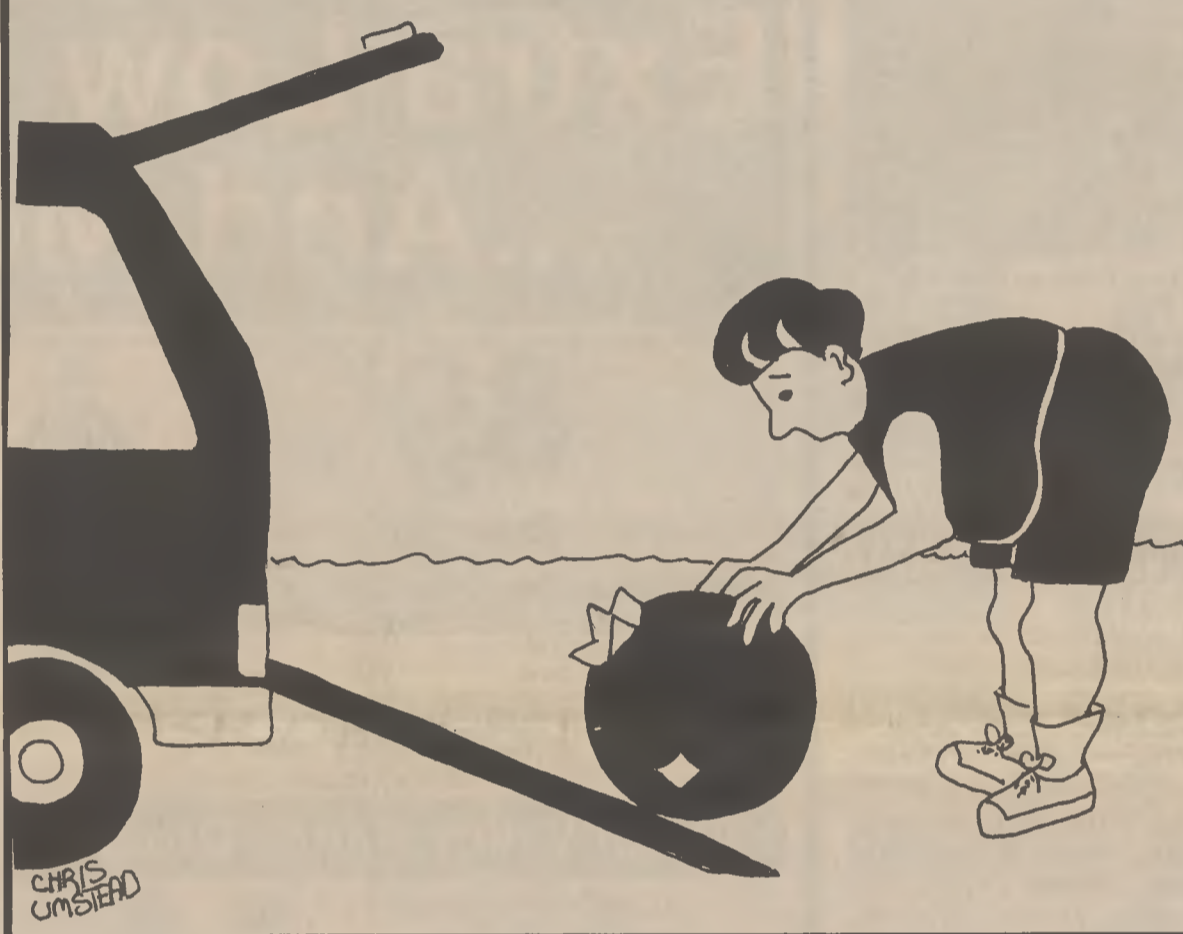
The loop we got thrown last week was huge. I must admit, I have not researched this situation too thoroughly, although I suspect that the temperature predictions were Elizabeth City's computer's idea of a joke. The only place I know of that was 50 degrees last weekend was my refrigerator.

This heat doesn't show any signs of letting up. I'm lucky to work in air conditioning and I know it. My husband, like many of you, does not have that luxury, and these past few weeks have been pretty tough on him.

The only thing we can do now is sip tall glasses of iced tea and dream of those chilly fall nights when we can slip into a lightweight sweater and really enjoy the outdoors again.

Fall is right around the corner. Really it is. Band camps started this week. Football practice starts Saturday. School begins in a month. Relief is on the way.

Blueberries so plump you have to roll them in your car at Perry's U-Pick



Wiley was education pioneer

By ASA C. RICHARDSON
Guest Columnist

Calvin Henderson Wiley was a pioneer in education.

This grandson of a revolutionary warrior was born on a farm Feb. 3, 1810 in Guilford County. He was named after Presbyterian ministers, John Calvin and Dr. Henderson, his mother's pastor. He attended Caldwell Institute at Greensboro and the University of North Carolina, where he graduated in 1840.

After studying law he opened a practice on Oxford. In his spare time he edited the Oxford Mercury for two years. In 1847 he published a novel, and two years later another novel. He was distraught with the hardship conditions, which he thought caused the emigration of so many North Carolinians. He believed education was the remedy. He opined that the young people should be taught a greater love for their state, to have pride in its welfare, understand the opportunities that exist and

prepare themselves to make use of those opportunities.

The young lawyer decided to give up his practice and devote his life to furthering education opportunities. He returned to Guilford County, became a member of the legislature and promoted the idea that common schools needed a superintendent. The assembly was, at first, not supportive of his efforts. His continued efforts, however, were successful and the legislature created the office of Superintendent of the Common Schools. Due to his long, ardent struggle it was thought that he should fill that office. On January 1, 1853, he realized his dream.

In 1853 the common schools were little more than log hovels; teachers were scarce; teachers were poorly prepared, and the people did not know how to manage the schools. He wrote letters, published articles in newspapers and made speeches all over the countryside in his efforts for improvement. His patience and determination brought him success. He increased the number of teach-

es to more than 2,000 and the number of schools to nearly 3,000. The number of children in the common schools, when he took over, was estimated to be 8,300. The number of children in the common schools rose to about 116,000. The school houses and books were greatly improved by 1861.

The war preparations caused the legislature to propose closing the common schools. Wiley strongly resisted the legislative proposal. The legislature relented. The schools remained open, however, it became more difficult to get new books and teachers. At the close of the war the schools were closed. Calvin Henderson Wiley became a Presbyterian minister. He died in Winston January 11, 1887. Calvin Henderson Wiley was truly an apostle for public education and a pioneer in awakening the people to the great need for public schools.

(Editor's note: This column is part of a series by Mr. Richardson based on his education research.)

Letters

Dear Editor:

As I prepare to journey off to college next month, I'd like to take this opportunity to say "thank you" to a few people. First, I have to thank Mr. Charles Woodard, my employer for 5 years. He is one of the finest members of our community and is not given the recognition he deserves. I don't

know where I'd be without him. Second, I'd like to thank the entire Perquimans County School System. From Ms. Mansfield in 1st grade to Mrs. Whitley just months ago, they all tried their best to beat some sense into my thick head. Third, I thank my mom for putting up with me for 18 years. Fourth, I thank my friends. I am fortunate enough to have some of the best friends in the world, and they mean a lot to me. And finally,

I'd like to thank everybody else in Perquimans County. Although I'm only 18, I've done quite a bit of travelling, and I must say that some of the nicest people on earth live right here. As I move onto college, I feel thankful to have known & met all the people I have met in Perquimans County. Thank you all for everything!

Guy Webb
Hertford