

Key Opinion

The Case of the Pixilated Pelican

Richard L. Hershatter
Contributing Columnist

*A wonderful bird is the Pelican;
His bill can hold more than his belican.
He can take in his beak
Food enough for a week;
But I'm damned if I know how the belican.*

(D.L Merritt 1915)

News item: Laguna Beach, (AP) Drunk Pelican hits windshield.

The news, accompanied by photos of the injured California brown pelican and the smashed windshield, made headlines coast to coast.

The motorist was not injured, but the bird needed surgery for a broken foot, and also received treatment for a gash on its pouch.

Unlike politicians, pelicans do not normally become flustered by their own reflections or go crashing into glass, so an investigation was immediately launched.

Toxicology tests determined that the bird was intoxicated, probably from ingesting algae tainted by domoic acid, which is frequently found in the ocean in the area.

The local Wetlands and Wildlife Care Center had already received 16 reports of strange bird behavior, and had taken into custody three other birds found disoriented and wandering in streets and trespassing on private property.

The report drew immediate expressions of concern from the Audubon Society and the local chapter of MADP (Mothers Against Drunk Pelicans).

Forty-five years earlier, a similar intoxication affected the behavior of thousands of birds in Northern California, who flew about frantically, darting hither and yon, crashing into buildings and attacking humans in the streets.

They also left their calling cards everywhere, to the pleased reaction of car wash enterprises, but angering thousands of housewives with fresh laundry drying on

outdoor lines.

We are not making this up. The incident became the inspiration for the Alfred Hitchcock film "The Birds."

The recent Laguna case was far less traumatic, but nevertheless engendered dozens of complaints from gated communities, which took exception to the fact that the inebriated fowl did not stop at the guard houses before making entry.

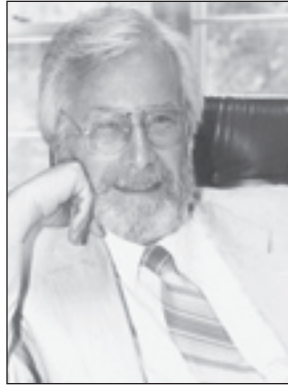
Rumors also circulated to the effect that the affected pelicans, which are capable of flying long distances without refueling, may have come over the border from Mexico and were in this country illegally altogether.

Immigration authorities and the CIA were brought into the case when an informant reported that the birds, drunk or sober, may have been trained by terrorists to deploy WMDs (Weapons of Mass Destruction) on the manicured lawns of the area.

Florida's authorities were especially concerned, because the State is home to white pelicans as well as the brown variety, and it was feared that if the latter failed to adhere to a sober regime, the two species would inter-mate and mixed couples would be a threat to white pelican family values.

The legislature drafted a proposed constitutional amendment establishing the category of "civil union" between pelicans, defined as a committed relationship between two white, sober pelicans, or two brown, sober pelicans and labeling anything else as "separate and unequal."

The proposal passed the House, but got hung up in the Senate, where one senator insisted that nothing in the Bible endorsed unions between birds of a feather, including pelicans.



Tallahassee declared a state of emergency, and the Highway Patrol was authorized to set up checkpoints, equipped with miniature breathalyzers to check any pelican flying in a suspicious manner.

Sadly, very few pelicans cooperated with the troopers, and lawyers representing the few that did challenged the accuracy of the breath-measuring instruments, with the result that law enforcement was obliged to fall back on the tried and true method of forcing the birds to walk a straight line.

Two of the birds were taken into custody, without a warrant. The police reports stated that the pelicans waddled, when ordered to walk, and the courts ordered them held without bail, as flight risks.

Finally, the federal government was brought into the picture, and FEMA operatives were dispatched with one thousand specially equipped house trailers left over from Hurricane Katrina. Each trailer featured a bird bath utilizing black coffee, instead of water, to assist the birds in sobering up.

The secretary of defense was asked for help, but demurred, stating that "guano happens," and the state of Florida would have to attack the problem with the weapons on hand.

Finally, the Vice President himself brought his personal shotgun into the State, but only succeeded in killing three morning doves and a partridge in a palm tree.

*The Pelican's a marvelous bird;
Flies straight as an arrow, I've heard,
But when it sips liquor,
It's apt to get sicker
And fly in a manner absurd.*

(R.L. Hershatter 2006)

Richard L. Hershatter is a retired lawyer and novelist who writes a syndicated column of interest to Floridians. He can be reached at Banyan502@aol.com.

Mideast Muddle and Silly Season

Tom Burgum
Contributing Columnist

News from the Mideast is not good. It is entirely possible that we are near a general conflagration unless cool and wise heads prevail. Yet, in spite of all the world troubles, the journalists, our political class, and Hollywood luminaries still find ways to amuse us.

Sen. John Kerry's (D-Mass.) contribution to the humor category is his statement that if he were President, Israel and Hezbollah would not be fighting. He did not, of course, explain just how this miraculous transformation might have taken place had he been sitting in the White House. He did allow that he would have been engaged in diplomatic efforts that would have headed off the current conflagration.

Kerry's statement is indicative of either a memory problem or a lack of seriousness. He seems to have forgotten President Clinton's initiative at Camp David wherein Israel offered to withdraw to the pre-1967 borders if the Palestinians would just recognize their right to exist. Neither Israel nor Clinton got the credit they deserved for this effort because Yasser Arafat said no and renewed the intifada just one month after the Camp David meeting. Arafat was a terrorist; he knew he and his compatriots could kill but not govern, a fact the Palestinian Authority has proven time and time again.

Chris Matthews, host of MSNBC's "Hard Ball" made his contribution to silliness this week. During an appearance on MSNBC's "Imus in the Morning," he joined Kerry in blaming Bush diplomacy for the current Mideast war. He even added that Bush's strong support of Israel is the cause of the current hatred of America. He is wrong, at least if you are to believe Tom Friedman of the New York Times. Friedman believes that decades of hate-America propaganda is the root cause of America's unpopularity: "Arab regimes, feeling defensive about their Islamic crackdowns, allowed their own press and intellectuals total freedom to attack America and Israel, as a way of deflecting criticism from themselves." He added, "As a result, a generation of Muslims and Arabs have been

raised on such distorted views of America..."

It is also instructive to remember that when Osama Bin Laden tried to ally himself with the Palestinians in the aftermath of 9-11, Arafat rejected his offer saying, you have never cared about us before so leave us out of your troubles now. Israel is a convenient target for Islamic radicals but the root cause is their hatred of the West — regardless of who is president.

U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan has come up with the usual solutions, while not necessarily funny, are certainly questionable if history is to be any guide. His solution is to call for a ceasefire and then negotiate a settlement based on a U.N. or multilateral force stationed in southern Lebanon. Israel cannot be expected to agree to a U.N. force because the current one not only has done nothing to keep the peace, but also actually videotaped the kidnapping of an Israeli soldier without doing anything to intervene or even contact Israeli authorities. How can Israel ever have any confidence in the U.N. led force?

Annan's solution also gives an unfortunate moral equivalency to Israel and Hezbollah. There is no moral equivalence and the clearest evidence of this is the statement of Hussein Massawi, the Hezbollah leader, about his desire to negotiate: "We are not fighting so that you will offer us something. We are fighting to eliminate you." How do you negotiate with someone whose one aim is to eliminate you? Where is a middle point or common ground in that discussion?

The most pessimistic analysis was David Ben-Gurion's as quoted in Time Magazine, "Everybody sees a difficulty in the question of relations between Arabs and Jews. But not everybody sees that there is no solution to this question. No solution! There is a gulf, and nothing can



bridge it... We as a nation, want this country to be ours: the Arabs, as a nation, want this country to be theirs." Ben-Gurion said this in June 1919 and some 90 years later it remains the best and most succinct analysis of the whole Israeli-Arab question.

Recently a friend of the liberal persuasion, one John Cook, volunteered that Bush was wrong to not talk to Syria. Cook's insight was unfortunately dismissed because, in his view, Bush has never been right about anything. I should have listened because Edward N. Luttwak, in his Wall Street Journal opinion piece, believes Cook was on to something. Luttwak, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, thinks involving Syria is actually our best strategy

It is clear Israel cannot continue the current military effort indefinitely. Occupation is out of the question, as is any type of agreement with Hezbollah. This leaves us with the Luttwak-Cook solution. If you recall, France, Britain and America forced Syria out of Lebanon last year. The theory, according to Luttwak, was that Lebanon could contain the various entities in the country in some kind of national framework. It didn't work and the result was that Hezbollah took over southern Lebanon, fortified the boarder and proceeded to attack Israel. Prior to this Israel could control Hezbollah by threatening Syria but once they were removed from control this option was off the table. This also had the unfortunate result of forcing Syria to strengthen its ties to Iran.

It seems the best option is to invite Syria to control Hezbollah and make them follow a political rather than military path. Syria does know how to control the Islamists. Tom Friedman recalls that, "In February 1982, the secular Syrian government of President Hafez al-Assad (the current leader's father) faced a mortal threat from Islamic extremists, who sought to topple the Assad regime. How did it respond? President Assad identified the rebellion as emanating from Syria's fourth-largest city — Hama — and he literally leveled it, pounding the fundamentalist neighborhoods with artillery for days.

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