Ornithology #1

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Recommended Citation
Retrieved from https://ro.ecu.edu.au/landscapes/vol2/iss3/10

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JENNIFER SCHALLIOL

Ornithology #1

Are birds every spring half-starved? Is hunger just the seasonal usual to them, the norm:

you go on down to Florida or thereabouts, you get the sign, the signal, and off you go

back to Ohio, Illinois, Wisconsin, and oops, it’s actually still snowing,

the ground is frozen, and worms -- well, they’re a ways off yet - so is this just the typical?

Is there a reason why they don’t lollygag in the South longer? Maybe people feed them too much

like the pigeons at Navy Pier, incapacitated solely via instinct, and provision,

so these vacationing Yank birds, I suppose they suspect they’ll grow fat and unable to fly, so

off back here they come to starve, to survive.

Still Life with Twister

A six-mile swath – must it always be a swath? A scythe. Arbitrary. Picture an unwound scroll, twisted over itself here and there, dangling to an end somewhere x minutes later on a road map.

County names in black, generic font, slight sheen, and back-
ground of that watercolor yellow.

Sharpen the focus to splinters of trees of sides of houses snapped in half, garages sliced cleanly and removed, shingles sliding neatly down, the furniture within standing still poised, tea-time get-up, untouched look. (National Guard in camouflage, Red Cross vans circling, the floor, a goldenrod linoleum, now white, covered in this sheer dust – from where?

c RAMPS of pet fur float listlessly over too, sucked from beneath the fridge and oven still the digital is out. it is No Time, the air is duller and fluctuates less about the ears.

t here are little boys’ toys in our yard that my mother can’t wash and give to her granddaughter, trees, she jokes, crying minutes before yuk…) and after too, trees impaling debris, the neighbors’ house, quiet. (where the twins we babysat used to live), garages and kitchens entirely absent.

most absent: all the trees.

Tasks Ahead, doughnuts and coffee and Gatorade in the mornings, salad and spaghetti and bread at noon, a man in boots who stomped through each now-borderless yard to tell us to come eat)

three mornings after now and State Farm hasn’t shown)

(plus innumerable scraps of roof, drywall (now wet and crumbled), insulation, bird’s eggs, pale wash of blue, brown speckled under caked debris, next to the stumps, under halved pine

(seven of the eight trees down in back, counting rings: 32 years old. “same age as you, Mom!” yuk

(morning to afternoons spent picking up this robins sitting on the stumps, eggs next to stumps, under halved trees, by the former-fence rubble, in the middle of the yard.

“I found a bird wing!”

“Oh…”

I found a whole bird.”

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My sister instructing me to put the eggs by the
upside-down nest under the standing pine. She'll bury them later
–
only don’t turn the nest over.

The male starling sitting all day in the apple tree
under which we had found his mate that morning
(he sat there the next two days, too)

And the landscape, the silhouette is so changed
I don't recognize the photos taken in our backyard, of my niece,
when my mother shows them to me now,
and every time we drive home I forget to retrain my eyes
until I see the treeline go.

Jennifer Schalliol is currently pursuing an MFA in Writing at the School of the Art Institute of
Chicago. She has had poems accepted in the journals Salt and Ink. She recently published a
chapbook, Means of Access, through the Kenyon Review Chapbook Series, and is working on
her first book.