

# sports & outdoors

## NO RESOLUTIONS, BUT STORIES TO REMEMBER

This began as a typical New Year's column, one where I'd give my sports resolutions for 2008. I got as far as — Resolve to use up the blank pages in all my old notebooks before starting a new one — and then got stumped. I suppose I could have added: resolve to clean my desk, but I spent much of last Thursday afternoon doing just that, and it still looks the same.

In the midst of that task, and as I scanned stories written during the past year, I thought back to all the stories and subjects I've covered. I realized how kind this profession has been to me — what I've been able to see and where I've been able to go. One of the best parts of being a journalist is getting a peek behind the locker room door, getting the chance to be on the inside.

And there have been some great moments.

One took place at Boston's Symphony Hall, not a place usually associated with sports, but on an April night in 1983 it certainly was. Ted Williams was back in town to pay tribute and to help raise money for Tony Conigliaro, felled the year before by a massive heart attack and stroke. "Aren't you going?" asked friend and

colleague Stan Grossfeld. "Mickey Mantle's supposed to be there."

I explained that I didn't have a credential.

"Are you a reporter or not?" he chided. "I'll see you there."

I was already in town because I was going with my cousin Paul to the Celtics game that night. (And if you'll allow me an aside: isn't it great that games at the Garden mean something again?) Over to Symphony Hall we went, where, at the same time, a taxicab pulled up to the front door and out unfolded Ted Williams, hefting two baseball bats. We were definitely going in now, no matter what it took.

Credentials were being handed out at the stage door. Other than following Ted Williams through the front door, entering Symphony Hall through the musicians' entrance is another dream come true. Without giving anything away, and in what could never happen today in a security-conscious world, we, as Ralphie gleefully expressed in the movie "A Christmas Story," pulled it off.

It was an afternoon press conference before a big concert that evening with Frank Sinatra and Dionne Warwick. The afternoon belonged to the athletes, however. In a large ballroom off the main hall, newspapermen and photographers jammed around. I can still see Joyce Kulhawik standing on a chair, imploring her cameraman to do what I don't know. (And, all these years later, she still looks the same.) When things finally settled down we looked over to the long table against the wall. There sat Ted in the middle of things, looking

uncomfortable as ever in a crowd. And there was Bobby Orr a little further down. But where was the Mick? Wait a minute — who's flanking Ted? Why it's Willie Mays and Joe DiMaggio. Unbelievable.

Stan, of course, got the picture that no one else did, of Ted, Willie and Joe — the dream outfield. I got an interview with Ted Williams, the dream assignment. "There are so many distractions these days," he said. "I don't know if any of us would be as good a hitter today." As he was leaving he looked at me and said, "Just don't say I said that Mays couldn't hit!"

And if Stan hadn't egged me on it never would have happened. It wasn't the first, or last, time he steered me in the right direction. And that's something else I'm thankful for — because more important than the places I've been on this job are the people I've met.

I saw an interview with David Halberstam on PBS the other night during Charlie Rose's look back at 2007. Halberstam said something to the effect of: You are who you interview. He spoke of what he'd been given from those he'd talked to over the years; how some people had altered his perceptions and the way he looked at life. I couldn't help but think of how lucky I was to have interviewed him on several occasions, and how his optimism and grasp of what was truly important has influenced my outlook in turn. David looked for the best in people, he nurtured his friendships, and that's something I took from my times with him.

"You are who you interview." How true.

Looking forward to the conversations of 2008. ■

## ARE YOU PINING FOR A SISKIN?

This is one of those subtle, somewhat nondescript birds toward the back of your bird book. New birders are usually looking for the colorful or the dramatic. So a Pine Siskin is not the first bird they look for. When you first see one your thought might be, "What is wrong with that goldfinch that won't tolerate anyone else near it on the bird feeder?"

Siskins and goldfinches are very closely related. They are in the same scientific genus, *Carduelis*, a Latin word that the French naturalist and colleague of Linnaeus, Mathurin Jacques Brisson, chose. It literally means thistle eater in Latin and historically that was the name the Romans called their goldfinches.

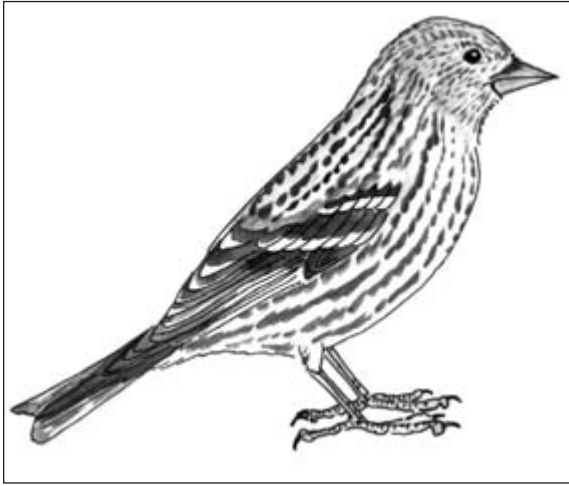
European Goldfinches are the same size and shape as our American ones but have little red faces. They were introduced here on this continent and thrived for a while on western Long Island, at least into the 1960s. They've also been brought into New Zealand. I remember them being in the garden where we lived on the North Island and being a bit appalled when my host's pussy cat proudly laid the head of one outside the back door one morning to show us what a great provider she was.

But I digress because we are discussing Pine Siskins this week. Their faces are light brown rather than red and the first word you think when seeing one is 'stripey.' You might think you were seeing a female House Finch until they stretch out their wings to threaten the bird next to them. When they do this they expose a striking yellow stripe down the wing and you realize this is no House Finch. Then other subtleties reach you like the smaller, more sharply pointed bill, and the deeply notched tail.

You don't find Pine Siskins on Nantucket all the time. As a matter of fact, when Griscom and Folger published "The Birds of Nantucket" in 1948 the species was considered a rare vagrant with only two records historically. But that was more an indication of how few birders there were back then and how easy it is to miss Pine Siskins.

## BIRDS OF NANTUCKET

by Kenneth Turner Blackshaw



*Pine Siskin*

Over the past 50 years they've been found on 21 of our Christmas Bird Counts (CBCs). In 1978 there were 329 of them! Earlier this season one of the Sunday bird walks found a flock of 85 near Warren's Landing. But by the time the date came around for our actual CBC on December 29 we couldn't find a one. This describes the nature of Pine Siskins.

As humans follow the money, Pine Siskins follow the seed crop. Many winter finches are very dependent upon the boreal forest cone crop. Siskins are somewhat less so but still are quick to move when pickings get slim. That's why some years we see none on Nantucket at all. They are happy staying up in northern New England and southern Canada as long as their tummies are full.

They tend to keep moving until they find a good food supply. Perhaps the birds that came through here in November are now in the mid-Atlantic states. Some years they go as far south as northern Florida. In the Western U.S. their migration tends to be more vertical,

descending from the boreal zones high in the mountains to the valleys as winter sets in.

Strangely, though, for 'winter finches' they've been found here as late as June. These are probably birds that are not going to nest for some reason and don't feel the need to move to their breeding grounds and mate. Siskins are often rather communal nesters, building their nests as close as three feet apart. Their four or five eggs are greenish blue with brown splotches. The nest is usually saddled on a limb, very unlike the inverted tripod of branches a goldfinch will seek out.

If you are providing thistle or sunflower seeds you may discover Pine Siskins among your goldfinches this winter. When siskins arrive their feisty dispositions give them away. They spread their wings and gape their bills to intimidate any birds around them. I recently watched a Pine Siskin actually drive off a male Northern Cardinal, a much larger bird with superior armament.

When no longer hungry though they are quite social, traveling in compact flocks of 15 to 20 birds, often flying quite close together. Your ears will bring you the first clue they are going over. Their flight calls are ascending, whistled 'zrrrreeee' notes with a tremulous quality. Indeed one of the collective terms for small finches is a 'trembling' of finches. Try and see which tree they land in. Then enjoy the way they often cling upside-down to feed on the pinecones.

When you identify a Pine Siskin you are well on your way to becoming an accomplished birder. You've identified a bird most people are unaware of and you've also reached the final pages of your bird book! ■

*George C. West creates illustrations for these articles. If you enjoy 'social' birding, join the Nantucket Bird Club at 8 a.m. Sundays in front of Nantucket High School for a two to three hour birding trip. Call 228-1693 for more information. To hear about rare birds, or to leave a bird report call the Massachusetts Audubon hot line at 1-781-259-8805. Ask Ken a question at: kenandcindy1@comcast.net.*

## THIS WEEK IN SPORTS

### Wednesday, Jan. 9

- Whalers ice hockey at Bellingham, 3 p.m.

### Friday, Jan. 11

- Whalers ice hockey vs. Dennis-Yarmouth, 5 p.m.

### Saturday, Jan. 12

- NHS swimming and diving vs. Nauset, noon
- NHS gymnastics at Attleboro, noon
- Girls' JV basketball at S. Shore Tech, noon
- Boys' JV basketball at S. Shore Tech, 1:30 p.m.
- Boys' varsity basketball vs. N. Cambridge Catholic, 2 p.m.
- Whalers ice hockey at Bourne, 5:30 p.m.

### Tuesday, Jan. 15

- Girls' varsity basketball vs. Cape Cod Academy, 3 p.m.
- Boys' varsity basketball at Cape Cod Academy, 3:30 p.m.
- Boys' JV basketball at Cape Cod Academy, 5 p.m.
- CPS girls' basketball at Wixon, 5 p.m.

### Wednesday, Jan. 16

- Girls' JV basketball vs. Martha's Vineyard, 4 p.m.
- Boys' JV basketball vs. Martha's Vineyard, 5:30 p.m.
- Whalers ice hockey at Diman, 8 p.m.