



DARK SKIES AT NIGHT: A BIRD'S DELIGHT

Fall in coastal New Jersey is migration time. We live on the I 95 corridor that goes all the way to Florida, with many other interstate options for getting to our winter homes. But, humans are not the only “Snowbirds” migrating in the fall.

We live on the Atlantic Flyway, one of four main routes for birds in North America. There are migratory birds that travel thousands of miles on this path each year. We know about osprey, purple martins and hummingbirds. But there are many fascinating stories. A sandpiper known as the red knot is the most extreme, traveling from the southern tip of South America to the Canadian arctic and back again each year, with a critical spring refueling stopover in New Jersey. Other birds may travel as far as Florida, the Gulf Coast, Mexico and Central and South America.

Although they are born to fly as it were, there are many migrating fowl that do not make it to their destinations. We humans might not cut our gardens back in the fall so the birds have natural food to eat. We might be sure they have water even in the coldest times. And yet, the attrition rate has increased significantly.

With one simple practice, we can help the birds survive on their perilous journeys. **TURN OUT THE LIGHTS.**

Birds use the stars as their primary guidance system. With the increase in development, there are many more lights in every type of setting. These lights and their reflections often mask the stars that are supposed to guide the birds. The birds then become disoriented and diverge from their paths, using precious energy and fat supplies that are critical for successful migration. So, if we want to help, all we need to do is to turn off our outside lights in the evening, make certain the light we have are pointed down, not up or out, and change to low wattage bulbs.

Your feathered friends will thank you, and most likely, your neighbors will thank you. The sky at night is truly a beautiful sight. Let's all enjoy it.