



poems and photographs
by Derek Kannemeyer



Petal Ridge Press edition,
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website PDF only edition, July 2021



~The Flap Over Tree Debris Island” is both a 2020 book and the title poem of that book.

~ The full book is a 112 page collection of hybrid pic/lit pieces about the animal life of Forest Hill Park in Richmond, Virginia.

~ It is available as a trade book, directly from the author, until his supplies run out.

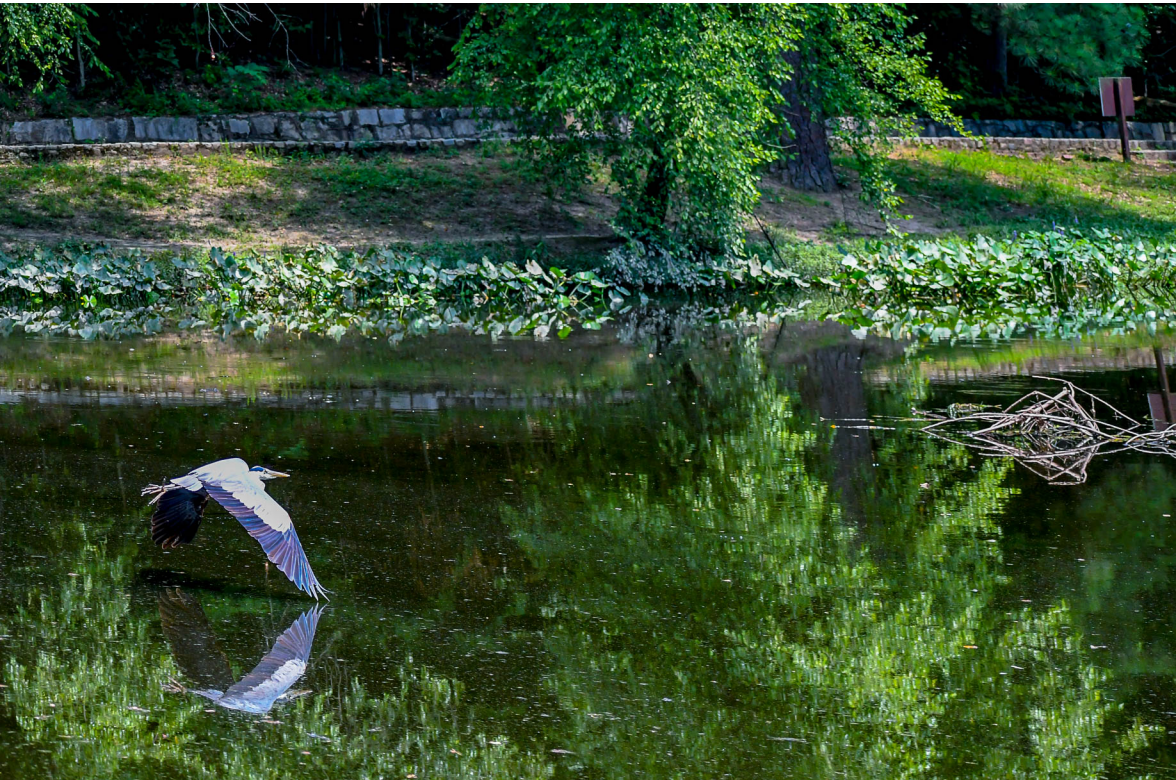
~ After the title poem, it features 60+ other animal photos and about 50 short poems, most of them (but not all of them) light verse pieces, grouped as “For the Lake Animals.”

~ This July 2021 version, adapted for my website, includes:

- a) the title poem’s introductory notes;
- b) its full text, with the accompanying photographs;
- c) a short bonus sampling from “For the Lake Animals.”

The Flap Over Tree Debris Island

(abridged website version)



Flap Notes: Setting

Tree debris islands are found wherever trees fall, and water, mud, rocks are there to catch them. Ours, in Forest Hill Park, Richmond, VA, came into being after a series of June 2018 storms. It proved inconspicuous enough to escape the lake clean-up, and sturdy enough to survive a dozen seasons—although as of now, July 2021, it has mostly sunk into the lake bed. In the photograph above, the islet was just ten days old.

Waterfowl are great fans of such places. Blue herons, green herons, kingfishers, Canada geese, cormorants, mallards, buffleheads, grebes, and goldeneyes have all perched here.

From mid-February to early March 2019 it was even the favorite hangout of a river otter.



Flap Notes: Time & Language

The events here described took place on February 19, 2019, beginning at 2:27 in the afternoon. They are accurately described, however whimsically and in however anthropomorphic a fashion I may interpret them. Most of the photographs I use to illustrate the poem were taken that afternoon, as the action unfurled. But there is a sizable minority that weren't.

Having crashed the lake, to take refuge from the roiling flood waters of the James River, the otter settled in for a while, and the islet became his banquet hall. I photographed him over the course of two weeks. And some of the images of the cormorant and the heron and the mallards were taken either a few days earlier than February 19, 2019, or a few days later.

In the verse tale, I assign the otter the pronouns *she* and *her*. With similar arbitrariness, I make my heron and cormorant male. In truth, I don't know the sex of any of these creatures, and have given them genders for linguistic convenience only.

A centuries old heron nickname I favor in this book is *shitepoke* (derived from what a heron tends to do if you poke it). Another term is *handsaw* (a corruption of the even older word *heronshaw*). In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the Danish prince famously declares himself able to tell a hawk from a handsaw.



3/6/19; here the islet is occupied by two geese and three adult cormorants.

Flap Notes: Characters

a double-crested cormorant: juvenile

a great blue heron: patrician

a river otter: piratical



***Phalacrocorax auritus*: the double-crested cormorant**

Members of the cormorant or shag family of diving birds; widespread across North America. Above, it is early January, 2019, and our own juvenile cormorant has just recently discovered the lake.



***Ardea herodias*: the great blue heron**

Great blues are the largest North American heron, widespread from Canada to Central America. Here, the great blue of my poem is fishing near the lake's stone gazebo.



***Lontra canadensis*: the North American river otter**

Otters are mustelids: members of the weasel family. Semi-aquatic, they are built to thrive in a healthy freshwater habitat. The North American river otter is in decline, largely because of water pollution, but they are fierce, agile fisherfolk.



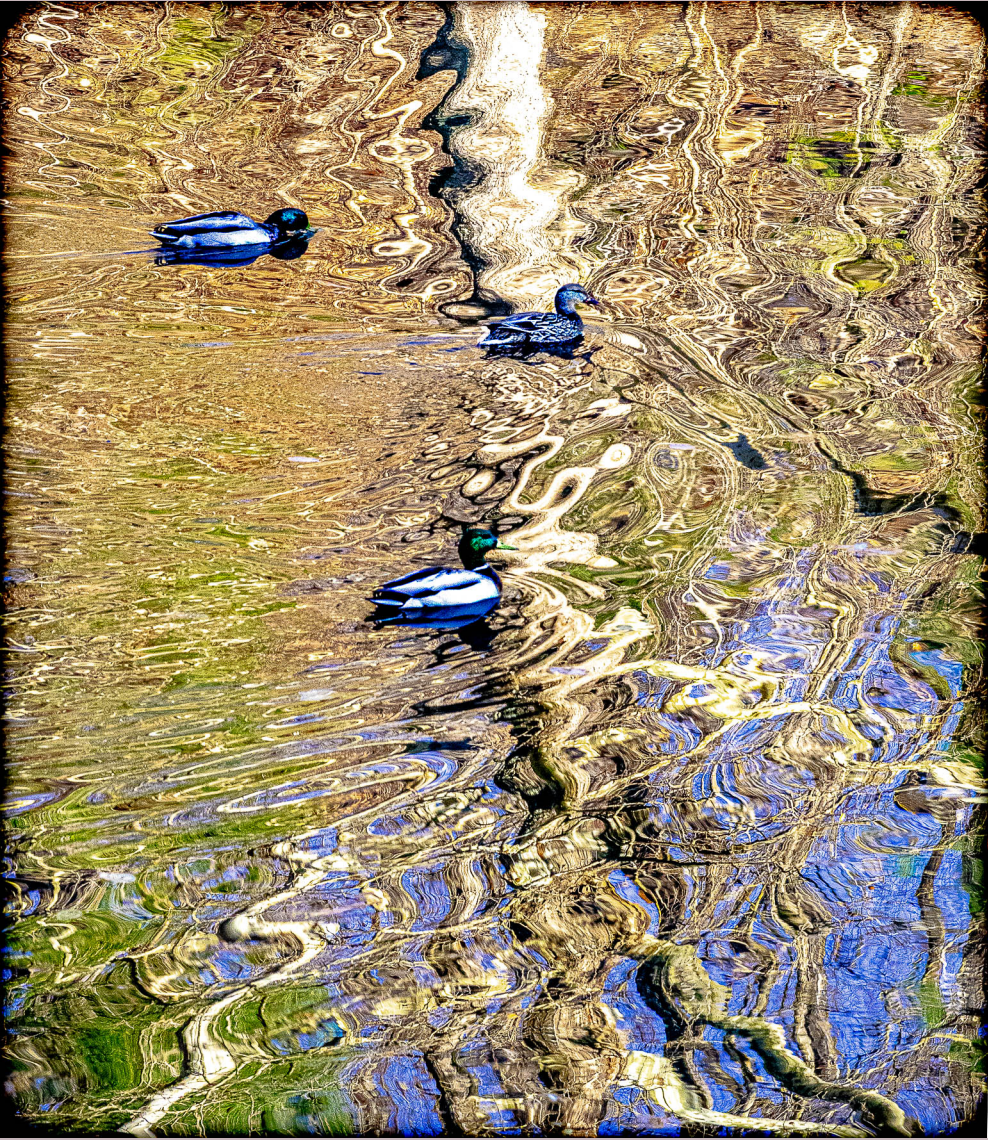
The Flap Over Tree Debris Island:

a verse tale & photo log



ONE

A dappled February sky. Sun-glimmer
dimples the lake with a soft shimmer.
A noon warmth lifts the morning's chill.
The woodsy air is sweet and still:
duck ripples, more than hints of breeze,
riff the reflections of the trees.







**For months now, a large fallen tree
has lodged its skeletal debris
in the lake's mud. It's made a kind
of island, where birds disinclined
to swim or fly might perch awhile.
A cormorant, a juvenile,**





has claimed the upper limb today.
He dries his wings in broad display,
and opens his beak high to caw
that he is now the local law—
casting a frowning eye upon
the neighbors of lower echelon.



His pee ablutes the pools below;
he lolls—he likes to take life slow;
for fun, he cannonballs his face,
and splats and flaps, splashing in place;
then reinstalls himself up high,
to hang his fine wings out to dry:

Mine!





TWO

**O cormorant! You blithe naïf!
You think yourself lord of the fief?
Poor innocent! See, on the shore,
that great blue heron waiting for
some fish to fin by? Some fish has.
Efficiently, no razzmatazz,**







the heron stabs, chows down, digests.
But after lunch, a heron rests.
And where do *you* think he might wish
to lounge, and let his smack of fish
pleasantly settle in the tum?
Tree Debris Isle's where he'll come!





The heron heaves himself upright.
He limbers, lumbers into flight.
Unfurled, his great blue heron wings
occlude the sky: they're massive things;
they beat above the water's mirror
like grand applause; it hails him nearer.



Uh oh! The cormorant gives a squawk.
Will he bluster? Will he balk?
Will he battle for what's his?
Heck, no! He'll scuttle, in a tizz.
With one low signature of froth
he cedes it to the behemoth.
Mine!







THREE

So now the heron rules the roost.
How cravenly that shag vamoosed!
He struts. He preens. Then down he glances,
and sees—my gosh, what are the chances—
a river otter? In his lake!
What nerve! Might it be a mistake?



Since river otters live in rivers!
Which this is not! He bends, delivers
a juridical opinion
on weasels entering his dominion.
The otter stops him with a sneer.
"The river's flooded. So I'm here."



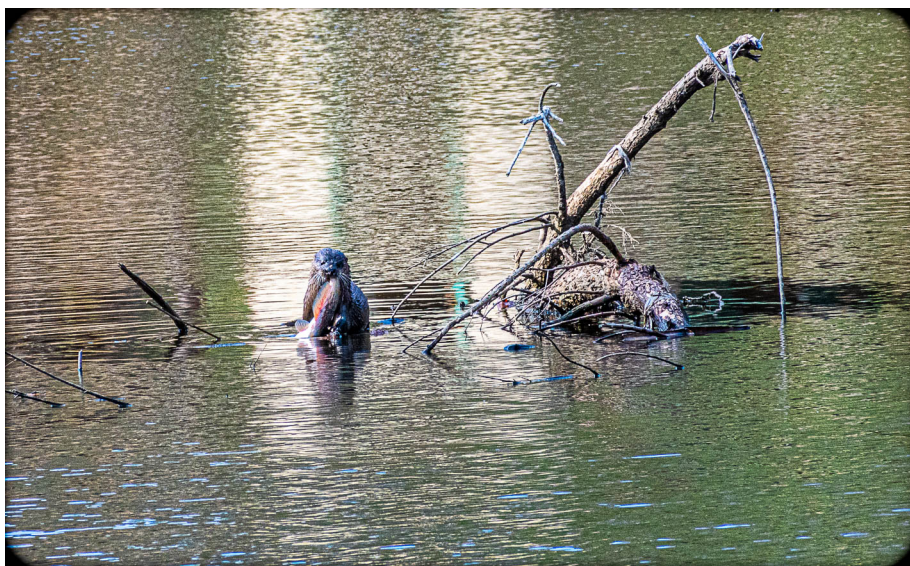
The heron protests in the strongest possible terms.



**"You say this with a mouth half-stuffed
with fish, you boor? We herons, rebuffed,
do not, as some do, cower and totter,
yelp 'Yikes!' and yield..."**



**...Hey, where's that otter?"
Her tail suggests she's spied a fish.
He's fulminating to a swish.**



Emerging with her catch, the otter
plops down on a branch—the rotter!—
a half-submerged limb, stout and cozy;
and shows her fish, like a spring posy,
as if the heron might admire it.
That's *not* how royals reprove a pirate.
Mine!



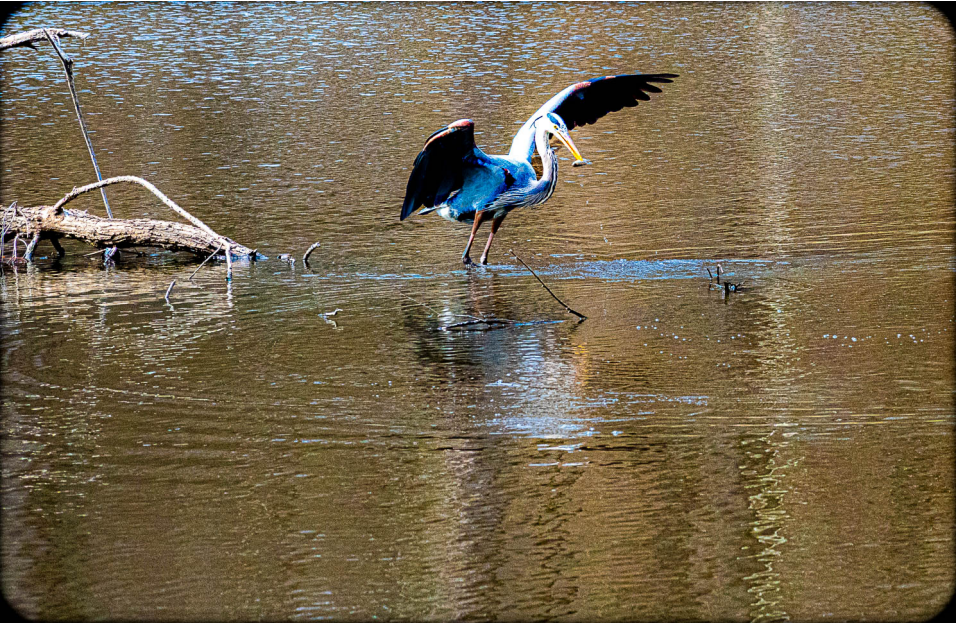


FOUR

They contemplate each other's mugs:
too big to squish, though *like* a bug's.
They glare. They weave and bob a bit—
too far apart, as yet, to hit.
"So you catch fish!" the handsaw drawls.
"Big deal." He drops into the lake and trawls.







**"Mere *humans* fish!" he sneers, and flaunts
a minnow to drive home his taunts.
A quite large minnow! But still not a
haul to much impress an otter!**



**Who slips in near him, snorts, and plunges:
up she rises; low she lunges—**

**right where the wader's scrawny shanks
poke from the water like pork franks.**





**“Yikes!” The startled bird skedaddles
onto the tree debris and straddles—
or tries to—he seesaws there, rather—
plumage and lake alike a-lather.**





With languid grace, the otter swims
her bosky coves—in, out the limbs—
feeding at will. Feebly, the wader
wheels to rail at the invader,
who seems, the scoundrel, to cavort—
to simper, and find this whole thing *sport!*—
Mine!





FIVE

A whole hour, Lady Lontra romps so,
Lord Ardea huffs and stomps so.
He, shadow-punching with a pinion
the upper air—his shrunk dominion;
she, culling fish after fish,
to stuff her face, with crunch and squish.





Until, de facto, one might file it
as a gerrymandered islet.
Though once or twice the bird might lift
his robes and let an odor drift
to mar the perfume of a carp,
he keeps a silence. (Slightly sharp.)





At last, annoyingly replete,
the mustelid scrubs clean her feet;
she dunks, and bobs, and flails a spray
of tub water; she sails away.
Whereon the shitepoke, too, feels free,
plumping his rumbled pride, to flee.



Off into her holt, up the bank and over the spillway bridge.





At last! In swoops the cormorant,
to caw, as was his former wont,
that of this pile of tree debris,
he is the Prince. The King! The Me!
(Less meek a me, now, learns a mallard
who comes to catnap, fat with salad.
Mine!)



“Mine!”



The End

**My tale is told. Let's skip the moral.
I ask instead that should *you* quarrel
with *your* neighbors, just for laughs,
invite me to take photographs!
Defend your turf! Find me my *next* tree!
Blowhards! boneheads! bozos! text me!**



Postscript

The heron harried the otter about the lake for a week, then gave up and drifted off. (In May, after nesting season, he returned; or was this now a new heron?) The otter all but depleted the lake of fish and then moved on. The cormorants left in late March. And the rest was turtles.



“OURS!”

II. For The Lake Animals



As a bonus, here are a half-dozen of the hybrid pieces from “For the Lake Animals.”

Most of the short poems in this section are light verse quatrains, but there are also prose poems, and some longer verse pieces. Some of the work is in a straightforward observational mode; some of it hunts for laughs, in an Ogden Nash kind of way; most of it aims somewhere between the two, in a tone more imitative of Guillaume Apollinaire’s.

I often append some kind of very brief zoological commentary.

I’ve restricted myself in these sample pages to six “buggy” quatrains.



Dragonfly Season

Light as the light, they coat
the lotuses—they dash, dart, float—
to claim; and claw—to feed; to heart—
such rage of grace. So slight. Such art.

(Dragonfly sex is called “hearting.” It is delicately brutal.)



"La chenille en peinant sans cesse"

Through the long, green night of the lake
some rest, and dream; some quest, and take.
Here, by a gold light of park lamps,
A future monarch grinds and champs.

(The title is from a caterpillar quatrain by Guillaume Apollinaire. "Poètes, travaillons!")



Mistress Mosquito

**Mistress Mosquito likes to huddle
between my clothes and skin and cuddle.
She wants my bod; she thinks I'm neat—
the I ♥ ve ain't mutual, Mosquito!**

(Only female mosquitoes bite.)



To Bee

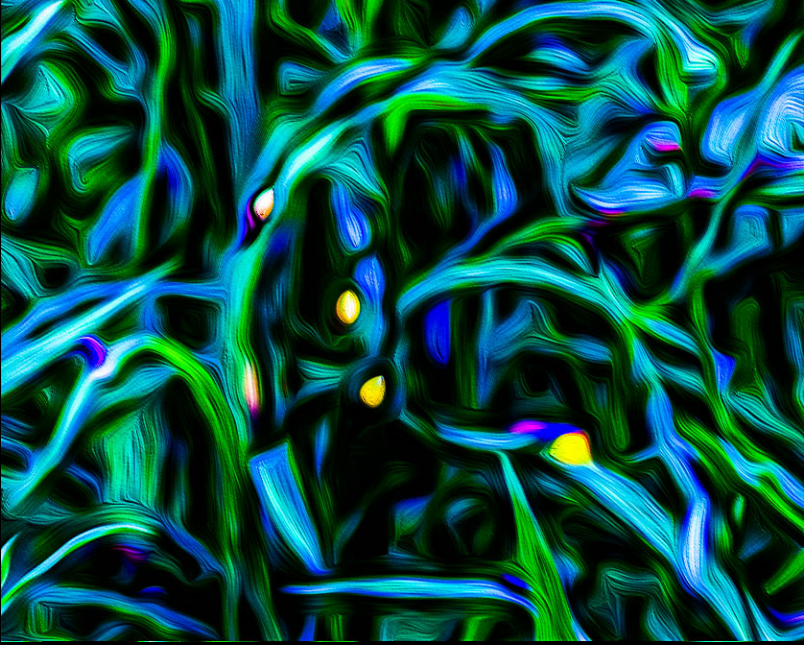
**Bee, be bee! BB the spring
with air pellets of buzz and bling.
Be bright with pollen—fetch, and freight.
Be verb—go forth and conjugate!**



Amberwing

In morning mists, sleep-clambering
up a dim trunk, an amberwing
pauses to preen. Small wings unfold;
sop up some straws of sun; spin gold.

(The eastern amberwing is the smallest of the lake's many species of dragonfly.)



Lake Edge Fireflies

The fireflies are out tonight.
They flit and fleck the banks with light.
We've scores of chores to prioritize.
But first, let's watch the fireflies.



“The Butterfly Whisperer”: author portrait by Sally Kannemeyer