

THE SPIRIT OF SERPENTINE (Episode 3)

Once upon a time a small group of flightless birds, mostly Ratites, sought refuge from predators in the low scrub of the Serpentine Valley. Over the years these birds transformed a small lease of bush into a delightful air field.

It is a wondrous Park. Through its magic, Ratites reclaimed the ability of flight which their ancestors had forsaken in exchange for terrestrial traits. Ingenious machines propel them into the sky where they display flight characteristics that are the envy of other birds.

This Serpentine Flock Of Flightless birds are categorized into species which are not necessarily the result of nesting. In part this is due to the unusual incubation process by polygamous male birds. Illegitimacy among Ratites is therefore common. In special cases the magic of the Park rewards or punishes the birds in accordance with their deeds. It is said that once a Kakapo become a Cassowary and a Rhea was transformed into a Penguin. All this adds to parental uncertainties which sometime causes poor social behavior. The lack of proof of one's progeny allows certain birds to assert undeserved status. A Penguin once claimed to be a Pelican. Possibly for these reasons, it was decided to appoint a bird to oversee the Serpentine Code of Etiquette.

Unavoidably, in any flock, a few birds tend to dwell on the fringes. Feeling alienated they brood. Often this reinforces their antisocial behavior. In the Park these unhappy specimens are few, but because they are of a feather they flock together. One such bird, was suspected to be a Stool Pigeon. Unlike a pigeon however, he could hardly fly. He envied those who frolicked in the sky displaying their skills to other Ratites. With his head down, but tilted to the side, he would slink among the Flock seeing and hearing all.

Meanwhile the bird in charge of the Serpentine Code of Etiquette was exiled to the forest, far away from the flat open lands where Ratites thrive. The outcast, sometimes known as the Émigré Bird, longed for power. He befriended non ratites such as Kakapos and Penguins. To feed his desire to control, he encouraged non Ratites at Serpentine to grass on all suspicious matters. Soon a strong net like bond was formed between the Émigré, stoolie and other non Ratites. Through this web they secretly communicated at speeds of homing pigeons.

How the Serpentine Flock Of Flightless Birds tackled the etiquette snag by snuffing the snitch, is the subject of this story. This tale begins long before the Moa Episode but ends soon after Darwin's Rhea was positively identified.

The following are fictional characters. Any resemblance to reality is purely unintentional and totally coincidental.

THE SERPENTINE FLOCK

The Episode of the Stool Pigeon

The Stool Pigeon has not been positively identified. Some infer that he is not a Ratite. Many suspect that he caballed to overthrow the Cock. There is good evidence however, that he alone, reported numerous infringements of the Serpentine Code of Etiquette. Why he assiduously grassed on Ratites is a matter of conjecture. At the beginning, the reports and the admonishment by the Émigré Bird were friendly, almost tongue in cheek. They were received lightheartedly or with disdain, but never seriously. This infuriated the snitch who began to embellish the transgressions.

The Flock of Flightless Birds are generally very well behaved. In spite of the diversity of species they coexist in harmony. They may not be aristocratic, but they are well mannered. At times they are over polite. When Etiquette requests one radio call, some make five. In an effort to be more genteel than their Murray Field neighbours, the Serpentine Flock of Flightless Birds have made their Code of Etiquette more onerous. Radios are mandatory, low level circuits are not permitted, right hand turns are prohibited not to mention early morning songs which are strictly forbidden. In its thirty years of history the Park has experienced only one collision between birds. That was at night, on bicycles, between two aging, dithering, doddering Ratites which hopefully will be the subject of a separate episode¹.

In spite of such a good record, the reports of bad manners continued to escalate. Some were so outrageous that they were testimony to the limited flying inexperience of the Stool Pigeon. Many suspected that he was just a mole devoid of any pigeon like characteristics. To avoid the scrutiny of the snitch, some practiced advanced maneuvers away from the Park. Others ensured that only true Ratites were present before challenging the limits of their proficiency. In spite of these measures allegations and denunciations continued.



¹ Efforts are in progress to gather material on this incident.

It all came to a head when a Penguin, perhaps incited by the snout, made a contemptible declaration. He publicly accused an impeccably mannered Ratite of treacherous Etiquette Code violations. Again these allegations were probably fallacious. They were made late at night and were devoid of logic, syntax and grammar. Some Ratites decided that enough was enough. A stratagem was set in train.

Under the guidance of the local Guru of flight, whose adherence to the Code is legendary, a display of aerobatic maneuvers was organized. It was witnessed and approved by many true Ratites. For the same purpose a similar solo event had taken place a few days earlier. So the trap had been set. The Stool Pigeon would be flushed out.

Within hours the Émigré Bird had been informed and was accusing the displaying Ratites. The defendants were prepared. "We have proof that the accusations are false." They proclaimed. "Declare your source or forever remain silent." The aviators demanded.

Suspecting entrapment, the Émigré Bird refused to reveal the identity of the mole. It became obvious to all, that the Serpentine Code of Etiquette could not be policed from afar if the informer was not reliable.

So it is that a new keeper of the Code of Etiquette will be selected from a list of distinguished true Ratites, who by definition nest at Serpentine. Plans are afoot to improve the Code. Proposals will be sought to ease interaction between all birds at the Park. Similar efforts will be made to harmonize the Flock's activities with the needs of terrestrial species which surround the Field. As in the case of the neighboring Murray Field, the benefit of right hand and low level circuits will be discussed. Proficiency flying will be encouraged, not inhibited.

Hopefully, in the near future the services of an Etiquette Overseer will disappear. True Ratites are more concerned with substance than form. Perhaps the position will be replaced with that of a Captain to promote all aspects of flight. The Flock of Flightless Birds is anxiously awaiting the decision. The Cock must recognize however, the danger of going too far. The Captain could become a Squadron Leader who like Baron Manfred von Richthofen was replaced by Hermann Wilhelm Göring.

Snitches or snouts can not exist if no one will listen. They have no value except for those who crave for power. If a transgression is observed let it be known, there and then. Invariably it is a misunderstanding or an error. Most often on the part of the witness. Any interaction is best resolved by direct contact without adjudication. Let the magic of the Park appeal to the transgressor. No member of the Flock Of Flightless Birds would purposely jeopardize the joy of flying at Serpentine Air Field.