

# An open letter to a dirty, rotten Bigfoot thief

In this neck of the woods, we take Bigfoot seriously. He — or perhaps she — is a source of civic pride and an economic engine, serving as the foundation of the Western North Carolina Bigfoot Festival held in downtown Marion each and every September since way back in 2018.

So, we don't look kindly on Bigfoot-related crime, the likes of which was perpetrated upon one Danny Shaw and family.

As reported in the Tuesday, March 20, edition of The McDowell News, someone stole their 7-foot-tall metal Bigfoot silhouette, purchased at an auto fair in Charlotte, from their yard on or about March 13.

"It costs about \$100, but it's priceless to our family," Shaw told the paper. Priceless indeed.

As a civic booster, Bigfoot aficionado and part-time vigilante, I am today writing the following open letter to the person or persons who stole Bigfoot's silhouette.

Some readers, perhaps only Tim and Kenny, may recall a similar open letter I wrote back in December to the evildoer who stole the Baby Jesus from the First Baptist Church's nativity scene, imploring the thief to bring it back.

Unfortunately, some people who read the column, or just part of the column or none of the column, mistakenly thought I was making fun of Baby Jesus instead of blasting the idiot who stole him, which led to comments like this:

"It is ridiculous and disrespectful articles like this which is why I do not waste any of my money on this 'news-paper.' Some subjects don't deserve to be topic of your 'humor.'"

And this one:  
"This article is in mockery of Him. I pray God help you understand your foolishness."

And let us not forget the succinct:  
"Shame on you!"

Hopefully, this next message to a thief will be better received than the last one:

Hey, you no-good, dirty-rotten, Sasquatch-stealing-son-of-\$\$!\$, bring back that Bigfoot silhouette you stole. I'm serious. Here we are, a small town in the foothills of Western North Carolina, trying to establish ourselves as the Bigfoot capital of the southeast, a place where Bigfoot enthusiasts of every stripe, young and old, short and tall, Republican and Democrat, fans of Duke and fans of Carolina, can come together each and every September, put our differences aside to enjoy all things Squatch and you pull a bone-head stunt like this?

I don't like thieves. Whether they are stealing my daughter's plastic snow sled from her granny's yard in the winter of 2006, kidnapping Baby Jesus from the First Baptist Church nativity scene Christmas of 2018 (again, for the record, I'm not condoning it, I'm condemning it) or ripping off Bigfoot's silhouette in mid-March 2019, stealing is wrong. It makes me want to strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger, Samuel L. Jackson-style.

I don't know the Shaw family personally, but I am sure they are fine folks, auto fair-going folks who like Bigfoot just as much as I do. They didn't ask for you to sneak onto their property and steal their 7-foot-tall metal Bigfoot silhouette. We're supposed to be a community united by Bigfoot. Any Bigfoot-related crime just serves to divide us. Simply put, it is wrong.

As a civic booster, Bigfoot aficionado and part-time vigilante, I could attempt to track you down and extract great vengeance with my furious anger, but all those people who yelled at me and wished for me to lose my job last December over the stolen Baby Jesus column have put the blessing of kindness in my heart.

I will give you the opportunity to return the stolen Bigfoot silhouette on your own without a Sasquatchian beat down. Just bring it back. Return it and we can again be a community united — not divided — by all things Bigfoot.

Scott Hollifield is editor/GM of The McDowell News in Marion, N.C., and a humor columnist. Contact him at rhollifield@mcldowellnews.com.



**Scott Hollifield**  
My Opinion

# Goodbye, you lovable fuzzball

## Heidi heads on to the great doghouse in the sky

I could never keep enough water in the bowl.

Somewhere around the first of the year, we began noticing that Heidi was lapping up lots of liquid from her big, green water bowl almost every hour.



**Joe Tennis**  
Tennis Anyone?

She had been slightly overweight for years. Heidi ate her regular food. And she might've had an extra Saltine here and there. She also liked a chunk of chicken.

Still, her main staple was regular, dry dog food. What's more, she was our baby. We spoiled her.

For our family, Heidi filled in where we had lost Wendy, our black-and-white dog who had lived with us for over 16 years.

Perhaps it's not fair to make a comparison. But let's not get too serious with this: Heidi was a dog, after all.

So when we looked at her black fur with white markings, it was, oh, so natural to begin thinking of her as "Little Wendy."

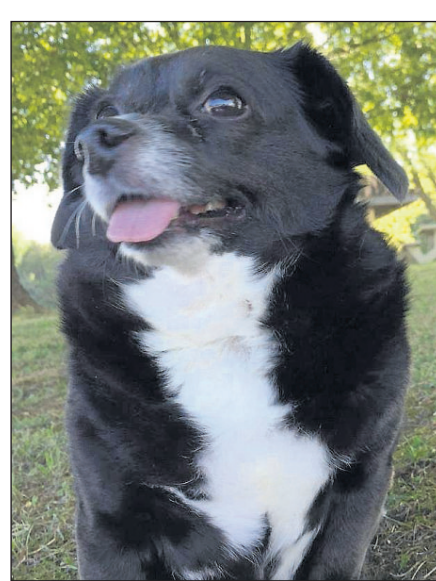
That's kind of what we called her, sometimes. Or at least I did.

For my wife, Heidi actually took her name from another "Heidi" — a dog that had belonged to her late mother — when she came to us as a puppy in the fall of 2010.

She grew into a rather wiry rascal.

We adopted her nearly a year before Wendy died on Aug. 9, 2011.

Yet when Wendy passed on to that great doghouse in the sky, well, that was



Heidi poses at the Tennessee Welcome Center in Bristol while en route to Georgia in 2016. She just loved her human family.

when Heidi truly began to assert her personality.

She growled if you got near her food.

Comically, she would sometimes guard that food and not eat it. Yet she would still growl.

Some might call that "food aggression."

We just called that "Heidi."

It was also kind of normal how she rudely ignored any other dog in the house.

Other than Wendy, she never took time to make any other canine friends.

She just loved her human family.

Heidi wanted to be held, and she was not about to give up her turn in somebody's arms.

Sadly, she began losing her luster for life around the start of this year.

She drank so much water that, sometimes, she had a hard time waiting to go back outside.

Her shape shifted.

What was once a plump Chihuahua-dachshund became almost bony.

Our veterinarian called her problem "complicated diabetes."

Another doctor revealed she had problems with her liver and probably more things that I don't understand.

Suffice it to say that she was just not herself.

And then she died.

Saying goodbye made me cry.

I do know crying is a healthy human emotion, especially when you're dealing with death. And saying goodbye to your lovable fuzzball, who slept almost every night at the foot of the bed, must be one of the hardest losses to endure.

What made me cry the most was seeing her little body in a bag, lying beneath a blanket, waiting to be buried.

I had put off the burial all day. Then I found both the shovel and the right spot — next to Wendy, perhaps the only dog that Heidi truly loved.

Returning inside the house on Tuesday afternoon, after a few more tears, I caught a glimpse of Heidi's water bowl.

My daughter said she thought she had again seen Heidi, still at that bowl — perhaps as a ghost.

I had no answer for that one.

I only stood there and wished I could have filled that water bowl one more time for my dearly-departed dog.

jtennis@bristolnews.com  
276-791-0709 | @BHC\_Tennis

# Smallest of the nuthatches finds a niche at woman's feeders

Veronica Rausch contacted me by email to share a story of the nuthatches that frequent the feeders at her home in central Oregon.

"I have a small flock of pygmy nuthatches coming into the feeders next to my dining room window on a regular basis," Veronica wrote, adding that the nuthatches began their visits about three weeks ago.

Veronica wrote that she lives in the pine forests of Central Oregon at an elevation of about 4,200 feet.

"The pygmy nuthatches are delightful little birds and share the feeders with the chickadees and juncos," she wrote. "The bigger birds such as the Stellar's jays and the woodpeckers will cause them to leave."

Veronica has also enjoyed observing their unusual antics. "I saw one do a little dance on a branch by the suet feeder," she described in her email. "Unfortunately, I wasn't able to grab the camera fast enough! I hope they stick around."

I replied to Veronica's email, noting how I consider her fortunate to be hosting the smallest of North America's nuthatches at her home. Admitting to some envy at her good fortune, I explained that I hope to someday add this species to my life list so I can check all of the continent's nuthatches off my list of target birds.

Even by nuthatch standards, the pygmy nuthatch is a small bird. In appearance, this nuthatch shows buffy-white underparts contrasted with a brown head and a slate-gray back. They often breed in large extended family flocks, so the four individuals observed by Veronica might very well have been closely related to each other.

Nesting pygmy nuthatches are often assisted in their chores by "nest helpers," which are close relatives that help the busy parents gather food and feed hungry young. These nest helpers also deliver food to females as they incubate eggs and will mount a spirited defense of a nest threatened by intruders. Their communal nature extends to nocturnal roosting when many individuals will huddle together to ensure their combined body heat helps them survive extremely cold nights.

So how small is the pygmy nuthatch? The adults are barely four inches long and weigh only a third of an ounce. A common fountain pen weighs more



The brown-headed nuthatch, the southeastern counterpart to the pygmy nuthatch that ranges throughout the western Rocky Mountains, is a rare bird in the Mountain Empire region.

than this tiny nuthatch, which goes a long way towards explaining the bird's scientific name, *sitta pygmaea*.

Pygmy nuthatches are not at all likely to be found in the Mountain Empire or any adjacent areas, but there is another small nuthatch that is found in some extremely localized habitats in the region. The brown-headed nuthatch is a specialist of pine woodlands throughout the southeastern United States, favoring loblolly-shortleaf pines and longleaf-slash pines. This nuthatch requires standing dead trees for nesting and roosting. They forage for food, however, on live pines. The birds are more abundant in older pine stands.

I saw several brown-headed nuthatches during a recent stay on Fripp Island in South Carolina. I've also observed this small nuthatch during visits to Chattanooga, Tennessee, and Atlanta, Georgia, as well as various other locations in South Carolina. This nuthatch even occurs in the Mountain Empire region, most recently with four of these birds being found at Washington County Park on South Holston Lake near Bristol during the 2018 Christmas Bird Count conducted by the Bristol Bird Club.

These small birds will occasionally forage close to the ground, but they

are often in the upper branches of pine trees. Their presence is often revealed by their call, which sounds amazingly like a squeeze toy. They produce their "squeaky toy" call persistently when agitated or curious. Brown-headed nuthatches often associate with mixed flocks in company with Carolina chickadees, tufted titmice, pine warblers and other small songbirds.

The power of flight gives most birds a perfectly valid reason to disregard the power of gravity. The family of tree-clinging birds known as nuthatches lives an even more topsy-turvy lifestyle than many other of their winged kin. Nuthatches prefer a headfirst stance, even "walking" upside down as they search for food in the nooks and crannies of tree trunks and branches.

The United States is home to four species of nuthatches: white-breasted, red-breasted, brown-headed and pygmy. White-breasted nuthatches are probably the most familiar nuthatch to backyard birders in this area.

Because of their gravity-defying antics, the white-breasted nuthatch and other members of the family can provide hours of entertainment at our bird feeders. Individual white-breasted nuthatches will follow a single-minded



# Adventures in crabbing

Buying live crabs is easy — at least one local shop sells them — but catching them is a challenge

**A**SSATEAGUE ISLAND, Va. — Armed with chicken necks on Assateague Island, I dropped over a roadside with lines and dip nets.

This was not rocket science, using a pole with a string fixed with a sinker and a hook.



**Joe Tennis**

Tennis  
Anyone?

It was the art of chicken-necking.

You use chicken necks for bait on a line. Toss out in the water, and wait for a blue crab to come a'tugging. Carefully, then, you pull in that line and come behind it with a dip net to scoop up your catch.

This is certainly much more work than the alternative: buying live blue crabs.

Amazingly, that can actually be done — about 300 miles from a blue crab's habitat — in Bristol, Virginia, where, once a year, I pick up a dozen from Greene's Seafood Market on West State Street.

I always want them live.

I want to hold 'em by the backfins, claws ceremoniously extended, and show 'em to my dogs, who act like they are aliens.

There is also a sport in cooking live crabs. Seems I'm always having a crab crawl out of the bag and into the sink.

Grabbing some tongs, it's like catching crabs in the kitchen!

Yet, also once a year, I like to do the real thing: go into the marsh and emerge with a batch of two-clawed crawlers.

It ain't always easy, using no crabpot.

Why, first, you simply have to find a place to crab.

Out on Assateague Island, in the far northeastern corner of Virginia, I had no luck securing my favorite spot on the last Monday of July.

There was a guy down there, and he was blocking it with all his lines and nets.

So I chose a new space — several yards down a shallow stream. And I found a few to my consolation crab hole — eight, in fact, which was enough to have a feast of fins, legs and claws.

The next day, I staked claim on where that guy had been — a crabbing hole where I had caught a few dozen the year before.

Shortly, though, two guys stopped in a pickup truck and looked down at me. But, by that time, I had six lines in the water and acted like I owned the place, blocking all access to this spit of sand.

They drove on.

Here are live crabs from Greene's Fresh Seafood in Bristol, Virginia.

JOE TENNIS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER



But then came the family.

There were crabbing women and crabbing kids plus a fearless dip-nettin' daddy who walked into the waters and bragged that he had caught a snake. Or maybe it was an eel.

I did not understand.

You see, most of this clan spoke some foreign language. And, not long after they trotted down the hill to the hole, they acted like they owned the place.

So I stepped aside, like a gentleman, and let the family have some fun.

What I presume was the mother, a nice looking lady with a hat, waded out and began rapidly catching crabs.

But, she said, she was almost out of chicken.

I was also running out of chicken as well as enthusiasm.

I certainly had no solitude.

Why, at one point, I looked up and saw that there must have been 15 people on my little lagoon, where, only 90 minutes earlier, I had been all alone.

See **CRABBING**, Page D6

# When a quick response goes down the drain

As far as restaurant mishaps go, I never accidentally served a \$5,760 bottle of wine but I did break an industrial kitchen sink with a load of frozen flounder. This is the mostly true story of how that happened.



**Scott Hollifield**  
My Opinion

I was reminded of the sink incident while reading a story about a restaurant employee in London who got his order mixed up and served patrons a bottle of Chateau le Pin Pomerol (that's a \$5,760 wine) instead of what they ordered, a bottle of Chateau Pichon Longueville Comtesse de Lalande (that is not a \$5,760 wine).

According to a story from the Associated Press, the source I turn to for news about fancy wine and big screw-ups, a restaurant spokesperson said "it was a very busy night at the restaurant and a very simple mistake. A member of staff picked up the wrong bottle" of Bordeaux. The restaurant told the employee that "one-off mistakes happen" and added "we love you anyway."

Still, I thought to myself, I'm glad I'm not that guy. Then I remembered I sort of had been that guy. It was 35 or so years ago, and I was working summers and weekends at a seafood restaurant to make money for school, gas and beer and not necessarily in that order.

Looking back now, it was the best job I ever had. It was better than putting up hay (itchy and too many bees), better than roofing (standing on top of a Winn Dixie with a tar bucket on July 4 will inspire some soul searching) and better than newspapering (I don't have the space to list the reasons).

At that time in my life, nothing could have been sweeter than odd hours, pretty waitresses and one free meal per shift. Actually, at any time in my life nothing could have been sweeter than that.

Fred, a man of great generosity and patience who also possessed a fiery temper when things went crossways, ran the place, and I always tried to keep on his good side, hoping that he would not regret his decision to hire me to cook shrimp and wash dishes to fund my educational and recreational activities.

One evening, diners decided they were going to eat all our flounder. I don't know if this was a collective decision on the part of the diners or it was National Flounder Day, but everyone was eating flounder like it was going out of style. Those with access to a globe or perhaps Google maps can see that a seafood restaurant in Western North Carolina is actually a fairly long way from the sea, so our flounder arrived frozen and had to be thawed.

"We need more flounder!" someone yelled. Being the responsive employee that I was, I went to the freezer and retrieved frozen flounder and — being as this was a flounder emergency — began banging the frozen chunks of fish all around the sink as hard as I could to facilitate the thawing process. It seemed like a good idea.

At some point, Fred had purchased a large industrial kitchen sink. It was not metal, but made out of some kind of space-age composite material. I imagine the person who sold it to Fred said, "No one can break this sink, not even some idiot who beats it as hard as he possibly can with chunks of frozen flounder." And I bet that man is no longer in the sink business because he was wrong.

Fred sent me home. While I doubt the sink cost \$5,760, it was worth a couple of hundred bucks in 1983 money, and that was a lot. But, once again proving himself a man of great generosity and patience, Fred let me come back for my next shift and we spoke not of the sink incident.

Maybe that waiter in London who screwed up will someday look back on his restaurant gig as the best job he ever had. At least he'll have a good story to tell.

Scott Hollifield is editor/GM of The McDowell News in Marion, N.C., and a humor columnist. Contact him at [rhollifield@mcldowellnews.com](mailto:rhollifield@mcldowellnews.com).

## South Holston Lake

# FUN WITH NICKNAMES



Here are the sands of "Sweetie Pie Beach," a hidden gem on South Holston Lake in Washington County, Virginia.

JOE TENNIS/BRISTOL HERALD COURIER

## Folks personalize spots on lake with nicknames like 'Sweetie Pie Beach,' 'Little John Cove,' 'Eagle's Nest,' 'Don's Folly'

**S**OUTH HOLSTON LAKE — I almost started talking about "Sweetie Pie Beach."

And then, in the course of interviewing everybody I could find on South Holston Lake, I knew nobody would know where that meant.

But, believe me, this is a magical place in Washington County, Virginia — a beach with actual sand on South Holston Lake in the Cherokee National Forest.

There are no roads or trails getting there; it's accessible only by boat.

"Sweetie Pie Beach" has just enough sand to tickle your toes while listening to waves pound the lakeshore from the wakes of passing boats.

But, does it really have that name? To me, it does.

My daughter coined "Sweetie Pie Beach" a decade ago when she was 8 years old — a time when little girls say all kinds of cute things and, really, can do no wrong.

Today, this is where I still tell my wife I am headed for an afternoon.

"Sweetie Pie Beach."

It's not far from "Little John Cove."

Which, of course, is another place that you have not heard of.

"Little John Cove" takes its name from an incident on July 2, 2006. That's when several of my family members boarded a pontoon boat. And, in the middle of a voyage, my wife went into labor with our son, "Little John," as we cruised along this residential area in Virginia.

As it turns out, we are not alone in assigning nicknames to certain points on South Holston Lake.

Meeting John Hill, a boater from Marion, Virginia, I learned about "Eagle's Nest," a cove marked by an artificial eagle's nest used to reintroduce eagles to South Holston Lake in Tennessee.

"The empty eagle's nest is still there," said Hill, 73. "It's made out of wood and metal. So we call that cove 'Eagle's Nest.'"

Another cove was dubbed "Don's Folly," because that's where one of Hill's friends — a guy named Don — fell off the swimming platform of his boat and dislocated his shoulder.

Still another cove in Tennessee is called "Trigger Hole."

Part of that name, according to Hill, comes from a friend's jet-ski, nicknamed "Trigger." Yet that jet-ski tripped over — in this "hole" — when another friend tried to ride it.

[jtennis@bristolnews.com](mailto:jtennis@bristolnews.com)  
276-791-0709 | @BHC\_Tennis



**Joe Tennis**

Tennis  
Anyone?

## Unusual ducks pick Middlebrook Lake for visit

**J**oanne Campbell notified me via Facebook of a visit of an unusual waterfowl on Saturday, May 18, at her home near Middlebrook Lake in Bristol, Tennessee.



**Bryan Stevens**  
For the Birds

I needed a moment to look past the obvious Canada goose in the photograph before my eyes registered the four small ducks on the grassy bank. I recognized them instantly as black-bellied whistling ducks.

Black-bellied whistling ducks are members of a group of ducks known as "tree ducks" and "whistling ducks."

There is some debate about whether they are more closely related to ducks or geese.

Joanne's recent sighting near her home culminates a series of sightings throughout the region over the past month or so. For whatever reason, these ducks have popped up in various locations throughout the region in recent weeks.

Birder and photographer Adam Campbell found 11 black-bellied whistling ducks at a new retention pond off Exit 14 along Interstate 81 in Abingdon, Virginia, on Sunday, May 12.

A month earlier, birder Graham Gerdeman, a resident of Nashville, Tennessee, found a black-bellied whistling duck at the Harpeth/Morton Mills Greenway in Nashville on Friday, April 12.

On Friday, April 19, another lone black-bellied whistling duck was spotted in a grocery store parking lot in Fairview near Murfreesboro, Tennessee, by birder Kathy Malone.

Birders Ronald Hoff and Dollyann Myers observed a black-bellied whistling duck on Friday, May 17, on a small lake on Highway 411 south of

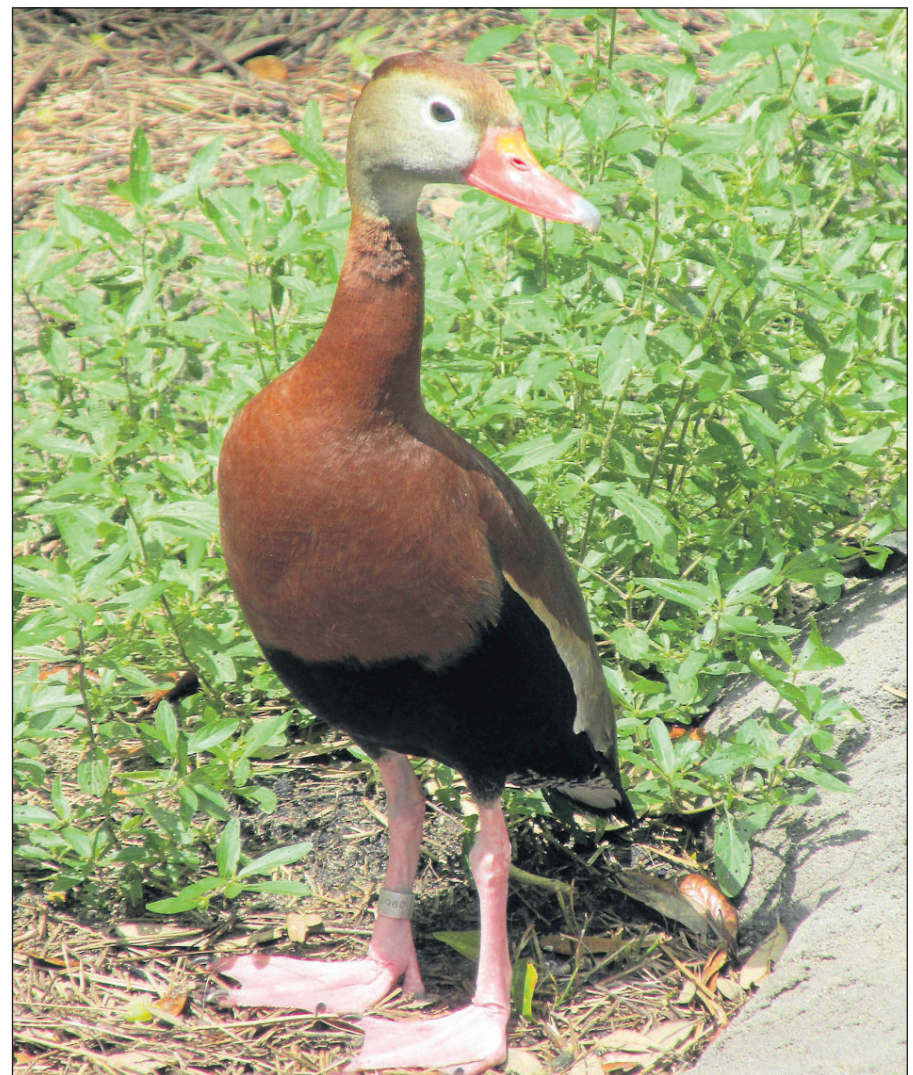


PHOTO BY BRYAN STEVENS

A black-bellied whistling duck stands inside an aviary located at Brookgreen Gardens in South Carolina. In the wild, this species of duck has been expanding its range in the southern United States.

Maryville, Tennessee, on the line between Blount and Loudon counties.

In West Tennessee, closer to the Mississippi River waterfowl migration flyway, the black-bellied whistling duck is a more common bird. The ducks, which are typically found in

Central and South America, range into the United States typically only in southern Texas and Arizona, as well as occasionally in Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas and Florida.