

SHELL SHOCKED
DON'T FEED THE BIRDS

By Art Stevens

The other day my wife and I wandered out to the beach to watch another stunning Sanibel sunset. We were armed with a bottle of nice cold chardonnay, a couple of wine glasses and a can of cashew nuts.

It was about five p.m. and we settled into our beach chairs oblivious to everything around us except the rolling surf and the dimming red ball up in the sky.

We were at peace. All was well. Nature was at its grandest. We poured the wine, toasted each other, wished for beautiful things in 2014 and expressed our gratitude for our wise decision in choosing Sanibel as our paradise retreat.

After a few moments we opened the can of cashews and passed it back and forth between us. From out of nowhere a big fat seagull appeared. It had apparently seen and sniffed the cashews.

"Go ahead," my wife said. "Make his day."

Well, we had plenty of cashews in the can and more at home. The seagull looked plaintively at us as though it hadn't eaten for weeks. I threw a few cashews in his direction and he pounced on them.

And then a second seagull appeared from the heavens sensing easy prey. It, too, hovered near us as the first seagull was devouring its last cashew. My wife and I smiled at each other. What could be more perfect? A peaceful beach, a beautiful day, a gentle surf, a setting sun -and now a session with the beach's nature bird, the perennial seagull.

I threw a few cashews in the direction of the second bird and it, too, pounced on them. And not to make the first seagull feel that it was being slighted in favor of its little brother, I tossed a few more cashews in its direction.

A few more moments passed in sublime bliss. And it appeared that a huge dark cloud had suddenly formed and covered the setting sun. The cloud seemed to get larger and headed in our direction.

As the cloud got closer, we realized it wasn't a cloud at all but an advancing army

of what seemed to be thousands of seagulls. My wife and I were astonished. We'd never seen so many seagulls all at once. Where did they come from? There were no other people on the beach to witness any of this.

The army of seagulls descended to the beach and surrounded us---I mean literally surrounded us. Then the birds began to communicate to each other. With their beaks facing skyward they filled the air with seagull sounds -loud, piercing squawks. Since the sounds were coming from thousands of squealing seagulls we weren't exactly listening to a Mozart symphony.

And then one seagull stepped forward and came within inches of our chairs. What happened to the so-called natural fear of humans I thought?

The leader of the pack waddled right up to the can of cashews that lay in the sand between our two chairs. It started squealing. I could swear I could make words out of the squeals. It sounded like, "give us your cashews and leave the beach. Take your wine with you."

I'm not sure what those seagulls would have done had we refused. We didn't bother to find out. We folded our chairs, packed up our stuff, left the can of cashews exactly where we had been told to leave it and gingerly left the beach.

We didn't dare look back but heard the distinctive sound of cashews being chewed and devoured. When we got back to our house we both had a long swig of wine. Finally, my wife said, "I hope they don't like paté."

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