



The Hooded Merganser

On a restored wetland project
Near Chef Menteur Pass outside New Orleans
On a cold and windy winter day -
Cold only like the marsh can be cold -
Wind blowing across uninterrupted sky,
Water and grass before my eyes.

The airboat hums and glides down the bayou,
Me layered up in everything I brought,
The boat traversing seemingly endless marsh,
But this is a marsh that is being restored,
For the marsh was falling apart and disintegrating,
Releasing roots and the carbon that was stored
Within the moist and dark, salty soil
That is losing a battle and cannot hold its own
Against the continuous pounding of eroding waves
And long-term damage from oil brine and canals.

The big diesel's throbbing, scooting us along,
When a hooded merganser dashes before the bow,
Pursued by the swooping red-tailed hawk
That hits the flying little duck,
Forcing it down into the water to its advantage
As it dives like a submarine escaping cannon fire,
Diving to reappear at a different spot,
Then taking wing after making sure

The red-tailed hawk is nowhere near.

The hooded one survived with skills forged
From millennia of evolution,
Evolution that moves too slow to save the wetlands,
Wetlands that require us to act to undo
That which we have done by taking
Actions that can restore the coastal loss
Caused by our neglect and lack of knowledge
For these water meadows can survive as did
The merganser, but only if we answer
The marsh's call for help.

The marsh and the merganser,
Submerged with the hope of reappearing,
Impacted but not subdued,
Insights coming on a really cold winter day
Near Chef Menteur Pass near New Orleans.