

## The Queens' Birds

by Lynne Belluscio

In 1951, my parents took me to see Walt Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*. I remember enjoying the movie, (which was in sharp contrast to my visit to see *Bambi*, which resulted in an early exit, because after the tragic scene, when *Bambi's* mother is killed, I would not stop crying, and my father had to carry me out of the theater.) *Alice in Wonderland* was great fun – the Cheshire Cat and the Rabbit. And who can forget the Queen's garden, where the cards are painting the white roses red, and the Queen holds a croquet match. The story is taken from Lewis Carrolls' book, "*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*", which was written in 1865:

Alice thought she had never seen such a curious croquet-ground in her life; it was all ridges and furrows; the balls were live hedgehogs, the mallets live flamingoes, and the soldiers had to double themselves up and stand on their hands and feet, to make the arches. The chief difficulty Alice found at first was in managing her flamingo: she succeeded in getting its body tucked away, comfortably enough, under her arm, with its legs hanging down, but generally, just as she had got its neck nicely straightened out, and was going to give the hedgehog a blow with its head, it would twist itself round and look up in her face, with such a puzzled expression that she could not help bursting out laughing: and when she had got its head down, and was going to begin again, it was very provoking to find that the hedgehog had unrolled itself, and was in the act of crawling away: besides all this, there was generally a ridge or furrow in the way wherever she wanted to send the hedgehog to, and, as the doubled-up soldiers were always getting up and walking off to other parts of the ground, Alice soon came to the conclusion that it was a very difficult game indeed."

I just recently heard about another queen's flamingo story. I was watching PBS



The illustrations in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, were done by John Tenniel. Alice is shown holding one of the flamingoes.

and a story about the Buckingham Palace gardens and I was astounded to learn that at one time, Queen Elizabeth II had a small flock of flamingoes. So I googled the story and discovered that in 1959, the London Zoo gave Queen Elizabeth a small flock of flamingoes. They apparently thrived and were fed shrimp and cockles in order to keep their pink color. (No, I'm not making this story up. It's true.) But in 1996,

the Queen's flamingoes met an untimely death, when a fox killed six of them, and the one sole survivor died of shock. I was particularly interested in the story, because it seems that the pond where the flamingos congregated, had frozen over during an unseasonably winter freeze. The pond gave the flamingos protection from the fox, but with the pond frozen, they were not able to find refuge and were easy prey. Keeping that in

mind, for this Sunday, April 1, I have been watching the weather forecast for LeRoy. It looks like 39 degrees with a chance of snow and going down Sunday night to a dangerous 26. We will put a out a few of our pink decoys on Sunday morning, but hope that the creek doesn't ice over, just in case the flamingos decide to fly in on Easter morning. We would certainly hate to see them become fox food.