
LETTERS

BIRDWATCHING AT BOWERS DRIVE

As an inexperienced bird watcher the statement that these do not seem to be many birds in an area could mean that the sightings of the observer have been inconsistent. As the trees mature in a new development so I feel sure have the numbers of birds [increased]. I am usually on the lookout for them but have never overcome the fear of being caught peering through binoculars by my neighbours. I find the identification of birds quite frustrating at times when I am unable to decide the species in question. I will not name a bird unless I am convinced of its identity.

Above is a list of the birds I have seen in my garden in the past year with a few stretching across Territorial Drive.

I will comment on some of them. But for the House Sparrow there are times when the garden would be devoid of birds, and I welcome them for this reason. However bad the weather they are the survivors, but at the feeder their manners are dreadful, for they sit there monopolizing the small space, scattering the feed all over the place.

I love the chickadee for the cutest of ways and well mannered feeding, never eating at the feeder, but taking each seed

to the same twig where it is skillfully shelled out and eaten.

A little lamb suet will often attract a woodpecker and I have had a little Downy visiting on the coldest of days working on a piece of flimsy fat. Individual birds give me the most pleasure, but I have to admit that I am thrilled to witness the presence of huge flocks of Bohemian Waxwings cleaning off the Mountain Ash berries. Later on during the winter they return in small numbers to clean up those berries which are exposed as the snow melts beneath the trees. The weather has usually turned very cold when they first arrive, although I have witnessed huge droves of migratory Robins get all the berries first.

I love juncos as I do chickadees, because of the way they forage among the leaves, scratching back like a chicken does. I have seen juncos in October with a beak full of hairs as if the nesting habit was hard to break. These Slate-colored Juncos are a dainty bird and a joy to see as the white in the tail is exposed in flight. They seem to stay for only a short time during cold days of spring and fall.

Of the spring arrivals the North American Robin is a favourite of mine; that is the ones which stay in our gardens and have their nests nearby. I like their worm searching habits, as they run, stop to listen and then jab at a worm. Mostly they are successful. They frequent the bird



Bohemian Waxwing

Lawrence Baschak

bath too, and are a pleasure to watch taking their ablutions, followed by flight to a fence to preen and dry off. Their young ones stay with us until they leave in the fall.

The arrival of the swallows means warm weather and lots of insects upon which to feed, their presence reducing the many mosquitos. I think these must be Barn Swallows. Their flight patterns interest me most with their capacity for speed and manoeuvrability. The feeding of young is interesting as they line the eaves awaiting their turn and jostling for position. The parent seems to know whose turn it is for the next feed. Some greedy youngster will meet the parent in flight, but usually misses out. In the fall I watch them anxiously, their departure signifying cooler weather and fewer insects.

I think I have Chipping Sparrows, at least they chip. They too, have dainty

habits as they search the grass for insects, staying with us through spring and summer, with nests nearby no doubt.

I have no meadowlarks of course, but I do have them on my walk to Broley's Corner [neighbour]. They delight me with their song of hope and I know where to look for them on the power poles. They have an in flight call like a sigh. They seem most conscious of territory. On my travels south they are to be heard at intervals right through the country.

Cedar Waxwings have been active since the pin cherries have been ripe, feeding on them long before resorting to the Mountain Ash berries. Most years I have been aware of a few Cedar Waxwings, but this year they came in hundreds, but appear to be immature, lacking streaking on breast and below, being comparatively plain grey to white in colour. Their behaviour due to numbers was different

from previous years when they seemed to be sheltering from stormy weather. They behaved in quite a drunken fashion having started in on the Mountain Ash berries earlier than usual compared with their cousins the Bohemian Waxwings and of course there were the usual window casualties due to drunken flying. Their insect catching antics are interesting, since they can fly straight up from a hovering position. They were here in September, but seem to have moved on.

Warblers came in large numbers this year but, owing to their quick-moving habits and remaining only briefly in one spot, I have been unable to identify them. I did notice olive coloured plumage on some. They seemed to be picking insects from the branches of the Manchurian Elms, also making rapid flight to the next door pine tree where cover is good.

In early spring I have heard, and caught glimpses of a couple of Baltimore Orioles, but they don't seem to stay. However, during the 15 May snow storm one perched on the ash tree outside the kitchen window and was kind enough to stay while I got a snapshot of him. He seemed most disorientated by the weather and kept returning to the same twig on the same branch. Evening Grosbeaks are conspicuous by their absence around here, although I have seen the lone female. In Nipawin they were so plentiful in the very cold weather.

Starlings are occasional visitors, feeding on low weeds around the edge of lawns. I always look on them as rather vulgar, greedy birds.

I found a dead sparrow near my picture window where two Cedar Waxwings had met their deaths. It was quite different from House Sparrows, having a central breast spot of black on its whitish breast and had a rounded tail. The top of the head had a definite pattern of black and

brown. Chin to tail was white, no special markings. I compared it with a western race Fox Sparrow.

Seen and heard from a distance are ducks and geese, crows, the odd magpie, gulls and terns and killdeer. The gulls are most conspicuous after a rain when they sweep down the streets apparently looking for stranded worms.

The sound of geese overhead never fails to cause me to pause and look up, while taking in the haunting sound.

All of a sudden one says or hears someone say that the crows are back, and somehow I feel glad although they don't greatly interest me. In the fall they are seen to congregate, and all too soon they are gone.

At the bottom of my road at the corner of Bowers Drive and 19th Avenue was once a run, extending out across Territorial Drive to a slough surrounded by thick scrubby trees and very often in the spring can be heard the saucy quack, quack, quack of ducks.

Several years ago, before the Territorial Bypass was completed and the waste ground boasted a gravel pit patch of water, one day in early spring before the youngsters were out on their motorbikes, I had the great fortune to find a beaver which had come from the slough and was setting up residence in the pond. I sat on the high bank and watched for some time. I knew I might not see him again because of people. He was gone the next visit I paid to the pond. Later the pond was filled, the ground levelled and seeded to grass. Now there is no hill for kids to toboggan down, but residents are placated because the pond attracted mosquitos, although the slough on the farmer's field must yield as many as before. — *John M. Hickley*, 1903 Bowers Drive, North Battleford, Saskatchewan. S9A 3B9