

Bird Lover

Written by Laura Lee Rose

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I can just get it off my chest. I am a bird lover. I can't begin at this late age to learn their scientific nomenclature, but I do know a few common names. I get a thrill when a pair of bluebirds bathes at the birdbath outside of my office window. I bought a small concrete one in memory of my mother. Hanging just above it in the crepe myrtle is a suet feeder. It is a challenge sometimes to identify the birds because of back lighting, so sometimes I need to cut off the lights and grab my field glasses.

They come to bathe and chat, grab a bite to eat and fly away, but it's like having visitors all day. My list for the past week includes house finches, brown thrashers, cardinals, bluebirds, a large black bird and the cheeky mockingbirds.

Since my house is 10 feet above the ground, it's kind of like a tree house. I can see gnat catchers up close and personal right outside of the screen porch. Even though I don't have a hummingbird feeder, the ubiquitous *Salvias* outside in the yard keep them very happy with their bright red tubular flowers.

Just in the last few months there have been Painted Buntings nesting in the overgrown shrubs on the marsh side of my house, and they regularly visit the suet feeder outside the kitchen window. They are also seen darting from the bird bath off the front porch back into the thickets. I

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don't prune but about once a decade because it's either nesting season, too hot, or too something else. I have all the stock excuses to avoid pruning. Something needs to be done soon or the creek and marsh are going to disappear behind my jungle.

Fortunately, in our neighborhood there is a long dock with an osprey pole and nest for our fish hawk couple. They come every year and add some sticks, long pieces of cordgrass, and raise a baby or two. They entertain us bringing fish and eels to the chicks, making quite the racket if we swim or paddle too close to their territory. Of course, there is the regular crowd of pelicans, cormorants, seagulls, and sandpipers keeping us and each other company. At low tide there may be a flock of wood storks and egrets digging for delicacies in the pluff mud. In the evening the barn swallows fly in and out under the dock constructing muddy nests and eating lots of mosquitoes and gnats.

Suet feeders are such a pleasure; all year long we see chickadees, titmice, Carolina wrens, cardinals, and blue jays. There are lots of woodpeckers- downy, hairy, an occasional large red-bellied, or yellow-bellied sapsucker. The latter are very evident in the basswood trees, and generations of them must have been visiting this property according to the thousands of small holes covering the bark of an old one.

Twice this spring I've heard rustling in the wood stove pipe in the kitchen. And twice I have been able to disconnect the standing pipe from the flue and carry it out the back door. Both times our resident chimney swifts flew on to catch some more mosquitoes.

Keeping up with visitors and permanent residents of my yard and garden is such a pleasure. Many thanks to my birding friends who have shared their enthusiasm for bird watching with me. Some have passed, on but their memories can be evoked by watching my new feathered friends.

*Meet me, Jesus, meet me
Meet me in the middle of the air
And if these wings should fail me, Lord,
Meet me with another pair...*