

THE TRILL ON THE HILL

OR.. WAS THAT A CAR ALARM OR A MOCKINGBIRD?

By Bob Page

I don't consider myself dedicated enough to be deemed a bird watcher, at least not in a militant sense. However, we have a distinct variety of birds around, and even the dullest eyesight would be hard pressed to miss some of them. My favorites are not yearly visitors. A pair of beautiful red tail hawks, they appear every two or three years to be seen and heard far above as they majestically soar on currents of wind and occasionally let loose with one of those goose flesh raising, piercing calls that bring to mind "Northern Exposure" Each time they do grace us with their presence they nest in the area, and each of those years it appears that they have one hatchling.

One day I was startled to see one of the hawks on the peak end of our roof. I'd not been that close to a hawk outside of a cage, and I was fascinated because the bird was acting rather peculiar. It wasn't coordinated at all and was making raucous noises while flapping its wings. It finally dawned on me: this was junior's maiden flight, and the bird was certainly announcing it to the entire hillside.

Another "not--every-year" avian occurrence has to do with a very large flock of crows that are amazingly vocal. The first time I saw them I felt as if I were in a scene from "Dumbo"...or that Alfred Hitchcock were filming nearby. I get a big kick out of them but am nicely happy that it's not an "oft" happening. Strangely enough, they seem to delight in dining on the blossoms of our coral tree. Either that or they are intrigued by the bright colors.

Late winter/early spring bring out the best and worst of the mockingbirds... The latter tail-whippingly attested to by any cat walking along, casually looking as if being blitzed by dive bombing mockers were no big deal. These birds are a bit difficult to feel warm about; they're aggressive, and they sure do communicate—especially when larking for a mate. Around our home we have a virtual Pavarotti who has an amaz-

ing, unending repertoire that swoops from something akin to an air raid siren to that of Jenny Lind. In stalwart alertness, he takes a determined stand on top of our tall yucca and proceeds to croon and caterwaul with far too much stamina. It is just a little jarring when he commences at 4:30 in the too early morn!

My pleasure in working in our garden is the often visits by the scrub jays. They seem to know that what I'm doing might lead to a sudden tasty grub or worm. I've had them perch on a pole just a couple of feet from me, cocking their heads as if to say..."Well? Where's the beef?" And lately a pair of doves seem quite comfortable in sharing the garden with me. I would suspect that there's a whole lot of nesting going on.

The least for last, as far as size goes... We seem to be a haven for hummers, although it's dem hard to determine if it's one or many more as these whirring wingers whip hither and thither. The hanging donkey tail plants seen an odd, but obvious

source of nectar for them, so we have visits often on our deck (much to the noisy attention of our cats). Lately the encounters have been very close with me first hearing the beat of wings very, very close to my head. This happens by our front door and down in the yard, and I always stand so still in order to watch these wonders of the wing as long as I can, as often as I can.

After one of the winter storms some years back one of our cats was playing with what looked like a dessicated mushroom she'd found on the deck. It turned out to be a hummingbird nest, a tiny jewel of construction.

We still have it, a small reminder of our local feathered friends



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