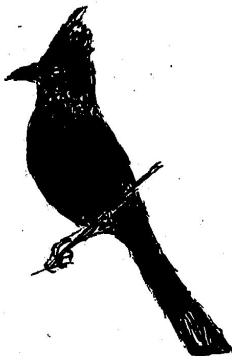


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Rare bird in Desert Foothills

"The window wing bird" is what the Indians call the Phainopepla. The Greek word phainopepla means shining robe and nothing could serve this small black bird better. It belongs to the family called flycatchers. There are four species in this family worldwide but we have only this one in our country.



The male is a solid glossy black and looks very much like a small black cardinal because of its shape and crest. When it flies, a white patch is displayed on each wing. This is the reason the Indians named it the "window wing bird." The female and the young are dark gray with lighter gray feathers on their wings which show when they fly.

In the book *Birds of North America* the Phainopepla is listed as uncommon. This means uncommon country wide, but in certain areas in the southwest it is fairly common. We in the desert foothills are fortunate in having quite a few of these black beauties around during the winter months. They nest here and raise their young, but when summer and the hot weather comes they go to higher country. They are classified as semi-migratory, moving between high and lower

altitudes.

This bird's main diet is insects, but they also eat berries. One of their favorite berries in our area is found on our parasitic nuisance, the desert mistletoe. You will commonly find them nesting on a horizontal mesquite branch or other trees where mistletoe grows. His nest is held together with strands of hair or spider web. He lines his small nest with the down from seed pods gathered the year before.

One note that will be particularly interesting to the ladies — the male Phainopepla not only builds the nest all by himself but also shares equally with the female in the responsibility of feeding and raising the young. If he should lose his mate during this important time, it is known that he will take on the whole responsibility by himself in the feeding and care of the nestlings until they are grown.

Next time you are out, look for him perched at the tip of a tree or on a wire near a tree and listen for his one syllable high pitched whistle. He is a beautiful sight and one of our many desert treasures.

Note: Reader questions, comments and contributions are invited.

Please write: "A Desert Place" in care of the Black Mountain News, P.O. Box 1569, Cave Creek, Ariz. 85331.