



*Blk Mt. News - 21 July 1983*

## *Nature cares for winged friends*

*A Wildlife Calendar — Part 2*

On Dec. 24 a Rufous Towhee showed up. It made a striking pre-Christmas picture perched in a hackberry near a male cardinal. It stayed around until March 24, not coming consistently to the feed as other birds did, but we saw it on 23 of the days in that period, and we were away for five days. In fact, it usually showed up after the feed on the ground had been pretty well cleaned up.

Now, if you have a weak stomach, better not read this paragraph, because nature is sometimes raw. Approaching noon on Dec. 26 I glanced out the window, and not 10 feet away, under the hackberry, a roadrunner was beating a female English sparrow to death on the ground. After life was gone it began a pretty rough plucking job, not holding the sparrow down with a foot (which would seem to be a more efficient way).

While this was going on, first a scrub jay, then a cactus wren, and finally a white-crowned sparrow took turns scolding from the top of the hackberry. When the plucking was far from complete, the roadrunner started to swallow the sparrow whole, head first. This was accomplished with some difficulty, a foot hanging out for a while. Then, after wiping its bill on the ground, the roadrunner spread its wings and sunned its back, a trait it often exhibits during the winter.

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While we're talking about roadrunners, March 28 Walter Camp was pruning a pyracantha up against a wall when one flew out in his face. She had a nest there, a little over 5 feet off the ground. By April 18 there were

two good-sized young in it and by April 25 they were gone.

By May 14 a quail had laid 14 eggs in the same nest — a pretty good height for a quail. We have been envious of those people who have been able to get roadrunners to come for meatballs, as we have heard the Kurzs' do, and we have often tried it without success. If we put them out before the bird shows up, something else gets them — a jay or cactus wren or a thrasher. If we roll a frozen one toward a bird, it's ignored. So when on May 13 one finally did pick up several meatballs rolled toward it, we thought we had arrived. The next morning she was back early, ate several, and carried the last one off, perhaps to a nest. And that was that. Perhaps she had been real hungry after incubating eggs for a long time with little to eat.

But to get back to our calendar: at least one Say's phoebe had been roosting in our front entry all winter, making something of a mess of the doormat. On Jan. 16 one was dead on the doormat, wings folded neatly, a very neat looking bird, no sign of injury, and we were sad to lose her. But the next night a phoebe was perched there again, and by March 25 a nest was in place.

On April 2 I saw a pair of English sparrows fly out of the entry and found a phoebe egg broken on the sidewalk below. But on April 9 there were at least three eggs still in the nest. On May 12 a fully feathered, young phoebe was crouched on the patio floor at 8:30 p.m., so I put it in a box and brought it inside for the night. At 5:30 the next morning I carried the box to the front entry and before I could

open it an adult started to fly into the entry, but turned up to the roof.

When I opened the box, the young one flew to the mesquite tree out front and the adult immediately flew to it, so that ended well. On May 15 there were three phoebes out front. Two would lock bills and fall to the ground where they would remain locked, lying on their sides. There were at least four eggs in the nest again. By June 24 there was at least one young bird in the nest. By June 27 it was able to fly, was frightened off the nest, but returned there in the afternoon.

By March 10 the poorwills were back and the scrub jays were courting. The jays stay with us year-round. Sometimes one will cram as many as 15 sunflower seeds into its craw and bill and then fly off to cache them. By June 24 they brought a couple of fully grown young ones around.

*(to be continued)*