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## ***Friendly nuthatch is entertaining***

By Frank Casanova

The Conservation Committee is taking a summer vacation as far as meetings are concerned, and there is an accompanying fall-off in contributions to this column. So in desperation, the editor has again agreed to let me fill in, with some of the wildlife scenes observed from my window. For that, I have to go back to Oct. 4, so much of this is out of date.

Had I seen a nuthatch working over the trunks of the mesquites and palo verdes, I would have thought it unusual, but one appeared under more unusual circumstances. A former neighbor had told us that her bottle brush bush had attracted goldfinches in Cave Creek, so of course we had to plant one. It did attract orioles (and I can't help but wonder if that is what she had seen). So on Oct. 4 we were in the process of planting another in Tonto Hills.

It was late afternoon, the hole was dug, and Thelma was running water into it from a hose. Looking down, she spotted a red-breasted nuthatch on the loose soil at the edge of the hole, obviously trying to get to the water. There was a water dish only 10 feet away, so Thelma moved over and ran the hose into the dish.

The nuthatch came down to a twig just inches above the water, but wouldn't come to it. Then she

turned the hose into a shallow depression in the ground and immediately the bird drank. We figured it was migrating through, and that was the last we would see of it. Next morning I had the hose running at the base of a mesquite tree and there was the bird, drinking from it. It must have hatched-out up on Camp Creek, or maybe much further North, but anyway it was accustomed to drinking from running water.

After it drank, it began working over the trunk of the tree in good nuthatch behavior. Wonder if birds brought up in pine forests up north, coming south for the first time, find the saguaro "forests" kinda unusual!

On Sunday, Oct. 31, the DeCurtiss family found a Cooper's hawk, which apparently had been used for target practice, but was alive and alert, though unable to fly. They first tried the Adobe Mountain Rehabilitation Center, but were told that it would not accept injured birds on weekends. They finally found a veterinarian at the corner of Scottsdale Road and Shea Boulevard who would treat it, but the bird expired on the way there. Moral: while the weekend is the most likely time to get shot, it's the poorest time to find help.

All summer and fall, our rock squirrels fattened up on the feed scattered on the ground for the

birds. By early November they disappeared, apparently into hibernation, although the little Harris' squirrels continued active all winter. The second week in January warmed up enough for at least one to venture out to try the bird feed again, and by the 28th they were all out for the season. Walter Camp told me that he spreads feed on the ground also, and that he was watching a rock squirrel taking advantage of it.

So was a curve-billed thrasher, which apparently resented the squirrel's presence, for it grabbed the squirrel's tail in its beak and began shaking it and beating it on the ground. This went on for about 15 seconds, with the squirrel ignoring the tail thrashing, until the thrasher finally gave up in frustration.

By June 15 we had four large and one small rock squirrels, and half-a-dozen Harris' squirrels helping themselves to feed. A friend in New River has tamed a young rock squirrel and like most young animals, it projects a lot more appeal than the older ones. It happily joined us in a glass of wine and then retired to a corner behind the sofa to sleep it off. When we left, we peeked over the sofa to see how it was doing and it just managed to open one sleepy eye.

*To be continued (editor willing)*