

post script to ol' one-leg
This story is for the birds
RR Mt. News 1 Jan 1981 copy Eckburn

Last week we wrote of the trials and tribulations of our one-legged cactus wren, and of three able-bodied cactus wrens ganging up on a shrike. We intended to move on to bigger and better things this week, but meanwhile events so dramatic, so electrifying, have occurred that we are forced to continue our story.

On the morning before Christmas we spotted the shrike perched on the spout of a watering can, and One-Leg on the wall behind it. We expressed some apprehension that the shrike might attack poor One-Leg. Not to worry! One-Leg hopped down behind the shrike, ruffled his feathers, and the shrike gave way.

Later they faced-off on top of the wall, One-Leg approaching to within a foot of the shrike. Interestingly, when confronting the shrike, One-Leg's balance seems to improve to the point that it can stand motionless. The shrike seemed to be sizing up the situation, seemed to realize that something wasn't normal.

About that time a Gila woodpecker appeared on the wall behind One-Leg, thrust it aside, and took its place in the confrontation. The Gila's heart wasn't in it, though, and it soon broke off and was replaced in turn by

One-Leg, which forced the shrike to the top of the pyracantha and followed it up. The shrike flew off.

On Christmas day the performance was repeated, with variations. A normal cactus wren confronted the shrike on the wall, closed to within six inches, and passed it on the wall, with the shrike attempting a single peck. A curve-billed thrasher flew in and with no preliminaries drove the shrike off.

We do not recognize many birds as individuals — mainly those displaying some abnormality. We have one thrasher that holds its tail cocked up like some of the wrens. Someone indelicately suggested it may have been a cloacal problem, and the field glasses verify that is indeed the case.

For a couple of weeks a brown towhee with an injured right foot hung around, and for a few days a thrasher with a bad leg. Why does the most common injury appear to involve a foot or leg? Do these represent narrow escapes from cats or other predators?

P.S. This morning a curve-billed thrasher with both mandibles broken and its long tongue hanging out, returned after an absence of several weeks — so it is surviving. Which reminds

us that broken bills are also very common, probably as a result of trying to fly through picture windows.