

Sentinel July 1, 1992



a desert place

Natural beauty
through preservation

Birds in your backyard

Throughout the summer months, the Sentinel will publish our popular "A Desert Place" columns from past issues. This week takes us back to July 1987 and Helen Fancher's thoughts on birds. The columns were provided by the Cave Creek Improvement Association.

By HELEN FANCHER

Have you noticed the additions to the bird population in your yard lately. I suppose our most popular and obvious additions are in the Gambel quail families.

Because we had spring rains at just the right time to produce fresh greens, which trigger the reproductive behaviour in the adult quail, we are now having an abundance of young - from the walnut sized, newly-hatched to the partially-feathered "teen-agers."

It is important now to see that fresh, clean water is available to them. It is fun to watch them come to our watering hole led by protective parents. When they leave, one parent leads the way while the other waits to see that there are no stragglers.

Among most other bird species we have here, the young are about as large as their parents before they leave the nest. They may still be awkward and dependent, though. We see them with open mouths and fluttering wings, begging to be fed by parents who are striving to encourage their independence.

At our house, we seem to be especially blessed with nesting sites this year. There is an attractive cactus wren's nest woven into the fig vines over the entrance to our carport. It has the characteristic round hole at one end, and a bird flies out nearly every time a car enters or leaves.

Another cactus wren family has taken up residence in a palo verde tree on the other side of the house, just off our deck where we can easily watch the comings and goings.

A pair of brown-crested flycatchers built a neat nest cradled by the arms of a giant saguaro. They

have raised seven young there.

The Gila woodpeckers raise a family every year in an old saguaro just back of our house. This year they had to fight off some starlings to defend their home.

A pair of gilded flickers claims a larger hole in a saguaro up the arroyo above our place. A young cardinal whose beak is still dark and whose crest still looks uncombed visits our feeder. I've never been able to discover a cardinal's nest, although we annually entertain one or two pairs of their young. This time of year is full of new life in the wild.

If you are among the many of us who take to the Mogollon Rim country for frequent or occasional breaks from the heat, don't fail to notice the very different species so close, but at a higher altitude.

On a recent visit, while walking through the pines, I noticed the murmurings of many different small voices close by. I discovered that by stepping quietly, I could move into the midst of a group of many small birds.

There were brown creepers busily picking their way up the trees, while pygmy nuthatches worked their way down. There were mountain chickadees, various warblers and bushtits all together, perhaps for mutual protection, but completely ignoring the stranger among them.

I was fortunate enough to observe in a group a black-throated blue warbler, an Eastern bird which is rare in Arizona.

We also saw rufous and broadtailed hummingbirds as well as one pair of magnificent hummingbirds. At home, we commonly have the costa and the black-chinned hummers. Among larger birds of the coniferous forest, we saw the spectacular Western tanager with its bright yellow body, red head and striking black wings.

Our birds are a never-ending source of enjoyment. May we always protect their habitats so that generations to come will continue to have this source of pleasure.