

Snakes alive!

*Roadrunner
story -
other bird
sightings*

Nan Casanova



Bird brain rids desert of serpents

Bek. Mt. News: 8 Jan 1981

One of the many nice things about the residents of the "Valley of the Sun" is their willingness to share their knowledge of the desert with visitors from back East.

Nan Byrne has been tending shop in Los Portales, and from her chair near the open door she couldn't help overhear some of this shared knowledge recently. In a nearby window there was displayed a replica of a roadrunner, and a large-voiced lady was explaining one of its attributes to a friend.

"They are very beneficial," she was saying, "in that they rid the desert of rattlesnakes. The way they do this is that whenever they find a rattlesnake coiled up asleep, they gather the berries of the jumping cholla and deposit them in a solid ring around the sleeping snake. The snake is unable to get out and

starves to death."

Even Nan, who has lived here for quite awhile didn't know about that — maybe you didn't either?

Speaking of roadrunners, for the last few years we have lamented their apparent scarcity in this area. In the last few months we have seen more than the total of several years. Are they increasing in number, or haven't we been in the right places at the right times?

Numbers of other birds sighted vary from year to year too. Some years we have seen cedar waxwings, Sage thrashers and robins descend on the Perfects' pyracanthas in flocks. This year we have had only two sage thrashers, and for a time just one robin after our berries. Usually we are blessed with few starlings here, but this year four are

(to the chagrin of one of the sage thrashers which fruitlessly tries to run them off), and this morning for the first time we noticed a Gila woodpecker gorging on the berries as well.

And birds aren't the only critters with changing dining habits. For a while this fall, the Crooks' honey bees were emptying our bird feeders of cracked corn as fast as we could fill them and leaving the hummer feeders alone. Now the situation is just reversed. Darned if I can see why we should pay Margo \$10 a gallon to sell us back our recycled sugar water.

Finally, this morning at breakfast (which is when we do most of our bird watching) we counted 16 species of common everyday birds. This did not include any hummers — which don't have a chance at their feeders now-a-days.