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Area is kind to visiting warblers

by Jo Walker

To celebrate the sunrise, our neighborhood Flicker drums on the metal spark arrester atop our chimney. Since we have a metal lined fireplace, you can imagine how loud his drumming sounds inside the house.

The Phainopepla are back. (Where have they been?) Somehow they know when the mistletoe berries are ripe. The Phainopepla have no common name, yet are easily recognized as slender, crested birds; the male with all glossy black body and tail. His white wing patch may be seen as he makes short flights after insects from his tall perch. The female is gray with paler wing patches.

As I put out bird seed, the pretty rose colored finches boldly fly up beside me. The more formally dressed blackthroated sparrow with white face stripes is more cautious and, with the cardinals and towhees, give way when the larger thrashers, woodpeckers, or flickers come to the feeder. These quickly scatter seed in every direction as they pick out their favorite kinds; thus drawing in the quail who strut in, wending their way through the desert shrubs, with frequent disputes over who is the most handsome. There is a cottontail rabbit

who calmly eats grain right in the midst of the noisy quail. Later several chipmunks will glean the leftover grain until their cheeks are near bursting. Meanwhile, the busy cactus wren rarely bothers with the grain, preferring to scratch around on his own when not noisily scolding from the Palo Verde tree.

The hummingbird and little Verdin prefer the desert salvia blooming at the window. For an extra Christmas treat we pressed ground suet into pine cones which were then hung near the feeder. Grapefruit rinds stuck on a nail on a stump are also enjoyed by many. (Sure was surprised to see a rabbit nibbling on it.) Occasionally, a roadrunner or hawk will dine on one of the fat regulars at the feeder; even though we have it near bushes and trees so they can scatter to shelter, (yet not so close a cat could hide and pounce). At sunset we listen to the coyote chorus — a different song every night.

Some bird seed or chicken scratch, a shallow rough bottomed water dish and a field guide to birds can give hours of fascination and enjoyment. The Conservation Committee has copies available of the list: "Birds of the Cave Creek and Bloody Basin areas". The list will help you narrow down "which bird is that?"

But remember, if you put out food and water you are responsible for those who come—don't get them dependent and then suddenly stop the food or water. If you intend to leave, either gradually reduce the food supply, or arrange to have it continued while you are gone. And, as the temperature rises, water becomes both more important and more difficult for them to find.