

A water hole for wildlife is delightful bonus

by Marshall J. Fancher

One of the pleasures of living in the desert is the opportunity to observe at close hand, the abundant wildlife whose habitat we share. One of the best ways to enhance this opportunity is to provide and maintain a water hole.

But this is not as simple a matter as it may seem. Providing water for wildlife has both advantages and disadvantages. It also involves responsibility and maintenance. If one is not willing or able to accept the responsibility and provide the maintenance, it would be better not to have a water hole at all.

The placement of the water hole is important. It should, of course, be placed where it can be viewed from inside the house if possible. It should be placed under or near a tree, shrub, or other ground cover. To place it out in the open is to ask birds and small animals to risk their lives for a drink for predators are never far away.

The water hole may be a shallow dish of pottery, clay, tile, concrete,



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or any other material that will hold water. It should have gently sloping sides. A straight sided container may result in young quail or animals drowning. We made ours of dabs of surplus concrete and stones while our house was being built.

Once one has established a water hole and attracted birds and animals to it, he has altered the pattern of their lives. They quickly become dependent on the water hole, so it is necessary to keep it filled all the time, particularly in the hot days of summer. Baby quail, for example, are brought by their parents to a known source of water, and if the expected water is not available, they will quickly perish.

If one is home all the time, a

daily filling from a garden hose may be adequate, but a slowly dripping hose or pipe, or a bubbler such as is used for watering plants automatically may be a better solution. When one is gone, some provision should be made to insure a constant supply of water.

It is surprising how many different creatures the water hole will attract. We regularly have deer, as well as coyotes, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, and probably many nocturnal visitors we do not see. Once we even saw a bobcat stop briefly for a drink.

Occasionally, however, some animals will make a nuisance of themselves. After I had just cleaned and refilled our water hole one day,

we were visited by nine javelina. They drank most of the water, wallowed in the rest and left a dirty mud puddle. I guess they have their needs too.

Many kinds of birds frequent our water hole. We are delighted to have them, but this causes another problem. Birds bathe in the same water they drink and a great number using one water hole may contaminate it and spread disease. Algae grows quickly here too and can turn the water hole an unsightly green.

I have found that sweeping the water out occasionally and dumping in a cup or two of household bleach will kill the algae and disinfect the pool. I just swish it around with a broom and then rinse and refill the water hole.

The small effort it takes to regularly care for the water hole is amply rewarded by the hours of enjoyment to be had in observing the wide variety of wildlife that is indigenous to this area.